

Any dialogue would be a step forward

Time is running out

ONE discerns a certain underlying inclination on the part of both the ruling party and the opposition towards commencing a dialogue at the secretary general level to begin a process of engagement.

Indirect approaches are being traded off between the two sides to get some kind of a dialogue started on electoral and caretaker government agenda.

Their tough talk diatribe is somewhat tapering off amidst a growing realisation perhaps that time is fast running out for reforms to be agreed upon and processed for enactment through the parliament before the general election can be held as scheduled in January.

The last session of the parliament during the present government's incumbency is being convened on September 10, less than three weeks away. This offers an added opportunity for following up on the reform issue in the parliament, in addition to a dialogue outside the parliament. One would have thought that the reform enactment could be wrapped up in the ensuing JS session, if sufficient progress were made between both sides in reaching a common ground for a suitable constitutional amendment in the end.

There is ample merit in the proposal originally made by the business community for an immediate dialogue between the BNP secretary general and his counterpart in the opposition as a precursor to wider talks on well-developed reform agenda. Since the opposition is reluctant to sit with any Jamaat representative on the government side, opening the talks at the secretary general level is the way to go about it by way of marking a beginning to an engagement process that yields a result.

We are in a breakneck race with time, so without any ado or dillydally, the secretary general level talks must be flagged off following, of course, a formal written proposal from Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to Abdul Jalil. For such a one-to-one dialogue to be useful they must be prepared to sit with an open mind, setting no preconditions whatsoever.

Since both sides know at their heart of hearts that talks are the only way to thrash out differences over the reform agenda, it is an imperative necessity at this stage that they try their utmost to ensure that the atmosphere remains conducive to starting a dialogue. But Khaleda Zia still berating in a public meeting that the opposition is 'out to foil' election cannot help the cause.

Lake turning into rubbish dumpyard?

They are easy to catch

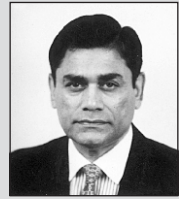
ILLEGAL filling of lakes and water bodies in the city continues unabated. Encroachers on Gulshan Lake are now using a different tactic. They are filling up the lake by dumping rubbish during the night, often at dead of night. This curse is going out of all proportions posing disastrous consequences for city dwellers, not just for now but for years to come. From the reports published in the media based on interviews with some plot owners around the lake it appears that there is a nexus between some owners and the rubbish dumpers, the former's interest being to extend their landholding and the latter's to grab some land. Apparently, a particular surveyor of Rajuk is actively involved in helping the grabbers.

No less than an executive engineer of Rajuk has said that he has no knowledge about filling of the lake. It is indeed disgusting to note that every time any Rajuk official is confronted with a situation like this he would say, "the matter will be looked into". But years pass by and nothing happens. To say the least, this is unacceptable. We are yet to hear of any punitive action being taken against a single defaulting official of Rajuk.

Grabbing of Gulshan Lake is not only polluting the environment of the locality but also causing illegal occupation of prime government land. At the same time, it is logging one of the major sources of drainage of rain and wastewaters.

This is an opportunity for the present administration particularly towards the fag end of its tenure to resist boldly and put a stop to such land grabbing and create a legacy of which it can rightly be proud. It is our strong belief that given the will and the honesty of purpose the job can be accomplished, especially when the offenders of the wetland law are easily identifiable for the physical evidence of their act.

Much ado about the military



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IT is heartening to note that the media is taking interest in what is going on in the military, particularly about the future planning and development of the armed forces. It is equally interesting and enriching to see the effort of the media in analysing the thoughts of the service chiefs and posing questions that demand answers and clarifications.

It is also very heartening to see at least one Service Headquarter, the AHQ, respond with its comments, attempting to remove some of the misgivings in the said analyses, while at the same time not holding back its reservations, though in some cases ill-founded as many are disposed to think, on the motive behind such an exercise by the reporter.

The reports, and the comments that followed, were serialised analyses and observations by Mizanur Rahman Khan, in the Prothom Alo appearing from August 5 to 8, on interviews of the chiefs of staff of the three services published in the Jane's Defence Weekly (JDW) not many months ago.

