

Govt's Warning Must Have Some Teeth

The government has at long last done what it should have done at the very least months ago. It is in a Press Note cautioned the people against 'issuing threats' against the lives of 'some persons' and 'announcing rewards for the killers'.

Although the government's belated announcement leaves much to be desired by way of both language and approach, we welcome it wholeheartedly hoping that it will be redeemed through follow-up actions.

Ever since the case of Chhatachhaura's Noor Jahan the government's credibility as an effective enforcer of law and ensurer of justice was being eroded unremittingly and dangerously.

The Press Note must presage a series of uniform actions combining amply to show that the government means to put its foot down, if only because it must.

We welcome the government's pointer even if it falls short of addressing the root problem. Groups of people all over Bangladesh have taken into their hands the power of passing sentences of punishment on whosoever they choose and — in most cases executing those into reality.

If these anti-social goons, — the same set that fell thousands of newly planted trees and resist population control campaign and burn down schools — displace the government good measure and in the process rob the state of its justification to be there.

Certain very debatable, if not outrightly dubious, actions of late by the government have undoubtedly exacerbated the already dwindling situation of democratic stability. That is all the more reason why the government should be very watchful of its steps in the ensuing weeks.

One thing the government shall not do on pain of harming all in the land and their institutions built over thousands of years — contribute to the destabilising process set in motion by certain self-righteous holy of holies. The long leash already allowed to these has doubtlessly harmed Bangladesh's image internationally.

RAJUK's Unpleasant Duty

The parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Housing and Public Works arrived at an important decision on Tuesday. The decision on illegal construction in the city seeks to address a problem that has grown over the years to a menacing proportion.

This is however only a hope. Even though the directive has been duly communicated to RAJUK, one cannot be sure it will — or it has the ability to — embark on such an ambitious programme soon.

This fresh directive from the parliamentary standing committee adequately equips RAJUK to perform the job, but only legally and on paper. The laws are there alright. But the important thing is to implement the legal provisions in practice.

We would only hope that this time no such clout will prove too much for RAJUK to overcome. Let the agency cleanse itself of its past mistakes or misdeeds and thus prove equal to the task. Faulty construction of a number buildings detected recently has created panic among the public.

Evolving a Security Perspective for Bangladesh

by Brig. (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

NATIONAL security in a country revolves around two basic questions: What do we all want to secure and where do we perceive the threat to our security to be coming from?

In Bangladesh these questions have seldom been addressed in some concrete terms, either officially or academically. Thus the national security objectives and threat perceptions remain largely undefined in our country.

The apathy is not without reasons. First, still there exists a problem even about the understanding of national security and it has often been treated as synonymous with national defence which relates essentially to military defence from external threats.

Security in a developing country is essentially the product of development. It is the end-result of the total process of development, when we talk of developments in the context of security it is the whole set of efforts that goes into building up a nation state in the contemporary global setting.

Security in a developing country

Security is a matter more of perception. It means different things to different people depending on the material circumstances in which they live and the geopolitical environ in which they operate.

In modern times, roughly forty countries of the world which were the direct or indirect beneficiaries of European renaissance and industrial revolution could, through their long and turbulent process of nation building, reach that level of development.

These nations are, thus, insulated from internal upheaval and fissiparous tendencies from within.

politico-militarily — to take on challenges from any direction. At the worst, they are to provide military security against external threat if there is any. Empirically however there are few such threats.

What is to be secured?

What do we really want to secure? It is said that each state aims at protecting its 'internal values from external threats'. There has however been a problem about the precise understanding of 'internal values' with attempts at explaining it in different ways.

Much of it were manifested through our aspirations, passions and struggle for our independence. They are partly enshrined in our constitution and also reflected through the hopes and expectations of our people.

Our core values

First, the political independence and territorial integrity are our minimum core value and we would like to secure them at all costs.

Second, we must be able to provide and sustain conditions conducive to un-interrupted socio-economic and allround developments for continued wellbeing of our people.

Disarmament

Pretoria Readies Arms — to Sell

Its new leaders have vowed to banish all things made for conflict, but South Africa is expected to be a major player in the trillion-dollar global arms trade.

Addressing the UN Security Council in May, Thabo Mbeki, deputy president of the new African National Congress (ANC) government, said Pretoria will "banish from our life all those things that make for war and violent conflict".

But Beaver said South Africa is expected to be both a buyer and a seller in the dog-eat-dog international weapons market.

Pretoria is close to ordering up to six 2,000 tonne, helicopter-carrying British warships to reinforce its blue-water capability in the Indian Ocean.

The sanctions, imposed in protest against the apartheid

at any cost. Thus the maintenance of congenial environs for a consistent national growth is a matter related to the security interest of a country.

Third, we have a distinct identity of our own with a political culture and socio-economic structure, which is different from those in the rest of the South Asian region. This is based on our history, heritage, tradition and peripheral location in the sub-continent.

Fourth, in a resource-poor country like Bangladesh viable egalitarian society can be built up only on the basis of social justice which is also a cardinal tenet of our religion.

Fifth, the democratic norm, is the essence of our society. During the British rule, Bengal was one of the pioneers of building up democratic polity through the self-government granted in phase, by the British.

Threats to our security: Internal dimension. If we have to secure these values, let us now see what can be the sources of insecurity for them. As I have argued earlier the sources of threats in a developing country can be multi-dimensional.

Let us first have a look at our social scene. Here the most alarming spectre is that of unemployment. According to World Bank report 35% of our workforce is unemployed although unofficially the figure is claimed to be more than 40%.

