

Need for a "security manual"

EKRAM KABIR
SECURITY has become a household word for a twenty-first century man. Attempts to redefine "security" are now something of a cottage industry. Anywhere you go, any seminar or workshop you attend, you'll have to listen to a whole lot of security issues and concerns which are worth paying heed to.

Analysts say, any attempts to elaborate a comprehensive definition of security may be a work in vain. However, the academicians think security can be used in three meanings. "Traditional meaning" is an attribute of state, absence of military conflict - "military security". In a broader sense, security refers directly to the phenomena taking place in international relations, or directly/indirectly caused by inter-state relations. Security also means public good, and in a universal sense (of a unit and of a social entity) - human security.

Speakers at Dhaka seminars and television talk shows do talk about security concerns but fail to come up with clear-cut proposals to stay "secure". The security talk in Bangladesh mostly revolves around terrorism and militancy. Other security issues are grossly ignored. But it's time for Bangladesh to think about all aspects of security and prepare a "national working paper" on all security threats.

Many analysts say that Bangladesh doesn't need to worry about any military onslaught on its land because its neighbours will never come to invade it. They think

Bangladesh's sovereignty will never be at stake, as its neighbours, such as India and Burma, would never disrupt Bangladesh's territorial integrity.

But one needs to take a look at other issues and incidences that are tantamount to interfering in Bangladesh's national security. Deaths at the border at the hand of Indian border guards could be the cases in point. What would India do in case of deaths of Indian nationals at the hand of Bangladeshi border guards? What did Burma do when Bangladeshi border guards arrested one member of Burmese army along the border? In this case, Burmese army entered into Bangladesh. On the other hand, what does Bangladesh do when its citizens get killed along the border? According to Odhikar, a total of 843 Bangladeshi people have been killed by BSF between 1 January 2000 and 28 February 2010.

Indian border guards resort to guns. Whether Bangladesh would do the same is a diplomatic and military decision. For a nation, the concept of security has changed after the Cold War. According to researchers and diplomats across the world, "traditionally, the concept of security in international relations has generally been addressed in the context of national security." During the Cold War era, people followed the decisions of the elite. In the current post-Cold War era, however, the character of conflicts has changed and the "people" have become the determinants. It has become increasingly clear that the successful

attainment of national security, or the conclusion of peace pacts, does not necessarily bring "security" to people, and that people continue to suffer and die from insecurity resulting from war-related effects

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long after the war itself has come to an end, or national security is seemingly restored.

And the UN says: "A core concern is to progress towards the construction of a new global order capable of placing human beings at its centre and for states, which continue to be the actors with the greatest relative power, to be able to efficiently guarantee people's security and contribute to overcoming the vulnerabilities and difficulties of hundreds of millions of human beings in acceding to progress and development."

Bangladesh seems to have taken Gandhian concept security when it comes to Indian border guards killing innocent people.

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ernment's election manifesto pledged that the number of poor people will be reduced to 45 million from 65 million by 2013 and will further come down to 22 million in 2021. The Outline Perspectives Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021 mentions that a comprehensive social security system is necessary to implement vision 2021 (Planning Commission, 2010), that is, by 2013 poverty level and proportion of ultra-poor will be brought down to 25 per cent and 15 per cent respectively.

Social security may be conceptualised as "the protection which society provides for its members through a series of public measures against the economic and social distress which otherwise would be

caused by the stoppage or substantial reduction of earnings resulting from sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age and death; the provision of medical care; and the provision of subsidies for families with children" (ILO, 1999). For 2010-11 the government has proposed 9,664 crore taka for social security and welfare.

Then come food and environmental insecurities. Food security is more important than attaining self-sufficiency. Food security means ensuring supply and thus keeping the price within the reach of people. Lawmakers, economists and experts have always stressed the necessity of boosting local food production which is the only way to face threats by the global climate change to the food security of the country.

In spite of the imminent danger posed by climate change and rise of the sea-level, the government is yet to formulate any policy to resist the conversion of arable land into non-farming purposes. Everyday hundreds of hectares are being transformed into sites for non-agricultural business. The government has to formulate a land reform policy immediately to prevent the further reduction of arable land for the sake of ensuring food security.

Climate change has already reduced crop production in some parts of the country. Water-logging and salinity in the south-western region, where several thousand hectares of arable land remain under water, have further impoverished the poor peo-

ple. Bangladesh has to give more allocation for research on new crop varieties that will resist water-logging, salinity and drought.

The list of security concerns in Bangladesh is quite long. One should also need to look at information, telecom and education sectors. The policy- and law-makers would do a great service to the country if they organize running a serious research on all aspects of security threats and put the solutions in one big handbook, which can also be called "Bangladesh Security Manual". Bangladesh has highly educated researchers and experts who could be assigned to do this. The National Defence College should also be involved in planning the security manual.

However, one aspect should always be kept in mind that most of the big-scale studies in this country seem to have been funded by donors. This manual should be self-funded, otherwise the concerns would be influenced by the donors. When UK prepares its counterterrorism strategy, it doesn't ask any other nation to fund it. And when the EU wants to know about the future of South Asia, they don't ask any South Asian country to raise the fund; EU does the research with its own fund.

