

Strategic interventions to fix the state of our politics

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

DEFINING politics and the politicians as they exist in Bangladesh today is not an easy task. At the very beginning I have taken the path of providing two specific quotations from the sayings of a world famous author Henry Miller and the other from Will Rogers the famous actor and naturalist from USA. I believe that this will help me to put across my message effectively and at the same time allow the readers to have a fair idea of what I am trying to convey. "One has to be a lowbrow, a bit of a murderer, to be a politician, ready and willing to see people sacrificed, slaughtered for the sake of an idea, whether a good one or a bad one" (HENRY MILLER-1891-1990). I quote the other one. "The more you read about politics, you got to admit that, each party is worse than the other" (Will Rogers).

Now that we have a comparatively calmer period of time since the declaration of the State of Emergency, let us ponder for a while and identify as to what would be our next course of action. As I put forward my ideas on the issue, I must point out that I have never been a politician but do certainly posses some idea as to what politicians represent or stand for. Frankly, I have but little patience for these savvy creations of God. While the politi-

cians remain busy talking and shouting about democracy, they continue to vandalize its very foundations.

What we have in our country is very popularly called "Dirty politics". I believe nowhere else it fits in as well as it does in our politics. Our politics and politicians are stuck in the groove of narrow thinking and fierce partisanship. They are money-oriented, power-hungry and, above all, ruthless in their objectives. Nation and the welfare of the people at large often do not come under the purview of their consideration. So far we had been talking about the "regular politicians and politics". Let us now take a look at politics as it prevails in the other areas of the society. With the backing of the regular politicians, we have politics at work at educational institutions, business circles including various sports bodies. It has also made its inroads into our theater, art and culture.

The ugly faces of our politicians that we have witnessed in recent times, in their efforts to save democracy and restore democratic rights of the people, have often caused me nightmares. If this is the way we are "exercising" our democratic rights, then I do not wish to be a part of it. I do not know of others. Where have all the core elements of democracy gone, like the spirit of dialoguing, discussion, tolerance, so on and so forth?

The only way we would be able to improve the state of our politics and political leadership is to vigorously pursue the path of putting back on the rails our vital institutions. We have to begin somewhere and now is as good a time as any. We could at least begin by dealing with some of the off shoots of our political activism and the so called democratic practices. I take the position that both 'Oborodhs' and 'Hartals' are a curse for this nation, irrespective of whatever good these may or might have accrued. These elements have caused immense sufferings to the majority of the country's population who are neither into active politics nor interested in politics.

Today, Bangladesh's democracy is closer to autocracy and is full of militancy, senseless demagoguery including jealousy, lies and deceit. Once again I am tempted to quote the renowned Irish dramatist and critic, George Bernard Shaw, in order to provide a ready insight into my assessment of the prevailing state of democracy in Bangladesh. He said, "Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few".

The only way we would be able to improve the state of our politics and political leadership is to vigorously pursue the path of putting back on the rails our vital institutions, although I do realize that it is easier said than done. But surely, we have to begin somewhere and now is as good a time as any. We could at least begin by dealing with some of the off shoots of our political activism and so called democratic practices. The three issues that come readily into my mind are: hartals and oborodhs, student politics

and separation of the Judiciary from the Executive.

While 'Hartals' have been justified as a valid instrument of political protests of democracy and democratic practices, 'Oborodh' has also been in vogue on similar grounds. As far as I am concerned, these are nothing but instruments of harassment and intimidation at the disposal of our politicians and the political parties. However, our political parties would like to justify that they have resorted to these tactics having had no other options to put their point of views across. This argument is not only feeble but untenable since they have never explored, with any degree of sincerity or seriousness, the traditional avenues of democratic practices like dialoguing and discussions at any time since we gained our independence. So acute is our nature of self-deception that even the so-called high profile members of the civil society including the intellectuals, whether wilfully or other-

wise, refrain from discussing at any length the evil effects of such political activism. I take the position that both 'Oborodhs' and 'Hartals' are a curse for this nation, irrespective of whatever good these may or might have accrued. These elements have caused immense sufferings to the majority of the country's population who are neither into active politics nor interested in politics. 'Oborodhs' and 'Hartals' have also resulted in immense losses for our economy and trade, a legacy that will haunt us for years to come. There can be no denying of the fact that these have caused considerable damage to the image of the country. Therefore, I earnestly hope and pray that sooner than later we remove the curse from our political arena once and for all. It may not be an easy task, yet we cannot simply sit with our hands folded and do nothing. Let us not worry about what the zealots have to say, we must do what we have to do. I find it strange that so many discus-

sions and dialoguing are taking place in this country on a regular basis on any issue under the sun and yet there has been no known efforts to put these vital issues on the table for some sort of debate. I wonder what it is that is preventing these highly concerned "good men" of the country to debate on this vital issue of national interest. I am tempted to ask as to whose interests they are trying to protect? An argument is often put forward by the advocates of 'Hartals' and 'Oborodh' that they do exist as a form of protests in democracy in many countries of the world but that cannot hold ground. The faces of our 'Oborodhs' and 'Hartals' are uglier than anywhere else, which we can ill afford. If we are to see this country march towards democracy and uphold democratic traditions, we must cut off these cancerous elements from our politics once for all.

