

National Security or Regime Security?

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

In Bangladesh our notion of national security is inherited from its tradition, experience and practice in erstwhile Pakistan. At least there is a striking similarity between national security pursuits of the military regimes of both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

A Refreshing Departure

The amnesty period for surrendering illegal arms expires tomorrow. Even after a four-day extension, making the period a whole long week, the response is very predictably going to be worse than dismal. If a government visibly fails to enforce its fiat, specially in the case of a very urgent and universally popular issue, it would face a loss of confidence of the people. And it might lose confidence in itself.

That such a failure is hardly affordable. Home Minister Rafiqul Islam is wide awake of. And he did some tough talking to the top policemen of the nation on Sunday. He was very forthright in giving them a piece of his mind. He blamed the lack of response to the arms recovery campaign on the police. He gave poignant expression to what we but suspect — that police know about the possessors of illegal arms but would not catch them. In the past, governments themselves created private armed cadres for malafide political reasons and offered them both sanctuary and an unhindered supply of ammunition. Police then could not have done anything against these criminals. The Home Minister's admonition of police passes the buck to them and in wide public view — and police now has little defence for not acting with all power and sincerity.

So, two cheers for the minister. One less because he was not well-advised in allowing that admonition to be public through the press — he shouldn't make his main implementers feel guilty and resentful days before they must embark on a tough campaign. And after all things are not as simple as ministers like them to appear. Last week when two groups of Chhatra League cadres created a panic in the DU halls by taking heavily armed positions against each other — the minister could have descended on the scene and nabbed scores of those he is supposedly madly after. But he didn't. One top policeman reminded the minister of such limitations on their part also.

Amnesty was foredoomed — nobody thought it would succeed, not even the Home Minister himself. It was at the most a ritual before the real act — the recovery campaign that should start day after tomorrow must send terror into all terrorist minds. It is Wednesday and the days following it all our eyes are turned on. If the Sunday tough-talk has been geared to make a success of the recovery campaign, so be it. Let that phase ensue at the end of the amnesty period in a fool-proof manner. It has been, all said and done, a refreshing departure from the age-old practice of whitewashing any police inadequacy by governments.

Stock Market Transparency

The Dhaka stock market is not yet the breakers' early morning storm over the tea cup as in some cities on the neighbourhood but lately its profile has grown considerably among variegated investors, both at home and abroad. The high demand for Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) we are banking in has its downside too. The unmet portion of it shows up the increasing gap between expectation and attainment. In those trying circumstances, how the limited number of primary shares are being handled now will naturally come under close expert scrutiny and critical analysis.

This is what happened in a seminar organised by the Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, on the theme: Trends and Potential of Emerging Stock Market in Bangladesh. The participating experts underscored the need for transparency and professionalism in the conduct of the stock market business so that it can grow to its full potential. The high speculative prices of the shares in the secondary market are out of proportions to their intrinsic valuation. This is rather 'bubbly', if you will, and the bubble might burst unless the structural and operational weaknesses besetting the stock market are overcome in good time.

A degree of speculation is a necessary part of the share business activity but it does not have to be fishy and intriguing. The AGMs of the industrial concerns themselves ought to be fully informative and transparent in the first place. Then there are the bank loan defaulting companies with their shares on offer and a suspected manipulation of the share prices in the secondary market.

This is the right time for streamlining the stocks and securities market. Its size is still small and manageable. But it is on the verge of expansion with the privatisation process picking up to raise the supply level of primary shares. The law commission being formed to incentivise investment with legal safeguards will hopefully turn their attention to the stock market where some reforms seem due.

Female AIDS Victim

This is an eye-opener to the scare about AIDS minus the matching preparedness to handle any known victim of the syndrome. Ruby, 21, hailing from Faridpur district had been on a housemaid stint in Bahrain. On being tested HIV positive, she got deported to Bangladesh on July 21. Three days later she consulted a doctor at the Faridpur General Hospital and retired to her Charbhadransan village home — just like that. Apparently the police were tipped off about the AIDS victim. They promptly tracked her down at her village home and put her in a hospital.

