

New strike corps in the Indian North East

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

THERE has been a very important military-strategic development in our region, more specifically in eastern Indian sub-region, with obvious trans-regional implications. We have hardly noticed that. In mid-July this year the Indian cabinet committee on security headed by Indian Premier Dr. Manmohan Singh approved the proposal to raise a 50,000 strong new mountain strike corps for the Indian army, to be located in the north east. The headquarters of this corps would be located in Panagarh, West Bengal.

From the military strategic standpoint the larger armies of some countries are subdivided into holding corps, the prime purpose of which is defence, and strike corps which are designated for large scale offensives. In India it's called Sundarji Doctrine as it was conceptualised and operationalised by former Indian chief of army staff and eminent military thinker General Krishnaswami Sundararajan, popularly known as General Sundarji.

The Sundarji doctrine called for a set of holding corps maintained close to the borders to hold off against an advancing enemy and a set of strike corps, kept at a safe distance from any preemptive enemy actions, which would be moved to deliver enormous conventional retaliation. This would be expected to lead to the complete nullification of the enemy. In a nuclear situation, this doctrine may not be optimal due to a prospect of nuclear reprisal if the attackers feel that they are facing an existential calamity.

But during Operation Parakram, when Indian mobilised about 500,000 strong army formations in the Indo-Pak border alleging Pakistan connection in the December terrorist attack on Indian Parliament, the other flaw of Sundarji Doctrine was evident. It was found that it takes a long time -- about 27 days -- to move the strike corps close to the frontline. As a result, the idea of Cold Start military doctrine

came up in Indian the strategic fraternity, despite official denial by India, where the holding corps would have attacking elements within them called Embedded Battle Groups (EBG). They would consist of hi-tech armour, mechanised infantry and self-propelled artillery that would be able to launch limited yet sharp and strong attacks within 48 hours.

While Cold Start had been talked about in the case of Indian western theatre, it may not be possible in the mountainous north east, not only for the terrain but also for India's caution in not antagonising China too much. Therefore, it seems that instead of forwardly located EBGs, the Indian army would stick to the conventional idea of distantly located strike corps.

The northern and north eastern boundaries have always been a concern for India, given their boarder dispute ever since Communist China disagreed with the MacMahon line agreed as boundary between the Raj and the then Tibetan authority in 1914. The territory south of this line, which is the Indian province of Arunachal of about 65,000 sq km area that China calls South Tibet, was a battleground in 1962 Sino-Indian clashes.

China never gave up the claim and often shows that chunk of mountains as a part of its territory in the official maps. There were also some minor incursions by the Chinese border patrols in the area. Indians, with their memory of the setbacks of 1962 war, get alarmed at every little incident in that area. But the Indians had learned their military lessons in 1962. The resultant overhaul and shift in attention and approach paid them dividends in 1965 and 1971.

Would the addition of this new bite in the Indian land force make a great difference in that theatre? Would that swing the balance of military power in that sub-region (including Tibet) in favour of the Indians? Perhaps not much, given the Chinese force level already there in Tibet and China's ability to send or raise more army formations there. But it would definitely reduce anxiety in Indian defence and

national security community to a significant degree.

Some Indian strategists argued to make this investment in the Indian navy instead of the army so as to counterbalance Chinese threat from the northern land border by threatening their vital energy and trade supply line in the Indian Ocean. But Indian national security experts went the army way considering that the vital territory battles, which have immediate consequence, can't be fought in a different front with delayed impact.

What's our stake in these developments? The chief purpose of this new strike corps is evidently to have an edge over, or at least parity with, the Chinese military might in the sub-region. Yet with the presence of a huge militarised zone of an aspiring continental power right in its backyard shouldn't Bangladesh worry? Well, it's true that traditionally Indian national security philosophy had been defensive. India doesn't normally fancy military engagement unless it is compelled to do so. Its internal diversity is both, strength and weakness.

But socio-political landscape of India is dynamic these decades. Lots of changes are taking place. Threat to a country's national security may lurk in the political sphere and stem from political developments in its neighbours. There had been the rise of right wing Hindu nationalist as a formidable political force in the otherwise secular India. These forces aren't that benevolent towards India's smaller neighbours. They could make much headway in eastern India. Picking up contentious issues with Bangladesh just to make shallow electoral gains can't be ruled out going by their political behaviour, which has often been opportunistic rather than propriety driven.

