

## The rising trajectory of India's military power

### This is unfair EC should cry halt

IT is difficult to shrug off the impression that Prime Minister has embarked on electioneering on some scale at government expense. Her cabinet colleagues are not far behind. Government protocol, funds, facilities, including surface transports and helicopters, seem to be pressed into service for thinly veiled official functions otherwise designed to canvass for the AL before polls.

There has been a flurry of foundation-laying ceremonies for variegated mini new projects inexplicably at the final moments of the transition from an old, exhausted budget to a new one. One lakh tons of wheat has been reportedly allocated to MPs and probable election contestants for distribution among their constituencies in an undisguised bid to curry favour with the voters. The PM's purported introduction of party candidates to the audience at certain places with the party's election symbol 'boat' displayed would not have raised any eye-brows if it were done at party functions. But that is hardly the case. This is unethical because other political parties are devoid of official facilities to be indulging in such a luxury.

In a democracy, the standard practice with a government in its lame duck phase, six months prior to any election to be precise, has been to refrain from making any fresh allotments or allocations of material or money anywhere that could be even remotely suggestive of any design to buy up votes. This is a far cry from what the PM herself did when early elections were being vigorously mooted: she directed all concerned not to take up any new project thereby picking up a laurel at that time for fair-mindedness.

We never tired of demurring that in matters of governance the AL has failed to draw a line between the party and the government. The same syndrome continues when it faces the litmus test of offering fair conditions to the Opposition before polls.

We believe the Election Commission has an obligation as well as the statutory writ to call a halt to the use of state apparatus and funds by the ruling party for election purposes.

### Huge amount lost in VAT evasion Stop defrauding the national economy

VAT evasion has acquired huge and endemic proportions. Companies representing a wide spectrum of business activities, from consumer goods manufacturers, to capital industries, service concerns and food producers, all have been evading payment of Value Added Tax with regularity and virtual impunity. The VAT owed by just six companies equals a staggering Taka 148 crore. They are among 60 VAT defaulters who have been issued demand notices for payment of outstanding VAT but have moved writs and obtained stay orders from the High Court.

It is no mystery how these companies shortchange the exchequer. They try to elude accurate assessments by maintaining incomplete and even falsified records of transactions that fall under the VAT net. Most companies are owned by members of the ruling party or the main opposition parties, or have close connections to them. In most instances, political pressure is brought to bear on the National Board of Revenue to halt investigations into default cases. As a last resort, the companies move the courts and stall settlement of their dues.

Abhorrent as this systematic defrauding of the national wealth is, it is even more heinous that the evaders do not hesitate to collect VAT from consumers. They continue to mark up their goods and services by the 15 per cent mandatory VAT charge, but do not pay up the amount collected into the national wealth.

We can only condemn this parasitic economic crime. The loss to our nation is obvious. VAT contributes a little more than half of the country's total revenue earnings, but it would be much higher without these default cases. Fraud on this systemic level, aided and abetted by influential political quarters, is eating into the economy. Unless the authorities make an example of these offenders the rot will continue, sapping whatever gains we make, while relentlessly extracting a price from ordinary citizens.



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

NINETEEN sixty two had been the turning point. After her humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese the same year, in a sharp U-turn India, the country steeped in the philosophy of Ahimsa and upholding the primacy of politics in a Nehruvian tradition, relentlessly sought military power. So much so that her thirst for its acquisition remains unsatisfied till date. In this process she has already acquired an arsenal dreaded by her rivals and envied by fellow contenders for power. Not only has it possessed by now the world's fourth largest military inventory includes the nuclear bomb with the full complements of its delivery system. Its blue water navy prowls the oceans well beyond its territorial water and the Indian space research organisation has ensured a niche for the country even in the space. With the dawning of the 21st century India seems to have scaled a new height which has assured her place, at least militarily, as a regional power. The long years of efforts on several fronts have combined to come to a fruition almost in a gush.

