

People know where the shoe pinches

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THE most important delivery point of services and development activities is the district administration. If one goes to a district headquarters one has the feeling that we are still at the mercy of the East India Company officials. One government in Dhaka is too far, remote, and unreachable to most of the people. Only a directly elected District Council will inject a sense of belonging and accountability to the people. The immediate need is to rationalize and democratize the layers of civil administration to open the window of services to the people. They want an elected and accountable administration at the district level for the vitally important services that has been choked by hardnosed bureaucracy. If the District Chairman is like city fathers, helpless even to the mosquitoes, purpose will not be served. The District Council should have authority over the service agencies, revenue right and subservient bureaucracy. One must also expect a serious vilification campaign by the vested quarters against the elected District Council, if there is one, the way upajilla council was tarnished immediately after their first election to office.

The jurisdictions of three hundred parliamentary constituencies do not match with the boundaries' administration. Some Upajillas are divided in two to three constituencies. The tug of war among the MPs of Jilla and divided Upajillas makes the uneven distribution of resources and generates corruption. Democracy can travel down only if local governments are installed in all layers of administration. The CTG will do a lasting service to the people if administrative boundaries are redrawn and election of local governments at districts and upajillas are held before the national election.

A classical example of whimsical administration is Dhaka cantonment itself. The small cantonment area has been divided under three thanas - Kafur, Gulshan and Cantonment. When the address is Dhaka cantonment for passports, police verification, nationality certificate etc. all inquiries invariably go to the cantonment PS. Only faster way of getting out of the frustrating experience is speed money. I have recently met a young man living in Dhaka cantonment but under Kafur PS desperately trying to get verification certificate on time, and finally resorting to money for speed of action. If it is happening inside



Dhaka cantonment due to the anomalous jurisdiction the condition of the rest of the country is left to your imagination. Much of the cantonment environment has been polluted when dubious people are allowed to buy and reside within the restricted cantonment area. In many cases they make payment of the properties but cannot get clearance for registration due to unaccountable source of money; they happily reside in their own houses recorded as tenants waiting for an opportunity for registration in the future. The legal and administrative procedures should be simple to eschew corruption, and most importantly, deny the escape route to the corrupt people.

National photo ID is a welcome development that will take the ghost voters. A person cannot vote except at the centre where he is registered. Why then one should be allowed to be a candidate anywhere for a public office. It was done centuries ago in Europe, as a compromise to ensure elected offices for the aristocracy only. We were colonies then. If we can ensure minimum residency and

compulsory local voter enlistment for seeking public office, much of our problems of absentee leadership, multiple candidacy, money and muscle will vanish from the elections. The grassroots leadership will grow to know where the shoe pinches. The rural leadership may lack experience and sophistication but no less intelligent than the townsfolk; they will soon learn and would be far better than the absentees. The highest bidders must go; constituencies should be represented by the indigenous people. If residency is made mandatory for representation, Bangladesh will achieve a participatory democracy of sharing and caring.

Shuttling the Chief Adviser routinely from residence to office and back on the busiest artery of Dhaka city - the VIP road is a nightmarish task for the security organizations. If you happen to use that part of the road you are a regular victim of the traffic jam in front of the CA's office. If a computer can calculate the security related expenditure and traffic dislocation, it will be more than a million taka a day; the amount enough to restore

a much needed dilapidated primary school or a union health centre in rural Bangladesh. The sad part, most of it is unnecessary waste - a luxury affordable only in a third world country.

As the founding DG of the PSE, now SSF I had to study and institutionalize the security needs of the VIPs. I am glad the VIPs have been safe and sound ever since. But the security needs must not be lumped with the waste that thrives on 'sacred cow wisdom'. If the Chief Adviser's office and residence is combined in the Ganabhaban which is on a link road, much of the security hazard and dislocation of traffic get resolved. The Chief Adviser should consider shifting to Ganabhaban, the world renowned architect Luis Kahn originally planned for the office cum residence of the chief executive within the vicinity of the Parliament House. It is the most spacious and secured fortress for the chief executive, idling for decades. The Chief Adviser should set the trend for future prime ministers to move to Ganabhaban complex for use as

office cum residence.

