

## Purchases for Defence

by Brigadier (Retd) M Sakhawat Hussain NDC, psc

*In absence of a well-articulated defence policy major purchases for defence forces is likely to come under scrutiny on both political and non-political plains as the expenditure involves taxpayers' money and may give rise to controversy.*

Of late, much is being written and talked about in the media in regards to purchases of few items for the defence forces of the country. Never before such wide ranging media coverage was given to any of such purchases. This by itself proves the fact of the openness of the government, relatively free press and above all the increasing inquisitiveness and interests taken by people of many disciplines in these sensitive issues. Opinions thus expressed show genuine concern and the level of interest it generated, though much of these opinions are based on inadequate availability of information. However, much has been talked about involving a few of the purchases which gave rise to some political statements as well, among these are purchases of MiG-29 for Airforce, Frigate for Navy and attempt to purchase trucks carrier for Army, for Army Headquarters and Air Chief himself to clarify the position which, under democratic norms, should have been the job of appropriate minister or the ministry charged with.

Am of this brief article is not to question or favour or disfavour the purchases but to examine the defence purchases in the perspective of a well articulated defence plan drawn out of the overall policy.

Every sovereign country, big or small, has its right to raise and maintain a defence force that she thinks is the minimum need for the defence of the country for a minimum period envisaged in the country's policy. Similarly she has the right to acquire by procuring or manufacturing equipment or weapons that are perceived to be suitable to meet the plan depending upon the expenditure that she can afford.

Strategy of defending a country and its interest would differ from country to country and which would clearly be mentioned in the policy laid down. Examples can be drawn from Israel, which has the policy of fighting the defensive battle in others' territory creating enough space for the defence of the integrity her own boundary, as her existing boundary does not provide any depth. USA's defence policy calls for fighting in the defence of US national interest away from the continental USA, anywhere in the world. Worthwhile to mention that USA participated in the

World War which was fought almost all over the world except the continental USA and the USA physically participated when the continent of USA came under threat. It was after Second World War that various doctrines of defence have constantly been evolved. Point to note that both the countries cited as example are equipped and constantly updating the equipment to achieve the given defence goal as envisaged in their policy.

The above context is brought to relate the method of defence and the equipment that are needed, to examine the context of our purchases those are under discussion and the defensive stance, if we have any. While expressing all kinds of opinion, perhaps basic question has not been focused properly i.e. did we or do we purchase major defence weapons out of any policy or plan? To my mind answer is negative, if so the justification of all kinds so far forwarded in support of purchases, gets negated. I would take the opportunity to discuss in brief the purchases those have currently raised enough controversy in the print media including raising political hypotheses.

Maximum controversy has been raised in case of purchase of Russian made MiG-29, characterised as Fulcrum by NATO, as offensive aircraft. The news of this purchase raised eyebrows of many a citizen including some political figures. Unusually, the Air Chief had to make a lengthy explanation justifying the purchase. In all eventuality this explanation should have been better done by the Minister for Defence or Ministry of Defence, as in case of any democratic government. However, the technical superiority of the aircraft in comparison to the inventory that we hold, cannot be challenged. It is true that at the end of the cold war, to counter F-16, Russia, in continuous bid to improve its MiG series, came up with MiG-29. The technology is a decade and a half old which has gone into further modification and a model change to MiG-31. India, who is one of the largest holders of MiG-29 series outside Russia, is currently go-

ing through approximately 21 modifications including avionics. Still the fact remains that MiG-29 is the latest technology and a superior aircraft that we could lay hand on. No denial also about the fact that this is one of the combat aircraft easily termed as offensive, not designed or suitable for close air support to the ground troops and would rather be prioritised. As such some weapons or equipment purchased in the name of modernising the forces, as in the case of MiG purchase, thus raised controversy.

Recently, few newspaper gave coverage to the purchase of a frigate for Bangladesh Navy though the deal was concluded last year but perhaps it came out late as corollary to the MiG issue. There seem to be nothing wrong with this purchase from South Korea as the frigate in question shall have all western equipment. A new frigate from any western country would have needed double the amount. It is only Navy that has definite role to protect maritime boundary not only in emergency but during peace time as well. It is the duty of the Navy to ensure the security of the natural resources within 200 miles EEZ even in peace time from intrusion by unauthorised vessels and from plundering. Currently our Navy is unable to perform effectively such role due to lack of surveillance and inadequate interception capability. To my mind we need to increase our Naval fleet to provide security to the investors in the offshore oil and gas fields, to patrol and protect coastal waters. One feels that we need to strengthen our Navy at least providing it with the capability to break any cordon or Naval blockade which would detach us from outside world and render us landlocked. It is imperative for our policy makers to take into account the geographical location of Bay of Bengal, its accessibility and probable dispute areas as it is certain that our land mass would be naturally expanding towards sea and increase importance of sea resources that our multiplying population would largely depend on. Thus our National Defence Policy should dictate the type and number of fleets that we need to have to at least counter undeclared incursion that might take place. Events of

Talpatti Island is a case in point.