With a literacy rate less than 25% it affects the growth of future leadership and the quality of the citizens. The youth force may fall victim to widespread narcotic culture which could make them into a complete liability for the nation.

Look at the economic sector which is equally bleak awaiting steps to be taken on an emergency basis to reverse the trend. The country is categorised as one of the least developed countries of the world with per capita income of a little over \$200.

South Africa's state-run Armaments Development and Production Corporation (ARMSCOR) — recently privatised under the name of Denel Corporation — was at one time the world's 10th largest arms manufacturer, he said.

I don't think that South Africa will find it either feasible or prudent to dismantle its military industry either for political or ideological reasons," Khatana said. He noted that

our vital revenue earnings. In a contemporary world where economic strength of a country is increasingly the instrument of power relations where do we really stand in security terms? The pervasive underdevelopment is compounded by our resource poor economy. Over 70% of our peasantry is landless and per capita calorie intake of our people is roughly 1900.

Now let's have a look at our political scene. The nation is divided on fundamental national issues. The political process was not allowed in the country and so has been the fate of political institutions.

Internally there are still more sources of insecurity like ecological degradation and natural disasters putting at times even our physical existence at stake. We also take serious challenges to our security in the very process of our nation state building with critical constraints on our resources in a highly intrusive, unfriendly environment and an international system rather hostile in the context of a third world country.

The state of domestic situation provided here is by no means exhaustive. How ever the internal weakness of a country due to its underdevelopment not only erodes its strength of resistance and survival it also encourages outside intervention in various guises.

Viewed in this perspective Bangladesh suffers from a great deal of vulnerability.

External dimension of our insecurities

Now let us turn to another front of threats. This aspect of threat is more clearly understood by the people. The country's external threat usually emanates from its neighbours.

India, the core country in the region has 72% of the region's area, 77% of its population and 78% of its GNP and also has concomitant natural superiority that constitutes power. It is several times the size and power potential of South Asian countries combined.

Most spectacular however is — particularly to the west — her practice and preservation of a resilient democracy in a highly pluralistic society.

Problems do however arise when this preeminence is turned into predominance. Independent India wanted to put on the British mantle as far as the security of the region was concerned and called for a 'strategic unity' in the region envisaging an orbit of her control in the immediate neighbourhood.

India still insists on its validity though in a modified form and proclaims a kind of South Asian 'Monroe Doctrine' asserting her exclusive influence in the region. Notwithstanding India's security outlook and regional policy the quest of smaller South Asian nations including Bangladesh to steer their course clear of India's sphere of influence has remained strong.

Col (Retd) Mirza Shafi 100, Aga Sadique Road, Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Barapukuria Coal Mine Project

Sir, We congratulate Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia for the inauguration of Barapukuria Coal Mine Project of Taka 887.52 on June 27, 1994. We also thank the government of the People's Republic of China for providing necessary help and assistance in the amount of US dollar 124.84 million for starting the much awaited work on Barapukuria coal mine.

It may be mentioned here that 'black-gold' mine of Cox's Bazar containing huge deposits of valuable minerals like zircon, rutile, garnet, magnetite and monazite etc. is no less important than that of Barapukuria coal mine project. But we wonder why our government has not taken in hand any commercial project on 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar as

yet? Why the government is keeping totally silent over the matter for years together is not understandable.

In fact, we hardly do not need any foreign aid and assistance for the exploration and commercial utilisation of the valuable minerals known as 'black-gold'. We may start the work of 'black-gold' mining at Cox's Bazar at any time with our own resources, indigenous method and technology without any heavy investment either in the public or in the private sector.

I wonder if we can produce salt, make shrimp cultivation in the coastal areas why can't we utilise commercially our valuable minerals available in

the coastal areas from Teknaf to Kuakata? I welcome anyone to come and see if my claim of valuable minerals 'black-gold' is not commercially viable.

Christian graveyard at Wari

Sir, On a recent visit to the Christian Graveyard at Wari, I found it very much a dismal situation. A number of young people in smaller groups were sitting at different places.

Up on a little asking, I came to know that at different times in the day-time many 'Romeos' and 'Julietts' also gather there for exchanging and expressing their emotional yearnings.

A cemetery is a sacred place because we bury the last remains of our ancestors there. We have respect for those because it would never be possible for us to be what we are today without their supports.

deprecate the graves of late relatives of somebody else today, tomorrow the very criminals will not hesitate to violate the sanctity of the other cemeteries.

In view of the above, may we ask all concerned including the law enforcing agencies to take appropriate actions to put the things straight at the cemetery by restricting the entry of unwanted persons and extending co-operation to the care-takers stationed there.

John Arun Sarkar Dhaka.

Megacity Dhaka

Sir, Congratulations to Mayor Hanif and all the best wishes for his desire to improve the living conditions in the metropolis — a megacity indeed — whose runaway growth may lead to unliveable state in days to come and the

signs of the state of devastating strangulation are already there. Let him, therefore, ensure the following so that the city starts functioning and not remain stagnated losing its battle against crime, economic chaos and filth.

Select exclusive public meeting places and shopping areas (pedestrian malls) during evening hours.

Introduce bicycle lanes connecting the parks and other open places.

Introduce incentives like free bus tickets etc for voluntary separation of reusable trash and non-recycleable ones.

Provide modern public transport system to eliminate city road problems.

Improve sanitation/cleanliness of market places/disposal areas.

Col (Retd) Mirza Shafi 100, Aga Sadique Road, Dhaka.