That unmarried girl's reappearance in Charbhadransan with the deadly AIDS on her person exposed the surroundings to a kind of danger we are so dreadfully unaccustomed to. Why is not there an arrangement to quarantine an AIDS carrier like her — much as she herself deserved to be taken care of — at the airport itself on arrival? Thereafter she should have been taken to a hospital with an AIDS ward to it. It is simply incredible that the airport authority were ignorant of the reason for her deportation.

As a matter of fact, we want routine AIDS-related screening done at the airport specially on certain categories of incoming passengers. Besides, those going abroad on assorted job assignments must be duly made aware of the consequences of dropping guard on AIDS in their places of work.

ONE of the problems of national security in a Third World country is its chronic misperception. Although the concern for security is as old as the evolution of civil society from a Hobbesian state of nature, a serious awareness of security problems and a realistic interest in national security studies that began only in the aftermath of the Second World War and its conceptualisation even in the developed countries is a recent phenomenon. While a public understanding of security in an underdeveloped country like Bangladesh is likely to be elementary what has however been disturbing is its perceptual distortion. Even in the informed circle of our country, the idea goes that the national security is entirely the domain of the military and sensitive enough to be dealt with in top secrecy whereas in its proper perspective the national security is the concern of the whole nation, to be managed at the highest level of the national leadership and with sufficient transparency.

More so, in a country where the security has its multiple facets i.e., political, cultural, economic, environmental and so on apart from its military dimension directed towards the external threats. The multi-dimensional nature of the security problems of our country warrants an approach capable of covering all conceivable threats and challenges to our security. Unfortunately such an integrated approach to our national security is yet to evolve. Worse still, most people in our country tend to treat

it synonymous with the security of the regime in power. Not only that they have a obsessive belief that the country's security hinges to the sustenance of a particular regime, group or a system — such ideas are carefully infused in them for the vested interest.

This proclivity has indeed shrouded much of our national security in ambivalence. Its objective of protecting the vital interest of the national have inadvertently been subordinated to the interests of a quarters-wielding power. The problem is acute particularly in an authoritarian system where there are few political alternatives and the sole authority of the country has monopoly over everything including national security. But surprisingly enough, even in a democratically polity the tendency of mixing up national security with the priorities and preferences of the incumbent government has grown menacingly fast. All the agencies and resources for security are unabashedly employed to safeguard the interest and continuity of the sitting government. The consequences have been dismal with neither national nor regime security ensured.

In Bangladesh our notion of national security is inherited from its tradition, experience and practice in erstwhile Pakistan. At least there is a striking similarity between national

security pursuits of the military regimes of both Pakistan and Bangladesh. One of the first few things that the national security in Pakistan aimed at was to relate it to the preservation of the ruling regime of the day. An emergency atmosphere was deliberately kept alive in the country and its bewildered people were persuaded to believe that without the Muslim League government of that time which was both inept and corrupt, the security of Pakistan as well as its ideology of Islam would be at stake.

When the armed forces in Pakistan took over the country in 1953 the national security was militarised by giving primacy to its military aspect and the country's civilian authority was gradually eroded. In the name of national security the military was encouraged to run a parallel authority, if not an exclusive one. In fact erosion of civil authority in Pakistan started even earlier. The story goes that in 1952 when the first military attaché to Washington was appointed, he was charged by then Commander in Chief, General Ayub Khan, to order arms from the United States but not to take the ambassador into confidence since the politicians could not be trusted with sensitive matters of national security.

An extensive abuse of secu-

rity agencies like the Inter Services Intelligence was committed by the successive Pakistani authorities to promote their political purposes like fixing and harassing the political opponents. At a later stage when Ayub Khan had an occasion during 1965 war to enquire about the intelligence assessments likely intention during the operation the ISI chief gave a blank look. Since the ISI remained busy keeping tabs on Ayub's political opponents at home the failure was obvious. Its counterpart in Bangladesh was indiscriminately utilised during the late 70s and 80s in breaking and making political parties as well as enlisting political support for the regimes that seized power in post-1975 Bangladesh. Once such practice was in place it continued even when democratically elected BNP government was installed in 1991.

