

Politicisation of administration

Long-term effect will be to undermine civil service

WITH the general election approaching fast, 'politicisation' of the civil administration has seemingly picked up pace. Already, there has been a series of promotions, appointments and transfers, many of which have come under fire, having been allegedly made under 'political considerations'. Despite having requisite qualifications, some 200 aspirants amongst 378 senior assistant secretaries have not been promoted as deputy secretaries and it has been reported that another spate of large-scale reshuffle is just around the corner.

Control has been so centralised with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) being the nerve-centre of the administration that sometimes even ministers are kept in the dark, not consulted with respect to the appointment even of secretary to the ministry, thus hampering smooth running of ministerial affairs.

Signs of politicisation are widely read. Not an appointment or promotion is made without consideration of the political impact, contractual appointments have risen to a dizzying 240, and by the same token, those who are deemed insufficiently loyal are either overlooked in matters of promotions or sidelined as officers on special duty (OSD).

The obvious negative consequences of politicisation are two-fold. The first is that this kind of stacking of the deck is only going to lower the efficiency of the administration and thereby make the day-to-day governance suffer. And second, any blatant politicisation of the civil administration will give a strong indication that the government is uninterested in a level playing field and add fuel to the controversies now raging.

The administration can only be crippled by politicisation. It has a demoralising effect across the tiers of bureaucracy and, of course, the overall performance will suffer immensely.

For the sake of the smooth and effective running of the administration it is imperative that the standard norms that have guided the bureaucracy for so many years be adhered to. Pulling down the bureaucratic edifice that has been the corner-stone of good governance will hurt everyone in the long run.

Badda killings

A macabre form of lawlessness

THE post-RAB deployment lull in violent crime -- which apparently set in following its crackdown on organised crime -- has been rudely snuffed lately. The latest case in point is the multi-targeted murder committed in late afternoon at South Badda before a large number of people in a densely populated locality. Four young men were gunned down in a gang attack which shook public confidence in law and order violently.

Many of the well-known criminals are reported to be in jail or have gone into hiding after RAB started its operations. But the Badda killings, newspaper reports go to suggest, might have been committed under instructions from a jailed criminal. If it is true, then some criminals might have been retaining their clout even when they are in jail.

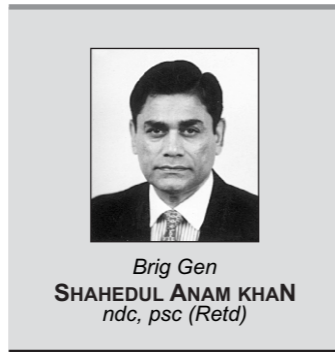
The crime was an open and blatant defiance of any semblance of law enforcement presence. There was not even an attempt to carry it out surreptitiously. The killers traced their victims moving from one place to another, yet the local police had apparently no inkling of it so that they could not take any pre-emptive action against them. The result was a demonstrative, if localised, law and order disaster. Apart from creating panic among people, it also did a lot to corrode public confidence in police vigilance.

The decision-makers should take stock of the situation and refocus the fight against crime with full vigour and greater imagination on criminals of both the old and new genres. The point of great concern is that a second string of criminal gangs may have emerged after the crackdown on their leaders. This is an ominous development that has to be tackled energetically and efficiently.

Obviously, the focus should be on drug trafficking and all such illegal businesses that have thrived in the city and spawned delinquents of all types in not so underworld a world. They fight turf battles, resort to gangster murders and extort business people right, left and centre.

In the ultimate analysis, nothing would be more effective in curbing violent crimes than catching the murderers, prosecuting them in a foolproof manner and punishing them severely. The culture of impunity has to be reversed at some point, otherwise it will be a self-reinforcing demon.

Need for a defence policy



DEFENCE Policy is a natural sequel to National Security Policy. Without the presence of the former, the latter would be incomplete and perhaps un-implementable. Given the changed character of the term "security policy," conceptualisation of state security must be comprehensive to address all the threats to our national security.

Defence policy as a subject has been constantly topical, more so in the last few weeks with some newspapers running series of articles on the issue. It has been topical primarily because, not unnaturally, defence evinces considerable interest in this part of the world, where resource-strapped countries are constantly struggling with the econometrics of the defence and security management.

