

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The army's new commander and the new commands



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE two have come almost simultaneously. The new Chief of Army Staff took charge of the army on June 25, and not very long before that

we were informed of the organisational restructuring of the army. And both the developments deserve our attention.

Changing of the guards is perhaps a normal affair for any military. In Bangladesh though, it excites keen interest among the public. And one would find the reason for that in the narratives of the political development of Bangladesh and in the profile of civil-military relationship, which the experiences of the Liberation War, and the period since then, have helped shape.

There is little argument about the fact that professionalism, merit and experience have received the highest consideration in the case of selection of the new CAS, and General Iqbal Karim Bhuyian has the rare combination of all the three qualities. And one would hope that the new commander's personality would be reflected in the army in the manner of his predecessor's, who has retired after three years at the helm.

It may be too early to see the result of the ex-chief's efforts, since the fruits of his labour would take their normal time to mature. But knowing the former chief from a very close range one can only say that there could not have been a person with a more balanced mind, more impeccable character and

with a stronger moral fibre than General Mubeen.

I have no hesitation in saying that the army had been in good hands the last three years and in equally good hands now. While dynamism is the key to any institution, more so in one that has to keep constantly evolving in keeping with the changing nature of the tasks and the means of performing those, one would only hope that changes that are brought about must be changes for the better and not change for the sake of change.

At this point it may not be out of

What she said is nothing new but coming from the PM it reinforces the principles that must be followed. However, I feel that two criteria, honesty and loyalty, should not feature at all in the list of traits. One cannot be in uniform, or for that matter in any other calling, without absolute loyalty and honesty. There can be various levels of capabilities in other traits but not in these two. You are either loyal to the state and impeccably honest, or not. And those that do not have these two shouldn't be in the service in the first place.

Contrary to the notion held by some, stemming entirely out of lack of detailed information, the new configuration is an eminently good idea which, among other operational advantages, would allow decentralisation of command and will make command and control of the formations so much easier.

place to reflect on one of the statements the prime minister made to the senior officers of the army at the meeting of the Army Selection Board very recently, relating to the promotion and appointments criterion of the army. She had said: "Consider professional efficiency, the spirit of the Liberation War, leadership, discipline, honesty, trustworthiness and loyalty as the criteria for promotion, and leadership should be handed over to those who are well educated, able for work, aware and intelligent, and above all firmly committed to strengthening democracy."

One is heartened by the PM's pronouncements. However, one would hope that while the services must be under political control undue political interference can hamper the conduct of the affairs of the military. Officers and men take oath of loyalty to the state and not to any government, but since the government of the day is the elected representative of the people entrusted to run the affairs of the state it is to that government that the soldiers' fealty is affirmed.

Admittedly, there have been substantive developments in the army insofar as reorganisation and rethink-

ing of its operational concept. A Forces Goal -2030, having four stages, has been developed keeping the defense policy in mind. And the three services are approaching their reorganisation task accordingly.

This may come as a surprise to many, particularly those who have been blaming the services for not having a defence policy, but the fact is, as far back as in 1974, a broad defence policy was formulated by the then government keeping the strategic and geopolitical realities in mind. However, there is a need to update the policy and we would like to think that those at the helm of the higher defence management of the country are seized with the task.

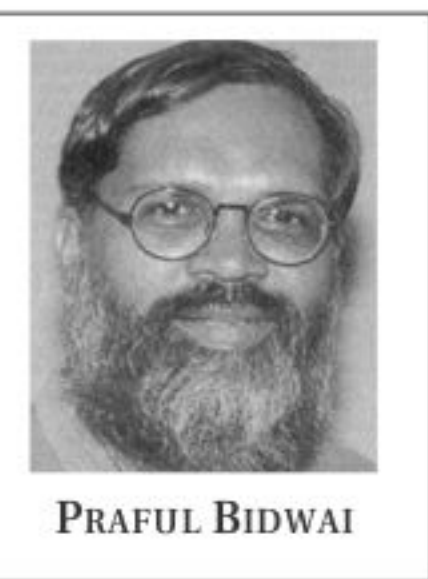
There is misunderstanding, and perhaps misgivings too, about the setting up of the two new commands, Eastern and Western Commands. The two proposed commands of the army, conforming to the layout of the terrain is in fact something that was clearly stipulated in 1974. However, the army has opted for two, instead of three commands as was stipulated in the 1974 Defence Policy. And those who cry hoarse about the size of the army may be comforted by the fact that the manpower level is far short of that proposed in 1974 -- 1, 50,000.