If there is a movement in India on a contentious issue with Bangladesh, be it their allegation against Bangladesh of supporting north eastern insurgents or alleged movement of economic migrants from Bangladesh to India or alleged cross border movement of Islamist terrorists, the political masters

may be compelled to yield to their own Frankenstein. A large military, properly prepared, could be a readymade tool of utility for limited or bigger action. The Indian military had been and still is subservient to the political masters, as it is supposed to be.

But, even in such worst case scenario for Bangladesh, unleashing of the big neighbour's military would be constrained by their conventional worries in the West and in the North, and other international factors. A full scale conventional offensive normally requires 3:1 force ratio in favour of the attacker. In 1971, the allied forces won with about 2:1 force ratio in their favour; the lack of critical numbers were made up for by the supporting guerilla activities of the freedom fighters and the mass popular support. If there is any aggression against Bangladesh with whatever better force ratio the aggressor can muster, the latter two crucial factors would be in the defender's side. Those could be Bangladesh's game changer in a worst case scenario.

Bangladesh doesn't have to react too strongly at this upcoming raising of the new India strike corps in the sub-region, neither should it turn a blind eye to that for we don't want to be caught off-guard at any time in future, like India itself was in 1962. Diplomacy and defence preparation, including contingency strategic planning and suitable geo-strategic posturing, must work in synergy to avoid any probability of national security debacle -- albeit fairly remote, yet not impossible. Therefore, the recent expansion and hardware purchase schemes declared for the Bangladesh armed forces seemingly has another angle to be looked at, albeit incidental, apart from the pervasive suspicion about the incumbent government's attempt to appease this perceptibly powerful state organ in this divisive political environment.

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President Mandela: A personal memory

JUNAID AHMAD

IT was a beautiful Sunday afternoon. Minister Mac Maharaj, a prison-mate of President Mandela, and South Africa's minister of transport in the Mandela government, drove us to meet the president. It was a short ride from our house to the Houghton neighbourhood in Johannesburg where the President lived. My father, Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmad, was visiting South Africa at that time to establish a memorandum of agreement between North South University and the University of Witswatersrand. Mac was acquainted with my father's work to establish the North South University and also his efforts to promote a dialogue between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. Mac felt that President Mandela would be interested to hear about these initiatives and about Bangladesh more generally.

President Mandela was seated in his study surrounded by his grandchildren. Having recently had surgery on one of his knees, he was resting that leg on a couch. On seeing us enter the room, the grandchildren immediately rushed out, probably used to having guests interrupt the precious time they had with their grandfather. My father quickly went over to where President Mandela was seated and reached out to greet him. President Mandela seemed to ignore my father's out-stretched hands, leaving him a bit perplexed. Instead, President Mandela moved over to shift his leg from the couch and with some effort to stand up. Only then, with the characteristic Mandela smile, did the president reach out to shake my father's hands and said warmly: "Welcome to my house, Mr. Ahmad." It is said that great people display their greatness often by the little things they do. That the president would make the effort to stand up to greet us, despite the pressure on his legs, spoke volumes about this great leader.

It was an afternoon that will forever be etched in my memory. President Mandela welcomed us with all the charm, grace, and magic for which he is well known all over the world. For over an hour the discussion covered a range of topics from the freedom movement of Bangladesh and South Africa to the role constitutional lawyers from India played in South Africa. President Mandela's deep knowledge of the law schools in the India and about the Indian legal system was very visible as he talked to us about how the ANC used the legal system as a strategy to take on the apartheid regime. In this context about Indian law schools, President Mandela welcomed my father's efforts to establish a relationship between Wits University and North South University. He was intrigued to learn about the role private universities were playing in Bangladesh. The president however wondered whether a private university system would be appropriate in a context where apartheid had made access to education so inequitable.

The discussion then settled on the issue that President Mandela wanted to focus on -- the political situation in Bangladesh. He reflected on his visit to Dhaka during Bangladesh's celebration of its 25th year of liberation and the warm reception he received from the government and the people of Bangladesh. The president, however, expressed his concern that the divide between the political parties in Bangladesh and in particular between its two leaders -- Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia -- seemed too wide. Talking about South Africa's history and his

own approach to politics, President Mandela reflected on the importance of reconciliation in politics for the greater good of the nation. He spoke with respect and deep appreciation about Bangladesh's language movement and our fight against military oppression, but he touched us most by his concern for the future of Bangladesh. He wondered what it would take to forge an understanding between Bangladesh's political parties around a common view of democracy and reconciliation.

