STRATEGIC ISSUES

Some strategic choices for the AL

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THEN I called a friend whose brother was winning a seat easily with an Awami League (AL) ticket on Election Day, his voice appeared tense. That surprised me. When I inquired why he was tense, he told me that he was worried because the AL was winning much more handsomely and decisively than he had expected in the height of pre-election optimism. He said that would burden the party with expectations from the people that the AL may not be able to fulfill.

My friend's concern is well based for this is an election result for which the AL is not prepared. This will put a lot more pressure on the need to deliver. This is 1971 all over again. In 1971 it was freedom upon which the people cast their faith in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League. This time the message is as focused and intense; a need to rid governance of corruption and make against humanity are punished.

The history of massive election victories in South Asia is not a good one and the one given to the BNP in 2001 must be a stark reminder to the AL that must now make a number of strategic choices to reverse the trend of history. The AL's strategic choices could be made simpler by reflecting on the mistakes made by the BNP in 2001 and avoiding those. The commentary by the editor of Daily Star that appeared on 30th "You will reap as you sow" and similar commentaries/articles in other newspapers could be useful for reflection. Among strategic choices, the AL must take heed that new cabinet must not be the elephant that the BNP created. The Cabinet must be much smaller. The number of Ministers in the US and Japanese Governments could

provide useful guide. The new generation provided a powerful impetus to the AL's landslide victory. In choosing the Cabinet, the representatives of the new generation must be given an important share in the Cabinet.

The way the new Prime Minister organizes her office will be as important as choosing a manageable cabinet. In the past, all elected governments laid emphasis upon party in choosing those who were given places at the PMO with the BNP extending this to an extent where the PMO became captive to the party. It is time for the future of Bangladesh to distinguish very clearly that the interests of the party that forms the government cannot take precedence over the interests of the government. In the 1960s, the Congress was faced with this problem and at one time, sent out senior Ministers in the cabinet of Jahwarlal Nehru to the party under the "Kamraj Plan" to balance between the interests of the party and the government. The plan met with failure and the senior Ministers returned to genuine efforts to achieve the dreams of Government. In India, the ruling party 1971 in terms of freedom and democracy, has been kept carefully and diligently where those who committed crimes outside governance ever since. The same is the practice now in all parliamentary systems. This allows the Government not just to be bipartisan but more impor-

tantly, also to appear as such. Such an approach will also help the AL Government tackle the politicization of the bureaucracy that has affected good governance under all the past three elected governments, much more so under the last BNP government. The AL will be inheriting a bureaucracy that is, to put it very mildly, a very weak one. In the past two years the caretaker government succeeded in making it even weaker. Years of indifference to the civil bureaucracy are responsible for the current poor shape of the bureaucracy. The new government will not be able to improve it overnight, perhaps not even during its entire tenure. The new government will have to look into this matter

with the seriousness it deserves. Still there is a need to do something immediate to bring this very important institution on the rails, for without an effective civil bureaucracy the new government will find it extremely difficult to bring to fruition many of the expectations of the people. It may therefore be wise for the new government to appoint on contract in key senior government positions such as the Principal Secretary to the PM bureaucrats who have retired from service but still very active and quite capable of serving the country. A percentage of senior positions may be set aside for such appointments as is done under the US system. This suggestion may meet natural resistance from the members of the civil bureaucracy with which many reading this piece may also agree. However, under existing rules, a percentage of posts at the level of Secretary is set aside that the President has the power to fill at his discretion. In the past, this rule has been misused and officers have been promoted from Deputy Secretary to Secretary for political reasons. This rule can now be used, with necessary adjustments, to make appointments at senior positions on contracts from capable retired bureaucrats on a bipartisan basis if possible and qualified expatriates may also be consid-

ered for these positions. In electing the AL, the people of Bangladesh have cast their votes for change similar to the way the voters in the US have done with Senator Obama. Already the US President-elect has set into motion changes that have caught the imagination of the rest of the world. His emphasis on bipartisanship to build the image of USA that took a battering under the neo-cons by taking an example out of President Abraham Lincoln, who, by putting the country's interest first, brought to his Cabinet his bitterest political enemies, could be used by the AL in a limited way in spheres of governance. More important, the new US



partners in dealing with the upsurge of international terrorism and militancy. The new government in Bangladesh is coming to office with clear and unequivocal stand on Islamic fundamentalism by standing firmly on secularism. This message, together with good governance and positive steps towards democratization should be spread through diplomatic channels to Bangladesh's development partners including the USA. That way Bangladesh could fit to the recent positive changes in international affairs like hand in the glove that in turn would make the statement of the US Ambassador in a seminar in Washington prophetic. The Ambassador had said: "There will be no more transformational election in the world this year than the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 29 in Bangladesh". The line of communication where the new The writer is a former Ambassador to Japan and Director, Bangladesh voters have set that stage for Prime Minister must play her role in the CFAS.

