

ATTACK ON AWAMI LEAGUE RALLY

Threat to national security

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THE August 21, attack on the Awami League rally and events thereafter, expose our vulnerability as a nation. What happened in Dhaka is beyond political rhetoric. It has raised serious question about the very existence of the country. Unfortunately, this incident, as usual, is seen as a continuation of confrontational politics that has polarised the country more than before instead of uniting on a single issue. The reasons for such polarisation could be many but is mainly due to the inadequacy of the government in guaranteeing individual security and amateurish handling of previous cases. It is true of past governments as well. The short-term political aim of each government in power has put the national security issue in the back burner. We had never visualised our strategic vulnerability at regional and international geopolitics.

The incident exposed the inadequacy in the basic requirement to forge and safeguard internal security. Our law enforcing agencies have been unable to provide security to the people that constitute the basic ingredient of national security. Our law enforcers remained hollow, when billions of Taka were being spent, in the last three decades on so-called modernisation. Modernisation remained confined to ceremonial parades with all the gaudiness and aura of regality. The country does not have even a bomb squad, something that should have been top on our priority list. Police reforms did not go beyond adding colour to

the uniform or establishing a police Staff College.

It took nineteen valuable lives, including that of a leading woman Awami League leader and an attempt on the life of the leader of the opposition and the former prime minister, for police to decide to form a bomb squad. Post Dhaka blast snafu in the government camp also exposed the inadequacy of our intelligence system to face the very basic challenges, not to talk about segregating terror threats from ordinary criminal offences. Our intelligence agencies

It is for the first time in our history that military weapons have been used in attacking political gathering. It was the planning and execution of the assault that caught our state apparatus unprepared. It had the signature of incidents that rocked Sylhet, adjacent to a couple of the most troubled states of Northeast India. Meghalaya on the north and Assam of north east of Sylhet is besieged with increased insurgent activities. Reportedly, Meghalaya alone has eleven insurgent groups fighting against the central authority. Indian authority suspects

biggest illegal weapon market in insurgent infested Northeast India and north Myanmar. Most of these insurgents depend on the smuggled weapons procured with illegal or drug money, from various black markets around the world. Apart from the more well organized ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), MNLF (Manipur National Liberation Front), TNV (Tripura National Volunteer), more than a dozen armed insurgents of Indian origin are operating in the proximity of Bangladesh's soft borders, leaving aside Myanmar's veteran

understand the complexity that we are confronted with, due to the shift in the regional power balance. One, the rapid growth of China as Asia's dominant power, its proximity to South Asia and possible presence in the Bay of Bengal. Reportedly, China is assisting in developing Bhambo-Sittwe link, close to Chittagong port for direct access to and from Yunan province of southern China. This development is seriously viewed by Delhi.

Two: North East of India still remains to be integrated with the rest of the union.

Bengal. Three: the perceptible rise of 'Islamists' in Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country in the world. One must take into account the sensitivity of the issue especially after 9/11.

These strategic factors make Bangladesh vulnerable in a region, which is perceived to be the most contested area for domination by regional and extra regional powers. The region could be the first nuclear battleground of the 21st century.

Concerns expressed by the world leaders at the incident are, however, not unfounded in a world where such kind of terrorist strike is not viewed as an isolated work but with much trepidation of international ramifications. We simply cannot overlook these concerns.

We must acknowledge that such a terrorist attack is bound to raise eyebrows in a changed world. The security of a nation, especially of any third world country, hinges on the internal stability than external factors. It is threat within that makes a country weak, and, if allowed to persist, the sovereignty comes under jeopardy. There are numerous examples of such collapse around us. Bangladesh, being a typical third world state, is no exception.

We cannot afford the luxury of endemic confrontational politics. It must end somewhere, at least for the sake of national security; otherwise we shall be accountable to our posterity.

The author is a defence analyst.

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Dynamics of illegal weapons in Bangladesh

EKRAM KABIR

WHEN the grenade attack at the Awami League rally showed its ugly teeth, almost everybody fretted. For the following few days, blames, counter-blames, proper investigations, fear of Islamic extremism etc., became the buzzwords. Amid this entire hullabaloo, one government minister spoke quite wisely. It was the finance and planning minister, M. Saifur Rhaman, who said the grenade attack has dealt a severe blow to the economy.