It would perhaps be incorrect to suggest that we do not have a defence policy. But the one we have has not been publicly articu-

One is given to understand that a committee led by a two-star general is in the process of determining the inputs required in formulating a defence policy. It is about time too. The defence forces must be told what the state expects of them and what they are required to perform to ensure the integrity of the country. It was about time that an objective assessment of threat was made to determine the sources. However, to be plagued by a mindset that is predisposed to only the external sources of threat without looking into the possible sources of threat from within would be catastrophic.

lated, at least those parts that would allow the people to understand as to what and how the armed forces in Bangladesh go about fulfilling their responsibilities.

It is not surprising that we did not have a defence policy from the very outset of our journey as a free country, although it would have been nice to have had one. But there are good reasons that we could not have a policy after our Liberation. Given the circumstances of our birth and the period that followed, it would have been asking too much of the leaders to propound comprehensive strategic policies much less a defence policy. That was a time when we were struggling to keep our body and soul together, having to survive on a day-to-day basis. And although there were perhaps the appropriate intellectual resources, there was not the time or the environment to formulate a policy on our defence. For good part of the thirty-five years of our existence, we have remained in a state of flux, emerging from one crisis only to be cast into another.

Another reason why there was no effort to formulate a policy at the seminal stages of our existence is perhaps the fact that there were considerable misgivings about the military, and many, including some in the government, questioned the rationale behind having a standing army when there existed no apparent threat to Bangladesh. With such a mindset, a workable and objective guideline to base our defence on was wholly unexpected. However, I feel that this in itself was all the more compelling reason to put in place a policy that would have provided the basis for the future structure of our armed forces.

Formulation of a defence policy would of necessity require us to identify our threats, both external and internal, and articulate the tasks of the armed forces in meeting the threats or challenges that the country is facing or likely to face. And to my mind, our leaders have been either unwilling to state the threats or unable to identify the threats (which I find unbelievable), that face the country, and that is one of the reasons why we

have not been able to evolve a defence policy as yet.

But after thirty-five years of existence there are no convincing arguments for not having a defence policy for Bangladesh. Although many would perhaps prefer to continue with the way that we have followed so far, i.e. go on in an ad hoc basis.

To say that we need a defence policy, of sorts, is stating the obvious. But having one would help us to get rid of ad hoc-ism in our defence planning and all activities that are associated in running the defence forces. It would also help us to formulate long and short term plans. It would also help us to save on lot of uneconomic expenditures if our defence plans were pegged on future perspectives. Thus, it would be easier to provide for the defence requirements without it becoming a burden on the country's economy. What a defence policy will also be able to do, although no one can guarantee that in Bangladesh, given the typical mindset and unique attitude of our political leaders, is

continuity in the planning process, without being regime-dependent like most of our activities.

In the past we have suffered from lack of defence planning due to absence of any higher direction. This has resulted in ad hocism not only in allocation but also in capital expenditure. Threat evaluation and assessment of our military requirements have been unfortunately left entirely to the military operatives. Evaluation, if any, had been influenced by individual and individualistic perception, divesting such assessment of objectivity.

Absence of a defence policy is one of the reasons for the "defence vs development" or the "guns vs butter" debate that is going on in the country. While a healthy debate on the subject is not unwarranted, lack of direction and specifics about the armed forces generate unnecessary speculation that can be avoidable. This has naturally compelled many to question the shape and size of the military.

But before we can determine the shape and size of our armed forces, we shall have to determine their likely tasks. This will be possible only after a realistic threat assessment is carried out to crystallise the various scenarios that the armed forces may be employed in. Admittedly, assessment of threat would be a subjective exercise since perception of threat would vary from time to time, person-to-person, and even

political party to political party. Be that as it may, the Armed Forces must be organised and equipped to meet the worst-case scenario.

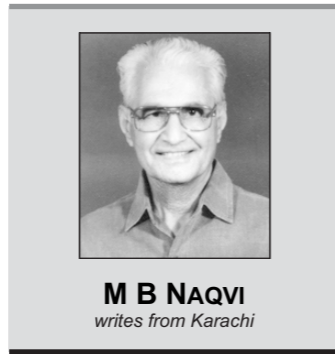
For this a strategic threat assessment will have to be done at the highest national level from which will evolve the National Security Policy. Defence Policy would stem from National Security Policy and directives in the shape of possible tasks of the respective services must be articulated for them to determine their needs to accomplish the stipulated tasks. This will obviate ad hoc-ism and bring in the culture of long term and forward planning, something that we lamentably lack.