Lastly, I would like to touch upon the issue of purchasing defence equipment from immediate neighbouring countries. It was reported in news media that the Army was contemplating to procure logistic trucks from India. There has been statements in newspapers from ISPR, which unfortunately involved one of the ex-Chief of Staff, now turned politician, though as far as knowledge goes these were not purchased.

Geographically, we are surrounded by India from almost three sides with the exception of 147 miles of border with Arakan province of Myanmar. From the geo-strategic point of view, in all cases, it is the neighbouring countries that threat is perceived from which dictates a country's Defence Plan. It is said that in geo-strategic scenario there is no permanent friend or foe. Here I would like to cite an example of pre- and post-1962 Sino-Indian relationship, two being neighbours having had best of the relationship. Under such circumstances how wise would be the decision of depending upon neighbouring countries for defence equipment is a matter of wisdom and understanding of our policy makers. Since the issue so far involved purchase of trucks, the item which, as I believe, a recurrent need of our Armed Forces, in substantial number, to meet such demand and growing requirements of commercial vehicle it is high time to consider reviving available infrastructure like Pregoti, which can meet the defence demand with special effort thus to reduce foreign dependency in this sector.

To conclude, the Defence Purchase is made to equip the Armed Forces with the best and effective equipment keeping in view the strategic and tactical need in broader and narrower spectrum. The strategy is drawn from the National Defence Policy formulated and given to be executed at Forces level by the political government. In absence of a well-articulated defence policy major purchases for defence forces is likely to come under scrutiny on both political and non-political plains as the expenditure involves taxpayers' money and may give rise to controversy. Therefore, it is time enough to let the Armed Forces be equipped, trained and administered in accordance with the National Defence Policy.

ties, a branch of the United States Agency for International Development, which is asking communities to identify which small-scale reconstruction projects they would like to make a priority.

"I don't think reconciliation is possible now — there are too many raw wounds," she adds.

Wounds still fester at the University of Pristina, which reopened in early August to the cheers of thousands of Albanian students. Excluded from the Serb-controlled education system in 1991, they took their classes in garages and makeshift rooms under the tutelage of sacked Albanian professors.

"I would have loved to have heard one colleague say a single word when we were expelled," says the urban and articulate Hamdi Daci, newly-appointed head of the English department.

Asked if he is willing to work with his former Serbian colleagues, he says: "This should be a university for all people in Kosovo."

But then the caveat: "If their conscience is clean, they should come back."

None of this bodes well for the UN's long-term aim of creating a multi-ethnic Kosovo. "I don't think we have the luxury of dealing with the long term," admits UNMIK spokesman Kennedy. "We have to deal with the here and now. The long term we will deal with down the road."

In the meantime, the partition is becoming stubbornly entrenched.

Bernard Kuchner, the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Kosovo, recently tried and failed to broker an agreement to unite the town of Mitrovica. Instead, after talks collapsed, he had the grim task of meeting the press at a mass grave containing the bodies of 70 ethnic Albanians near the town centre.

A self-appointed 'government' established by the KLA is already worried about the implications of the ethnic border.

"Without Mitrovica, Kosovo would be a desert," says its information minister Bajram Kosumi.

North of this line lies the Trepcia mine, one of Europe's richest supplies of gold and lead and a key source of income for the government of Slobodan Milosevic. At the coffee shop near the Iber River bridge, Qazim Hyseni's 22-year-old friend, Shpend Emin, explains: "They say Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Well, Trepcia is the heart of Kosovo."

## When It's a Matter of Pride to be a US Ambassador

by Ishtiaq K Ahmad

No, I am not referring to the distinguished American Ambassador to Dhaka, Ambassador John Holtzman; I am talking about my maternal uncle, Ambassador Osman Siddique, the US ambassador-designate to the Pacific Island nations of Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Nauru. Ambassador Siddique was sworn in at the US State Department on August 18 and thus quietly made history. Siddique is expected to present his credentials to the host governments in early September. He is the first person with origins in the Indian sub-continent and the first Muslim to become a United States Ambassador and thus the first American to be oath of public office swearing on the Holy Quran.

Osman Siddique is the son of late Dr Muhammad Osman Ghani, a former Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, former Pakistan's Ambassador, and a former Member of the Bangladesh Parliament. Siddique was born in Dhaka in 1950 and is the sixth child of a nine-children family. He grew up here attending various local schools including Holy Cross, Shaheed and St Gregory's High School. He later attended Notre Dame College and Dhaka Uni-

handicapped people from Washington, DC Social Services agencies and employing them in his company. I particularly remember one mentally handicapped employee who worked in his office for years whose mental capacity was limited to only folding invoices and stuffing them into envelopes and that's what he did all day long.

Osman Siddique is a devoted husband and father. He is married to Catherine Mary, an accomplished linguist and a graduate of Georgetown University. In addition to English, she fluently speaks Italian, Spanish, and French and can also speak Arabic and Bengali with relative comfort. Siddique and Catherine have two sons and two daughters, Omar, 17, Julian, 15, Leila, 11, and Zachary, 7. In spite of his successful corporate and public life, Siddique is still very much a family man. He frequently brings his family to Bangladesh to visit with friends and relatives. Siddique is also a very religious man but never the one to show it. Those of us who know him well and have seen him over the years, know that he says his prayers regularly and recites the holy Quran in the privacy of his home.