India's dream project of manufacturing its Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) to replace the aging MIG-21 squadrons as the workhorse of

Indian Air Force (IAF) made its creditable maiden flight on 04 January 2001. The project in making since 1983 has, after a troubled history, been able to pack the LCA with a state-of-the-art aircraft technology which would make it one of the most advanced fighters in its league. Although the official statement by New Delhi regarding the technological excellence of the aircraft is indeed debatable, the LCA production by itself indicates a great

American engine (General Electric's F404-F23) it is going to be the first Asian aircraft to be subsequently fitted with locally produced engine. India's Gas Turbine Research Establishment was entrusted with the task of designing the engine for LCA back in 1989. Christened Kaveri GTX-35VS, the local engine expected to be in use next year will be more powerful than some of the imported engines.

The demonstrations on January 4

Even then the LCA is cheaper than contemporary aircraft of its class.

When the mood was still celebratory over the LCA's success, coming close in its heel had been a remarkable breakthrough in India's missileology. A little over a week later on 17 January Agni II, India's first intermediate range ballistic missile accurately hit its target in the Bay of Bengal. After having overcome the shortcomings observed in earlier tests since 1989 the Agni was now

strike capability from deep inside the country.

Alongside these significant military achievements, India has also been systematically working towards developing and projecting her defence capabilities and building strategic alliances to boost its image as a regional power. For the purpose she also held the International Fleet Review (IFR) in Mumbai in February, 2001 and Millennium Airpower show during the same

display the LCA that carried out its first flight on 4 January.

India's first Geo-synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) successfully lifted off its launching pad this month although the mission was aborted last month in its first attempt. The 3-stage GSLV in which India, for the first time, used cryogenic engine was the culmination of a 10-year long project. It cost the exchequer Rs 1400 crore. Its successful launch would now enable India to enter the elite space market and join the US, European Union, Russia, Japan and China which already crossed geo-stationary launch milestone. The military implication of the venture is also no less significant. Given the technological status of India's space programme in developing the technologies of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) and now Geo-Synchronous Launch Vehicle (GSLV) she is well poised to proceed to the next goal of achieving Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capability. There are reports that the work on an ICBM 'Surya' with a range of 5000 km is already in an advanced stage.

In analysing these developments of India's recent military achievements, one must not isolate the technological advancements from New Delhi's ambitions to grow into a world class power. The BJP government wants to transmit the message across the world that India is in no way behind China in defence technology which is well recognised in the west. Beijing's technological advancements have received considerable attention of the international community. Obvious, similar technological developments on the part of India go hand in hand with New Delhi's rich strategic agenda.

## PERSPECTIVES

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achievement for India. The development, design and production of the LCA by an indigenous team has definitely put India in an exclusive class. When it becomes fully operational the LCA would make India only among the eight countries in the world to have the capacity to develop supersonic fighter aircraft. It has been justly rated as a landmark in the history of Indian aviation industry.

On the LCA's successful test flight Air Chief Marshal AV Tipnis assessed it to be "the advanced technology, single seat, single engine, supercruise, light weight, all weather, multirole, air superiority fighter designed for air to air, air to ground and air to sea role." It's most remarkable feature is that it was entirely an indigenous effort and not an assembly work of imported components. Although the LCA is currently using

were not however final. There are a lot of development works that are still in the planning stage for the LCA. In the meantime, the detractors both at home and abroad are critical that the aircraft is not cost effective. But the LCA project that consists of public and private sector collaboration on the other hand, will have greater spin-offs. For example, the development of sub-systems such as the engine and radar will boost a variety of industrial and technological sectors. This may be one of the reasons that a jubilant George Fernandez, the former defence minister of India told the ADA (Aeronautical Development Agency) team on the day of the demonstration, "There is only going forward from here - we should not worry about the critics." Each LCA would now cost Rs 80 crore instead of Rs 10 crore estimated earlier.

finally 'operationalised'. It was announced to be inducted as a major strategic delivery system in Indian Army. The significance of the successful development of Agni II lay in the fact that India had now developed a 'credible minimum nuclear deterrence' - the cornerstone of India's draft nuclear doctrine. It constituted an important part of the triad of land, air and sea launched missile system.