Education is the backbone of any nation worth its name. It is sad that we systematically and

relentlessly continue vandalizing its sanctity. Today our educational institutions are in a near endemic state of indiscipline and anarchy. There may be numerous factors behind this debilitating state of affairs but it must be said that "student politics" stands out most prominently. Let me cite a recent example as to how student politics has disrupted the very academic routine in one of the highest seat of our education in the country, the University of Dhaka. A media report recently revealed the other day that as many as 32000 students of the University would be behind academic sessions by two years or so due to indefinite strikes recently called by the 14 party backed student bodies since last November only. I am almost certain that similar situation persists in many other public universities across the country. Our intellectuals, politicians and political parties, including the newly emerged high profile members of the society are crying their hearts out while seeking people's support to vote for and elect honest and competent people to the Parliament but it is not understandable as to why they choose to remain silent on this vital and critical issue facing the country for years? Even if you are able to put all the honest people together, without education they would be of no use to the country. We are all political animals one

way or the other. I am not advocating against being politically conscious but what I am objecting, is the violent and vicious spread of partisan political activism amongst the students. We must embark upon a vigorous program of dismantling and disbanding all student bodies backed by our political parties. Let no fear or confusion blur our vision any longer.

The last issue of my suggested intervention is this long outstanding contentious issue of separating the Judiciary from the Executive. For years now successive governments had been dragging their feet in resolving this matter, despite the fact that hundreds of the innocent masses year after year continue to be victims of the travesty of justice. People are picked up from the streets and even their residences on the slightest of pretexts. They are put in custody by the police and are not granted bail by the courts run by Metropolitan Magistrates. These Magistrates happen to be a part of the governmental bureaucracy and for all practical purposes are accountable to the Ministry of Home affairs. No wonder their allegiance also lies with the Ministry against their good judgment. Recent positive developments in this matter is very welcome.

The author is a freelancer.

Strategic evolution in seabed mining under the laws of the sea, 1982

COMMODORE M KHURSHED

ALAM *ndc psc, BN (Retd)*

THE UNCLOS III was adopted in 1982, notwithstanding the strong objections of the industrialized states to many of the provisions of Part XI, on seabed mining in the "Area". The "Area" is the seabed and ocean floor and the subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. The area and its resources are the common heritage of mankind and no state can claim or exercise sovereignty or sovereign rights over any part of the Area or its resources. This controversy over seabed-mining had occupied the centre stage of the convention for more than 15 years and indeed, this deadlock threatened to unravel the work of decades. In the early 1970s, at the time drafting of the Convention began, the developing countries argued that because the resources of the area beyond the zone of coastal state jurisdiction were "the common heritage of mankind," and the deep seabed should be exploited only under the auspices of the United Nations, seabed miners should share the benefits from their endeavors with mankind as a whole. Most of the exploration and technology development related to seabed-mining, however, was being undertaken by private firms and consortiums from the industrialized states. These firms risked their own assets and worked for their own stockholders, and neither they nor their governments felt an obligation to share either their profits or their technology with a UN "Enterprise" that proposed to compete with them.

The original Part XI of the Convention explicitly asserted UN control over the mineral resources of the area of the deep seabed seaward of the limits of national jurisdiction. Moreover, it established a seabed-mining regime called the International Sea Bed Authority (ISBA). Specifically, the Convention set up a "parallel system" in which the seabed would be mined both by an Enterprise controlled by the ISBA and by various national and multinational entity, mostly from the industrialized world. To make this system feasible, the latter were required to pay a substantial up-front fee, which would be used to fund the ISBA and the Enterprise. The other mining entities were also to turn half of each mine site they had identified over to the ISBA for exploitation by the Enterprise. These and other seabed mining provisions were strongly opposed by the United States and many other industrialized countries, which characterized the regime as so interventionist that would discourage investment and prevent development of the seabed resources.

