

Our anti-corruption efforts

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"If character is lost, everything is lost". As per this saying, we have lost everything, i.e., our national character, the most important national asset. Unfortunately, every discipline of life in Bangladesh has been badly affected by corruption. To recover from this grim situation, we need to take certain measures at the national level, which is not an overnight job and obviously not an easy task. This could only be possible with a determined objective supported by strict implementation of rules to be carried out by a national body.

The Caretaker Government has certain programs at hand and we understand that it is moving forward according to the current need in order to accomplish that daunting task. Nevertheless, no program is beyond criticism. Criticism is good for the interest of the nation. Healthy and positive criticism is very much part of the development process as long as it is not leg pulling or with the purpose of getting an initiative paralysed through analysis.

No criticism, no progress

Examples are there throughout the world including in our rapidly developing neighbor, India. Irrespective of fathom and magnitude they allow criticism. Those leaders or decision makers who depend on muscle power cannot gain from criticism; first, due to subservient intelligence agencies and second, owing to the presence of hypocrites around. None of these two syndromes are probably present in Bangladesh at the moment, which makes us reasonably bold to criticize the government's initiatives in the backdrop of the state of emergency.

To start with, let us accept some hard facts as the basis of our criticism. Our previous generation (leadership) could not provide our future generation and us an honest living environment. Our leadership gradually went into the grip of democratic hooligans. Their affluence became directly proportional to the sufferings and depravity.

We have been living in a cor-

ruption of the common people. Many are now considering the government of Dr Fakhrudin as a direct intervention of nature. By all counts, the government probably could not select a better person than whom it has for the post of Chairman, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Our intention is to analyze the actions taken so far by the ACC.

If hunting down the corrupt is the only task given to a personality like the present head of ACC, we may say that he is underutilized; any honest Tom, Dick and Harry can do this job. We want him to ensure an honest environment like those of the advanced countries of the world as rated 'honest' by Transparency International. Our expectation knows no bound. The question could be: is ACC doing enough to eradicate the long-standing and deep-rooted corruption in our country? Does it not look somewhat haphazard? No doubt they are busy digging out the massive corrupt assets of the erstwhile political leaders and some government officials. However, some missing links are noticeable to make the initiative a wholesome one. If getting hold of corrupt people is the only mission then they are doing a fantastic job. However, if the mission is to ensure an honest environment, then there is a lot of work remaining unheeded; some of them need immediate attention and some need to go parallel along with the present actions.

In any planned operation, there are some actions that have to be gone through sequentially, and others simultaneously. Here, the ACC probably needs to prioritize its task. Nabbing corrupt people is one of the most important actions in pursuit of creating a corruption-free environment but it cannot be the only action. Here is the cardinal and comprehensive intricacy. Honest environment is not a hypothesis; it is very much an attainable reality. Ershad Shikder, Tarique Rahman and many others are the product of the environment (industry); if we take care only of the product and not the industry we will reach nowhere.

We have been living in a cor-



MEASURING CORRUPTION:

ruption environment for a protracted period. Corrupt leadership ensured that our moral fabric was depleted, zero resistance to corruption and finally ensured sedimentation of dishonesty in the fabric of the nation's intellectuality. In fact, they revolutionized corruption in our system. Hunting down corrupt people is the anti-biotic, but we need other medicines as well, and some of them need to be administered simultaneously with the anti-biotic. We need to launch a reverse revolution to bring back

our long lost honest environment, which can never be achieved by sheer culling of the criminals. We may say that ACC is yet to offer a vibrant anti-corruption environment for which people had been craving so long. If someone considers that only hunting down of corrupt people will gradually produce an honest psyche, we have very recent sparkling but reverse example. JMB top brasses have been caught but supply of explosives and young suicide bombers continue.

The point to note here is that the authority could successfully subdue JMB initiative by capturing the leadership but could not do enough against JMB environment or their motivational infrastructure. For a permanent solution to the JMB issue we need to hit the bulls eye, their false faith, and de-motivate them and bring them towards the main stream of Islam. If we fail to nullify the base (false faith) of JMB motivation, the supply of explosive and suicide bombers are sure to continue. It is the same with corrup-

tion; if we fail to purge the corrupt psyche from the heart and mind of our people, dishonesty will only have a temporary stopover. With a change of government, the honest lot will face a dire consequence, this time, may be with more venom and ferocity.

