

# Home they brought...

By Suchita Malik

THE peace-keepers are back home, not with a bang but with a whimper; back in the country which they called their own and pledged to sacrifice their lives for. The gallants returned not to a rousing hero's welcome but to the wails and sobs of their near and dear ones who lost them forever only because of a waving of the politician's finger. They flew home but, alas, in coffins that were alighted off the plane and placed on grieving shoulders of their comrades.

The old parents stood stoic, immobile and imbibing fatally the oddity of the strange welcome to their brave sons. The sisters were numbed by the crushing thought that they would never again be tying the *rakhi* on the wrist of their brothers. And who would fulfil the bond of affection and pledges of honour that their illustrious brothers stood for? And, for the peace-keepers' widows, the restoration of peace in another country has resulted in the shattering of peace and hope in their

own lives, and in a wait that is fruitless and eternal. What an irony! The restoration of peace for some turns against its grain, and ends in the destruction of peace for those who had pledged their happiness for others. The inexplicable paradox, perhaps.

The peace-keeping fiasco has a long and sad history. After the frustrating experiment in Sri Lanka in 1987 with the deadly LTTE failing to realise the cherished goal, no accounts were made for the loss of the many precious, vibrant lives and the resulting demoralisation of one of the world's largest and most efficient armed forces. The hasty, impulsive despatch of Indian troops to a troubled area to face the gruesome onslaught of the once 'friendly' enemy and that too with a hand tied to their back and a peace-song on their lips ended with devastating repercussions. Milton has rightly said: "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread". The failure could only be attributed to the lack of vision and political

immaturity on the part of the leadership which mercilessly pushed the peace-keepers into infernal misery, displaying scant regard for their lives, families and ideals.

For how long will the lives of our soldiers be at the beck and call of their political masters who seem to decide on peace-keeping operations in a jiffy, with a casual wave of their hands? And, as they do so, they themselves remain firmly grounded on their protected, cushioned chairs. For how long will old parents keep sacrificing their valiant sons submitting themselves to their masters' sagacious political will? And what laurels, pray, do await the dead warriors when they are brought home? After the last post, they are forgotten and pitied as victims of a past mistake by those who are responsible for their untimely departure from this world. They remain fresh only in the dazed memories of their kin and friends for whom it is a perpetual loss.

The tragic death of Dr (Major) Ashwani Kanva, who made the

supreme sacrifice of his life in 'Operation Pawan' while attending to the wounded jawans in the enemy-zone itself, remains a sad example of political apathy. In brazen defiance of the rules of the Geneva Convention for the protection of medical personnel while on duty, he fell victim to the LTTE snipers, and died for lack of medical assistance. So much for the unsung hero of the Sri Lankan fiasco.

In the violent death of three peace-keeping medical doctors in Somalia, the history has merely been repeated. But how long should this go on? And, if peace-keeping is a global responsibility that India must undertake, are not there humanitarian works at home for which the military expertise of our forces could be more fruitfully used? I, for one, would possibly take my brother's sacrifice in a war at home more supportingly than his death in Jaffna or Somalia for the nation's cause that is neither obvious nor uplifting.