The success of Agni II firmed up the country's ability to assemble the delivery system for its nuclear warheads. Agni II - a surface to surface missile will be part of India's land based nuclear deterrent and is capable of carrying warheads and hitting targets deep within China and Pakistan - the countries with whom India is now engaged in reconstructing relationship. The Agni II greatly adds to India's second

month. Each of these events contributed towards New Delhi's image and power posture. The IFR was comprised of two main parts i.e. a fleet review and a symposium under the title, 'building bridges of friendship'. The stated objective of the grand exercise was to enhance friendly relations between India and other nations. Also in the past India had such event but this time it was arranged at an international level with several dozens of the navies of the world participating in it. The event clearly reflected on India's desire to project itself as a regional power or a country to be taken seriously. One of the underlying objectives of the IFR was also to exhibit Indian Navy's capability to the world especially the participating countries. The second important event i.e. the air show was not the air show per se. Its vital feature was to

## A crisis is an opportunity



M.J. AKBAR

WHAT is the difference between a crisis and an opportunity? The correct answer of course is none. A crisis is an opportunity.

A good political leader uses the pressures of a crisis to rearrange the internal balance of power and redirect the current of popular opinion, both necessary and both difficult in normal conditions.

Remarkably, both the ruling party and the Opposition are unaware of this equation. The government faced a crisis and converted it into an opportunity for the Congress. The Congress got the opportunity and used it to create a crisis for itself!

There was no logic, apart from the compulsions of a leader's self-interest, in the Congress *quid pro quo* for letting Parliament function: the party demanded a commitment from the government that there would be no investigation by the CBI into certain charges made by Dr Subramanian Swamy against Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The linkage was self-defeating and smelt of fear when the operational mood should have been one of confident aggression.

No government has given its Opposition more open space for assault. The Tehelka tapes show the president of the BJP take a wad of notes across a table: the memory of those swarthy fingers closing over currency notes has become an abiding and defining image of Indian politics. Defence minister George Fernandes' personal friend

and party president is filmed discussing the quantum of a bribe from an arms dealer and directing the money towards a colleague. This is a scenario made in some Congress heaven. Any Congress leader would have demanded that Parliament be convened in case it was in recess for a full debate in front of the world's television cameras on Tehelka, and perhaps demanded the resignation of the government after using Parliament to hammer the last nails into a

decided to link the Tehelka expose to the Swamy allegation, and brought it into the news. At least one charge in the Swamy list seems serious and must either be proved or thrown out. It cannot be left unchecked. Dr Swamy alleges that Mrs Sonia Gandhi took KGB money at some point. If Mrs Gandhi is in the clear then she should demand a time-bound investigation that will exonerate her. She cannot afford to run away from the charge. She is in

Neither the ascent nor the preservation is easy; he has made both look deceptively comfortable. Within two years he has turned an improbable coalition into a working reality, and created a constituency for himself that cuts across party lines and moves towards that broad mental space called liberal India. Remember that his starting point was the RSS, as he occasionally reminds any meeting over flowing with allsorts. An uncertain leader's mistakes

who has been loyal to you. This rationale holds for Rajesh Mishra but not for N.K. Singh. N.K. Singh is not loyal to the Prime Minister: his loyalty is to the owners of India's most powerful corporate house, the Ambanis. This is not a secret. N.K. Singh himself would be loathe to deny it. When word spread a couple of weeks ago that N.K. Singh was going to be at long last prised out of the Prime Minister's Office, one of the Ambanis sons flew down to Delhi

sage to that complex web of institutions that interlinks in the mesh of the Indian economy. The government of India, and the Prime Minister in particular, has in his dispensation the most powerful jobs in banking and financial institutions. Any business family that can claim, justifiably or otherwise, that it can influence decisions is significantly ahead of the game. The perception becomes more important than the reality. It must be said to the credit of the Ambanis that they do not allow a mere trifle like a change of government to cloud this perception. Their N.K. Singhs would do equally well in a Congress government.

What is a well-advised Reliance man doing in Mr Vajpayee's office?