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The writer is Editor, Op-Ed & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

The road to Rashtrapati Bhavan



PRAFUL BIDWAI

INDIA'S presidential elections often acquire a significance which well exceeds the function of that exalted but ceremonial office, which typically becomes all-important only with a hung Parliament.

The election of the first president, Rajendra Prasad, saw rivalry between Prime Minister Nehru and arch-conservative home minister Vallabhbhai Patel, who backed Prasad. Nehru's candidate was India's first Governor-General Rajaji (Chakravarti Rajagopalachari), a well-regarded scholarly politician, who later formed the Right-wing Swatantra Party.

Nehru had an excellent rapport with Rajaji but was averse to Prasad because of his public display of religiosity and superstition. Prasad wanted to change the date of Republic Day to make it astrologically auspicious. He wanted to renovate the Somnath temple, and opposed Ambedkar's mildly progressive Hindu Code Bill.

Nehru pleaded, with great politeness, that Prasad withdraw from the contest. Prasad, equally politely, refused. Nehru lost. Ironically, Rajaji swore Prasad in!

The 1967 election was dramatic because Koka Subba Rao resigned as India's chief justice to become the opposition's candidate. A bench headed by him had just passed a judgment with major Constitutional implications. This was seen as motivated by political reasons.

The sensational 1969 presidential election transformed the Congress, indeed Indian politics itself. It became a contest between Indira Gandhi, then three years into the prime ministership, and conservative regional party bosses, including K. Kamaraj, S.K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh, and Neelam Sanjiva

Reddy, called the Syndicate.

The Syndicate controlled the party, was allied with Big Business, and compelled Gandhi to induct her rival Morarji Desai as her deputy. The Syndicate wanted to strike against Indira, whom they dismissed as *goongi gudiya* (dumb doll). It forced the nomination of Sanjiva Reddy.

Meanwhile, vice president and trade unionist V.V. Giri decided to contest as an independent. Indira used this to take on the Syndicate. At astonishing speed, she sacked Desai and nationalised major banks and gave the Congress a Left-leaning identity.

Giri won and Indira established her political pre-eminence. Soon, she

Orissa's Biju Janata Dal and Tamil Nadu's AIADMK nominated former Lok Sabha Speaker PA. Sangma. Even more bizarre was the list of three candidates, including Manmohan Singh, proposed by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ms. Banerjee.

This galvanised the Congress. It pulled off a trump card. Mr. Mukherjee is backed by Mr. Yadav, although not yet by Ms. Banerjee. He's certain to win more than 60% of the votes.

BJP tried hard to build up the greatly shrunken NDA -- down from 24 parties to a mere seven -- by recruiting non-constituents into a joint front. But Mr. Mukherjee attracted support from the BJP's own allies, including the Janata

would only back a secular NDA prime minister.

Mr. Kumar is a star as Bihar's first successful chief minister in decades. Although he rules it in alliance with the BJP, he has kept it on a tight leash and Modi at a safe distance. Besides, his party is close to winning a majority in the Assembly.

His anti-Modi stance has found other backers -- e.g. the Telugu Desam. This could well be the beginning of a new non-Congress-non-Left secular front which might play a significant role in the 2014 general elections.

The presidential election has catalysed a UPA-Mulayam line-up, the NDA's weakening, and Ms. Banerjee's isolation. It has also highlighted the growing disarray and infighting in the BJP. The party is rudderless and without a credible national leader with a modicum of acceptability.

The Congress will suffer by losing Mr. Mukherjee, its most versatile politician, principal trouble-shooter and astute negotiator, with friends across the political spectrum, who has headed as many as 43 Groups of Ministers on a variety of subjects.

The gains for the Congress through his near-certain victory are likely to prove minor and temporary in comparison with its general political decline and growing loss of credibility.