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Way out of West Asian crises



THERE is reason to treat the two crises in Palestine and Iran as one, though each merits fuller treatment. The two should be taken together. What is common to both is: (a) United States is determined to be the only hegemon in all of West Asia (Middle East), it is theynchpin on which much turns in Palestine and Iran, and (b) militant Islamic ideology now holds sway in Palestine and Iran; the US disapproves.

American policy in Palestine Authority's lands supposedly promotes democracy. The dictatorship of Yasser Arafat and PLO's corruption were much condemned. New polls in January have changed much. Echoing the election results in Egypt, the Hamas victory in Palestine surprised both Americans and Israelis. Although the 24 years rule by Hosni Mubarak remains in place, the controversial Egyptian polls have convincingly returned many Muslim Brotherhood candidates. The trend was confirmed in Palestine where in free elections Hamas returned with a thumping majority. That has upset the Israeli and American appercat.

The US's old enemy, Iran, is accused of wanting to have atomic weapons and that upsets America's imperial designs.

PLAIN WORDS

Outsiders should stop being partisans of aggressive Israelis. There is no morality in supporting aggressors all the time. If the Europeans and the Americans stop being godfathers and protectors of Israel, an Arab-Israeli settlement can quickly follow. Moreover, Israel is strong enough to survive by its own strength. It needs this kind of western support for aggressive purposes to take away more lands from the Arabs and to keep them subjugated. This is not on.

Americans have been smarting since the 1979 revolution and subsequent hostage crisis. If only the US-led world had left Iran alone, the social evolution would surely have broadened democracy's base and would have started removing its deficiencies. Iran is only partly democratic because it is hamstrung by clerical authoritarianism. It is actually a hybrid of clerics' authoritarianism and people's democratic preferences.

Iran has a fairly elected government but it is controlled and checked by superior clerical authority through a nominated upper house of 12 clerics that can veto almost anything of importance to democracy. The two elections of President Mohammad Khatemi, mainly on the votes of discontented youth and women, represented an assertion of democratic impulses; Khatemi was in practice trying to work loose from the constrictions imposed by Khomeini's constitution. The US cold war against it and the recent campaign against the alleged Iranian nuclear ambitions have helped clerics suppress the reformers by projecting themselves as the defenders of Iran's national honour. That has caused a setback to the democratic forces there.

Iran has now been "referred" to the UN Security Council for possible punitive action, though Russia and China have expressed misgivings about possible UN sanctions. Even the Europeans' solidarity with America looks a rather uncertain category. There are reasons for it.

One, Iran is no Iraq or Afghanistan. Should the west contemplate entering militarily in Iran, it would get into a morass with no way out. After Iraq and Afghanistan experiences, military intervention by America or Israel in Iran is not a practical proposition. Willy nilly, the US will have to rely on talks and probably Iran would go its own way in the end.

As for nuclear question, the P5, IAEA and others -- assuming Iran's secret nuclear ambitions are genuine -- have no moral right to object. As a Pakistani, this writer cannot denounce possible Iranian nuclear intentions in the situation it finds itself, with so many enemies around, all armed with nuclear weapons. After all Pakistan also built the Bomb. So did Israel and India. There are clear double standards here.

UN recognizes five nuclear powers as does the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But the P5 are not acting on the NPT in good faith; they have no plans to dis-

arm. They go on proliferating vertically. NPT requires them to begin disarming. There are three other powers with known nuclear weapons: Pakistan, Israel, and India. Israel directly threatens Iran. If these three can get away with their atomic arsenals, why shouldn't Iran? Which morality enjoins that India, Pakistan and Israel should have the Bomb but not Iran?

The world is in a quagmire. The only way out is for America to allow democratic processes a free play in Iran and elsewhere, especially in remaining Palestine. The fear that Iran will eventually dominate large parts of the Middle East is both speculative and altogether too arrogant. The US intent to remain dominant everywhere is clear. If a higher stature is implicit in Iran's capabilities, let it find free play. Who has the right to checkmate it? Which thinking person would condemn Iran while closing eyes toward what others are doing?

