

## 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.*

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 do 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 hype.

Maximum controversy has been raised in case of purchase of Russian made MiG-29, named as Fulcrum by NATO, characterised 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 uneconomical in that role.

Some commentators attacked the procedure that government adopted for purchase i.e. State to State. Only other procedure was through international tender called by Directorate of Defence Purchase, as is done in most of the cases. Both means are equally transparent, the difference is, there is a provision of appointing local agent in international tender and no such agent is needed i.e. elimination of middleman. In direct purchase, thus a definite reduction of incidental expenditures. There is no doubt that government, in all fairness, has made the deal in the best possible manner reducing chances of corruption in such a big deal and to be more transparent allowed uninterrupted media exposure of the purchase. Therefore, the method of purchase seems, in all counts, the best possible option that could be adopted but the question remains, whether this purchase was a priority or priority fixing should have been done formulating a much needed Defence Plan. No justification of major equipment purchase is enough if it does not fit in the strategy drawn from the policy. To my assessment we are far short in our air defence which includes early warning system, both high and low altitude, capable of providing sufficient time for ground to air defence system to ascertain the direction of attack and own aircraft to scramble to meet the intruders.

Our air defence policy must cater for the defence of ever increasing vulnerable areas (VAs), vulnerable points (VP) and key point installation (KPI) as top priority. Question remains that whether we have adequate defensive assets for these areas against hostile air attack. Could the money spent to buy

such offensive weapons as MiG-29, be better utilised for enhancing our air defence capability as first priority? Since no policy or plan was ever laid down by political government, the actual defence requirement has never been assessed or 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 newspapers 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 defined to protect maritime boundary not only in emergency but during peacetime 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. Current 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 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 incursions on 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 Progati, which can meet the defence demand with special effort thus to reduce foreign dependency at least 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.

## 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 Holzman; 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 take 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, Shaheen and St Gregory's High School. He later attended Notre Dame College and Dhaka Uni-

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 MetLife 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-

cluded leading Washington law practices, consulting companies, trade associations and alike. At the 15th anniversary of its founding, his company had become the largest privately owned travel company in the greater Washington DC area with multiple offices in Washington, DC, New York, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and Florida. He was variously written up in trade and business journals including the Forbes and the Inc. magazines.

In spite of his immigrant background, Siddique easily assimilated and befriended the Washington business and political circles. His affable personality and charm gained him friends both in the Democratic and Republican parties. It may be mentioned that although Democratic President Bill Clinton nominated Siddique, during his confirmation hearings at the US Senate he was warmly introduced by the senior and highly respected Republican Senator from Virginia, Senator John Warner.

Osman Siddique unequivocally expresses his deep-felt and genuine pride in being an American, but he is equally proud of

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, Julien, 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.

Being a Bangladeshi-American, he has never forgotten his roots and time and again he has shown to his family and friends that he is proud of his heritage. He is a no-nonsense man as far as work is concerned but also a very kind and caring person. Many of us who were struggling students in the United States remember his help and support. He readily offered summer jobs not only to relatives like me but to also other enterprising Bangladeshis. I still remember the summers of the mid '70s when he would walk with me the corridors of the office buildings of Washington, DC's commercial district and teach me the art of cold-calls and door-to-door marketing.

Siddique was not only kind and generous to Bangladeshis, he had a thing for all people, especially the less privileged. I remember him seeking out

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.

## Unused Bridge over Troubled Waters Marks New Ethnic Divide

The UN insists that it wants to create a Kosovo that embraces all the province's ethnic groups — Serbs as well as Albanians. But as Gemini News Service reports, the reality is different. A kind of ethnic partition has emerged in the troubled province, deepening existing divisions. Mike Crawley writes from Mitrovica, Yugoslavia.

says the report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

In the south of Kosovo, the reverse is true. About 8,000 Serbs used to live in Prizren; only 300 remain. All 500 Serbs from Suva Reka are gone; most chose to leave, but the few who tried to remain were driven out.

In the capital, Pristina, 90 per cent of the pre-war Serb population has left. If you drew a line across Kosovo and said the southern three-quarters is Albanian and the northern quarter is Serbian, you would be close to the mark. But this reality is a far cry from the vision spelled out in the UN Security Council resolution that led to the creation of KFOR and UNMIK (the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo).

"We are doing everything we possibly can to maintain a multi-ethnic Kosovo," says UNMIK spokesman Kevin Kennedy. "We are doing the best we can to try and create conditions where people can respect the rule of law and allow communities to live together and start the process toward reconciliation."

But retribution rather than reconciliation seems to be on the minds of many in Kosovo. KFOR's thrice-weekly press briefings start with a ritual recitation of the latest crimes: bodies found with their throats cut, abductions, house burnings, forced expulsions and uncovered arms caches. Human Rights Watch, which had condemned Serb atrocities in Kosovo months before the action by NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the West's main military alliance), criticised ethnic Albanians in early August for rights abuses against Serbs and Gypsies.

Neither Serbs nor Albanians believe that KFOR is completely in control: Albanians think Serb paramilitaries are operating in northern Kosovo, while Serbs say the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is still active and armed in pockets in the rest of the country.

Even in the few places where the two ethnic groups are together, there is a kind of partition. For instance, Radio Pristina recently resumed broadcasting with one hour each of Albanian, Serb and Turkish-language programming every day. The OSCE, which runs the station,

says it will be a "true public broadcasting entity" at the service of all those in the Kosovo community, "but according to one Albanian journalist, the workplace atmosphere between the two main ethnic groups is hardly collegial.

"It's not like we sit and drink coffee together," says Isa Blumi, who gave up work as an Ottoman historian in New York to come to Kosovo. "We translate the news from the wires and we give it to them. We spend about five minutes together in the studio as we finish our show and they start theirs, they ask us questions about the equipment, and that's it."

In Pristina Hospital, less than 10 Serbs can be found among the nearly 2,000 patients. "We get only the worst — gunshot wounds, that kind of thing," said a doctor. A Serb hospital on the outskirts of the city looks after the rest.

In the handful of villages that remain mixed, those trying to solicit feedback from both Serbs and Albanians have their backs against the wall.

"It's very difficult to get them in the same room," says Jeanne Bourgauf, who works for the Office for Transition Initia-

tives, 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 re-opened 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 Trepeca 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 Ibar River bridge, Qazim Hyseni's 22-year-old friend, Shpend Emiri, explains: "They say Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Well, Trepeca is the heart of Kosovo."

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

THE new frontline in Yugoslavia between Serbs and ethnic Albanians is not the provincial border of Kosovo, but further south along the Ibar river.

The Ibar has long divided the Kosovan town of Mitrovica physically. Now it divides the town ethnically.

Two months after the end of the bombing campaign by Western powers, almost all the people north of the river are Serb, and most to the south are Albanian.

The single bridge across the river is a quiet and empty no-man's-land patrolled on either side by troops from the United Nations peacekeeping force, KFOR.

It is a bridge that Qazim Hyseni, a 19-year-old Albanian, will not cross. He has not been to the north since 2 May, the night that Serb policemen sent him, his parents and sister to the south.

"It's like an artificial border," says Hyseni as he sits in a coffee shop a stone's throw from the bridge. "It seems almost like they [the Yugoslav government] intended it to be a demarcation line."

Whoever is to blame, divisions run deep — and few Serbs want to live in the south.

A new report says there are almost no ethnic Albanians north of the river, in Kosovo's four northern districts of Leposavic, Podujevo, Zvecan and Zubin Potok.

"The ethnic Albanian population have all left Leposavic (destination unknown) whilst Serbs displaced from other parts of Kosovo have moved in."