The Left Front is also among the losers. The Communist Party of India and Revolutionary Socialist Party have refused to join the CPM and Forward Block in backing Mr. Mukherjee.

The CPM will find it hard to justify its decision and counter the charge that it has acted out of parochial West Bengal-centric considerations to exploit the "fissures" between the Congress and Ms. Banerjee.

As the resignation of its sole new national-level full-timer and spokesperson Prasenjit Bose suggests, this doesn't augur well for the CPM or the Left.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist. E-mail: bidwai@bol.net.in

Observing Shab-e-Barat

It is a time to rediscover ourselves

TONIGHT will be a time when Muslims all across the world remember the Creator in all the humility of submission to Him. Shab-e-Barat, in that very broad sense of the meaning, is but a reassertion of the belief that our fortunes, indeed the course life takes at every given point, is what Allah wills it to be. And Allah is all-forgiving and all-knowing. Because he is, it is for every Muslim, wherever he might be, to seek His forgiveness for all the sins that have been committed and in equal measure seek to know the path to truth in light of the Islamic faith.

Against this background of forgiveness comes the knowledge that Shab-e-Barat is also a night when believers seek the Lord's blessings for the year that is to be. These blessings are of a spiritual sort and therefore far removed from the materialistic conceptions some of us might mistakenly have as we ask Allah to fulfill our needs. It follows, therefore, that our needs are those that strive toward a more concrete understanding of our place in the universal scheme of things. And they essentially relate, fallible as we are, to thoughts of the good deeds that we do or are supposed to do in the course of our life. We seek the Almighty's blessings in a number of ways, but those ways again converge around the thought that what we seek is centred around religiosity. Tonight we set aside the banal and the worldly and simply recall the fundamental nature of belief in God and His universe.

On this night of forgiveness and blessings, it is not false celebrations that we indulge in through a misuse of resources. It is a night of happiness, but happiness of the kind which takes us a little closer to the Almighty. As the twilight approaches, we ready ourselves for a night of prayer, of self-examination as it were, all directed at a scaling of the heights of belief. Let tonight be one of a rediscovery of the self, of the thought that while this life matters, there is too the hereafter that must not be lost sight of.

Fair food prices for RMG workers

A modest step that needs to be taken forward

THE Ministry of Food and Disaster Management has taken an initiative to provide food items at fair prices to garment and knit workers. An MoU is likely to be signed soon with the BGMEA and BKMEA leaders to this end. This is undoubtedly welcome news which could not have come a day later. We believe this will ease the plight of the workers to some extent given the continued inflationary pressures compounded by soaring food prices before the month of Ramadan. But does fair price mean affordable price?

We hope it would not be a seasonal relief to fend off the pressure of prices during Ramadan, rather it would continue all the year round especially until such time as their salaries are raised from the current minimum of Tk 3,000. Our understanding is that the three-year cap on their salary increase ends in 2013. In the meanwhile, though, the costs of living have gone up so much so that these cannot even be affordable to middle income people. Among the basic needs, housing is crucial and the rents and electricity charge have skyrocketed. Under the circumstances, it is desirable that negotiations for arriving at a sustainable living wage for the workers will be initiated.

There is no gainsaying the fact that garment export is one of the strongest pillars of our economy and therefore, in keeping with the pivotal importance of the sector, matching steps must get underway to ensure better wages and good working environment for the RMG workers.

Frequent unrest in this sector has a disastrous impact not only on this industry but also on the economy as a whole. Since lower pay has been one of the persistent reasons behind such unrest, we urge all concerned quarters including the garment owners and the government to address this issue immediately.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- July 5**
- 1295** Scotland and France form an alliance, the so-called "Auld Alliance", against England.
 - 1687** Isaac Newton publishes *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.
 - 1770** The Battle of Chesma between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire begins.
 - 1950** Zionism: the Knesset passes the Law of Return which grants all Jews the right to immigrate to Israel.
 - 1977** Military coup in Pakistan: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, is overthrown.
 - 1987** First instance of the LTTE using suicide attacks on Sri Lankan Army. The Black Tigers are born, and in the following years continue to use the tactic to deadly effect.