Earlier when General Zia was catapulted to power following the putsch of 1975 obviously his only political constituency was the armed forces on which he performance relied rather heavily before his support base could be extended. This reliance unavoidably exposed our military to the cross current of national politics. This phenomenon together with other prevailing factors significantly when in

shaping our national security perspective which insisted on seeing Zia and national security inseparably linked. Zia freely used national security plank not only for consolidating his position but also to buttress his own growing power. In the process our military was highly politicised and Zia craftily pursued 'divide and rule' by playing 'freedom fighters' groups off against the 'repatriates' and vice versa.

The similar game was played by Ershad but he was more subtle. The politicisation of the military got accentuated during the regime of former prime minister who also pitted one group of military brass against another. Some were rewarded in term of promotions and plum posting at the cost of others who were quietly eased out from the service. In spite of her considerable popularity among the masses she was apparently trying to build up her contingencies also in the military which became an important factor in our national politics since 1975. Notwithstanding the differences in approach and style, they all were aiming at entangling the future prospects or otherwise of the armed forces with those of their own.

From time to time, a large number of our bright officers in whom the nation invested heavily were relieved from the services perhaps because they

proved prejudicial to the ruling regime of the day. And in each such event, a measure of confidentiality was insisted upon in the name of secrecy of the services. The murmurs of protest were instantly suppressed. When such events were pieced together the loss incurred to the nation appear grievous and public who sustain the military though their taxes remain unconvinced of the inevitability of such waste. The explanations have been advanced at times that such releases were in the public interest and their details cannot be further divulged for security reasons. But when the armed forces are denuded of its valuable leadership as if through an invisible hand more of insecurity haunts the nation.

Recently there were furrows over the retirement/dismissal of some of our senior officers for gross indiscipline and irregularity. Such blanket accusations seems indiscreet because then the question arises as to how and why the state of discipline or irregularity was allowed to come to a pass where an extreme step of this nature becomes necessary. The state of discipline or irregularity was allowed to come to a pass where an extreme step of this nature becomes necessary. The state of our military's morale, discipline and welfare is a subject which needs to be open for public debate. After all it impinges, in one way or other, on our national security. More importantly, we should be able to separate the security of the nation and that of the regime so that they cannot mix up in a manner that both remain unattainable.

National Budget 1996-97: Characteristics and Control

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

SINCE the Presentation of the Budget by the Finance Minister on 28th July 1996, in the first session of the Seventh Parliament, we have seen debates in the parliament and comments in the seminars outside the Parliament. This session will continue through August, so, we have more days ahead to see how the matter finally boils down in the new parliament.

Actually the provisional budget for 1996-97 was approved by the caretaker government on 20th June 96 to maintain continuity and financial discipline. Scope to make necessary changes in the estimates by the new Finance Minister was kept. The new Finance Minister SAMS Kibria has kept the figures, announced by the caretaker Government, after incorporating a few changes within it. So, the estimated revenue receipts remains Taka 17,120 crore and estimated Revenue expenditure Taka 12,103 crore, leaving a revenue surplus of Taka 5,017 crore. Likewise, the Annual Development Programme amounting to Taka 12,500 crore as announced by the Finance Adviser of the Caretaker Government, has been kept as it is by the new Finance Minister SAMS Kibria.

What is disturbing to note is the increasing trend of revenue expenses and the declining size of ADP. The revenue expenditure would be 9.33 per cent more than the level of 1995-96, which stood at Taka 11,070 crore. In the revised budget 1995-96, the revenue expenditure is Tk 11,814 crore, which is 2.44 per cent more than the original revenue budget. It seems that there is no room for reducing the revenue expenses!

