

Armed Forces' Accountability

THE HERE is no gainsaying the fact that for any Armed Forces to be 'a power unto themselves or a holy cow, immune to public exposure or criticism,' would be an anachronism in a democracy. Nobody in Bangladesh today needs to entertain such a prospect nor do the people in the armed forces themselves fancy such a role. In fact, there has been a healthy trend in the armed services to open up to public criticism and lend their ears to the civil society's demands upon them for greater accountability and transparency. Lively debates take place these days on MIG-25 or Frigate purchases, both out in the open and also at the meetings of the parliamentary standing committee on defence. The MIG matter went to the High Court as well. Questions have been raised about the increase in the defence budget with fingers pointed at the lack of information about the heads under which the higher allocation will be spent.

This is a good omen; because it is through open discussions alone that the road to accountability and transparency can be paved.

That said, we now turn to some of the conclusions drawn at the *Prothom Alo Roundtable on Defence Forces and Defence Policy* held in the city on Saturday. That we have had no defence policy but only a set of guidelines is because the matter has been traditionally doctored to our foreign policy based on the dictum of friendship to all and malice towards none.

The armed forces are spending the tax payers' money, so that they are ultimately answerable to the public for what they do with that money much the same way that other arms of the state are. It is through the question-answer sessions in Parliament or the meetings of the standing committee on defence that they fulfil their accountability obligations. But we think the so-called unstated content of the defence budget should come closer under scrutiny. The defence purchases ought to be closely monitored and scrutinised, because that is where large chunks of money are spent.

The armed forces have to remain focused on their professional role as the sentinel of national sovereignty and stability. That is their supreme call of duty. From this point of view, the conduct of DGFI, the armed forces' intelligence wing, which tends to step into the civilian domain constitutes a deflection from the set course. This does not sit in with democracy.

A Necessary Tiff

THE Dhaka Mayor's express fear of yet another round of road digging to install some 14,000 new telephone lines — although it may have amply embarrassed the telecommunications minister in presence of the prime minister — must have gone down well with the city-dwellers. Seen from a different angle, this only makes official the lack of co-ordination between such utility service providers as DESA, PDB, T&T, WASA and Titas Gas. However, what the residents of the capital city expect to gain from this episode is an immediate step from the government to ensure better coordination among these agencies. Surely, repair and maintenance programmes of these agencies can be effectively synchronised to obviate repeated road digging exercises. That way, not only the citizenry would be spared endless suffering but also saved would be a huge amount of public money.

Not only has the frequency of excavation been irritating, the very timing of it has also been extremely inconvenient. Often we have seen roads being dug in monsoon, making the situation all the more troublesome. Usually these are hurried through the fag end of a financial year lest the allocations should lapse. The solution definitely lies in having a mechanism in place whereby these agencies can go about their repair and maintenance programmes in a well-coordinated fashion.

The Mayor must have meant every word when he said that he was "accountable to the queries of residents for all these inconsistencies", but we wish he had said this earlier on. We would definitely like to see the reflection of this spirit in the DCC's actions. At this point of time, however, we look forward to a plan that ensures better coordination among the civic amenity providers. By no means, should the citizenry be made to suffer for policy inadequacies.

Globalising Cricket

THE International Cricket Council (ICC), the highest controlling body for the very English game of cricket, has embarked upon an ambitious programme for globalising the game. The programme started on Sunday morning in Dhaka will culminate in an international one-dayer in the city between Wasim Akram's Asia XI and Mark Waugh's World XI on Saturday next. The fanfare will continue through the week with the United Nations lending its support to introduce the game to new audiences around the world. The British took cricket with them wherever they went either as traders or conquerors and the then British subjects, black or white, yellow or brown, knew the game and played it to the best of their ability. They bequeathed the tradition. The ICC is currently trying to promote cricket in as many as 46 countries around the world.

Most of these countries have poor cricketing standard. So far the ICC has found only nine countries capable of achieving a good enough standard to qualify as 'Test' playing nations even though some of these countries have been playing cricket for about a hundred years. Instead of aiming too high it will be worthwhile to take all possible measures to improve the infrastructures of the existing cricket-playing countries so that the list of elite is expanded and more nations qualify for the highest class of competition. As an expensive and time-consuming form of entertainment globalisation of cricket might remain a slogan unless special efforts are made to turn a corner. In these days of open sky and generous sponsorships popularity of cricket has had a tremendous fillip and this was possible without the globalisation slogan of the ICC.

We feel that improving the standard of the game in the countries which are already members of ICC and have cricket as a topclass popular game is more imperative than taking the game to newer places. Spend your money and effort where they are due.