Besides, the United States, United Kingdom and West Germany did not sign the Convention and the other industrialized nations that did sign it, did not subsequently ratify it. Instead, they proceeded to abide by the provisions of the Convention except for those relating to seabed mining. In 1984, Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States entered into the "Reciprocating States Agreement",

which set forth the rules and procedures under which, in the absence of an UNCLOS Convention, their firms would undertake seabed mining. In lieu of registering their mine sites with the ISBA Preparatory Committee, as called for in Part XI of the UNCLOS Convention, most of the Western seabed mining consortia registered their exploratory sites under the existing laws of the United Kingdom, the United States or West Germany.

All these problems came up due to discovery of potato-size polymetallic nodules, which constituted a potential alternative source of strategic minerals. The nodules are composed largely of iron and manganese oxides but often contain small amounts of nickel, copper, cobalt and other metals. Since then, however, the prospects for land-based mining have improved significantly. Modern exploration techniques have uncovered additional resources, and new mining methods have decreased costs. To be even minimally attractive to seabed miners, nodules must have a combined nickel, copper, and cobalt content of at least 3 percent. Of them cobalt offers the most potential for

alternatives to nodule mining, especially if the deposits are within 200 miles of a coastal state.

Metalliferous sulfide deposits have been discovered along the crest of the mid-oceanic ridge at depths of 12,000 feet or so near volcanic vents that have heated the seawater to hundreds of degrees. At that pressure the seawater remains liquid but turns strongly acidic, to the point that it leeches minerals out of the rock. As the warm, mineral-rich water rises, it cools and the minerals precipitate out and are deposited on the seafloor. At some vent sites, the deposits contain metal compounds of singular purity and at other sites they contain a much wider variety of minerals - including lead, zinc, silver, gold and germanium. The vent deposits are concentrated in small areas, in contrast to the huge mine sites - up to 150,000 square kilometers, over which polymetallic nodules would be collected. Oxides of nickel and cobalt have been discovered on the flanks of islands and seamounts at depths of about 3,000 feet. In general, such crust deposits would most likely be found within the EEZs or on the Continental Shelves of

power of the developing countries as a voting bloc in the ISBA and increased the influence of the United States and other industrialized countries. The Assembly is now permitted only to ratify or remand decisions of the Council; it cannot originate policies. Among other things, the Agreement sets up three four-member chambers of the Council - one for the major Consumers (importers) of minerals that could be mined from the seabed, one for the major Investors in seabed mining, and one for the major land-based Producers (exporters) of minerals that could be mined from the seabed. Another arrangement would permit as few as 11 developing countries to block decisions of the Council and it gives the United States and Russia seats in the Consumer chamber. Consequently, the US Government could block decisions of the Council with the support of two of the other three members of the Consumer chamber. It also requires that substantive decisions be made only by consensus in the areas like protecting land-based producers from adverse effects of seabed mining, revenue sharing, amendments to rules, regulations, and procedures implementing the seabed-

1994, the new Agreement was presented to the UN General Assembly, and a resolution supporting it was overwhelmingly approved, with 121 states in favor and none opposed. As of March 2006, 122 countries including USA and all other major industrialized states have ratified the Agreement.

The new Agreement reached in 1994 eliminated, or greatly weakened, the provisions to which the industrialized states most objected but retained the framework in which seabed mining would be conducted under the authority of the ISBA. The compromise was made possible by the conclusion of both sides that what each viewed as the optimal seabed mining regime was not achievable. The general view among the developing countries is that paving the way for universal acceptance of the Convention was worth the concessions they made on seabed mining in the Agreement. The convention and the fundamental changes from the 1994 Agreement constitute a huge success for the world body and especially to the US and other industrialized states. It can be fairly said that there is a broad acceptance in state practice of the fundamentals of the regime - that the

India seeking the blue waters

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

INDIA is the second largest populous country (nearly 1.1 billion) in the world and the seventh largest in geographical area and is likely to overtake China in the 21st century as the world's most populous country. It is strategically located in the middle of South Asia and the Indian Ocean, which spreads out from the sands of Egypt to the Straits of Malacca.

India, China and Pakistan face each other across the contested borders. Although Indo-China relations have considerably improved in economic terms (two way trade \$18.7 billion in 2005), the core issue of settlement of border remains. It is common knowledge that while India defines its security position in light of Chinese military strength, Pakistan assesses its security concerns against India's position.

Against the background, India has increased its naval profile in the Indian Ocean and distant waters.

This means that India is committed to build a multi-role navy that can project its power in distant waters, apart from rendering assistance during disaster and checking terrorism, infiltration and piracy that affects India as well as its allies across the seas. The Indian navy is increasingly taking on policing and responsibilities in global security, having played an important role in evacuating people in last July during Israel-Lebanon war and in rescue missions in December after the tsunami in 2004.