In the ADP, the size was reduced to Tk 10,447 crore in the revised budget 1995-96 from the original estimate of Tk 12,100 crore. The caretaker government prepared a core ADP for 1996-97 amounting to Tk 11,300 crore, although it was showed at Tk 12,500 crore in the Budget. Experience has shown that there is always a cut imposed in the original ADP. BNP, now in opposition, might have a good point to say that they could have mobilized the resources to implement the ADP, had there been no political turmoil. But then they could have ended the political deadlock by resigning earlier. Anyway, there would not have been qualitative implementation of ADP. Finance Adviser of the last caretaker government

Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud rightly opined that in the name of ADP crore of Taka were misused every year, which is unimaginable for a poor country like Bangladesh. Newspapers are agog with reports as to how ADP projects are seized for personal, local and coterie interests. So, the usual formulation of ADP will not serve any national interest. There is expectation that the new Finance Minister will do something to prevent leakages and wastages. Towards that end, consensus between the Treasury bench and the opposition within the Parliament on the basic issues are the crying need of the hour, not hurling abuses at each other. The so-called labour leaders and CBA should work within limits, without hampering revenue and development activities.

When Begum Khaleda Zia assumed the office of Prime Minister on 20th March 1991, the main hurdle before her Government to cross was the huge amount of loan default. The then Finance Minister lost no time to launch the drive against loan defaulters! But the hard reality is that, after five years, the burden of loan default has increased by about

hundred per cent. The current amount is estimated to be Taka 14,000 crore. Will AL Finance Minister Kibria be able to bring back financial discipline, by avoiding favouritism and nepotism, continued through the autocratic rule of Ershad and also democratic rule of Khaleda Zia? No doubt, the task is difficult! But the Finance Minister has already expressed his concern in his Budget speech and calculated payment of tax at the rate Tk 25 per citizen per annum on it this account! The voters will be relieved and economy will be invigorated if Mr. Kibria remains steadfast in commitment, even if that means loss of some voters or annoyance of a few stalwarts of the party. The net result would be the present government will gain more confidence and get more votes in future. The fall of JP and BNP from the seat of power amply testifies this presumption.

There is no use to drum up that BNP has left fund the empty in the way BNP did after the fall of JP Government. Instead, people want to see

action against the wrong doers and deeds, like misappropriation of public fund, if any. In spite of many a failure of BNP, the foreign exchange reserve stood at 2 billion dollar, rate of savings increased and inflation rate was by and large low, till their departure.

There was always stagnancy in the rate of investment, for which BNP may be squarely blamed and also for low per capita income of 220 dollar and deepening of poverty of the people. As such, AL has received a shattered economy from BNP, no doubt! But then, it is equally necessary to appreciate that people have voted AL to power to salvage the economy and alleviate poverty in real terms; not for propaganda, as practised by their predecessors.

Meanwhile, the parliament has passed the supplementary budget to the tune of Taka 3 thousand crore for 1995-96, which covers the period of BNP and caretaker governments. The excess expenditures were mostly of non-development nature, and bear an eloquent proof of bad financial management by any standard. The intent of Article 91 of the

Constitution providing for supplementary and excess grants should not be so liberally interpreted as to authorise such huge excess expenditures which should rather be kept as minimum as possible. Otherwise, what was the real need for the budget speech of Finance Minister at the start of the financial year and the placing of the annual financial statement before the parliament? We hope that present government will not quote it as precedence, while discharging their responsibilities, henceforth.

More budget provisions are not enough; equally important, is budgetary control throughout the financial year, which is exercised by the Finance Ministry and other ministries concerned. If necessary, the rules of business may be changed at par with parliamentary form of government. This was kept hanging during the past government. It is now clear that policy of non-governance is neither good for the country nor for the party. As such, we expect operation of stringent rules, for sound financial system, as is maintained at least in our nearby countries.

To the Editor...

Bravol

Sir, I heartily applaud our Home Minister for the brave 'drama' enacted by him for going on an expedition 'in disguise' to get the real picture about drug trafficking in the city. The poor response of the authorities at the Demra police station was the reality we cannot expect anything more on their part since they are in it. If they had been more active and honest, our country's drug situation (business) would not have flourished so openly!