Obviously, the thought may have occurred in the minds of many people in high places, but it was Mr. Rahman who mentioned it. As the finance minister, he couldn't be more right in mentioning the fact that these sorts of incidents, perpetrated with the help of illegal weapons, do destroy a country's democracy. More so, the proliferation and use of illegal arms breed more poverty, a battle which, our national leaders keep telling us, is yet to be won.

But who needs illegal weapons most?

Isn't the answer to this question obvious? Since independence, force evolved as a concept for politics with political actors aspiring for power. Over the years, the nature of actors has changed and the use of violence holds a strong footage in the country's politics. From the post-independence years to the months before the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, some outlawed parties such as the Sarbajha were set to destabilise the regime. From the 1975 coup, to the time of General Ershad's coming to power, different sections of the army used force to consolidate and later legitimise power.

During the dictatorship of Ershad, mainstream political parties of Bangladesh resorted to force through their students' wings to oust his government. Although their mission was successful with the fall of the Ershad regime in 1990 and the introduction of parliamentary democracy, yet the price that the nation had to pay was high. The cohesion that the political parties showed by forming a unified movement against the autocratic government soon showed signs of tension between the parties after Ershad's fall. Suspicion, mistrust, hatred and rivalry,

severe impact on the people's confidence in democracy.

Misery caused by illegal weapons

The spread of illegal weapons, these days, has become a major challenge to law and order in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh's association with illegal arms is nothing new; what is new is its large-scale use. Earlier, Bangladesh was only used as a transit route for smuggling small arms, but now it is a user of these weapons.

It has been estimated that there are about 250,000 illegal firearms in Bangladesh, a fourth of which is in Dhaka. There are, reportedly, 80 syndicated terrorist and

Today, all major political parties have their armed cadres whose main responsibility is to strengthen their 'political base' and counter the cadres of the rivals. In the process, politics has become more reliant on muscle power, and a new breed of 'politicians' with money and armed support is increasingly replacing old-fashioned politicians.

criminal groups, of which again 28 are in Dhaka. About 600 to 700 illegal firearms enter the country everyday through its borders. Statistics from different human rights organisations say that about 30 to 40 violent incidents take place in the country every day, which leave about 1500 persons dead every month.

Armed violence is not confined to politics. Arms have become a serious menace that is jeopardising human and societal security. Recent increases in crime, terrorism and violence bear testimony to this fact. The concern is even greater where the terrorists or criminals enjoy the protection of law enforcement agencies. Illegal arms have also found their way into educational institutions. In the name of 'student politics', armed cadres resort to extortion, campus violence, illegal weapons accumulation, drug trade and other anti-social activities. The major student parties are all affiliated to one or the other mainstream political party.

Political instability, intra-party rivalry, national and local elections, student politics

revenue collection; and the dislocation of social cohesion and trust in communities.

About 100 innocent people have been killed and 500 injured in bomb explosions in Bangladesh since 1999. Some of the injured never recovered and became disabled and the rest are still traumatised. The governments paid compensation to a few victims and their families, but could not complete even a single investigation into the bestial acts.

Women and children are major victims of these small arms. 3105 persons were murdered in the country in 2001; more than 1500 were murdered with guns. Most of the women and girls murdered were killed after rape. 923 persons were abducted at gunpoint in the same year, 57 per cent were

women and girl children. 1673 women and girls were raped in the same year, mostly at gunpoint.

The use of illegal weapons has a direct effect on the country's social, economic and political problems. Armed robberies of horrendous dimensions continue to make life unsafe with the law enforcement agencies making little headway in cracking down on the dens of the hardened criminals. During the much-discussed Operation Clean Heart, professional killers and robbers lay low but with the soldiers back to the barracks they are reappearing with seemingly new zeal. The Bureau of Human Rights, Bangladesh said that 102 people were killed and another 2, 279 injured in robbery-related incidents in 2003.