South Asia: From Hope to Despair

Can the deadlock be broken just by Clinton asking India to restart the negotiation and serving tough warning to Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism? Kashmir's fate is bound up in the founding principles of India and Pakistan. To unravel the imbroglio it would require a comprehensive peace process presided over by an over-arching power. And the United States can hardly escape its responsibility.

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's visit to a region which he himself called 'the most dangerous place of the world' is just over. According to conventional wisdom only a brave man or a fool would like to tread a land of such compliment. In a well calibrated tour of South Asia Mr Clinton, however, proved to be neither of these while earning at ease some foreign policy mileage for his future evaluation. Clinton's much awaited visit of South Asia during the fag end of his presidency and in the sixty-second trip abroad as US President might have given a halo of distinction to the region — henceforth the world's backwater, but it failed to effectively address the factors that earned it the notoriety of being a dreaded place. The discussions on none of Washington's concern — the Indo-Pakistan impasse over Kashmir, nuclear proliferation and terrorism could be led to any meaningful consequence — let alone a breakthrough on any one of them.

During his 5-day sojourn in India he expansively went about sight-seeing in Rajasthan desert, seeing for himself the magic of Hyderabad's cyber-city and lecturing in Mumbai's stock exchange. With their eyes fixed on vital sectors for US investments like those of energy and information technology the members of his entourage identified at least \$15bn to \$20bn worth of projects in which the American companies could be involved. Obviously, the security dimension of Clinton's visit quietly took a back seat.

The US' change of heart did not suddenly occur. India, firmly wedded to non-alignment and a socialist economy



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

was once viewed by the Americans as 'immoral'. But since the early nineties a subtle transformation has been taking place in India which by shedding its economy's socialist legacy opened up to world trade and started to privatise. Since 1998, Atal Behari Vajpeyi's business-friendly government, in spite of its xenophobic impulses, hastened that process. All this is entwining India with the rest of the world and especially

with the United States which by now imports two-thirds of India's software products. It is not thus surprising that a convergence of Indian and American interests has been in the offing, even if surreptitiously. Therefore, can Clinton be blamed for his shift of priority from peace and security to economy and commerce?

There was a visible surge of Pax Americana during the visit which had been a both-way phenomenon. India's burgeoning middle class shows a growing crave for sharing an American quality of life while an in-

crease in the defence budget of India is overlooked. The two countries seem to have agreed, for now, to disagree over India's nuclear status and as expected India refused to sign the CTBT.

Apart from these apparent contradictions there are many imponderables of international politics to which an incipient Indo-US understanding will be subjected in the days to come.

But for the present the peace and security of South Asia are indeed orphaned with Clinton's policy shift. Millions of people directly and indirectly affected by tensions over Kashmir were plunged into fresh despair as Clinton left last week the planet's most dangerous place. As the Kashmir question eluded a solution for last half a century they pinned their last hope on Clinton, a US President who, unlike his predecessors, showed great understanding of and to an extent inclination for its resolution. Those hopes

However, the future of an

'Signs of a Post-Cold War Era'

Former Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral was in the United States when President Bill Clinton came on his India tour. However, he had detailed discussions with senior US officials including US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott prior to Clinton's visit. In fact, discussions with the former Indian Prime Minister were part of the preparatory exercise undertaken by the US officialdom as part of the presidential visit.

Gujral assessed the visit in a positive light. Before the visit he maintained that the time had come for a white paper on the "strategic discussions" that have been going on between India and US representatives for the last one and a half years. After the visit, he feels that bilateral issues between India and the US have become much more transparent. In an interview given to Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, of *Frontline*, Gujarat said that there is a new orientation in Indo-US relations now and both countries have to build on this. Excerpts:

How would you assess the overall impact of the US President's visit?

The visit was the culmination of a process started in 1997, when I, as Prime Minister, had met Clinton. At that time I had perceived a growing interest in the US about India. Two things had contributed to this. One, of course, was the growing market in India. The second was the increasing clout of the 'Indian Americans'. In this context, I told President Clinton that the time had come to get away from the influence of the Cold War in our bilateral relations and evolve it in a holistic manner. I pointed out that the relationship, in the past, had been confined to one issue or a couple of issues, such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). I think this beginning was sustained. In fact, the President would have come earlier if the US had not taken a tough position on the Pokhran nuclear tests.

Before his visit I was in Washington and had detailed discussions with senior US officials. I had also written to the President repeating the need to develop a holistic relationship. I am happy that this approach has been followed up, particularly in the Vision Statement signed by Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi. The Vision Statement examines our relationship holistically in

terms of multi-dimensionalism, and it takes care of circumstances and viewpoints prevailing in India.

But does the visit represent a new beginning or a shift in the strategic balance in South Asia?

These are clichés which I do not use. But I do see the advantages or the signs of a post-Cold War era. It benefits and should benefit a new orientation to our bilateral relationship.

