

# When diplomacy turns into intervention

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**G**OOG Heavens! Having fought the British for almost two hundred and fifty years and struggled against Pakistani repression for twenty five years for an independent country, our leaders and many of the elites of our society seem hopelessly and sometimes shamelessly dependent on foreign advice and dictates in running the affairs of the nation. It has become so common to see the journalists running after the diplomats enquiring about the future of our country and the diplomats making public statements on political issues and advising political leaders as to what they should or should not do, that one can not but wonder who is running the country and whether the definition of national sovereignty and security and the codes and conduct of diplomacy have been rewritten for us.

The people of Bangladesh share the concern of its European and American friends for a quick election and an early return to democratic governance. They are almost flattered that fourteen powerful senators including some would-be presidents have taken some time out of their extremely busy schedule of running their own country and managing the strategic flash points around the world to focus their attention on a poor and small country like Bangladesh. It necessitates noting that America with all the wisdom of its founding fathers and leaders and its enormous wealth took hundred and fifty years before the women were allowed to vote and not until the successful completion of the civil rights movement in the 1960s that the African-Americans were allowed the freedom to register to vote. Even without suffering hundreds of years of crippling colonial exploitation and its dreadful consequences, it has taken time, sacrifice and sincere efforts of many generations for the western democracies to be where they are today. So will Bangladesh.

The military backed caretaker government has its own agenda driven by the extra ordinary need of an extra ordinary situation. Those who are urging and pressuring the CG to rush into an early elec-

tion tend to forget that its unenviable task is not only to hold a timely election but also to ensure that it is

ing our foreign friends welcomed the Chief Advisor's road map of holding the election within eighteen months. Eighteen months have not passed and yet it is intriguing to note a sudden rise in pressure on the government, which is already in a pressure cooker, to rush into a process that the incumbent directors of our country feel that the nation is not ready for. Most will agree that the military backed Caretaker Government has not, so far, by actions or utterances indicated any sinister hidden agenda. Unless, of course, the continuing unravelling of corruption of Himalayan proportion by the "elected protectors" of the people and their henchmen in and out of the administration are considered undemocratic by

it is said that public memory is short. It is surprising to see how short it is. Since 1991, we had three "democratically elected" parliaments all of which ended their tenure virtually without the participation of the opposition. Some of the lawmakers and their cronies turned this country's treasury and its resources into a slush fund to materialize their wildest fantasies and to use it for continuing their unholly grip on the power mechanism. Everyday people are waking up to read and watch tales of limitless greed, blatant misuse of power, complete disrespect for law and a total disregard to others' democratic rights to exist with dignity. Even the person responsible for upholding the law and protect the people, through his own confession, turned out to be a cheap and greedy criminal masquerading as a guardian of law. What future will another democratically elected government have unless the process of our election and governance are not freed from those criminals hiding behind the cloak of politics and bringing shame and infamy to politics and honest politicians?

Almost all the actors in the power play of Bangladesh includ-



held fairly and freely, that it is free of the influence of ill gotten money and terror, that honest and capable

people can take part in such an election, that identified crooks and criminals can be prevented from

sneaking back into the system and hi-jacking the process again and that the process can last and

endure. That is a tall order and it will take time. Obviously it may not sell well with many. But then a nation has to pursue its own interest first and then please others.

Many groups inside the country as well as the international community are demanding a specific dateline for handing over power to an elected government. All concerned parties should consider that such specific date line is neither possible nor is it to the best interest of the nation. Just as president Bush says America cannot hand over the reign of Iraq to Al Qaida and the terror organizations and leave Iraq, similarly the military backed caretaker government cannot simply hand over the country back to those who have sold the national interest, sovereignty and security for their mere personal gain. The friends of democracy in Bangladesh, both, at home and abroad should be patient and give time to the present government to succeed in its mission so that a lasting democracy can emerge.

The country is passing through one of the most critical crisis in its history. The reformers need united support from all the vital dynamics within the country and from its friends abroad as long as they pursue the stated agenda. Our friends in Europe and America need to understand that public pressure on the government for pursuing a course for which it is not yet ready cast shadow on the government's intention and its credibility; it only makes the task more complicated and harder. They also need to define the line where friendly assistance turns into interruption and intervention.

The caretaker government on its part should be bold to make the dateline of the election conditional upon the time required to the successful prosecution and conviction of those found guilty of plundering the country and derailing the democratic process of the nation. This will provide clarity to the political direction in the minds of our friends on one hand and reinforce the resolve of the present government of seeing through to the end the cleansing process on

the other.

No one disagrees that there is no alternative to a democratically elected government. By the same token, all sane minds in Bangladesh and around the world would agree that the political circus played out behind the veil of an elected parliament since 1991 was a shameless mockery of democracy. Most of us are well versed with the famous "of the people, by the people, for the people" definition given by Abraham Lincoln. But rarely do we reflect on his another famous but less quoted speech where he said "any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off their existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most sacred right...."