I am sure that like myself, most people will congratulate the minister for his noble endeavour, but my question is: what next? We want to know what he is doing or what he will do now, since he now has a 'glimpse' of the terrible situation! An entire generation has fallen prey to the clutches of the drug menace and it is about time that we do something firm to stop this terrible trend which is fast destroying our society!

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Chittagong and Biman

Sir, On 28 February, 1996 the mayor of the Chittagong City Corporation was apprehended by the then government that incident stoked fire in non-cooperation movement. Movement activists expressed their fury in retaliation of mayor's arrest on Biman office, General Post Office, Railway Station and other government and private establishments. Law enforcing agencies seemingly mocked with the city dwellers. Skirmishes on that day which had been around us looked immune from law. All modes of transport were ceased to operate. No one from in and out could move without special arrangements. Those conducts we witnessed were questionable with respect to political activity.

I was directly affected by the incidents happened on that day. I had two reservations in Bangladesh Biman from Dhaka to Jessore. We could not move from Chittagong city, for the situation arose from incident. There was virtually no operation at Biman office after this incident since the office was ransacked and put into arson. We could not yet surren-

Slums in Dhaka City

Sir, Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. About 80 per cent of its people are poor. Thousands of them live in slums. They usually come from distant villages. These slums earned a bad name on the account that they shelter poor people along with hoodlums.

These slums grow with dirty environment where there is no utility service. They also make slums beside 'dirty canals. Most of the slum people in Dhaka city have no proper jobs. They are mostly illiterate. Some of them are cart pullers and day labourers. These jobs do not give them enough income to support their families which consist of three to four children and in some cases more. Those who do not have proper employment indulge in nefarious activities like hijacking and pilfering in order to survive. The reason behind all this is poverty.

Slums affect us in many ways. They cause overcrowding and pollution. The slum people pass their excreta in the drains. They cook by burning rubber tyres or bits of synthetic cloth in makeshift ovens. This causes hygienic problems for the neighbourhoods. They throw garbage on the streets from where obnoxious smell fouth the air. People cannot breath fresh air. Everyday the slum people quarrel with each other unaware that they are disturbing others. A city with slums looks like a peacock with ugly feet.

Slums sometimes grow in large vacant areas where markets or buildings can be built. A question arises: if these

Raising of Retirement Age

Sir, We are surprised at the suggestion made by Mr M Syeduzzaman in his recent commentary on the 1996-97 Budget, published in your esteemed daily on the 5 August, 1996 that the government should raise the retiring age to 60 years. In his opinion, this is needed to avoid losing the services of senior public servants due to retire in the coming months. Contrary to his suggestion, bureaucracy in Bangladesh actually needs infusion of new blood in its top echelon. We have seen the rather lacklustre performance of present senior officials in all spheres of administration. Therefore, it will be only appropriate to allow these officials to proceed to superannuation at the age of 57, whenever the same becomes due.

Senior citizens like Mr M Syeduzzaman are rendering useful services to the nation even long after their retirement. Senior officials retiring in the coming months can follow their footsteps.

After prolonged service with the government, some civil servants find it extremely difficult to adjust to the life after retirement. These people try to perpetuate their link with the government by seeking extensions or sneaking back into the government on ministerial or similar policy-making assignments. This is contrary to our public pronouncements of revitalising the private sector, improving our social services network, and bringing dynamism in our civil administration.

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OPINION

Law and Order: Policemen and Local Authorities

John Arun Sarkar

THE print and electronic media of the country have elaborately reported on recently held seminar/discussion on the prevailing state of law and order in the country and sought way-outs. For pertinent reasons, it seems that the discussants focused on the roles of policemen/law enforcing agencies and the local bodies. In this connection while agreeing that it is not possible for any single agency to deter crimes but only united efforts of the government, law enforcing agencies, local bodies, and large members of the community, can do it, I would like to share the following points:

FALSE REPORTING: Whenever it comes to police investigation and report, it is widely believed that the party that is stronger in influencing the investigating officer will have the report to his/her favour. It is further asserted by many that this is no myth but has become the rule of the day.