It merits more than the limited space of an op-ed and a detailed and threadbare dilution on the interviews, the report, and the responses thereto. However, an attempt will be made to touch upon briefly some important

aspects of the "debate." Other issues brought out in the report will be addressed subsequently. One hopes that it will generate views, hopefully many differing ones, and help, rather than hinder, what I feel was the very purpose of the article, which is to determine how we can spend less on defence but be more secure. This, I am sure, is also the ultimate objective of the defence as well of the national level planners.

To start with, let us dwell first on the three interviews. These are extremely well articulated views on the projected shape of the three services. One can make out that the year 2020 is the datum year for the purpose of planning the force structure.

The interviews dwell on the weaknesses at the macro level and suggest option to reverse them. The forces goal is spelt out with the current state of expansion, highlighting some of the major responsibilities both at home and at international level, like the peacekeeping engagements under the UN. Not only are we made aware of future plans but also of what have been approved. The details of the weapons inventory, in some cases, are perhaps more than what needed to be bared.

All in all, the statements fit into the mode of a very classical white paper on defence except for the fact that they did not spell out the detailed policy as a white paper should (and indeed the chiefs' statements to JDW was not meant to do that) nor do we get an indication of cost appreciation of the requirements of the three services. However, what it does, though, is provide a reference point on which to proceed on a discussion on the way ahead for defence in Bangladesh. That is what, one feels, the report in the Prothom Alo wanted to do. And that is what we shall dwell on next: the report and the responses thereto.

Defence has always elicited interest in the public. It is just as well that it is so. That we have the JDW interviews translated into Bangla with analyses and comments of several senior retired military officers on various aspects of the interviews, shows that the armed forces are no longer considered sacrosanct, better left out of public scrutiny. There is very little difference of view on the need for the military's accountability to the public, ensured on its behalf by their elected representatives in the parliament and the media.

However, it is not always that

service chiefs talk to the media, much less the local media, and the Bangla daily should be commended for bringing to the public important statements made to a foreign journal by the three service chiefs that outlined the way the armed forces were moving in the days ahead rather than ascribing ill-motives to the author of the articles, as a few commentators have.

It has, not unexpectedly, generated a crosscurrent of arguments, and quite justifiably so. Thus, one cannot but take issue with those who rationalise the tendency of keeping the local media out of the discourse regarding the military, for fear of misinterpretation, either due to misperception, or lack of detail knowledge of military matters.

This calls for all concerned to seriously address the necessity to develop a crop of defense correspondents and the lead must be given by the armed forces to generate the link and sustain it. Regular interaction will certainly remove many misperceptions about the defence forces. It ought to be noted, too, that a lot of the observations on the rationale of certain plans are those of retired military officers.

It would be advisable to focus on the macro and not the micro

aspect of the report. Very little will be gained from splitting hairs on arguments centering on whether the howitzer has a higher trajectory than a field gun or whether a fire-and-forget anti-tank weapon is more effective than a wire-guided or a optical-guided missile, where the nature of our terrain impacts on the effectiveness of the weapon.

The piece on the army elicited most comments on various aspects of the CAS's observations, and quite a lot on the title of the article where the translation of more "teeth" for the army was taken in a negative light by the establishment. For an ex-military man, "teeth" conjures up easily the idea of being an "effective" entity by possessing the ability to influence issues rather than the reverse. A non-military person may quite easily characterise it in the way that the reporter did, and the AHQ clarified the matter in its rejoinder, but not before questioning the motive of the writer.

The final part of the report does very well to highlight the issue of defense policy and various views on it. The long and short of the articles was the very justification of going for development plans that are not the result of specific policy. And the argument that the ad hoc manner of acquisitions is wasteful in money and time, bears very strong rationale.

However, the onus for not having a defense policy, at least not in the way that it should exist, is not that of the services but entirely on the political leadership. It is good to have a written policy or a guideline. It ensures continuity and saves wasteful expenditures. The Mig and the frigate issues are very classic examples of regime, rather than strategy oriented

planning, and the consequence of the absence of a well-considered policy. This reinforces the demand for restructuring the AFD and the post of a Chief of Defence Staff.