The leadership of this country should not forget that the people of Bangladesh have successfully exercised that sacred right in 1971, 1975, 1990 without any intervening prompt from any quarters. This time around the people have exercised the same right by providing the present government with their silent support. Running off to a foreign capital and soliciting the public display of foreign support during the time of national crisis is a manifestation of a total lack of confidence in the people and an insult to the dignity of the nation. For a change, they should give adult behavior a chance: Have decent and civilized dialogues with opponents to resolve problems and look within the national intellectual resource base for advice and guidance before tapping outside. One needs to ponder where would Bangladesh be if the founding fathers of this country were running around seeking diplomatic consultation before launching the war of liberation instead of putting their faith in the people. Mir Zafar invited the British to unseat an incapable Nawab and the Chalabis of Iraq instigated the Americans to do their dirty job of overthrowing Saddam. Rest is History.

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## NATO-Russia equation and security in Afghanistan

VINOD ANAND

**F**OLLOWING the Cold War and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact the raison d'être for NATO vanished overnight. The US as the dominant partner in NATO was concerned about losing its strategic influence, and started a drive to seek a new role for NATO. This was the major reason for NATO's eastward expansion - to capture strategic space vacated by the disappearance of the Soviet Union. After achieving some success in the Balkans and admitting additional members from the erstwhile Warsaw Pact, it started looking for fresh pastures. 9/11 allowed NATO to expand further, and it soon found itself leading the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in its 'War on Terror.'

The launching of Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban regime was largely welcomed by Russia and the Central Asian countries alongside other regional powers. Russia and China raised no objections to the US being granted air bases and logistics facilities in the Central Asian Region (CAR) states because it suited their short-term strategic interests. However, of late, Russia with its growing economy and rising foreign exchange reserves derived from its oil and gas wealth has been pursuing a policy of strategic reassertion.

Putin's strategy of internal reform and cementing strategic cooperation with China has enabled him to express strong criticism of NATO's expansion and the aggressive unilateral policies of the US. Asking the US to vacate bases in the CAR that support NATO's efforts in Afghanistan, via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was one such step. Russia has exhibited strong ambitions to reassert itself in its near and extended neighborhood which includes the CAR and Afghanistan as instability and terrorism in Afghanistan have the potential to spill over into the CAR and Muslim republics of Russia.

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC), established in May 2002, for consultation, cooperation, joint decision and action, has NATO and Russia working together on a wide spectrum of security issues. In April 2007, their Foreign Ministers welcomed practical cooperation in their relationship, noting the joint work on meeting the Afghan narcotics challenge through Operation Active Endeavour. Russia, in cooperation with NATO, has trained a group of Drug Enforcement Officers from Afghanistan. But cooperation on other security issues is only in form, without much substance.

Afghanistan has become a test case for NATO's credibility and relevance. Its 26 members are pulling in different directions with their own rules of engagement and caveats. Further, there is no clarity on NATO's role and mission in Afghanistan. America has handed over the most impor-

## Urgent need for valuing marine resources and environmental accounting

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**I**n Bangladesh, the limited work that has been done on valuing marine resources can be termed as descriptive or conceptual rather than empirical. Such studies have focused primarily on wetlands, secondly on resources close to the shoreline, and only rarely on the abundant sea resources lying in our 12nm Territorial Sea (TS), 200nm Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and 350nm Continental Shelf (CS) of the Bay of Bengal. The assessed value of coastal wetlands within a total economic value framework indicated sizable aggregate economic values of wetlands. There is hardly any mentionable work for valuing marine wilderness areas and marine protected areas in the Bay of Bengal. Likewise, pollution has hardly been evaluated by applying an integrated system/economic damage assessment model to study the impact of oil and hazardous substance spills in the sea. There have been several attempts to estimate the damage from oil spills near the ports only. Some of the main challenges to improved accounting of marine resources arise because a large part of the seas are outside the Territorial Sea limits of Bangladesh and are being exploited like a common property resource (in terms of fishing) by the fishing trawlers and also sometimes used as a (free) sink for wastes by the oil tankers/merchant ships of other countries. The multi-purpose nature of the sea resources produce not only fish but also a large number of other social and climatological services, and they are an important pool of biodiversity. The same argument holds true for coastal resources such as mangroves of the Sunderbans that produce, among other things, wood while also being important as a breeding ground for shrimp and fish, as bird sanctuaries, etc. Fish and other organisms and pollutants are not confined to national boundaries, making it more difficult to prepare precise accounts even for the marine resources within the 200-mile EEZ limit of Bangladesh. Measuring stocks of fish and other organisms is difficult, and so is the determination of the sustainable level of exploitation. There are significant limitations in knowledge on how pollution physically affects marine output, biodiversity, and the various services. Even in areas where physical information is available, economic valuation in monetary terms is often difficult or sometimes not possible.