Do you think there has been any kind of appreciation of India's position on the CTBT and the minimum nuclear deterrent? Would pressure to accede to the CTBT still persist?

The Vision Statement itself makes it clear that the Indian position is appreciated. On CTBT, even the US is yet to solve its internal problems. The Senate is yet to clear the US Government's position. Nor has the Russian Duma or China done it. Hence, the question is far away. And secondly, India has made the commitment that we are not going to test anymore. I think this serves the purpose of the US to a large extent.

There has been some controversy about President K.R. Narayanan's banquet speech. What is your perception on that?

I don't take a negative view of the President's speech. The propaganda on the Indian sub-

continent being the "most dangerous place on earth" is part of a bogeyman that has existed for long. In 1989-90, the bogey was that India and Pakistan are going to have a nuclear war. You would recall David Hurst's article that weapons were even loaded into planes. As Foreign Minister then, I had repeatedly said that this was not right. Yet the bogey was persisted with to an absurd level. Then the book, *Critical Mass*, advanced this further. This is part of the strategy to raise public sentiment to the level of panic. In fact, 'Musharrafism' that we see now in Pakistan coincides with this strategy. I am glad that President K.R. Narayanan, with the consent of the government or otherwise, punctured this bogey. This should not be analysed simplistically, as some sections of the Indian media have done, by debating whether these were harsh words or discourteous words. What President Narayanan did simply was to state what effect the "dangerous place" statement had and whom it helps. It clearly spelt out one part of the Indian perception of foreign policy. And I do not think that the Americans have taken it amiss.

After the Clinton visit, there are conceptions about possible steps from Pakistan. One projection is that they would curtail artillery cover for infiltration across the Line of Control and cordon off the terrorist training camps on their territory. Do you think some such actions will be taken in the near future?

Training camps have always been there. Only their operations have been varying in intensity. Now it has acquired more dangerous proportions because Afghanistan has stepped in. Even Musharraf admits that there are camps in Afghanistan. The US is also alive to this situation now. They have come a long way from the position that there is no conclusive evidence for the training camps. I suppose statements from President Clinton such as the one pointing out that the borders cannot be redrawn with blood, would have a positive effect; though it is too early to say whether Pakistan would take positive action.

What kind of impact do you expect from the agreements on economics, trade, and science and technology?

The Vision Statement and President Clinton's speech in Parliament indicate that cooperation in these areas will improve.

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To the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Inactive Bangladesh Embassy

Sir, I attended a seminar in Tokyo on March 2000, which was organised by Nihon Shinbun Kyōdai (NSK) or The Japan Newspaper Publishers' and Editors' Association. This organisation is very important. Nearly all the newspapers of Japan are members of NSK. On the opening day, the NSK held a reception for the participants. Important media personalities of Japan attended this reception. They also invited the respective Ambassadors and Press Attachés. However, the embassies of the other participating countries except Bangladesh sent their representatives to the reception. As a participant, I was very surprised and so were the organisers. This was an excellent opportunity for our country to be represented. But our embassy failed to utilise the opportunity. One of the functions of the embassies is to interact with the media and to expose the respective country. I wonder why our embassy chose not to attend the reception. Will our foreign office please explain?

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English in our national life

Sir, After watching Clinton-Hasina speech of 20 March 2000 on BTV, I feel, it is high time we look into the standard of English language we learn in our schools, so that an educated personality of important public position, can at least spell out from a prepared speech in an average way before an august gathering.

In order to sell as well as spell out our ideas in a comfortable manner we have to articulate our intonation. Here a command on language works as a vehicle. We gather from cable TV that, our neighbours are better in this respect, whereas, their national language is different from mother tongue and English. There, overseas entrepreneurs are more attracted as language poses no barrier. Their educational system is so well that many of our school goers are sent there for their basic schooling. This dents our foreign exchange and talent. In school curriculum of other nations, a foreign language exists which subsequently becomes a vehicle of higher and advanced education. But in this country, we have created an 'emotional vanity' on the question of introduction of English in our education curriculum.

Recently during President Clinton's visit, a Zee-News re-

porter (Mr Sanjay Sinha) when asked us a (a policeman, a lady and a vendor) about the visit, then we all hurried, in a funny way, to reply him in Hindi. This happened once with our PM too, in an 'Ek Din Ek Jivan' episode of Star TV, whereas, we all could have replied in our mother tongue. In such scenario in Madras or other parts of India, the reporter would have got the reply in a language one knows — well-educated one in English, others in Hindi/own area language. Then the reporter would have interpreted it for his viewers. The Indian PM delivered his speech in Hindi, before the US President, for the Indian's benefit. The Indians understood well what had been said and in what manner. Facilities existed there to let Clinton and others know what was in that written speech. I hope our policy makers would ponder on the dangers lying ahead of the product of our 'general educational institutions'.