But not having a defense policy does not preclude the armed forces from planning on the minimum basis of operational requirements, derived primarily from the military perspective, not an ideal situation, but has to do for the interregnum. The problem is that the interregnum has lasted for nearly thirty five years, again not the fault of the services.

The statement of the air-force chief puts in context the point we are trying to make, when he says to the effect that he was asked by the government to plan his force development through to 2020. Very well and good, but what are the planning criteria that the plan will be circumscribed by? This is perhaps the moot point that the Prothom Alo reporter was trying to highlight.

Some see in the statements of the service chiefs an aggressive stance that might not go down well with our neighbours. It should be remembered that the prime concern of any government is to provide security to its people, and physical security is one of them. And we must not hesitate to identify and articulate the threats before we contemplate appropriate actions. Our security posture cannot be dependent on how others feel about it. Aggressiveness is an attitude of mind apart from capability. Our military strategy may be defensive, but that should not keep us from vesting the military with tactical offensive capability.

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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Defence has always elicited interest in the public. It is just as well that it is so. That we have the JDW interviews translated into Bangla with analyses and comments of several senior retired military officers on various aspects of the interviews, shows that the armed forces are no longer considered sacrosanct, better left out of public scrutiny. There is very little difference of view on the need for the military's accountability to the public, ensured on its behalf by their elected representatives in the parliament and the media.

The promise of e-governance

Overall, then, e-governance is the ICT-enabled route to achieving good governance. We might even prefer to think of it as "i-governance" -- integrated governance -- since it integrates both the processing and communication technologies; and since it integrates people, processes, information, and technology in the service of governance initiatives.

KAZI SM KHASRUL ALAM
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NEW theories and techniques are being evolved with the passage of time. E-governance is such an innovation, or rather eventuality, full of potentials. Many theories and techniques are hard to put in place everywhere owing to variations of societal settings and cultural norms. However, e-governance promises and seems to be the exception. Its acceptance is worldwide thanks to its in-built credentials. Thus, it can be safely remarked that this very phenomenon has come to stay.

Admittedly, developed country governments have been using IT for more than 40 years. So, what is new about e-governance? What's new is that -- as an ardent exponent of e-governance thinking Richard Heeks puts it -- we are moving on from IT to ICTs and from IT to IS. The old model was

one of information technology (IT) automating the internal workings of government by processing data. The new model is one of information and communication technologies (ICTs) supporting and transforming the external workings of governance by processing and communicating data.

The old model also held information technology isolated from the mainstream of reform, or held IT as the objective of reform. But the new model brings information systems (IS) to the heart of reform. In practice, this means two things:

- A central role for ICTs: as governance becomes, and becomes recognized as, even more information-intensive, ICTs become an essential part of more and more governance initiatives. ICTs are also recognized as a key lever to change. They are no longer isolated on the sidelines.
- An integrated role for ICTs: e-

governance means using ICTs as servants to the master of good governance. ICTs are no longer seen as an end in themselves and they are seen to work only as part of a wider systematic "package."

Overall, then, e-governance is the ICT-enabled route to achieving good governance. We might even prefer to think of it as "i-governance" -- integrated governance -- since it integrates both the processing and communication technologies; and since it integrates people, processes, information, and technology in the service of governance initiatives.

In simple terms, electronic governance is defined by scholars as giving citizens the choice of when and where they access government information and services. Putting the citizen at the centre of government means taking a delivery channel view. This would mean using more and

more of electronics and information technology in many of the government functions. In the current literature, most definitions of e-governance are loaded with its advantageous or virtuous connotations.

For example, e-governance is considered a system of governance that represents "good governance," that works better and costs less, that enhances accountability and responsiveness, that promotes civil society, and that is moral and transparent.

E-Governance should be seen, as elaborated by Heeks, to encompass all ICTs, but the key innovation is computer networks -- from intranets to the Internet -- creating a wealth of new digital connections:

- Connections within government -- permitting "joined-up thinking."
- Connections between government and NGOs/citizens -- strengthening accountability.
- Connections between government and business/citizens -- transforming service delivery.
- Connections within and between NGOs -- supporting learning and concerted action.
- Connections within and between communities -- building social and economic development.