People may raise their eyebrow saying how can honest environment be created? What is the practical meaning of honest environment? What is meant by actions in support of creating an honest environment? Except

punishing the corrupt what else can we do to create an honest environment? The worst-case scenario is the well-known syndrome, 'whatever we are doing is good enough for the future of our people'. Putting corrupt people behind bars does have an effect on the society in the form of coercive or repressive motivation. It has nothing to do with the conviction or on a long practiced corrupt psyche. Such active coercive action induces cautious silence, which is temporary, only to burst

out furiously during next opportunity moment.

Depleted moral fabric needs to be re-constructed; psycho-cleansing operation is urgently needed to clear the dump of corrupt moral and political philosophy. If we fail to conduct these two operations effectively, no one in this world can make our current anti-corruption effort a permanent one. Affluent corrupt people incubate domestic and foreign beneficiaries who enjoy wealthy lives out of our unbridled corruption. We have to recognize the shrewdness of corrupt people as well. They will gradually employ lobbyists at regional and global power centers to create pressure to hand over power immediately to the democratic authority. Against that the best recommendation is to leave the command to the honest echelon whatever way they might have come to power as long as our democratic leaders are not able to differentiate between democratic practice and democratic hooliganism.

Providing more power to ACC by the present government falls under the category of an action that relates to system development and these active measures are very much operative. We need to employ passive measures too, which is the cardinal step towards achieving a truly honest environment. We may prepare a time frame and an attainable target mentioning by what time we want an environment wherein people would be patriotic, and honest up to a level to feel proud as a Bangladeshi. We may be very tough with the extreme corrupt people but we have to give the 'semi-corrupt' people a chance to go back to an honest lifestyle; does the ACC have any modern and effective motivational mechanism up their sleeve?

For an effective ACC, putting a corrupt group of people behind bars is far easier than turning a corrupt group of people into an honest class. Let us put corruption away as a dark history of Bangladesh and move towards a better future.

The author is a freelancer.

Iran and the geopolitics of energy

GARIMA SINGH

The instability in West Asia, particularly over Iran, is growing with the current standoff over its capture of British marines. The US has deployed its largest fleet of warships and submarines in the Persian Gulf, since the Iraq invasion, and warplanes are flying simulated attack games. This has raised concerns for oil security, resulting in a surge in oil prices by three percent as on 29 March 2007. Iran has the world's third largest oil reserves and second largest gas reserves, and currently exports around 2.5 million barrels per day (bbl/day) of oil. The geopolitics of energy is raising the conflict profile in West Asia and Iran. Given the current situation, how will Iran respond? What will be its implications for India's energy security given its heavy dependence on West Asian crude?

The strategic location of Iran is important here. It overlooks the Straits of Hormuz, the conduit for about 14 million bbl/day of oil, roughly two-fifths of globally traded oil. If Iran is attacked, will it retaliate by blocking the Straits of Hormuz? Iran cannot afford to block this waterway for more than a couple of days as its economy depends on the outflow of oil and inflow of gasoline. At the same time, it might believe that a controlled crisis could boost its economy by driving up oil prices. If the crisis escalates and Iran is attacked, Iran may retaliate by launching a counter-attack on oil fields in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, which together hold more than half the world's known oil reserves. Iran may also engage in sporadic, low-level attacks on Gulf shipping and oil production facilities. Iran possesses a number of Shehab ballistic missiles with a range of 300-500 kilometers. An Iranian counter missile strike could reach US bases in Qatar, Oman and Iraq. The Shehab III, which reportedly has a range of 1300 kms, could reach cities in Israel. Iran also possesses high-speed underwater missiles capable of destroying warships and submarines. Iran may open another front for the US, apart from Iraq, which would further destabilize the region.

If these events take place, it will

have a multidimensional impact on India's energy supply and India's economy. India currently imports 67.43 percent of its energy requirements from West Asia, of which 10.03 percent is from Iran. India will have to suffer a crunch period, due to its heavy dependence on West Asian crude. Though the US and British navy are preparing to increase the number of minesweeping vessels and magnetic 'sleds' carried by helicopters to improve their ability to counter Iranian mines in oil-shipping lanes, there is reason for India to be concerned. It still has no strategic oil reserves, and the proposal to establish such reserves is still in the initial stages of discussion.

In this scenario can India expect assistance from the US or China? Unlike China, itself imports 58 percent of its oil requirements from West Asia and is the leading oil and gas importer from Iran. The US, on the other hand, will not be in a position to help India in any way due to its active engagement in the conflict zone.

