

Coastal defence is national defence

MD SAEEDUR RAHMAN

TSUNAMI means 'harbour waves' in Japanese. *Tsunami* has very low height while travelling over Deep Ocean. High waves occur only when it reaches the shallow waters, typically near the coast. And as such fishermen returning from fishing in deep water find harbours devastated. The deadliest natural disaster caused by the *tsunami* generated from an undersea earthquake on 26 December, 2004 in the Indian Ocean has shaken up the world. The mega thrust earthquake measuring 9.0 on Richter scale, off the western coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia was the largest of its type since the 9.2 magnitude Good Friday earthquake off Alaska in 1964. The 2004 *tsunami* generated waves of up to 15 meters in height and even hit Somalia at a distance of about 4500 km west of the epicentre. The *tsunami* traveled slowly and took seven hours to hit the farthest coast at the west. Because of the 1200 kilometer of the fault line affected by the seaquake was in a nearly north-south orientation, the greatest strength of the *tsunami* waves was in the east-west direction. Bangladesh, at the northern tip of the Bay of Bengal despite being a low-lying deltaic country escaped this devastation.

The Bay of Bengal is one of the world's sixty-four Large Marine Ecosystems (BOBLEME) bounded by eight countries viz. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The Bay is a relatively shallow or embayment of the north-eastern Indian Ocean covered by the southern part of Bangladesh. It occupies

an area of 2,173,000 Km² with an average depth of 2600 meters and is 1600 kilometer in width. About one-quarter of the world's population live in the littoral countries of the Bay of Bengal with approximately 400 million in its catchment area subsisting at or below the poverty level. The *Tsunami* 2004 on 26 December has freshly panicked the BOBLEME countries.

Bangladesh's coast is hydrologically aggressive and prone to extreme cataclysms with eventual vulnerabilities to the hard core poor. It has 710 km long coast along the

every sphere of livelihood. The tide along the coast of Bangladesh is of semi-diurnal type. The variation in tidal range is less than 2m to about 6 m. The maximum current velocities vary from approximately 0.1 m/s to 4 m/s in tidal channels.

Under the prevailing south-south easterly winds with average speed of about 8 m/s, the average significant wave height ranges from 0.6-1.5 m in the near shore zone to 0.1-0.6 m in the landward zone of the coast. During monsoon, wave heights can exceed 2m with periods greater than 6 seconds. Higher waves occur

factors such as possible changes in the severity and frequency of cyclone events were not incorporated. An indication of the impact of severe cyclone events on the coastal population demonstrates that at 100-year return period 3.92 million people will be at high risk of devastation from saline flooding arising out of extreme hydraulic events.

The 654-km of sea-facing saline embankment along the coast of Bangladesh gradually built over the last four decades is the living geometry enhancing the degree of safety to life and property of coastal population against the cyclone and cyclone generated storm surges. These embankments are still principally considered as a safety barrier to coastal agriculture only. The frontline saline embankment along the coast has seldom been seen or learnt to have been overtopped by the past storm surges. The *tsunami* in media term Asian Quake Disaster in the hard hit countries has not surpassed the damages caused by cyclone in terms of cutting the lives and properties in Bangladesh during 1970 cyclone.

The geographical location of Bangladesh in relation to the fault line in the Indian Ocean has itself made the nation's coast less prone to *tsunami*. Bangladesh has no device for detecting *tsunami* and monitoring the sea level rise or recording the storm surge heights. It should therefore join hands with the multinationals in the venture of installation of *tsunami* detecting device in the Indian Ocean for sharing the benefits. The development strategy contained in the National Water Management Plan 'continue as at present' approach is a less viable option for the existing coastal embankment system than it is for inland schemes. Unless increased funding for adaptation to changing nature is provided and beneficiary participation in maintenance is increased, the coastal defense system will deteriorate, with increased vulnerability to saline flooding, cyclone surges, and *tsunami*.

On social grounds alone, it would seem unacceptable to allow the nation's coastal defence to degrade to the extent whereby they ceased to provide adequate protection to life and property. The government's sag at any time therefore may not appear to be rational, as millions of coastal population cannot be left at the vagaries of nature. Handing over of the coastal embankments system to beneficiary is likely to be as difficult as for inland schemes in the immediate days. As in other countries, therefore, the coastal defence system must be 'expected to remain' largely the responsibility of the government. If it is accepted that the coastal defence system must be preserved, 'rehabilitation and improvement' is the only viable option for the existing coastal embankments system in the perspective of deadly disasters. Most land at risk from saline flooding is already protected, but new polders are required for newly accreted land. In any event, accreted area should be undertaken only when natural accretion processes are substantially completed and should provide for periods of further inter-tidal play to restore drainage system and raise the land. Afforestation to provide some protection against wave action and to promote accretion is an important part of this process. The National Water Management Plan in the backdrop of slower accretion of coastal lands recommends that coastal reclamation projects will be less attractive in the next 25 years. Yet there is no denying the realisation that coastal defence is the national defence -- with or without *tsunami*.