The reality is, beyond our national boundary, there exists a buzzing world progressing faster. There, we need to compete with proficiency and efficiency. The affluent group have understood this fact and managed their children's education in English medium schools at home and abroad. Whereas, our leaders and thinkers, have not guided our mass transparently about that reality. Are we so technologically or economically strong, that other nation would adopt our mother tongue? Even China, an emerging global power, lately has introduced English lessons for the new generation and for the elders to keep pace with the world developments. How can we do better unless we know a lingua franca for higher studies and

exchange thoughts and ideas?

A R Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

A President's Visit

Sir, The above captioned letter published in your esteemed daily (DS-Apr-01) has attracted my attention. I fully agree with the learned writer. Where selected US elite force with all necessary outfits and our fully stretched security efforts, even empowered with Public Safety Act, have failed to ensure US President's few well-scrutinised cherished visits in daylight hours around the capital, then who can ensure an ordinary citizen's en-route safety during his/her journey that involves night travels to nook of the country.

However, our authority must have known the details before cancellation of the US President's programme to our national mausoleum and Jaypur, since the programme has to be rescheduled accordingly, known, and acceptable to both ends. If security was the issue, our part must be knowing about the power of Laden or someone else's agent, their strength and location that posed the threat. Then what action our concerned ministry has taken to prevent any future mishaps?

I hope, our government would clarify the public on the security situation that led to dropping of a powerful nation's President's pre-scheduled programmes, as people's will and support are widely needed to thwart any evil designed infiltration.

A Star Gazer
Uttara, Dhaka

are now dashed removing in the process the buffer, if any, between the two deadly contestants for the disputed state. As a result the world's most dangerous place has been rendered still more dangerous in spite of Clinton's mealy-mouthed sermonising for peaceful solution through negotiation to both India and Pakistan.

On the eve of Clinton's visit, Kashmir, South Asia's flash point of Indo-Pakistan rivalry went unusually gory. Even as the US President arrived in Indian capital, 40 persons belonging to minority Sikh community were brutally killed in the valley. India promptly held Pakistani militants responsible for the mayhem while Pakistan pointed its accusing finger to Indian security forces. But that was only one of the many such ghastly incidents that make Kashmir literally the valley of fear since the outbreak of Kargil war almost a year ago. After Kargil if Pakistan had upheld the ante on the ground India also bolted the door of diplomacy and dialogue. Can the deadlock be broken just by Clinton asking India to restart the negotiation and serving tough warning to Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism almost out of context? Kashmir's fate is bound up in the founding principles of India and Pakistan. To unravel the imbroglio it would require a comprehensive peace process presided over by an over-arching power. And the United States can hardly escape its responsibility.

If President Clinton avoided that responsibility for his country's own overwhelming imperatives, the conflict in Kashmir would find its own dynamics to push it on. It is unfortunate that the distinguished visitor found fault with the cross-border terrorism — and rightly, but cast a blind eye to terrorism that is perpetrated internally in Kashmir against its innocent people.

Recalling Justice Murshed An Indefatigable Crusader

by Nurul Islam Khan

HE rapidly appeared in the limelight and almost immediately became everyone's idol. Mr M S Murshed, the then Chief Justice of East Pakistan High Court, had just been delivered with the introductory words that began with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*: 'Of its excellent/To have a giant's strength; but tyrannous/To use it like a giant'. This quotation from Shakespeare and its apt application stirred up many in the course of their mundane lives. But for those, who then ruled; for the high and mighty, these aphoristic lines were extremely disconcerting. It created a stir all over Pakistan and across the borders. Prolonged martial law had sapped the vitality of the nation; dashed the aspirations of its youth and created impediments to the emergence of new, creative ideas.

In the then West Pakistan, Mr M R Kayani, whose wit and ironical humour had assailed the martial law authorities expired after a short illness in Chittagong while on an intellectual sojourn. Martial law had left in its wake a political system which was incompatible with the workings of free and liberal politics. But for the energetic, there was plenty to do as free enterprise prospered: many jute mills, textile mills and industries emerged in the then East Pakistan. But that is a different matter.

Just as Basic Democracy made the holding of free general elections impossible, the military might behind the supreme commander Gen Ayub Khan held every one in awe. But many rulers, after long periods in office make the grave error of believing themselves to be invincible and their power indestructible. They become intolerant of criticism and endeavour to crush the opposition. The period I speak of was a time when the government had a powerful control over the legislature. The judiciary was the only independent institution in the country and the sole avenue for establishing the principles of justice and some semblance of the rule of law.

But this required men of courage and integrity who could move the conscience of the nation. No one else fitted the description in a fuller manner than Justice Murshed.

His handsome appearance earned him an extraordinary mind. I met him for the first time during the latter part of 1964 in