This accomplishment of



Mr. and Mrs. Siddique with President Clinton.

versity. In 1972, Siddique was admitted to the Graduate School of Business at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

With an MBA, Siddique accepted a job in Washington, DC with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. After a year at Metlife, Siddique began to see more clearly the promise and opportunity in America. He decided to be an entrepreneur — with a few thousand dollars in his pocket and the support of family and a few friends, he launched a small travel company in the heart of Washington, DC's business district. This was indeed a very brave step but to many of us at the time it seemed to be a very foolish and futile move. Yet he defied all odds and in less than ten years established his company as an icon of corporate travels business in Washington. His clientele in

Osman Siddique, a first-generation US immigrant from Bangladesh, is no small feat. In the same token, one must admit that this is only possible in the good old United States of America. It has once again proven that it is indeed a land of opportunity and land of the free. This is not to say that there are no prejudices and that it's a perfect system, but given the human nature, the USA is still the most open, free and fair society in the world. In a small way, it has once again proven that it is indeed a 'melting pot' and 'land of the immigrants'.

The friends and family of Osman Siddique congratulate him and wish him the best in his new career.

The writer is chairman of a Dhaka-based infrastructure advisory service company and nephew of Ambassador Siddique.

## West Bengal to Change Its Name after All These Years!

by Dr A H Jaffor Ullah

The people of West Bengal wanted a new identity at this time when the world is in the threshold of a new millennium. West Bengal's trusted neighbour, Bangladesh, will be watching the development with curiosity.

BANGLADESH'S neighbor Poshim Bongo (West Bengal) has decided to change its name to Bangla. The news startled almost everyone. On July 20 when West Bengal's assembly met for the last time for the current session, the members moved a non-official resolution unanimously giving the West Bengal Government a carte blanche to change the name of its capital from Calcutta to Kolkata along with the name change for its state.

According to the state's home minister the new name Kolkata would come into effect soon once the announcement comes from various governmental agencies. The name change for the state would take some time since it will require the consent of India's parliament.

West Bengal is not the pioneer in changing the name of its state. Madras had changed its name twice: first from Madras to Tamil Nadu years ago, and now from Tamil Nadu to Chennai. Similarly, before Calcutta was given its name the city was known as Calcutta. It is true that most big cities in British India were given Anglicized name because those names suit the English tongue. Pure and simple! Thus, Dhaka became Dacca, Kurwach became Karachi, Varanasi became Benares, and Dilli became Delhi. But if you take the colonial issue out of the picture, then are there other reasons for changing the name of the state?

Recently, I have seen some editorial write-ups in fringe newspapers from West Bengal where the writers are questioning quite blatantly what the state had received all these years being in the Indian union? I recall one such write-up in a Bengali Internet newspaper by the name Suprovat from Calcutta. I translated the short editorial into English and then posted it in various news groups in the Internet earlier this year. A big debate got started resulting from the posting of Suprovat editorial. Most West Bengalis empathised with the Suprovat editorial; however, diehard unionists were very upset by the tone of the older Deshi term Bongo, which

not prosper at the same pace as western and northern states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, and Punjab. Some West Bengali economists and activists would argue that the easternmost provinces received a step-motherly treatment from the central government in matters of industrialisation.

The eastern states of India are rich in minerals and other natural resources; but ironically, most of the manufacturing industries were set up in western most provinces like Maharashtra and Gujarat. During the early days of India under Congress party, most agricultural development took place in Punjab and Haryana, Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Bihar, and eastern hill states suffered immensely in the hands of Congress leaders. Thus, under the political patronage of Congress party, while the northwestern states made significant economic gains, northeastern states saw their economy wither. No wonder, the oppressed states of eastern India became the breeding ground of radical socialist movement like Naxalbari Andolion in the mid-1960s. Does it come as a surprise that Communist Party of India has a large following in the state of West Bengal? Mind you that CPI leader Jyoti Basu enjoys an unprecedented loyalty from all cross section of people in that state?

Perhaps it is possible that this name change of the state is a proxy statement by the people of West Bengal. They wanted a new identity at this time when the world is in the threshold of a new millennium. West Bengal's trusted neighbour, Bangladesh, will be watching the development with curiosity.

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TOM & JERRY



James Bond  
BY IAN FLEMING  
DRAWING BY HORAK

ON THE EDGE OF WINDSOR PARK... WITH THEIR SCREENED OFF THE ROAD BY TREES, THREE MEN WAIT ANXIOUSLY... AND AT LAST THE SIGNAL COMES!

WE HAVE JUST SIGHTED OUR MAN TURNING OFF THE A-30... YOU MAY PROCEED WITH THE OPERATION!

COLONEL SUN

BY ASIA FEATURES

HIGH TIME! WE'RE 50 MINUTES BEHIND SCHEDULE ALREADY!

ON A CAPER THAT COULD SPARK WORLD WAR III?

The author is a Canadian journalist working for Gemini News Service on a fellowship from the International Development Research Council in Ottawa.