The interest of the politicians is in an election to whitewash their past, threatening to launch movement soon on pretext of their choice. They do not need democracy in their parties; accountability is the virtue of lesser beings. The university teachers and students cannot be tried because judges do not know that honorable people cannot commit offence. They are also threatening to launch a movement. The businessmen are serious about a truth commission to sustain their rock solid innocence. The gallant sector commanders of the liberation war are calling for the trial of war criminals. But what do the people want? The people also want to try those who have been collecting booty on one pretext or another that made freedom and democracy meaningless in Bangladesh. Of course people want election if only administrative reforms make all layers of government accountable, transparent and reachable. Without reforms Dhaka is like a fortress, too far, remote and anti-people.

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Realities and challenges to Bangladesh foreign policy: Regional scenario

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

ON 18th December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh held its first foreign policy dialogue in collaboration with London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies.

The initiative is a good and constructive one because Bangladesh needs to adapt its foreign policy keeping in mind that the world order is changing fast with new players on board. The dialogue prompted me to write a few thoughts of my own on realities and challenges to Bangladesh foreign policy.

MAJOR DETERMINANTS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy is not created from vacuum. It is grounded on a country's strengths and weaknesses. Besides, size, geographical location and resources influence directions of foreign policy. All these attributes are to be assessed objectively and dispassionately in determining the policy.

Furthermore foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. In other words, objectives of domestic policy are to be pursued robustly through foreign policy. Domestic and foreign policies are two sides of the same coin. It cannot be separated.

One particular fact to be noted in this context is what Lord Palmerstone had said. No country is an eternal enemy or a permanent friend. What is permanent is national interest and it is to be pursued vigorously.

REALITIES OF SOUTH ASIAN REGION

First, Bangladesh is located in South Asia, a war-torn region since 1947. Peace and stability have eluded it.

Bangladesh is sandwiched between two rising Asian giants India and China. India is the hugging neighbour and China is only 100 miles across the Himalayas. Furthermore, Bangladesh stands as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia.

Second, India and China have uneasy political relationship as they face contested borders. The unsettled boundary often erupts as an irritation to their bilateral relations.

Third, India and Pakistan have rivalry and the Kashmir dispute has

exacerbated the bitterness of their relations.

Fourth, India assesses its security position in light of China's strength, while Pakistan defines its security concerns against India. This means that security is not confined to regional states.

Fifth, shared security perception is the glue that binds regional countries, such as ASEAN or the European Union. In South Asia, there exists no shared or common perception of security among the countries. Some states even perceive security threat arising from within the region.

Sixth, the South Asian region is asymmetrical because India's physical size is more than the combined size of all countries in the region. Moreover, India's geographical position puts it in the centre of South Asia. India shares borders with almost all the countries of the region and no other country shares border with another. This provides India a great geo-political significance.

Seventh, India's long-standing policy of bilateralism to resolve disputes with South Asian states and insistence on non-involvement of a third party or the UN is not conducive to peaceful settlement of outstanding bilateral disputes. The policy may suit India but not other states.

CHALLENGES WITHIN SOUTH ASIA

Against the peculiarities of South Asian region, the challenge is how to maintain a delicate balance of relations between China and India. If Bangladesh is perceived tilting towards one, it may arouse misgivings of the other. Bangladesh cannot afford to have an imbalance of bilateral relations with two Asian giants as it needs both of them.

Another diplomatic challenge is how to take advantage of the geopolitical situation of Bangladesh, regionally and globally. To attain the objectives, one significant factor appears to be the interconnectivity with both the giants. Interconnectivity includes cooperation in resource endowments of the region. Bangladesh will flourish most when connected to the region, China and the rest of the world.

Accordingly, there is a strong view that an integrated multimodal transport operation is imperative within the region. Transit and transshipment within the region ought to be considered for gaining

benefits. Advantage cannot be realized unless physical infrastructure is addressed by Bangladesh comprehensively in an era of globalization where international borders are no more real than the equator and sovereignty of a country is getting diminished.

Energy-security is another challenge for meeting the developmental needs of Bangladesh. India is coal-rich, Nepal is rich in hydro-power and Bangladesh is gas-rich. Cooperation in having a common regional energy grid is called for. It is reported that Nepal alone, through its hydro-power, can generate 80,000 MW.

Degradation of environment poses security risk for Bangladesh because there is an interdependent relationship between internal security and economy. The devastation caused by Sidrin Bangladesh is an instance in having a common concern for occurrence of such natural disasters might happen in future years due to global climate change.

Another challenge is how to manage, develop and utilize the water resources of the region for the benefit of people. In the future, scarcity of fresh water will be acute in the region and development of water resources is to offset the deleterious effects within the region.