Aggravates poverty

In a weak economy like Bangladesh, where the majority of the people suffer from appalling and abject poverty and misery, use of illegal weapons would only expedite poverty. People live in extreme economic hardship, misery and exploitation. The sufferings and vulnerability of the people aggravate because of recurrent calamities like floods, cyclones, famines, and epidemics. In such a situation, the helpless people become easy prey of extortion, toll collection, robberies, etc.

In the country's southwest, innocent people are being killed after being robbed of their properties by so-called class warriors; in the cities, law-abiding businessmen are giving in to the arms-carrying terrorists; on the streets, small shopkeepers even rickshaw-pullers have to share their earnings with armed goons. Moreover, those who use illegal firearms are pushing land and house owners across the country out of their property.

All these imply direct financial loss incurred by the commoners at the hand of those who, by means of force, are obstructing the people to become financially solvent. When force is inflicted on someone, she/he, too, is encouraged to buy force for him/herself to counter the force imposed on him/herself. There, too, lies a loss in terms of finance.

Although illegal arms are not themselves a cause of conflict, their easy accessibility encourages a violent rather than a peaceful resolution of differences, and generates greater insecurity in the society. When a society becomes violent, the sense of justice disappears. And in the absence of justice, there cannot be any democracy.

Ekram Kabir, a Dhaka-based journalist, has a published study on 'Proliferation of Unauthorised Small Arms: Impediments to Democratisation in Bangladesh'

Kargil: two tales

MUMTAZ IQBAL

Before 1999, Kargil to most South Asians meant Cargill, world's largest grain trader, or ex-ICS Brit I.P.M Cargill of IBRD 1952-80, who worked on S. Asia.

This changed in summer 1999. Fighting between Indians and Pakistanis made Kashmir Kargil known wider.

Is Kargil then "...a conflict...primarily a limited tactical defensive operation, linked to a series of events and military exchanges...along the LOC in Kashmir since the signing of the Simla Agreement in 1972," according to "The Kargil Conflict 1999" (p.15) by Dr. Shireen Mazari, Director, ISS, Islamabad.

Or, is it "Pakistan's...fourth war for Kashmir...to position an armed force across the well established formally accepted LOC in the Kargil sector in J&K state in the form of a bridgehead during...winter...which could be expanded as the season changed" as claimed in "Kargil 1999: Pakistan's Fourth War for Kashmir" (p.132) by contributor and editor Air Cdre Jasjit Singh, Director, IDSA, Delhi.

Delhi and Islamabad's toxic intractability over Kashmir explains why Mazari and Singh's perspectives are poles apart. Before reviewing them, we should know:

Where kargil is

It's in India's northern Ladakh, and comprises 155

FCNA (Forces Command Northern Areas)" (p.29).

Shaqma was one area. Occupying its "dominant heights" would enable India to protect the vulnerable Dras-Kargil road (p.32). Thus, her reserve 70 and 114 Bdes, normally moved to the Valley in winter, remained in Ladakh during 1998/99 "aggravating Pakistan's threat perceptions" (p.30-32).

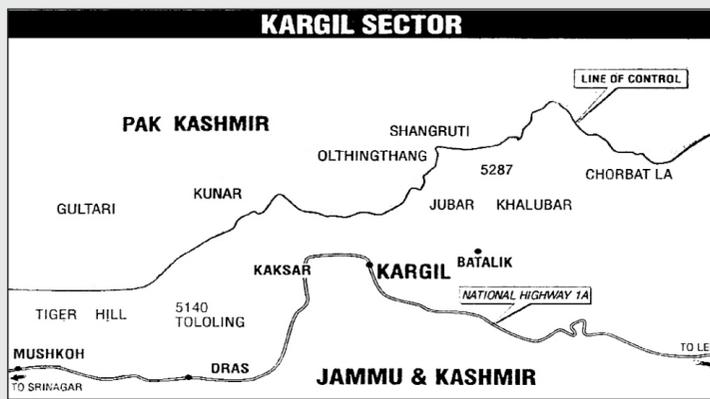
Meanwhile, Kashmiri Mujahideen, pressured in the Valley, regrouped to occupy "inhospitable unoccupied areas in the Dras-Kargil sector" (p.33) by avoiding "...the Pakistan Army as they proceeded to occupy the heights even beyond the unoccupied areas along the LOC." (p.34). This suggests exceptional Mujahideen stamina and rather sloppy Pakistani patrolling!