India's naval role is its military obligations. While the navy is addressing this aspect through upgradation and modernisation of hardware, weaponry and logistics, Indian domain of influence has increased considerably. Currently, India is competing with China and its naval vessels flitter over waters from the coast of Africa right down to South-East Asia and the South China Sea.

India's growing naval strength

At this time, Indian navy comprises of 136 major ships, with as many as 33 warships under construction at naval shipyards across India. India has placed an order for three more Talwar class guided missile frigates from Russia, after they have bought three earlier. Besides, it is reported that Cochin shipyard is scheduled to deliver 37,500-tonne aircraft carriers it is building by 2011-12 with another to follow. Russia is refitting and refurbishing (at a cost of \$800 million) the 44,470-tonne carrier, re-christened INS Vikramaditya in 2008.

Furthermore, it is reported that the 16,590-tonne USS Trenton, an amphibious transport dock will be inducted in 2007 (at a cost of \$48.44 million). It will be renamed INS Jalashav and it will be able to carry 900 fully armed troops.

The steel cutting for licensed manufacture of six diesel-electric submarines by Mazagon Dock Ltd started a fortnight ago with France under a 2.4 billion euro agreement.

India has already managed to extend the operational radius of its naval UAVs from 120 to 400 miles by maneuvering them in conjunction with not only surface platforms, but also other UAVs in series.

Network-centric operation is another thrust area for the Indian navy. Its expanding presence compels the evolution of a maritime battlefield doctrine through enhanced interoperability capabilities among its tri-dimensional units. A network-centric system can facilitate exchange of data and



communication among Indian Ocean surface, undersea and aerial platforms during their missions over widening areas.

Budgetary outlay for acquisition of sophisticated ships

It is reported that the navy has received Indian Rs.15,000 crore last year and it has budgeted a requirement of Rs.10,000 crore over the next five years. As much as 60% per cent allocation goes towards capital expenditure (acquisition and modernisation) and the balance towards revenue expenditure.

A key necessity for the Indian navy at present is for a credible maritime surveillance capability. Proposals for 8 long-range maritime patrol aircraft are being finalised. The navy is considering satellite coverage as an eventuality.

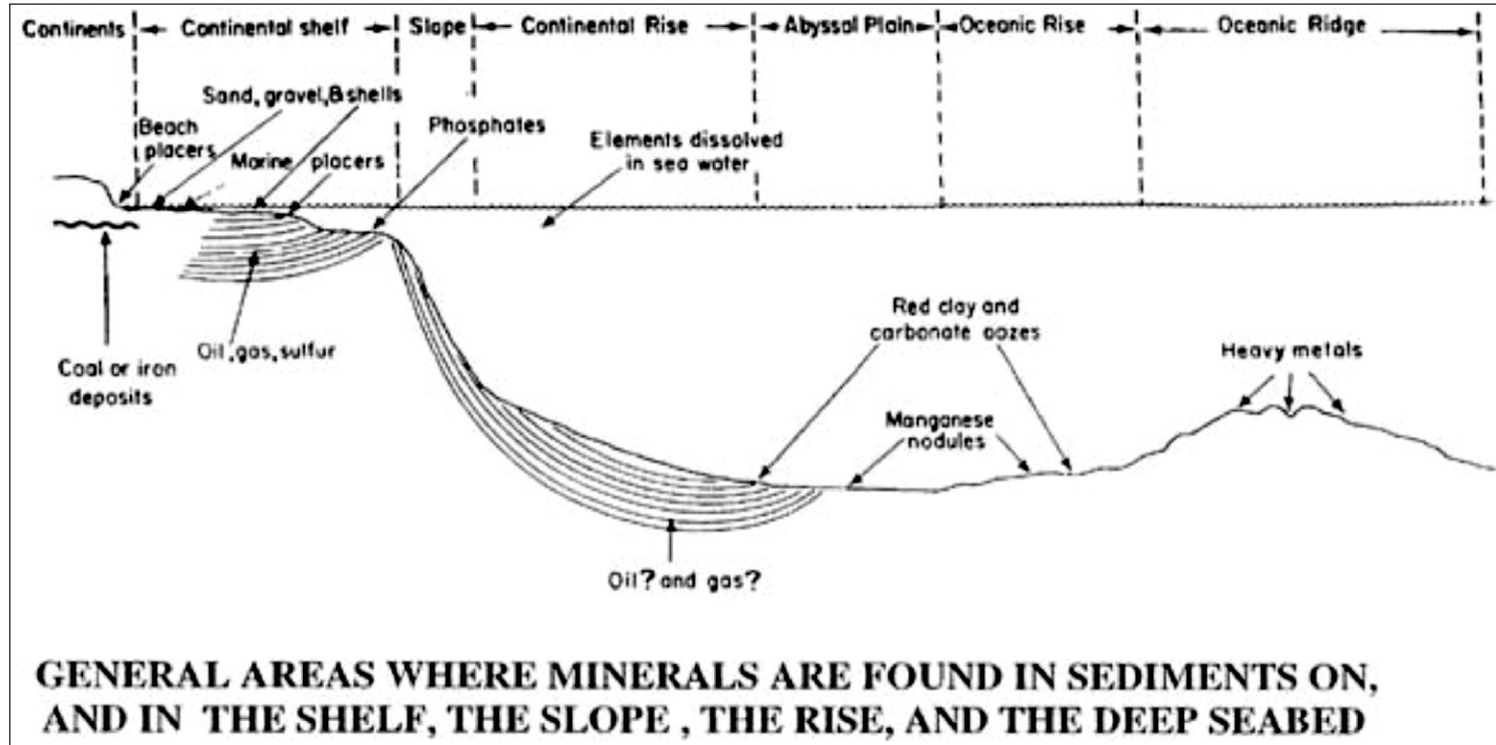
It is also keen on developing the innovative rotary-wing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), essentially helicopters outfitted with UAV features. This can prove an effective force multiplier as it can considerably enhance the navy's surveillance range.