Atal Behari Vajpayee does not have to reinvent himself, but he does have to reinvent his environment. There are empty spaces which important colleagues once occupied; there is a credibility gap in his personal office. The Prime Minister probably has less to fear from a confused Opposition than from whispermongers on his own side who are widening the credibility gap to include him. Mr Vajpayee has chosen his opponents with care, but they too are searching for weaknesses on his side. There is more than one crisis afoot. Proven corruption is only the obvious one; there is also the breakdown of confidence in the economy; the unnecessary stagnation after a positive start in Kashmir; the deterioration in relations with neighbours to a point where a commander in Bangladesh can step across and occupy disputed territory... However excellent his personal abilities might be, Jaswant Singh cannot manage two large and critical ministries. Drift and inaction will not address these problems. A Cabinet reshuffle and expansion is a compulsion now, not an option. This has to be followed by a revamped PMO.

If the Prime Minister does not act, someone else will.

## BYLINE

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very well-constructed coffin. Instead the Congress wants a judgment before a debate. Why have Parliament at all in that case? Is this because the leader of the Congress Mrs Sonia Gandhi is terrified of a debate? Because she does not know how to debate in the House, as is amply evident?

If this position is extraordinary then there are no words in any dictionary to describe the supplementary Congress demand. How can you have accountability for the Prime Minister but a blank cheque for the leader of the Opposition? Is Mrs Sonia Gandhi beyond the scrutiny of mere mortals?

Dr Swamy made his allegations and posted them to the government long before Tehelka made its turbulent appearance. Since time has diminished the good Doctor Swamy's credibility, very few people took his allegations seriously initially. The Prime Minister marked them on to his minister for personnel, which is par for the course; and the minister marked it to the police, which is also usual. To dismiss any such charge out of hand would have been unusual. The Congress

public life now, and allegations tend to become mud that sticks unless it is washed away by an independent investigation. Instead, the Congress officially stops Parliament from functioning because it wants no investigation whatsoever! This seems to indicate that the party is terrified that Mrs Sonia Gandhi will be found guilty. Or that Mrs Gandhi is terrified even if her party is privately more sanguine about such a prospect.

Hence the view held by the cynical element in the Congress: the Congress was started by a foreigner; it will also be ended by a foreigner.

Unless of course it is rescued by the BJP, which is always a possibility. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has one enormous advantage over both his friends and his foes: he is very easily underestimated. This tends to make his foes complacent and his friends confused, particularly those friends who want his job. The Prime Minister's affable manner and measured style disguise the careful craft of a man who has watched the politics of sharp contemporaries and risen through the political mist to sit on the chair of everyone's dreams.

are explicable. Mr Vajpayee's mistakes perplex. Why is he stumbling when he could run? He started badly when Tehelka broke. Decisions that should have been taken within twenty-four hours, and which would thereby have had a positive impact were cursed by suspicious delay. If Bangaru Laxman (president, in the words of a fellow columnist, of the New Year Party of India) and George Fernandes had been forced to resign, and an enquiry ordered within 24 hours, the damage could have been controlled. The Prime Minister might have in passing suggested that he did not necessarily approve of all kinds of journalism, but who was he to pass judgement; he could name at least one former journalist on his own side who had tried the same techniques. In the end the Prime Minister was forced to take all these steps, but he took too long and walked with a confused limp. The same thing is happening with what might be called the tail end of the Tehelka dog. It is impossible to understand what keeps a bureaucrat like N.K. Singh in the Prime Minister's Office. It is not a simple matter of loyalty to a man

and lobbied with anyone who would listen to drum up support for N.K. Singh. This is a fact, in the knowledge of the men and women of Delhi's ruling class. It is extraordinary that a bureaucrat with such proven links to a corporate house should be appointed to the PMO in the first place; it is appalling that he should remain there despite allegations made by the president of the BJP and while the process of enquiry is on. The PMO is not an ordinary office; the Ambanis would not want their man in an office that was ordinary. They need information about government decisions at the highest level. It is fair to add that N.K. Singh is not their only lobbyist; it would probably be accurate to state that he is their most important one.

The Ambanis need influence in government; all corporate interests need it, and the Ambanis are only better at this game than their competitors. The issue is not what an ambitious business family wants; the question is why the Prime Minister of India has permitted them to get what they want, and get it brazenly. Such exercise of power by a business family sends its own mes-

## TO THE EDITOR

### PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



STAR PHOTO: A.K.M. MOHSIN

### Stop this mess

Even the surface of the moon is more conducive to the eye. The Karwan Bazaar-Hotel Sonargaon road, which is already pock marked and bumpy, is now being 'excavated' by one of the city's many works departments. This is one of the most congested thoroughfares in Dhaka. With the first rains expected any time, surely the authorities could have found a more appropriate time to add to our woes?