A serious consideration is to be given as to whether Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Indian northeastern states could be grouped into an integrated economic unit for bigger market access for Bangladeshi goods, for availability of mineral resources from northeastern states for production of cement and setting up of joint enterprises with India using gas resources of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh faces the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Ocean is gradually being militarised by many littoral states. The peacetime functions of the navy of many coastal countries have changed considerably. It is not confined to defense of territories. The navies patrol the distant waters to keep safe the sea-lanes for transportation of oil from the Middle East to Far East and promotion of trade. Bangladesh needs to monitor and consider how to play a role in the area of security of the Indian Ocean.

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N Korea reports 2,250 US, S. Korea spy flights

North Korea has accused the US and South Korea of carrying out more than 2,000 spy flights over its territory last year.

The official Korean Central News Agency, quoting a military source, said late Dec. 31 the combined US and South Korean espionage flights reached 180 in December to total more than 2,250 this year.

The agency said the aerial reconnaissance peaked when US and South Korean troops launched "military exercises for aggression" in August.

"Keeping pace with the US imperialists' aerial espionage, the South Korean military warmongers let two or three RC-800 and RF-4C fly in the sky... for madcap aerial espionage every day in the year," it said.

Seoul and Washington say their annual drills are purely defensive.

North Korea has routinely reported the alleged spy flights, while US and South Korean military authorities have refused to comment.

North and South Korea remain technically at war after the 1950-1953 Korean conflict ended in an armistice and not a peace treaty.

Currently, about 28,000 US troops support the South's 680,000 against any threat from the North's 1.1 million-member military.

Source: www.defensenews.com

Japan's Fukuda on charm offensive in China

Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda played a friendly game of catch during his visit to China on Saturday, a symbol of warming ties between the North Asian rivals despite a row over gas resources in disputed waters.

In a show of amity that would have been unthinkable two years ago when anti-Japanese protests erupted on Chinese streets, Fukuda and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao both wearing baseball uniforms tossed a ball in a state guesthouse gym.

Fukuda, who took power earlier this year, has said he would not visit Japan's Yasukuni war shrine, seen by critics as a symbol of the country's militarist past, cooling tension over Japan's wartime invasion of China.

"The Chinese side has really welcomed that, this kind of attitude toward the history question. Because after Fukuda took power, he very clearly said he would pay attention to Asian relations, and in particular relations with China," said Huang Dahui, a Japan expert at the People's University of China.

"So I think this has given China's leaders certain hopes and expectations."

Talks between Fukuda and Wen on Dec. 28 yielded no major breakthroughs on another key issue dogging relations, a row over how to develop natural gas resources in a disputed part of the East

China Sea.

But both said talks had made "certain progress" and a Japanese diplomat said there was consensus to resolve the issue before Chinese President Hu Jintao goes to Japan next spring.

"We hope we can find a settlement acceptable to the two countries at an early date," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao told a press conference late on Dec. 28. He would not say when that date might be.

After his morning athletics on Dec. 29, Fukuda visited a Beijing elementary school where he was greeted by students. He displayed his skills at calligraphy and folded origami paper as students escorted him around the school and sang for him.

Later, Fukuda visited the northern port of Tianjin en route to Qufu, birthplace of the ancient sage Confucius.

The 71-year-old Fukuda had a tour at a factory run by Toyota Motor Corp in Tianjin and chatted with Chinese assembly workers.

Despite the new-found warmth in their relationship, some commentators said ties between the Asian powers were not yet in the clear.

"If not properly resolved, it will be hard for China-Japan relations to avoid some twists and turns," the Beijing News quoted Zhou Yongsheng of the China Foreign Affairs University, as saying, referring to the gas dispute.

Source: www.defensenews.com

India cancels order for Eurocopter

Citing discrepancies in the evaluation process, India's Ministry of Defense (MoD) has cancelled the Indian Army's tender for 197 Eurocopter AS550C3 Fennec light observation helicopters (LOHs).

"The current request for proposals (RFP) has been scrapped. A fresh RFP will soon be sent out," MoD spokesman Sitanshu Kar said in New Delhi on 6 December.

Hours earlier, Eurocopter had issued a press statement denying media allegations that its contract had been called off and that it was "confident" of signing an agreement.

For almost a year, Eurocopter had made it known that it had almost secured the USD 550 million-USD 600 million order, even as its competitor, Bell Helicopter Textron with its Bell 407 model, claimed it had been unfairly excluded from the race.