Mazari's description suggests a triple-decker deployment in 1998/99 along Dras-Kargil LOC: Mujahideen, top peaks; Pakistanis, slightly lower ones; and two Indian brigades in the vicinity (Mashkoh-Dras-p.44).

This disposition set the stage for "some form of a tactical military operation along the LOC... as part of its (Indian) forward policy in the area." (p.31) that focused on "Shaqma Sector" (p.42).

In March 1999, Pakistan used two NLI (Northern Light Infantry) battalions plus two reserve ones to "occupy the watershed on the Pakistani side of the LOC" (p.43) as "a tactical operation to preempt further Indian adventurism in Dras-Kargil." (p.44).

Mazari admits "...the possibility some NLI



by 75 kms of harsh mountainous terrain. The LOC (line of control) is to the north.

Dras-Kargil section is closest (5-10 kms) to LOC. Through it runs the National Highway NH 1A linking Srinagar to Leh/Siachen. At Kargil, the NH turns SE to Leh. Cut off / dominate this section and Ladakh is at your mercy. Naturally, India is sensitive to who occupies the peaks and what they do.

Mazari version

Her thesis is simple. Simla 1972 required "Both sides...to refrain from threat or use of force in violation" of the LOC (p.24). India has been doing the opposite and "seriously undermined de facto destroyed-Simla almost immediately after it was signed." (P.24 25).

Mazari's examples: India's unilateral banning of UNMOGIP (1972); ingresses in Chorbhat La (1972); Siachen (1984); Qamar (1988); Bhimbet and Marpola around Dras (date not given); Neelum Valley (1994); and introduction of IAF along LOC and troop build-up in IOK (1997) (p. 23-26). Pakistan riposted in 1996 by targeting the Dras-Kargil road (p.25).

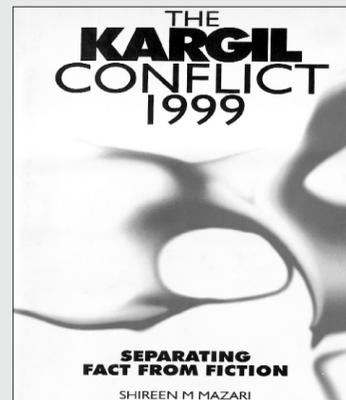
Things became bad after BJP assumed power in March 1998 e.g. Advani's provocative statements (hot pursuit); worsened after Pokhran May 1998 and led to a raised "belligerency level... July and August 1998 saw the most violent spell...of military exchanges... in a decade" (p.26-27). Despite Vajpayee's Lahore trip in February 1999, "bilateral talks were a non-starter...(when) BJP fell...April 1999" (p.28).

By end-1998, Pakistan intelligence became aware of reports that the Indians were "contemplating some... operations ...summer of 1999...in Siachen or area within jurisdiction (Pakistan's)

...crossing LOC... cannot be ruled out" with some "junior commanders...going... ahead (to) more dominating heights." (p.44). Two brigades were deployed only "after massive Indian attacks on Pakistani posts," (p.43) from around 15 May when "Indians upped the military ante." (p.46)

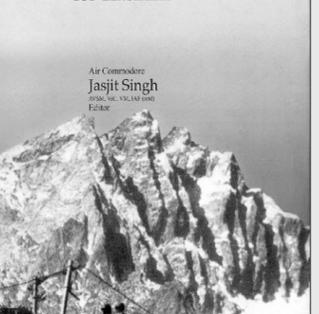
Indo-Pak troops first clashed in Turtok (30 April 1999) and Kaksar (early May 1999) over some posts usually vacant in winter but occupied in summer by Indians (p.31), with Pakistan initially having things its way.