Widespread global acceptance of electronic governance bears testimony to the observation that e-governance has rocked the governing systems in the world to a degree. As a matter of fact, it has revolutionized the systems of government service delivery and the developed states have made strides in adopting this technology driven mechanism. Countries such as US, UK, Canada, France and such other economically dominant ones are about to have e-governance in a full fledged manner. Many other countries are in hot pursuit.

Developing countries are not lagging far behind, given their capacity. Bangladesh, too, has taken positive steps in this direction. Though Bangladesh has many other problems of overriding importance, its journey has started with due emphasis on e-governance at the state level. But making the facilities of e-governance accessible to all strata of people remains a critical problem for Bangladesh because the state is ill-equipped to make it happen sooner rather than later.

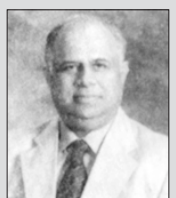
Notably, however, the production dimension of e-governance has been embraced really quickly by many a state but its informing aspect is being neglected even in the cradles of

democracy. The cyber-pessimists, however, believe that the use of IT in governance may worsen inequality in access to government services due to the lack of an adequate infrastructure, unequal ownership of computers, language constraints, and so on. There is also a concern that e-governance may disempower citizens by individualizing them, eroding their common bonds and endangering their privacy.

In any event, e-governance promises a lot to better the service providing functions. It also augurs well for democracy as it has the makings of enhancing people's participation through widespread internet access. But the fear of digital-divide, that is, discrimination between the information rich and the information poor, has made the situation rather complex. If the digital divide is negotiated well, e-governance -- because of its extensive facilitating dimensions -- has the wherewithal to deliver the goods.

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The shock of stalemate



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

FOR the first time in its entire history since 1948, Israel walked away from the battlefield without scoring an outright and convincing victory, in effect a stalemate. Israel has never fought a war with numerical superiority, this time the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) was fought to a standstill by a force far less in numbers.

Totally dominant in weapons and munitions on the ground, Israel's air-force ruled the skies unhindered, over 10,000 sorties delivering tons of ordnance in the form of precision-guided bombs, and smart missiles along with heavy stuff like "daisy-cutters," etc. 155 mm self-propelled guns constantly pounded Hezbollah positions, with direct tank fire on Hezbollah strong points from

South Lebanon circa 2006 has ended the 50-year psychological domination that Israel had built up on its Second World War and 1948 veterans. Israel will not search for every opportunity to re-assert its "myth of invincibility," for them it is a matter of life or death as a nation. The ceasefire will not hold, if anything the failure for the Hezbollah to disarm will be used as "casus belli" by Israel. This time around the war will be carefully planned and meticulously executed by the Israelis, the Hezbollah are not likely to sit on their laurels. Expect another war in the future, dear readers!

Merkawa tanks (MKs 1 & 2 with the regular 105 mm gun and MK 3 with the smooth barrel 120 mm gun). This tremendous concentrated firepower was followed by waves of mechanized infantry, they could not dislodge dedicated Hezbollah fighters. That failure shattered a myth built up carefully over the years, that the Arabs could not stand up to Israel's military might. The IDF did achieve, through a UN Resolution a buffer zone of sorts, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army moving in between Israel's border and the Litani River in South Lebanon to enforce the ceasefire. One doubts the Hezbollah will allow themselves to be disarmed.

The "Haganah" was created in 1921 to protect settlements

AS I SEE IT

(Kibbutz) The "Irgun" faction led by Menachem Begin, who later became PM, separated to focus on terrorism. Haganah helped British forces put down the great Arab uprising from 1936 to 1939. The Jewish Brigade formed by the British during World War 2 fought in Italy, ultimately about 30,000 Palestinian Jews took part in the war on different fronts. These combat hardened cadres returned to increase the Haganah field strength, its "strike" companies were called the "Palmach."

From 1945 to 1948, Haganah drew in soldiers as well as young displaced refugees from Europe (my friend, artilleryman Col David Yarkony joining as an 18-year old). The Haganah became the IDF at

the birth of Israel in May 1948, all other militias were banned. After a brief struggle between the Haganah and the Irgun, the latter was also absorbed into the IDF. Fighting both conventional battles and as unconventional forces, the IDF succeeded in 1948 in defeating the Egyptian and Jordanian armies, superior both in numbers and weaponry. This was possible only because of the combat experience and motivation inherent in the IDF. The Arab cause was not helped by the excesses of many small Arab irregulars indulging indiscriminately in murder, arson, and loot.