By the grace of Almighty, the innocent victims of such practices usually come out clear but sadly writhing through lots of harassments, difficulties and heavy prices.

Many consider that the policemen should be made accountable for false investigative reports. The penalties for false reports and harassments be clearly spelt out and circulated for information of all and sundry. A clear-cut procedure to handle such cases be developed.

FABRICATED MEDICAL REPORTS: To square up a false case, often the incriminating party obtains fake medical certificates surprisingly from government hospitals. Again criminals produce false medical certificates to avoid charges. Reportedly, issuance of false medical certificates is very much in vogue. It is further said that it is so commonly practised that doctors also perhaps have been considering it very much alright.

While looking for solution, many opine that specific and smooth legal procedures be there to bring the defaulting doctors to book and the wrong-doing doctors be stripped of licences to practice. Is there any superhuman policeman in reality? It is true that when it comes to deter-

ring crimes, policemen many a time fail to demonstrate average dexterity, forget behaving superhumanly. However, when dealing with common men/citizens, policemen are very much superhuman (domineering, sometimes arrogant). They frequently turn true the widely said statement, "A policeman has the legal clauses as many as the stars in a clear sky up his sleeves". A policeman often behaves in a way as if he can do and undo anything and there is none to stop him.

The laws that arm policemen with the authority for doing anything they wish to do should be curbed. Any absolute authority is crime prone. A policeman must know that any misbehaviour or unusual authority demonstration will be dealt with severely.

LOCAL BODIES: The misdeeds of Mohallah committees and other local bodies including the committees under the ward commissioners (the chairmen etc often come vivid in the mind of the common men. Their activities verge on delivering more injustice than justice in all sorts of disputes (often arisen purposefully by themselves). They do these by putting up immaculate expressions with saintly words on their lips and under the patronage of a quarter in the authority. That having the backing of the people in power, they feel that they can override any disciplinary action. As such they are nonchalant. They often claim to be in the status of magistrates and that their decisions are final and accepted by the courts also.

They keep or have to keep close contact with the local police station and it is alleged that with the support from that end, they in the guise of justice-doers exert tremendous pressure on the commonmen. The government should consider the means and tools to check any mischievous activities by these committees/local bodies.

In this respect, the associations of lawyers, retired Judges, the Human Rights activists and the NGO activists may be given special accesses to perform their investigation activities and protection for reporting publicly which will

in turn would restrain the pre-tentious crime-mongers.

It is alleged that identified criminals frequently visit police stations. On any average day, a visit to a police station would testify that the locally identified criminals are seen roaming in the precincts of the police station. Often they move about like bosses which undermines the trustworthiness of the policemen. Whereas the general mass who sometimes visit PS for obtaining clearance certificates etc are hesitant and fearful that by some ploy, they may have to pay a high price.

Mobile special teams may time to time visit police stations to keep watch on the activities at the police stations. Periodical visits of team of responsible persons (civil servants, professionals, social workers) without knowing of the PS will be helpful in many ways.

VISIT AT ODD HOURS: Unless emergency, policemen should be instructed to avoid visits at odd hours because visiting a house at the middle of the night without valid reasons per se is equivalent to punishing the inmates. And often it is reported that policemen misbehave not only with men, they are tempted to utter dirty words and make filthy gestures in presence of ladies. This indicates that our policemen are not well-disciplined.

The solution to the above problems demands accountability. At certain intervals, different teams not directly linked to the police administration and/or local bodies should be invited to make surprise visits, collect information, analyse and suggest remedies for effective improvement in the state of law and order. Any permanent committee/body will be perverted by corruption with the passage of time as experiences suggest.

The complaints against the policemen and the local committees may be seriously looked into by the Ministry of Home Affairs. People often for the sake of personal safety and security send complaints anonymously but just on the ground of anonymity, the complaints should not be dismissed. Some false complaints may cause embarrassment no doubt, but the benefits will far outweigh the cost.