### Misleading caption

This refers to a photograph printed on 21 April, in the back page of your daily along with the caption, "Although a weekly holiday, classes in many departments of Dhaka University were held yesterday to make up the losses due to hartals. Photo shows first year English (Honours) students attending class." Both the photograph and the caption are misleading. The students I am shown teaching in the photograph belong to the Intensive Course in Basic English, and not to first year (Honours) in English. The Intensive Courses in Basic English are being offered at the Department of English, Dhaka University, for the last 17 years. The Basic English Language Course classes on Fridays are nothing new because since the inception of this short intensive course the classes are being held on the weekends. When a young man accompanying the photographer, who took some photographs of the students of the class in progress, asked me about the class level, I clearly told him that it was a special class comprising students of different educational backgrounds. I

wonder if there had been any communication gap and the wrong caption was given inadvertently.

I would appreciate if your daily acknowledges the error, and let the readers know about it at the earliest opportunity.

Dr. Sadrul Amin  
Professor of English  
Department of English, Dhaka University

The error is regretted. - Editor

### Border tension

I am compelled to reply to the letter from the True Indian (April 23). His virulent comments, scoffing and scolding Bangladeshi characteristics have revealed his true self and raised our hackles. More than half a century has passed since Mahatma Gandhi was brutally killed, and later Indira Gandhi, the daughter of the great Leader, Jawaharlal Nehru was also assassinated. One is in a fools paradise if one assumes that India was the ingenious messiah of our liberation war, without thinking of its own interest. We have made full restitution for what we owe, in the form of treaties and trade. As for the

begging and stealing by Bangladeshi citizen in India, it is India who has to be blamed entirely. As a result of Indian goods being sent through our borders, the local industries are in total ruin with itinerant and unemployed masses.

ACitizen  
Chittagong

This is in response to the 'True Indian' (April 23). The writer has dismissed us as beggars and thieves. I cannot imagine how anyone can scold and scoff a neighbouring country. We love our country no less than they love theirs. I admit that the writer must have patriotism for India, but why deviate from humanitarian grounds and disrespect others' feelings?

The True Indian is shocked by the killing of 18 BSF soldiers. But we have been bearing the same pain for the last 30 years as many BSF soldiers have been killed mercilessly during this period. BSF often intrudes into our country, kidnaps our citizens and plunders our wealth, disobeying international law. In spite of all these losses, we do

not support the killing of BSF soldiers. And in any case, according to the media, the skirmish took place when the BSF attacked our soldiers. Our BDR moved to save themselves and the accident occurred then. About the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, has the writer forgotten the killing of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi? First look at your own face in the mirror, then criticize others.

India has failed to prove to be our friend. The way India is ripping off Bangladesh from a fair share of the Ganges waters indicates its attitude towards us. I suggest that the writer does not encourage a master-slave relation between two neighbouring countries. This will bring nothing good for them as well as for us. I suggest that the writer think seriously before commenting on a serious issue.

Saifullah  
BUET

### Pahela Baishakh

The Prime Minister has indirectly made the opposition and other 'Islamic groups' responsible for the

bomb explosion at Ramna Batamul which claimed valuable lives. This is one of a number of bomb explosions that point to a failure by the administration. How could the government blame any quarter prematurely? Wouldn't it influence the inquiry?

The Prime Minister also pointed her finger at those quarters that she terms 'anti-sovereign' and 'communal forces'. Her address has highlighted two distinct characteristics among the existing political and non-political groups of our country. One is 'anti-sovereign', 'communal' and the other is 'patriotic' and 'culturally awakened'. Let us be rational about these allegations. Could any Islamic group afford to be an anti-sovereign, to bring back Pakistan? No, not at all. Yes they may be communal, but it is far-fetched to term them anti-sovereign. On the contrary the groups who believe we have the same culture as neighbouring West Bengal, are they not communal? They have all the possibilities of bifurcated loyalty.

Minash  
Dhaka