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Assessing objectives of American foreign policy

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

THERE has been clamor among the Republican lawmakers in particular for the formulation of objectives of the foreign policy during second term in office of President Bush. Swearing in ceremony of the President would take place on January 20. They are of the view that this has become all the more imperative in respect of hard economic reality in the country. In the words of Senator Chuck Hagel of the Foreign Relations Committee, "there is no question that the Bush administration is going to be dealing with an immense budget challenge. The pressure from our budget difficulties will allow the Bush administration very limited margins in both foreign and domestic policy." With a budget deficit of \$ 412 billion coupled with \$ 600 billion worth of trade deficits American administration is economically in a bad shape, to say the least. The new \$ 350 million pledge by President Bush for tsunami affected region in Asia and Africa would eat up the entire budget earmarked for disaster relief. Economic Freedom and Wall Street Journal in a recent survey placed America as 12th rich country in terms of economic index.

Bush administration will be facing daunting challenges around the world. Gigantic humanitarian problems coupled with on-going war in Iraq and the proposed election there and unresolved Middle East problem remain to be addressed during the second term in office.

Bush administration has already embarked on a massive scale of relief operation in the tsunami affected region, which will bring dividend in the ultimate analysis. The visit of departing Secretary of State Colin Powell in the affected region along with Jeb Bush, governor of Florida State would help establish rapport with the governments and people of the battered regions. Bush administration's efforts to inject massive scale relief in Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world, is seen as useful diplomacy.

The on-going war in Iraq has increased expenditure beyond imagination. Bush administration is likely to place request with the Congress for \$ 80 billion emergency spending in Iraq. That means that defence budget would be increased. Geoffrey Kemp, an analyst at Nixon Centre commented adversely by saying, "We can't have a war that is at this point unwinnable and costs soaring, and a military that desperately needs more support." Stalled peace process in the occupied Arab territories between Palestinians and Israelis is another area of concern, which needs to be addressed as a part of election campaign pledge. Lopsided handling of the peace process by President Bush during his first term in office has led to misgivings and misunderstanding not only in Arab and Muslim countries, but in European countries as well. Road map drawn up by UN, European Union, Russia and the United States should receive priority of the Bush administration, if they care to improve the tarnished image in the comity of nations. On environmental issue Bush administration has been condemned by the world community because of walking out of the Kyoto protocol.

World attention is focused on the ensuing election in Iraq on January 30. Although puppet government has been in place in Iraq, Bush administration has been conducting business there, including maintaining law and order and fighting the insurgents as well. Since many

countries are withdrawing troops from Iraq, Bush administration has been trying to maintain a semblance of a military coalition in Iraq. Bush administration has recently clashed with President Putin on the issue of Chechens and the election in Ukraine. There has been distinct differences of opinion between America and Russia. President Bush will have the opportunity to meet European leaders in February on the

Middle East, demonstrable limits on assembling coalition of the willing, stretched US forces and skepticism about America's veracity and competence."

In another area Bush administration will have serious problem, which relates to deficits of trade. Through diplomacy the administration will encourage investors to buy more products and there have been talks in the Congress about increase

which remains closed on flimsy ground. Governor Mike was urged to look into the complaint of Canadians regarding mad cow disease. Canada is having another problem on the supply of inexpensive prescription drugs to about two million Americans, which Bush administration is likely to stop.

Misuse of copyright by China has received attention of the Committee during confirmation hearing of the nomination of Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, a Cuban origin American. Many countries in Asia, including Bangladesh would likely be affected this year when non-quota and duty free system under the generalised system of preference would be abolished. The announcement of appointment of Robert B. Zoellick, America's trade representative as Deputy Secretary of State under Dr. Condoleezza Rice is seen as the administration would pursue economic diplomacy vigorously as has been the trend of the present day world. Another significant appointment is Nicolas Burns, a career diplomat, presently Ambassador to NATO, as Under Secretary of State for political affairs.

It gives the impression that Bush administration would put emphasis on developing favourable trade relations with many countries and improving relations with NATO member countries in particular.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former diplomat, now resides in Virginia

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northern tip of the Bay of Bengal. The coast of Bangladesh, based on geomorphologic conditions and hydrological features, can broadly be divided in three distinct regions: the eastern, the central, and the western. It has 25,150 Km² of internal water up to baseline. The territorial water of the country is 9,100 Km² up to 12 nautical miles. The estimated total marine water is 166,000 Km². The coastal population is 33 million with about same density as compared to the rest of the country. The poverty rate is higher and access to common facilities is lower over

mainly during cyclones. About one-sixth of the tropical storms generating in the Bay of Bengal hit the coast. Cyclones occur at a frequency of 1.3 per year. Severe cyclone generates wind speeds of more than 150 km/hour and surges are 9 m above the astronomical tide. Climate change impacts on the coast of Bangladesh were investigated through the simulation of the possible situation in 2030 allowing for information derived from a number of Global Models. The analysis indicated an increased surge height of between 5 and 20 percent. Other

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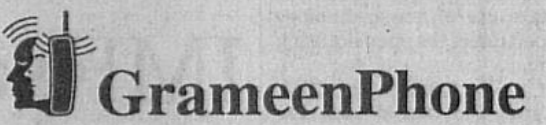
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