Bangladesh must now be made crucial in the country's foreign policy for in an age of globalization, that image will open for Bangladesh more market access for her exports, increased export of manpower and foreign direct investment that are crucial for her sustained economic development.

The new government must thus adopt a paradigm shift in handling foreign affairs and handle it more professionally than has been done under past governments. Towards that, it must choose a Foreign Minister with the intellectual competence to deliver. In the new administration, the Foreign verdict on December 29th. Ministry and the PMO must develop a

with the PMO to be handled at the level of bureaucrats without the ability or the understanding of issues as It has been in the past.

Rabindranath Tagore had said "we are nearest to the great when we are great in humility". This quote of the great man holds the key for Bangladesh's future if only the AL takes this message to heart. One is encouraged to hope that this time; the AL will show the nation what it takes to transform a dream from what Sheikh Hasina told her supporters when she became aware of her party's historic victory. She urged them for calm. It is this calm she must show over the next five years to translate the voters' unequivocal

India's security overhaul plan: Will it work?

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

HE Indian new Interior Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram has recently announced a raft of measures to overhaul the security apparatus after the Mumbai attacks.

The attacks clearly demonstrated how twenty terrorist-individuals paralysed sixty-two hours of Mumbai life and how Indian security forces were illprepared to cope with such an attack, despite the fact that India has been a victim of terrorist attacks for years.

To many outsiders, it was incomprehensible how the terrorists came on a boat to Mumbai a few weeks before the attack and no intelligence agency was able to detect them. The relaxed security on the sea front, at the hotels and at the railway station was unbelievable. Many security experts reportedly were stunned at the gross failure of Indian security and intelligence agencies in preventing or coping with such attacks, despite the fact that they had glimpses of a blueprint for the Mumbai attack months ago and even a strong indication

India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) law in parliament's elected 543-seat lower house to give sharper teeth to the existing legislation. Furthermore in recent days, Interior Minister P Chidambaram has announced a series of measures to boost security, which are as

(a) setting up a federal investigation

(b) strengthening coastal security

(c) training more commandos

(d) anti-terrorism schools (d) beefing up anti-terror laws

(e) filling vacancies in depleted intelligence agencies

These measures are being called a "major overhaul" of India's internal security after the deadly Mumbai

The question is: Will they make any difference? Critics say they will not because of fundamental internal deficiencies together with a serious lack of resources and the lack of commitment to address some regional disputes, creating tension and insecurity in South Asia.

in favour of major amendments to UK's MI5 or the US's FBI. The Research and Analysis Wing (Raw) is akin to the UK's MI6, responsible for external intelligence. India's top detective agency the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has a charter to investigate certain The announcement of a-new coastal

> Experts are wondering where the new federal investigation agency will fit in. Will it be an upgraded version of the IB or CBI? If it is expected to handle terror attacks, will it be armed with fresh laws in a country where law and order is a state subject? Will it have federal powers to arrest unlike the IB?

There are other pressing questions: does this new agency bypass the local police and completely take over the investigation of offences committed in different states? Then there is the question of manpower. Experts wonder where the officers for the new agency are going to come from: the CBI and IB are already operating at 35% below strength. Will the new national investigation agency need a new cadre of officers who will be hired through separate examinations?

terrorism and hostage rescue, taking on heavily-armed criminals. They need to be equipped with the state-of-the-art weapons, communications and body-

command" has also left most security experts wondering what it is all about. Currently, the police (patrolling up to five km from shore), coast guard (patrolling between five and 20 km from shore) and the navy (patrolling beyond 20km from shore) are entrusted with securing India's 7,500km coastline.

The marine police, the last line of coastal defence, are the weakest link with little training and near non-existent infrastructure. But there is no mention in the government's plan of strengthening the marine police. "What is important is capability building, teaching people skills, providing them infrastructure," says Praveen Swami.