By 1956, the first of the three all-out short wars till 1973, the IDF had become a lean, mean, fighting

machine, the hard core being the motivated and hardened veterans of the Second World War and 1948. This value-added combat experience is vitally necessary for any fighting army (as opposed to a peacetime army where other standards apply).

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was well executed, yet it relied heavily on support from the Maronites in the Lebanese Army and the Phalangist militia. The Sabra and Chatilla massacres took place while the IDF stood by, one feels this marked the start of a downside, the steady rot to IDF's aura of invincibility peaking in south Lebanon this summer.

Hezbollah absorbed tremendous attrition without breaking, it soon became clear that the IDF's forte, "Close Quarter Battle" (CQB), the acid test for any army, had been lost over the years. A village called Bint Jbail, only 1-2 kms from the border was repeatedly taken by the Israelis but could not be held. With things going haywire the IDF chief, Lt Gen Dan Halutz, an air force officer, sent his army deputy, Lt Gen Moshe Kaplinsky to oversee (not replace) Northern Commander Lt Gen Udi Adam, a vote of "no confidence" in

the field commander, bad for morale for soldiers fighting in the field. A tactical land battle on that scale should only be fought by army officers, from the combat arms, infantry, armour, or artillery. A preponderance of air-force generals in the Command HQs cannot run a land war.

With 50 plus burnt-out armoured vehicles being towed back, at least 200 Israeli dead must have been the minimum count, with multiple more having battlefield injuries. That is a high price to pay for claiming 400-450 Hezbollah dead, mostly by bombs and artillery shells. The Hezbollah suffered grievous losses in key combat commanders and experienced personnel but those who took part in the fighting, a hard-core of 4,000-5,000, will emerge as battle-inoculated hardened cadres who can be fleshed out by the 10,000 personnel "in reserve" in no time at all. Shaikh Hussan Nasrallah has been careful in being easy on the rhetoric even though he was quick to claim victory. One supposes if you have not lost to Israel, you have won.

Hezbollah used a combination of classic guerilla tactics, both in urban areas and elsewhere, using the broken ground of (mountains

and fields) to good advantage. Armed mainly with AK-47s, anti-tank missiles (AT-3 Sagger, AT-4 Spigot, AT-5 Spandrel and the more modern AT-13 Memis and AT-14 Kornet), and new heavier, more effective rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), along with anti-tank landmines and hand grenades, the Hezbollah copied the Viet Cong in operating in small groups relying heavily on tunnels to offset their inferior numbers and weapons. Over 5,000 Katyusha rockets were fired on northern Israel, extending from Haifa to Nahariya. The longer range Fajr rockets with ranges of 45 kms and more were not used, neither were Zelzal-1 & 2 (rockets) and Zelzal 3 (missiles) with longer ranges (beyond Tel Aviv).

While the IDF chief did not break the law, when he off-loaded shares in the stockmarket three hours after two soldiers were kidnapped by Hezbollah, Lt Gen Dan Halutz broke a moral covenant. Along with battlefield blunders, this will probably cost him his job. He is best known for his callous comment when asked how he felt about bombing civilians during the "war of attrition" during 1970-71: "Only a slight bump on the wing when I release the bomb!"

The first principle of selecting

battle leaders is that you do not appoint a man without good combat experience, those who have not heard a shot being fired in anger cover their inferiority complex (to combat hardened soldiers) by resorting to bluster. There are many in this world who fight battles in their imagination or with their mouth. The 5-man commission appointed to investigate Israel's first military debacle in its history, will certainly find many shortcomings.

South Lebanon circa 2006 has ended the 50-year psychological domination that Israel had built up on its Second World War and 1948 veterans. Israel will not search for every opportunity to re-assert its "myth of invincibility," for them it is a matter of life or death as a nation. The ceasefire will not hold, if anything the failure for the Hezbollah to disarm will be used as "casus belli" by Israel. This time around the war will be carefully planned and meticulously executed by the Israelis, the Hezbollah are not likely to sit on their laurels. Expect another war in the future, dear readers!

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.