There is also Hamas in Palestine. Like PLO and Yasser Arafat earlier, it does not recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli state; many others, including all honest intellectuals, also question its legitimacy. Israel is an imperial imposition on Arab Palestine, approved by UN on US, British,

and Soviet insistence. European nations and America were those that persecuted the Jews. They had salved their collective conscience at Arab expense by imposing European Jews on Arab Palestine. If the directly concerned Arabs reject it, what is strange in it? The great swindle of the Arabs began in 1917 and continues as Israel.

Hamas is accused of wanting to liquidate the Israeli state, it has an armed militia of its own, and does not recognize Oslo and Roadmap agreements. That supposedly creates the crisis: Israel and US cannot recognize Hamas's victory. But negotiations remain the only way out. Hamas wants to talk. It proposes an unlimited armistice with the Israelis and wants to negotiate many other matters. These talks offer ample scope for peaceful settlement. Why make a formal recognition of Israel a precondition? Demanding a prior formal recognition from Hamas seems to hide unsavoury designs. A substantive measure of de facto recognition of Israel is implicit in negotiations between warring parties. It is in fact the substance of de facto recognition, bar shouting.

And what will negotiations settle? Naturally Hamas-Israeli talks will be about Oslo and Roadmap. Whether Israel has acted upon them or not will be the question. Let Israel settle the terms of coexistence with elected Palestinians, including about disarming of Hamas militia. Disarming process can be agreed upon as a result of negotiations, dovetailing it in official PA security services' upgradation; it cannot precede negotiations. The west has been threatening to cut PA to a shilling. Those who pay can certainly withhold payments. But

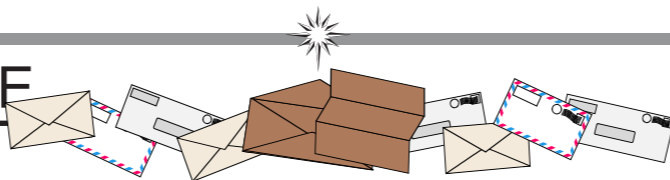
is that the way to treat a democratically elected party? Talks have to begin first. All these differences are easily resolvable.

Some correction of angle of vision is necessary. The two, the Israelis and Arabs, cannot be treated on a par. Arabs are the main residents of the place and Palestine belonged to them, and Israelis are, all said and done, aggressors and usurpers. Vacation of the aggression is a natural demand. If, for the sake of the argument about power -- and Israel is a powerful state that cannot be wished away and is unlikely to be thrown out -- realism has to inform both sides' stances on coexistence. But realism cannot totally preempt or change the basic status of either.

Outsiders should stop being partisans of aggressive Israelis. There is no morality in supporting aggressors all the time. If the Europeans and the Americans stop being godfathers and protectors of Israel, an Arab-Israeli settlement can quickly follow. Moreover, Israel is strong enough to survive by its own strength. It needs this kind of western support for aggressive purposes to take away more lands from the Arabs and to keep them subjugated. This is not on. No impartial person anywhere approves of the current western obsession with protecting Israel. Israel needs to do some recognizing of its own: Arabs' human rights and those as the rightful owners of Palestine. Realism today does not demand Israelis' disappearance from the Arab homeland. A co-existence on an honourable basis has to be worked out.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Dear Professor...

I have nothing to say about this sad incident. Sir, we couldn't believe that you are not with us anymore. You will be with us forever by your personality, affection for the students and as an ideal teacher. You have given a lot to the RU, to the nation. The country didn't give you the guarantee of a normal death. The cruel death made lot of people cry but all are going to forget you soon.

This is the common limitation of us. We, the Bangladeshis, can forget very quickly all the tragic incidents. We want exemplary punishment to the killers. We want guarantee of normal death which the government has failed to give us.

A reader
One e-mail

Mother Language Day

I take this opportunity to share the

good news about our Language Martyrs' Day--21 February, which was declared as the International Mother Language Day by UNESCO and has received its first ever government level recognition in Canada this year.

Both the Mayor of Toronto and the Premier of Ontario have taken steps to celebrate the day in Canada.

To observe the day, Mayor David Miller has issued a proclamation, in which he encouraged the residents of Toronto to join this Language Day celebrations, where people from over 200 countries who speak more than 170 languages and dialects will take part.