Another grey area is beefing up antiterror laws: experts are not sure whether India needs new laws. They say reforming the existing laws will serve the purpose. Most lawyers say India has a plethora of laws, both local and federal, to tackle crime and terror. These include strong federal preventive detention and anti-money-laundering laws. They say some of the loopholes could be closed for example, the fact that Indian courts still don't accept confessions by a person in custody. So the need is to reform that and make confessions legally admissible evidence by videotaping them or recording them in front of magistrates.

There is also no word on a massive push for local police forces that toil with low wages and antiquated equipment the so-called quick response team of the Maharashtra police, for example, has not fired a single shot in the past year because of the lack of ammunition.

"Let us not fool ourselves. We are looking at least a five-year roadmap for fundamental changes. I am not sure whether the government is talking about that. There can be no quick fix," says Praveen Swami.

There is another dimension to India's security, which is political. Some experts say that unless the Indian government leaders take certain concrete actions to root out some causes of terrorism, internal security measures are not enough. The causes might be attributed to (a) rise of Hindu fundamentalism and attack on believers of other faiths in India, (b) Kashmir dispute, (c) close link of Israel with India, (d) India's increasing influence over Afghanistan and (e) close ties with the US.

Many are disappointed to note that on 11th December, in a speech to the Parliament, India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee refused to recognize Kashmir dispute as being "not an India-Pakistan issue" and rejected summarily the link between the Kashmir dispute and terrorism by stating that "This is not an issue related to Jammu & Kashmir. This is a part of global terrorism".

India's intellectual and cultural leadership has remained silent on the causes of terrorism. One has to realise that internal security is often interconnected

The author is a former Bangladesh ambassador to the UN,

Israel mulls truce but says assault may last weeks

Israel on December 30 mulled a proposed 48-hour truce as world leaders stepped up calls for an end to the violence and warplanes pummeled Hamas targets in the battered Gaza Strip for a fourth day. But Israeli officials warned that the onslaught, which has killed at least 368 Palestinians, could continue for weeks, while Hamas militants remained defiant, firing more deadly rockets into Israel and

threatening to step up the attacks. "We tell the leaders of the enemy - if you continue with your assault, we will hit with our rockets further than the cities we have hit so far," a masked spokesman for the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas armed wing, said in televised comments.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was meeting his foreign and defense ministers to consider a French proposal for a 48-hour truce in Gaza, a senior official said. And US President George W. Bush spoke with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas to discuss a "sustainable ceasefire."

"What we want is not a ceasefire but a stop to terrorism," said President Shimon

Accompanying Peres on a tour of the Israeli High Command headquarters, armed forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi said: "It is our intention to continue this operation in an urgent manner to improve the security situation for the residents of the south."

Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer warned a ceasefire would allow Hamas "to regain strength, recover from the shock and prepare an even stronger attack against Israel.

"There is no reason that we would accept a ceasefire at this stage," he told AFP. With tanks and troops massed on the Gaza border, the Israeli military said ground forces are ready to join what politicians have warned would be a prolonged offensive.

Olmert said the bombardment so far was "the first of several stages approved by the security cabinet," while deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai warned the offensive - one of Israel's deadliest against Gaza - could turn into "weeks of

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice renewed calls for a halt to the fighting in a telephone conversation, Moscowsaid.

World leaders have expressed serious concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, a tiny, aid-dependent territory of 1.5 million which Israel has virtually sealed off since Hamas seized power in June last year.

Israel opened one of its crossings into Gaza for a third consecutive day on Tuesday, the defense ministry said, add- entered service this decade, Xinhua said. ing that a total of 179 truckloads of humanitarian supplies and 10 ambulances were allowed into the Palestinian enclave since the military operation

In Gaza City, residents picked through rubble and broken glass after a night which saw Israel hammer the overcrowded territory with some 40 strikes on Hamas buildings, training camps and rocket launching sites.

"It was a night of horror, the way the earth shook," said Iyad al-Sayagh, a mother who lives in the area. Children again fell victim to Israel's bombardment, with two sisters dying when a missile slammed onto a donkey cart in northern

have killed several senior Hamas officials and reduced much of the Islamist movement's infrastructure in Gaza to rubble, but have failed to stop rocket fire.

Three Israelis - two civilians and one soldier-were killed on Monday by rockets

fired from Gaza, with one slamming into the southern port city of Ashdod more than 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the border. Hamas has threatened to carry out suicide attacks inside Israel for the first time since January 2005.

Since the massive aerial attack was unleashed on Saturday in a bid to halt persistent rocket fire from Gaza, at least 368 Palestinians, including 39 children, have been killed and 1,720 wounded, Gaza medics say.