The possibility of a disruption in energy supply from Iran and West Asia and ensuing rising crude oil prices should be a cause of major concern for India. The rising crude oil prices may not immediately effect domestic inflation as the government regulates petroleum prices. This however, cannot be sustained for long, for if crude prices continue to rise, it would have a cascading effect on all aspects of the Indian economy. According to the Asian Development Bank, India's economy is headed for a slowdown at about 8 percent after growing at a brisk 9 percent rate over the last two years. With the threat of energy insecurity, it may decline still further. India registered a GDP growth of 8.9 percent on a credit growth of around 30 percent. The threat of energy crises may lower global investors' confidence in India resulting in a slowing down of Indian economy.

It is certainly in India's interest that this crisis does not escalate. Stability in West Asia is required and the US has a central role to play here. It is time for the US to realize the geopolitical reality of Iran being a regional power. Rash decisions on Iran will further deteriorate the situation impacting on the availability of oil from the Persian Gulf; the ramifications of which will also be felt in India.

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India's missile power: Launching of Agni-3

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

South Asia's security does not depend only on South Asian countries because China comes into the picture. The impact of Indo-Sino war of 1962 looms large upon India's security strategy.

India assesses its security concerns in the light of Chinese military strength, and Pakistan defines its security position against India's position. This has manifested in arms and missile race in South Asia.

Both India and Pakistan have intensified their missile manufacturing capabilities not only as a defense strategy but also as a symbol of power and prestige. Both India and Pakistan are capable of striking any part of each other's territory with missiles.

It is reported by the Arms Control Association, an US weapons research organisation, that India has between 45 and 95 nuclear bombs, while Pakistan has between 30 and 50, and China a staggering 300. Both India and Pakistan have been investing money to improve the range and mobility of their missile systems for delivering nuclear warheads.

On 5th April, India tested Agni-3 missile (16 meters long and weighing 48 tonnes) that has a range of more than 3,000 kilometers and can easily hit China. The US Department of State made a statement that the successful launch of the Agni-3 hopefully would not destabilize the security situation in South Asia.

The US statement is meaningless because under the US-India nuclear deal, India will receive nuclear fuel and technology and will be much more capable to enlarge its nuclear arsenal. The deal is likely to set the arms race in motion as China and Pakistan watch with deep concern, and they will not sit idle with India's increased defense capabilities.

According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, India's Defense Ministry has earmarked US\$ 2 billion annually to build 300 to 400 nuclear weapons over the next 5 to 7 years.

India has a large army (1.3 million compared to Pakistan's 625 thousand) and possesses sophisticated weapons. It has a strong military presence in the Indian Ocean and its naval bases in far off islands, Andaman, Lakshadweep and Nicobar, are getting stronger day by day, to meet future challenges on the sea.

India has also undertaken a number of naval and air projects including

military reconnaissance centre in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In 2005, India began constructing a 37,500-tonne aircraft carrier that will fly MiG-29 fighters, joining with navies of big powers in such capabilities. It also plans to lease two nuclear submarines from Russia. The US has openly discussed the sale of naval vessels and combat helicopters to India.

Pakistan is also building the Gwadar naval base in Balochistan with Chinese support to counter India's supremacy in the Indian Ocean. China has a naval base in Myanmar's offshore Coco islands to have its presence felt in the Indian Ocean.

Why do India and Pakistan seek to develop missile capability?