It should be always kept in mind that "when the developed countries had developed, they didn't develop with donor money".

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Body armor safe, despite procurement shortcuts

Soldiers have the best body armor in the world, the Army said, in spite of a recent Department of Defense Inspector General report that states the service failed to follow contracting rules in purchasing components for Interceptor Body Armor between 2004 and 2006.

A DOD IG report released Jan. 3 determined the Army had not followed proper procedures on contracting and testing protective gear and therefore could not guarantee the body armor met contract requirements.

Still, Col. William Cole, project manager for Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment at Program Executive Office Soldier, said that Soldiers were not in danger, and that the equipment in question in the DOD IG report -- the outer tactical vest, or OTV -- is no longer fielded to Soldiers in combat zones.

"We're committed to providing our Soldiers the best armor money can buy and we are confident that we are providing the best armor," he said.

One problem cited in the IG report was that the Army failed to perform ballistic tests on the deltoid and axillary protectors that were then part of the OTV. The DAP provides additional fragmentation and small arms protection to the upper arm and underarm areas.

Cole said that in those cases, the DAPs had been cut from the same ballistic fabric as other components that were tested.

"They were all assembled using the same ballistic cloth, manufactured at the same time," he said. "So the Army tested the front right panel, the front left panel and the rear panel -- and they all passed."

Cole also said Soldiers needed the DAPs as soon as possible, due to an increased threat of improvised explosive devices. That increased threat necessitated that the equipment be fielded as rapidly as possible to protect Soldiers in harm's way.

"We determined the material used and tested for the front and back panels of the OTV would meet the fragmentation requirements for the DAPs, based on the successful testing of identical lot material comprising the panel components of the vest," he said.

SOURCE: DEFENCETALK.COM

MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

POLITICAL standoff persists in Nepal with no sign of quick solution. The UN mission in Nepal (UNIMIN), which declared its closure with immediate effect, is not a good news for the country's politics. UNIMIN was set up to oversee Nepal's post-war transition.

Prevalent situation is of mistrust and disunity. Political pundits in Nepal are of the view that there is a fear that a failure to find a solution to the crisis and fulfill pledges, might pave the way for another protracted struggle between the Maoist and its opposite parties. This might throw the country back to those uncertain and horrific days of rampant abduction, destruction of property and killings mainly carried out by the Maoists. Chances of peace might be lost for good or for a very long phase.

UNIMIN was created in 2007 with temporary mandate to monitor progress towards durable peace after a decade-long conflict between Maoist guerillas and the state in which at least 16000 people died.

UNIMIN did work hard to find solutions. It persuaded the conflicting parties to sit and work out a charter for peace. It helped establish camps for thousands of Maoist fighters pending agreement on their integration into the national army -- a key tenet of the peace agreement.

UNIMIN also assisted with 2008 elections that brought the former rebels briefly to power.

The political leaders at the time should have taken things under their control from there on. They should have acted with wisdom and maturity, as this was certainly an innovative phase for their politics. The Kingship was done away with and people were looking for a new sunrise with hopes and aspirations. But progress stalled. With the time, disagreements between the Maoists and their political rivals grew and sign of understandings disappeared. The world at large failed

Standoff continues



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to comprehend as to what held the parties from reaching an agreement with such golden prospect on the platter and no enemies around. They had a green field. Instead, they failed themselves and the people. Many believe it was for the rigid and unreasonable demands and imposing attitude of the Maoists that prevented the parties to reach an understanding. Finally the United Nations took its stand last September and decided the mission would close on January 15.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said UNMIN was designed to be a transitional arrangement, and it made little sense to keep it open "without any meaningful progress by the parties on political issues."

The Nepalese politics have been living under a different ambience for a long time under the

king. It could not possibly mature the way it should have. Democratic lessons were only academic and entire politics were either on decrees of the King or the dictates of the Maoists.

Absence of democratic practice disabled the growth of democratic thoughts.

No wonder, after dissolution of the monarchy and the graduation of the guerilla fighters into politics proper, they found it difficult to carry out negotiation, mainly because neither they were prepared to be guardians of their own nor educated in democratic politics. They lacked negotiation skills.

More than four years after the war ended, many of the promises made by both sides remain unfulfilled and the planned merger of the two armies, intended to draw a line under the conflict, looks increasingly unlikely.

UNIMIN officials also complained the mission had been unfairly dragged into the political battles that have prevented the formation of a new government since the last one collapsed in June.

The sore point of disagreement is the assimilation of 19000 members of the Maoist People's Liberation Army into the National Army. It is but natural for the other parties to oppose the Maoists

demand of absorbing the entire 19000 members in the National Army; they fear the ultimate sway they might enjoy in the armed forces. It appears that the Prachanda and his members want entire power - civil and military - in their hands - that might not be easy to achieve.

We realize the situation the leaders and the people are going through. It has been a testing period for all. Negotiation is not an easy task and to create a win-win situation is even tougher. Amidst the entire crisis, Nepalese leaders ought to show signs of maturity and resolve their problems by their own merit, instead of looking on the international bodies to do it for them. Nepal had always been a land of beauty and now it must combine peace.

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