However, in June, even as commercial negotiations were in progress, it emerged that there had been 'irregularities' in the evaluation process as Eurocopter had fielded its AS350B3 Ecureuil civilian variant for extended hot weather and high altitude trials in 2004 and 2005.

The final push came a few weeks ago from India's corruption watchdog, the Central Vigilance Commission, which said it had unearthed "sufficient grounds" to scrap the tender.

Sixty LOHs were being acquired in flyaway condition and the remaining 137 were to be built locally under licence.

Source: Jane's Defence Weekly.

Annapolis, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the lame duck President

KHALED KHALEFEH

Nothing has changed since Annapolis. No Israeli actions have occurred in the field to change the relation with the Palestinians. The air bombardment in Gaza continues, and at least 32 Palestinians have been killed since Annapolis. Lupinsky, the Mayor of Jerusalem, justified the construction of 390 housing units in Abu Gneim, so called Har Homa in the area by saying that this will solve the demographic problems of the Jewish population of Jerusalem.

However, with or without Annapolis, Israel continues to perceive the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as security problems and not as political ones. In Annapolis the US adopted this Israeli perception and appointed a general to deal with the Palestinians in any security cooperation contacts with the Israelis. General Jim Jones a former Chairman of NATO will take responsibility in this area. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen of the US Army, also received a security briefing from Israel concerning Annapolis on 9 December 2007 in his meeting with General Gabi Ashkenazi and Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

Admiral Mullen, during his one-day visit, expressed his understanding for the Israeli strategic concerns, mainly on the Iranian front. Israelis gave special importance to this visit by briefing him about its regional concerns in order to understand its strategic assessments. However, Israel mainly considered the visit of this admiral important after the collapse of the political leadership coming from the White House as a result of the National Intelligence assessment.

The Israeli military establishment tried to convince Admiral Mullen that this intelligence report is neither sufficient nor reliable, and that the Iranians have other intentions that did not appear in the National Intelligence report. It seemed that the report shocked the Bush Administration by decreasing

the options of operating militarily against Iran. The US Forces will now find it difficult to act against Iran.

This may be what Admiral Mike Mullen tried to inform the Israelis. It appears that Israel will not try to act alone against Iran. In that sense, they accepted this American alert from Mike Mullen. What's more, they need the American umbrella in case of strategic regional ballistic warfare with Iran or with other countries.

Consequently, we will not expect any attack against Iran from the US. The Bush Administration initiated this crisis with Iran in order to divert attention away from its failure in Iraq. This Administration did not imagine that such an occupation would be unbearable, but the reality is that Iraq has become a real burden and has prevented this Administration from acting in any other arena. Therefore, the Intelligence Report was a great salvation to the Bush Administration. Actually, we will not be surprised if the National Intelligence Agency creates a new report that will say that we were wrong in order to get out of Iraq.

Nevertheless, as concerns Admiral Mike Mullen, he cannot act strongly or decisively in any form if such a report that has just been published. At the same time, behind him is a lame duck President, George Bush.

However, even being a weak president does not prevent Bush from conducting political policy as if everything is usual. In several speeches he has asked for further sanctions against Iran, a policy that will be hard to implement. His regional policy in the Middle East is collapsing; he is losing in Iraq. The Sunnis are acting against the US. The Shiites, who had hoped to gain control of Iraq from the US have realized that it is impossible to obtain it easily and they have currently begun to cooperate with Iran and to act against the US. The Kurds started to concentrate on their area. At the same time they are allied with the Iraqi army in order to support the US interests. Turkey, however, has begun to contain the



Kurds.

Moreover, the Americans are also losing influence in Syria and Lebanon. In Lebanon they are outside the game of electing the new president. They have also begun new confidence building measures with Syria, both in Lebanon and in Iraq.

I am not sure whether Admiral Mullen explained this strategic deterioration in the US foreign policy to his Israeli counterparts. Israel, however, perceived the

strategic threats differently after the publication of the American intelligence report. Israel is mainly concentrating on Iraq and on the upgraded Iranian threat. They will make do with manufacturing nuclear weapons and will answer critics that they are surrounded by enemies and therefore need a defense capability.

Israel will continue to accuse Iran of being a country that endangers the stability of the region. Iran will say the same about Israel.

Finally, Israel will accuse Iran of supporting Hamas and Hezbollah. This will be the new strategic dynamic between Israel and Iran. Israel will try to upgrade the Iranian threats, and at the same time the Hezbollah threat and maybe Hamas, in order to justify the stagnation of the negative status in the process with the Palestinians as we approach 2008.

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