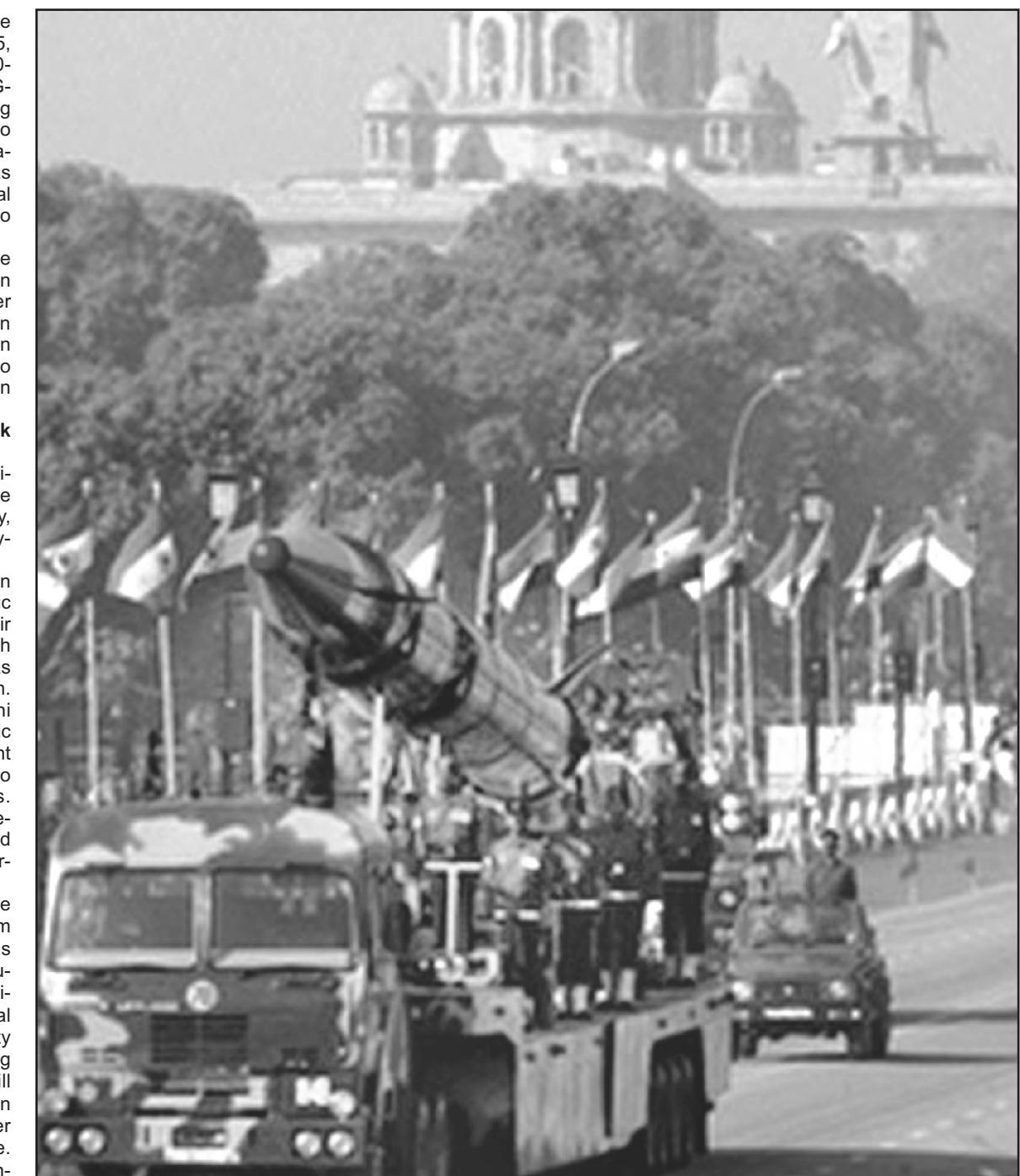
First, recent events in world politics have not only highlighted the indispensability of military capability, they have accentuated the military strategic allure of missiles.

Second, both India and Pakistan have decided to rely on ballistic missiles as a critical element of their deterrent strategy against each other. In the case of Pakistan, it has comparatively less strategic depth. More significantly, all Pakistani airbases and nuclear and ballistic missile research and deployment sites are extremely vulnerable to India's pre-emptive air strikes. Missile capability has its effectiveness due to its speed and assured penetration together with its deterrent value.

Third, India plans to acquire theatre missile defense system (TMD) from Israel and Russia as part of its efforts to effectively neutralize Pakistan's missile capabilities. The introduction of anti-tactical ballistic missile (ATBM) capability into South Asia by India, according to Pakistani defense analysts, will have cascading effect on Pakistan by generating pressure for a bigger missile force as a countermeasure.

Pakistan worries that India's defensive systems would be able to neutralize a nuclear strike by Pakistan, thus allowing India to engage in a conventional war with a large army without fear of nuclear retaliation from Pakistan.

Fourth, missile defense systems could help alleviate some of the instability associated with the region's poor command and control and the possibility of the accidental or unauthorized launch of nuclear weapons.



Fifth, India, Pakistan claims, views Pakistan as an obstacle to its great power ambitions and is therefore pursuing a security strategy that seeks to nullify the Pakistani threat through Indian threat of a second strike option.

Conclusion

Many strategists say that military superiority of India would not bring peace and stability between them or in the region. Political stability is a must. Both countries must proceed to negotiate how to reduce mistrust among them. The SAARC Summit in New Delhi provided an opportunity for them to speak on sidelines their concerns on each other's military programs.

Military strength does not necessarily give a country the power to influence another country politically as the world politics involves global processes in an increasingly complex world.

During the Cold War, an absence of armed conflicts was considered a success. After the Cold War, the definition of success was changed. It is judged by interactions within the regional countries to collectively utilize their resources to enhance their economic gains in a competitive world.

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