Similarly, Premier Dalton McGuinty's office would initiate a Statement in the Provincial Legislative Assembly at Queen's Park, Toronto on February 21, 2006. In that statement, the Citizenship and Immigration Ministry would focus on the Language Movement

Day of Bangladesh and its implications in shaping the International Mother Language Day, as confirmed by Director Strategic Operations, Stephen Chiang and Associate Press Secretary, Priya Suagh.

At this hour, I also appreciate the support and encouragement of the weekly Bangla Reporter as well as both Bangladesh Association and Bangladesh Society (SC) of Toronto to this effort.

Muhammad Ali Bukhari
A Bangladeshi-Canadian Journalist

TATA and gas price

I am indeed shocked to learn that TATA wants to negotiate gas price with Petro-Bangla at 1US\$/Mcf, which is way below the gas price at any time in North America since 1995.

While I fully understand the positive impact of foreign direct investment on Bangladesh economy, the US\$2 billion investment

by TATA is not alone a sufficient condition for selling gas to TATA at 1US\$/Mcf. Obviously, the loss figure will be different if discounted cash flow and variable gas prices are accounted for, nonetheless, it will be a staggering figure if we consider the gas price by international market price.

Mohammad Sarwaruddin
Canada

On 15th anniversary

We congratulate The Daily Star on the occasion of its 15th anniversary. No doubt since its inception with the commitment to us, readers, 'People's right to know' and adhering to journalistic ethics 'Journalism without fear or favour' it has been successful in catering to readers' needs to a great extent.

Journalists are vocal against the rise of fundamentalism, terrorism, corruption, violation of human right so as to help ensure

social justice and rid the nation of social maladies. Only the journalists themselves can maintain the objectivity of news and keep their profession uncontaminated by the perniciousness of yellow journalism in an ambience of free media. May The Daily Star Continue its journey with its commitment to 'People's right to know' representing heterogeneous opinions.

Roney
One e-mail

'Enemies of Islam'

Thank you, Mr. Akbar, for criticising our comment titled 'Enemies of Islam' published in The Daily Star on February 5, 2006. You stated some points; but we cannot quite agree with you. You wrote that the US war on Iraq was not religiously motivated, I agree with you. It is ideologically motivated, you can say it's an extension of the crusade. You may claim it is just for controlling oil, what about Palestine? Israel, the

illegal occupant, is killing innocent people in Palestine everyday, why? For oil? Or anything else? Why the US is backing this terrorist state? Obviously, the reason is ideological. We have to go by world politics.

You know Mr. Saddam Hussein was the ally of the US once upon a time.

After the revolution in Iran and the fall of 'Shah' gov't, the US became the enemy of Iran and tried to destroy the 'Khomeini' gov't. As a result it incited Saddam Hussein to fight against Iran. The US also helped Osama bin Laden to fight against Soviet Russia (USSR)-the ideological enemy of the US. Now Saddam and bin Laden are the enemies of the US, as they are not serving it anymore.

Many leaders in Muslim countries are serving US interests. They always try to satisfy their master. The Shiite-Sunni conflict is nothing but making division

among Muslims. You know the US tried to divide Iraq into three parts- Shiite, Sunni and Kurd. Darfour crisis in Sudan is also a conspiracy to make the country a failed state with the help of a puppet government to pave the way for military invasion by the US.

You said insurgents in Iraq are killing Muslims. Why this insurgency is going on? The US occupied Iraq in the name of WMD. But that has not been found anywhere in the country!

They captured Saddam Hussein who was a threat to world peace according to their view. Why are now they staying in Iraq? Guerrillas in Iraq are fighting against the occupation forces like Bangladeshi freedom fighters who fought against the Pakistani army.

What is going on in the name of JMB? The bombers and killers are the enemies of Islam. The enemies of Islam want to

destroy the image of the religion.

Sabu and Mamun
University of Dhaka

Spelling mistake

A foreign company is running an advertisement in local satellite channels. It is about their success in different countries. In the advertisement they try to portray each country in one scene. I'm not going to argue whether a young girl riding on a swing represents Bangladesh but they misspelled the name of our country. It was written "Bangladesh".

Abu Sayeed
East Nakhapara, Dhaka

Tendulkar

The master blaster is far from finished. He played a magnificent innings in Peshwar. Indians were unlucky as the match came to an abrupt and unjust end.

Hope this is going to be an interesting series with four more matches remaining.

Aziz Pasha
Dhaka