Palestinian militants have also fired more than 250 rockets and mortar shells killing four people inside Israel and wounding around two-dozen more.

Israel's offensive followed days of rising violence after a tenuous six-month truce in and around Gaza ended on December 19. It also comes ahead of early parliamentary elections in Israel called for February 10.

Chinese Navy on historic anti-piracy mission

An anti-piracy task force of the Chinese navy set sail Friday for Africa, state media said, in the nation's first potential combat mission beyond its territorial waters in centuries.

The three vessels, decorated with colored ribbons, flags and flowers, weighed anchor at the Yalong Bay naval base on south China's tropical Hainan island at 1:50 p.m, heading for Somalia, the Xinhua news agency said.

"It's the first time we go abroad to protect our strategic interests armed with military force," said Wu Shengli, commander of the Chinese Navy, in a ceremony to see off the roughly 1,000 sailors, according to Xinhua.

"It's the first time for us to organize a naval force on an international humanitarian mission and the first time for our navy to protect important shipping lanes far from our shores.

Dressed in white naval uniforms, the crew of the two destroyers and one supply ship saluted crowds on land amid waving flags and as a military marching band played.

It marks a new chapter for the modern Chinese navy, which has focused on the defense of coastal waters, combined with the occasional friendly port call. Only in 2002 did it circumnavigate the globe for the first time.

Indeed, a Chinese fleet has not fired a shot in anger near Africa since the 15th century, when a Ming Dynasty armada

sailed to the continent and back. The navy has been drawn back to Africa by an escalation of pirate attacks on merchant ships, including Chinese vessels, plying the crucial shipping route

linking Asia and Europe. The three vessels on the mission - the missile-armed destroyers DDG-171 Haikou and DDG-169 Wuhan and the Weishanhu supply ship - are among China's most sophisticated and have all

They will operate alongside other international warships patrolling the area near the Gulf of Aden, part of the Suez

Canalroute. The mission includes a special operations detail that has spent the past days in

intensive training in maritime tactics and diving, said one of their commanders, Lieutenant Commander Xie Zengling-"If the pirates make direct threats to

the warships or the vessels we escort, the fleet will take counter-measures," he told Xinhua, bragging that one member of his unit "could handle several enemies with his bare hands." China has said its warships will investi-

gate any suspected pirate vessels, and approach them and demand that they show Four days of intensive bombardment their relevant documents and certificates. The UN Security Council last week

gave nations a one-year mandate to act inside lawless Somalia to stop the rampantpiracy.

Source: www.defensenews.com



of the intended culprits. No wonder Indian people across the country were enraged with the state and the Union governments for their role in not preventing or coping with the attack. As a result the Union's Interior Minister, the National Security Adviser and the State's (Maharashtra) Chief Minister had to resign, keeping in with the spirit of democratic accountable government.

December agreed on tougher antiterrorism laws in the wake of the Mumbai attack, including the setting up of an FBI-style agency to plug gaping holes exposed by the atrocity. The changes also allow for the detention of managing federal intelligence and invesalleged militants for up to 180 days instead of 90, special courts to try suspects, sweeping police powers and the eral investigation agency will play. India possibility of a financial clampdown on already has a federal Intelligence Bureau suspects.

MPs cut across party lines and voted to internal security and is akin to the

Critics say that these measures will confront problems due to nearinsurmountable odds, namely the lack of instructors, police officers, infrastructure, laws and money which will definitely hinder the government's wellmeaning plans to make India safer.

"There is seriousness in the intent of announcing these measures. But the plans don't emphasise the main priority The Indian parliament on 17th areas," says Delhi-based security analyst Dr Ajai Sahni. For example, the plan to set up an ambitious federal investigation agency has befuddled experts. They say it is too grandiose given India's limited resources and poor track record on tigative agencies. And experts say there is very little clarity on what role the fed-(IB) which gathers intelligence relating

Security analysts like Dr Sahni say "Here the government cannot run a 50officer federal detective agency like the CBI and they are talking about an overarching federal investigations agency which will work on all facets of terrorism," he says. But lack of adequate training academies and most important, lack of instructors will almost certainly stand in the way of any quick progress on this front.

States like Chattishgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Indian-administered Kashmir have set up their training academies and set up their own commando forces with mixed results. But using those commandos to tackle urban terrorism and hostage rescue operations is not likely to yield results, experts say.

Essentially, as security analyst Praveen Swami says, India needs elite crack units like Swat (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams trained in counter-

with regional issues and disputes.