Besides, the true value of the marine environment is not understood and the full social cost of using it and the resources it supports are not taken into account. Often, scientific data are available from research voyages by the developed countries but are not synthesized in a way to be understood due to lack of technical knowledge, apathy and lack of government initiative. Thus, hardly any useful data could be integrated into coastal management processes. Bangladesh still does not know what is out there in our claimed waters, and is still not in a position to conduct real resource assessments, to really collect all the information and data that can be used as a major economic component in our development plans. In this regard, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), in cooperation with UNEP and WHO, studied for UNCED ways and means of strengthening observation systems for the marine sector, i.e. through the establishment of a Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), and the Satellite System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), which aim at covering comprehensively the total stock of reserves of natural resources and changes therein, even if they are not affected by the economic sector. GOOS is being developed as a comprehensive, integrated system for collecting, analyzing and distributing physical, chemical and biological data from the ocean world, including the coastal zones and enclosed and semi-enclosed seas. It consists of five "modules" for living marine resources, coastal zones management and development, health of the ocean, ocean services, and climate prediction. We are yet to avail any modules for our EEZ/CS.

A problem lies in converting the values of certain natural assets to monetary terms so that they can be properly compared with values resulting from market transactions. Therefore, IUCN/UNEP/WWF considers the elaboration of an ecological sustainability indicator covering ecological life-support systems, biodiversity, sustainable use of renewable resources and minimum depletion of non-renewable resources, and acceptance of the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. At the macro level, priority is being given to measures relevant to the development of satellite accounts to the system of national accounts, and for work on natural resource accounts. The Index for greenhouse gas net emissions published by World Resources Institute in collaboration with UNEP and UNDP requires a value-loaded allocation of the earth's natural ability to cleanse the atmosphere as well as equate luxury emissions, e.g. from automobiles, and survival emissions, e.g. from paddy fields or cattle in subsistence farming.

However, disaggregated physical accounts result in an unusable mound

and recycling of organic matter, nutrients, inorganic human waste, maintenance of biodiversity, providing nursery, feeding, and resting habitats, carrier functions, providing oxygen, mineral resources, wild plants, and animals, providing opportunities for educational and scientific activities. The theory of wealth and welfare also stresses the importance of the functional value of marine resources and more generally, of service activities as opposed to production activities.

Available valuation techniques can hardly capture the long-term global functional value of natural resources. More generally, a systematic evaluation and adjustment in the light of the concept of utilization value, which includes functional values, is needed. An accounting framework is the requirement of the hour that permits the computation of measures such as an environmentally adjusted net domestic product (EDP) and an environmentally adjusted national income (ENI), which account for natural capital and its depreciation, relevant categories of defensive environmental expenditures, and damages to the environment as a result of production and consumption activities. Thus, resource depletion and environmental degradation would enter into the traditional macroeconomic measures of gross domestic product (GDP). The integration of sustainability concerns in macroeconomic management requires the establishment of better measurement of the crucial role played by the environment as a source of natural capital and as a sink for by-products generated during production and consumption activities. The goal is to establish SEEA with steps like segregation and elaboration of all environment-related flows and stocks appearing in present traditional monetary accounts; linking physical resource accounting with monetary environmental accounting; assessment of environmental costs and benefits; accounting for the maintenance of tangible wealth including natural assets.

A large part of the oceans are outside the territorial limits of coastal countries; hence, global accounts for the Oceans and seas are needed. This aspect is crucial for environmental accounting at the national level which should have a logical addressee, namely the agency producing the traditional product and income measures of the country concerned. This requirement should be considered in designing institutional mechanisms for sustainable development of the oceans/seas at regional and national levels. We will need to develop and use new indicators of value added calculations that include, for example, the value deducted from societal benefits

and by the production process itself. We may ask for more systematic integration of the valuation techniques with the principles developed in the theory of wealth and welfare. We strongly feel and recommend the establishment of separate accounts for marine resources outside territorial waters; i.e. our EEZ and CS covering an area of about 2,07,000 sq km. Again, coordination with the GOOS activities would be a prerequisite. Keeping in mind that National Bureau of Statistics is not responsible for preparing supranational accounts, some other institutional solution is needed. We may ask for the lead to be taken by any government agency and in cooperation with any international environmental body dealing with institutional mechanisms at the regional and national levels.

Accounting for marine resources and valuing their contribution in generating sustainable income and providing other services have so far been neglected but the issue must be brought forward in the future. Better accounting for marine resources both inside and outside national territorial waters may face conceptual and empirical problems. Nevertheless, work should be pursued in this area, perhaps leading to a national workshop in a year or two. For oceans outside territorial waters, one should work towards the goal of establishing separate government departments to find the total resources lying there and their economic benefits. Various international agencies gather information concerning the oceans, and one could be requested to take the lead in preparing such accounts indicating extraction of fish for processing and/or sale would represent an export, and the dumping of wastes would represent an import that reduces the natural capital of the ocean in question. It is not understood as to why we are not requesting an international agency to assist us in establishing these accounts in collaboration with other national and international agencies. The Government must take proper initiative to review existing databases and suggest which agency should be appointed to act as the lead agency to pursue this initiative. We must not waste any time in establishing the inalienable rights over the EEZ and CS and thus find out what we have there and how these resources are going to shape our destiny in the 21st century.

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