Conclusion

The newly appointed Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Suresh Mehta, who took over on 31 October last, is a navy aviator whose string of commands included INS Garuda, the training hub for naval aviation in Kochi, the Vizag-based Eastern Naval Command, Fleet Command of the Western Naval Command and Director General, Coast Guard. Admiral Mehta thinks the time has come for Indian navy to transform its role, not only based on threat perceptions but also on the capability-driven force in distant waters.

India aspires to be a global power during the 21st century. Its rival obviously appears to be China. Although India does not say that its naval strength is directed at any other country, the US needs support of India to contain China. India's naval power may collide with that of China in the Indian Ocean. To both countries, sea-lanes are kept open and secure from piracy or any other threat. Some strategists suggest the gradual militarisation of Indian Ocean poses a threat to littoral countries including Bangladesh.

The author is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



profit. Cobalt is a component of special alloys employed in many military, aerospace, and industrial applications, and there are no satisfactory substitutes in critical applications. Because the sources of cobalt are limited and not easily expanded, a disruption in the supply of cobalt from one of the land-based producers could drive up global prices.

According to mining industry analysts, it would probably cost several billion dollars to mount a seabed cobalt-mining operation far more than the cobalt would be worth. Industry experts estimate that seabed nodule mining is not likely to become competitive with land-based mining for at least the next decade. Polymetallic nodules are commonly found far out at sea at depths of 20,000 feet or more. Other mineral deposits found at much shallower depths may offer attractive

coastal states, which consequently would have the sole right to exploit them. The technology for mining vent and crust deposits has yet to be developed, but preliminary indications are that both forms of mining could be undertaken with significantly less investment than nodule mining.

Because of such importance of the minerals and consistent refusal of the developed countries to sign the UNCLOS III, in 1990, amidst a general thaw in both East-West relations and North-South relations, the UN Secretary General sponsored new consultations aimed explicitly at ameliorating the objections of the United States and the other industrialized countries to the UNCLOS Convention's seabed mining regime. The new Agreement changed the proposed earlier Part XI regime in several fundamental ways. In particular, it reduced the

mining regime, and amendments to the seabed-mining regime itself. In addition, the Agreement addresses other US objections to the original seabed mining provisions by establishing a Finance Committee controlled by the five largest contributors to the Authority's budget to make budgetary and financial decisions by consensus. The Enterprise, which would engage in seabed mining on behalf of the developing world, will not be established unless and until the economic viability of seabed mining has been demonstrated.

Indeed, the Agreement contains a provision to the effect that the 10 developed countries registered as pioneer investors are Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; the other four pioneer investors are China, India, Poland and South Korea. In July

resources of deep seabed are the common heritage of mankind.

It would be difficult to repeat the achievements of this convention if we were to begin anew or to rely on unclear assertions that something more could be achieved by the developing countries. Bangladesh have signed and ratified this Seabed Mining Convention in 2001. But we have made no effort at all to claim the extended Continental Shelf up to 350 nm or 650km from our baseline, wasting six precious years of time and it is not known when we will be taking some step to find out what is there in the seabed area of the Bay of Bengal and how to get maximum benefit out of the huge sea area lying unexplored.

The author is a freelancer.