Both President Mandela and my father have now left this world for their final journey, and with them they have taken away their thoughts and views. But, one message was clear from their conversation: there could not be any substitute to democratic processes and that even a "flawed democracy" was superior to any other model of governance for a nation -- a message with deep implications for Bangladesh.

The afternoon ended and we bade our farewell to President Mandela. I gathered enough courage to ask if we could take a picture with him. He smiled and said warmly: "If you want to upgrade my status," suggesting that it was he who was being honoured by having a picture with us! Minister Mac Maharaj took our picture. And, again, the dignity, grace and warmth of the president emerged. Despite the difficulty he had walking, he insisted on escorting us to the garden gate and to wish us



J. AHMAD, M. AHMAD, MANDELA

well. My father thanked the president for everything he represented. "No Mr. Ahmad," said President Mandela, "it is I who must thank you for the good work that you are doing for your country."

I had the opportunity to meet President Mandela several times after that meeting, including working with Minister Mac Maharaj on writing a speech for President Mandela when he agreed to become the Patron of the "Cities Without Slums" Initiative. It was, however, the last time my father had an opportunity to meet him. From that brief meeting, my father always considered President Mandela as Bangladesh's most sincere friend. I am eternally grateful to the president for the precious time he shared with us. And today, as we say good-bye to President Mandela, I thank him again for that afternoon when he so kindly and generously honoured my father by receiving him at his residence. The memory of my father meeting the world's last super hero is something that my family and I shall cherish eternally. And so, even as you make your last journey, President Mandela, you still continue to selflessly give to others.

Thank you Madiba, and farewell.

The writer was working for the World Bank in South Africa during this visit with President Mandela.

Speedy response in crisis management

FARID HASAN AHMED

BANGLADESH, with a population of 150 million, is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Over the last three decades, Bangladesh has invested in disaster management and has gained considerable ability to manage natural disasters, floods and cyclones in particular, in a better way. What about the capacity of the country in managing the emergency phase of industrial disasters, in particular infrastructure collapse and fire?

Fire accidents occur frequently

Fire causes huge loss of lives and properties every year. Although termed as 'fire accident,' most fires are far from being accidental. Indeed, most are preventable. Industrial units, particularly garments industry, cause the deadliest of the fires. Fire incidents in the country are increasing at an alarming rate. In 2004, 7,140 fire incidents occurred, causing damage to property worth more than Tk.200 crore (Source: National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015).

Incidents of infrastructure collapse are on the rise

The collapse on April 24 of Rana Plaza, an eight-story building, was the worst industrial disaster in the history of Bangladesh, killing over 1,100 garment workers and injuring over 1,600 others. Since 2006, over 1,800 people have been killed as a result of substandard safety conditions in Bangladesh factories. The Rana Plaza disaster followed fires at the Tazreen Fashion factory and Smart Fabrics on the periphery of Dhaka, leaving at least 117 dead and at least 200 injured.

Management of fires in factories has shown the strengths, weaknesses, limitations and challenges of key organisations and communities involved in responding to unexpected occurrences. Taking into account the risk and vulnerability of Bangladesh to earthquake, risk in garments factories and the existing emergency practices, the following points are placed to relevant institutions/authorities for appropriate strategies and actions in improving performance in emergencies.

It is the expectation of the people of Bangladesh that responsible authorities will act appropriately in line with the disaster management vision of the government. The vision is to reduce the risk of people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged, from the effects of natural, environmental and human induced hazards to a manageable and acceptable humanitarian level, and to have in place an efficient emergency response system capable of handling large scale disasters (National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015).

Emergency response operations

This covers activities undertaken immediately before, during or after an event which help to reduce loss of life, illness or injury, property loss or damage, or damage to the environment. It may include, for example, planning, co-ordination and implementation of measures to lessen the effects of a disaster upon members of the public or to protect property of the state. (Source: National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015).

Emergency assistance comprises the saving of lives and covering of the basic needs of the affected individuals/community. Emergency support operations may contain (a) rapid assessment of the situation and identification of the needs, (b) coverage of basic needs by providing drinking water, emergency medical assistance and shelter for victims, and (c) strengthening the coordination of search and rescue and relief efforts.