Thereafter, hostilities commenced in earnest along Dras-Kargil highway. India used artillery (Bofors) and IAF (Safedsagar) to support its costly



KARGIL 1999

Pakistan's Fourth War for Kashmir



infantry attacks on the Pakistani-held peaks. Indian operations (Vijay) lasted till July when Islamabad, following Nawaz Sharif's sudden one-day dash to Washington on 4 July, agreed to withdraw its forces from Kargil.

Mazari concludes that "Pakistan saw a successful tactical operation...turn into a politico-diplomatic setback" (p.69-70) because the Pakistani civilian leadership led by Nawaz Sharif chickened out under US pressure.

Had the fighting lasted till end August, "most military analysts I (Mazari) spoke to felt it would have led to a Pakistan-India dialogue." (p.71). She doesn't name these analysts nor clarifies how the outcome would have differed had dialogue occurred.

Singh version

This like Mazari's is simplicity itself. Singh traces Kargil's genealogy back to the wars of 1947, 1965 and 1988 (proxy; p.119). Its aim: tactically, to sever Srinagar-Leh link by "domination of the Dras-Kargil road," and "cut supply line to Siachen" (p.132; 145-46); and strategically "... the first step toward... solution ...Kashmir... problem." (p.133, Singh citing Pakistan's ex-COAS Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg)

Singh hints Kargil planning started in 1994; preliminary preparations in 1997 and "operationalising" it in September 1998— following Chagai 28 May 1988— under Mangla-based 10 Corps (Lt. Gen. Musharraf, now President; p.133).

Reluctant debutante COAS Gen. Karamat's ambivalence over Kargil led to Musharraf replacing him in October 1988. Singh avers Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif knew about Kargil (p.134; 136), one of the few things with which Mazari agrees, though her account and interpretation of events tends to find the civilians culpable and whitewash the army (Conflict; p.57-59; 64-66; 72-77).

Singh acknowledges Kargil caught "India...by surprise" (p.134), losing its first patrol to ambush on 8 May 1999 (p.135). Thereafter, the Indians got their act together and, despite stubborn resistance, outgunned and outfought the Pakistanis under trying conditions (p.144-177).

The vital Dras sub sector overlooking NH 1A saw the heaviest fighting (Tololing and Tiger Hill), followed by the Batalik sub sector ENE of Kargil (p.154-58). Oddly enough, Kargil itself saw little action. Hostilities ended 26 July.

Assessment

Mazari's argument Pakistan was more sinned against than sinning and a target of Kautilyan deviousness cuts little ice because accepting it requires a willing suspension of disbelief. The book buries her hawkish credentials as a national security analyst than as a war historian.

Singh et al present India's case as a victim not perpetrator of violence eruditely. The contributions would have been more readable were they less didactic and pontifical.

Both books are exercises in partisan polemics. Each takes pot shots and shy—some gratuitous, others nasty—at the other's case. We await a good yarn on Kargil.

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enabled illegal arms to conveniently find a permanent place in Bangladesh politics. The only irony lay in the fact that these parties were neither outlaws nor autocrats, but parties who had the people's support and whom the people wanted to elect to power.

Today, all major political parties have their armed cadres whose main responsibility is to strengthen their 'political base' and counter the cadres of the rivals. In the process, politics has become more reliant on muscle power, and a new breed of 'politicians' with money and armed support is increasingly replacing old-fashioned politicians. Politics today has, consequently, become apolitical, commercial and violent. Vote-rigging and gunfire during elections, the murder of competing candidates as well as killing of newly elected candidates have become the norm rather than exception, and have had a

are to name but a few examples in which overt and covert violence take place. But most importantly, their impact on politics has had spillover effect on the socio-economic life to the extent that as a result of the proliferation of small arms into mainstream politics, nation-building process is being largely affected.

The direct effect of illegal arms availability and misuse of human development include fatal and non-fatal injuries, the cost of treating and rehabilitating firearm casualties, and the opportunity costs of long-term disability and lost productivity. The indirect effects of arms availability and misuse include: rise in the incidence and lethality of criminality; collapse or erosion of social services; decline in formal and informal economic activities (and potential rise in illegal ones); the distortion of investment, savings and