Readiness for a rapid response

a) It includes formulation of workable emergency plans, development of warning systems, maintenance of inventories and training of workforce. It may also include search and rescue measures as well as evacuation plans for areas that may be 'at risk' from a disaster;

b) Readiness encompasses those measures taken before a disaster, which are aimed at minimising loss of life, interference in critical services, and damage when the disaster occurs;

c) Prior to an emergency situation, the contingency plan provides the basis for identifying and further developing response capacity. The Contingency Plan is the basis of readiness and covers (1) analysis of the context, risk mapping and identification of likely emergency scenarios; (2) mapping of capacity, vulnerabilities, constraint and resources, and tangible/intangible assets; (3) identification of other external organisations' capacity, constraint and resources in the department/ministry/area/country/region.

When an emergency occurs, the following actions are required; (a) activating the Contingency Plan as quickly as possible with proper commitment, resources and strength, (b) doing a quick preliminary analysis of the circumstances and available skills and resources (internal and external), (c) leading a first assessment and sketching what could be done at different levels, and developing a quick strategy and an action plan; (d) external and internal networking, collaboration, coordination with effective management and leadership.

Way out:

After starting an emergency response operation, the authorities need to formulate a way out. For a way out two major steps are (1) shutting down: a gradual reduction of activities resulting in a complete shut down (2) relinquish: a reassigning of required actions to a responsible organisation. Way out should be drawn up by setting a precise timeframe and deadline for closure activities based on context and standard procedures.

It is worth having guidelines for effective performance in emergency operations. The following could be consulted for a better readiness: (1) The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (2) The SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards (asserting the right to life with dignity, and a comprehensive set of standards and indicators (3) The Human Accountability Partnership (HAP) Principles of Accountability (4) Standing Orders on Disasters, (5) National Disaster Management Plan (6) The Disaster Management Act (6) Organizational Policy, Guidelines, Learning Documents and Good Practices as appropriate.

Capacity of carrying out a comprehensive plan for managing emergencies is needed for averting disastrous consequences. General basics to be considered in all emergencies include pre-emergency groundwork and provisions for alerting, rescuing and evacuating affected people, handling fatalities, and for containing of the emergency. Political and administrative determination, effective policy formulation and coordinated implementation and participation of stakeholders are of great importance for avoiding risk and also for running speedy emergency operations effectively and proficiently.

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(Note: The views in the article are the writer's own. No link with his office.)

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Casino calculation

5 Complaint loudly

11 Designer Wang

12 Name, for one

13 TV's

14 Trebek

15 Unsavory sort

16 NBA's Jeremy

17 Goose egg

18 Store worker

19 Comedy off

20 Basement

21 Pitcher Santana

22 Squad car sound

23 Thick of

24 Skilled Seminar group

25 tempo

30 Work unit

32 Writer Asimov

34 Linen source

35 Bowler, e.g.

36 One of Arthur's knights

41 The Phantom Tollbooth hero

42 In awe

43 Tennis star

44 Roddick

45 Emphasis

46 They may clash

DOWN

1 Ellipse

2 Sub shop

3 Like a downpour

4 Get's instrument

5 Twisting sword

6 Physics particles

7 Destroy

8 Finished off

9 Fake locks

10 Frat party item

11 Buddhism branch

12 in the thick of

13 Skilled Seminar group

14 tempo

30 Work unit

32 Writer Asimov

34 Linen source

35 Bowler, e.g.

36 One of Arthur's knights

41 The Phantom Tollbooth hero

42 In awe

43 Tennis star

44 Roddick

45 Emphasis

46 They may clash

Yesterdays answer

18 Stargo cargo

19 Twisting suddenly

20 Influence

21 Aware of

22 Practical joke

23 Poet Khayyam

24 Notion

25 Symbols

30 Indulgent

33 Beach bits

34 Disconcert

35 Ray of films

37 Stocking stuffers

38 Heating choice

39 Quantity: Abbr.

40 Simple card game

41 West of Hollywood

11-20

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40

41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

11-12 CRYPTOQUOTE

P WTCN LXYT DFT LPGDXYT

VO XNHSPWH MPDF UTVUET

OVN MFGVT VUPWPVWG

P FXCT WV NTGUTID

TKMXNK HPZZVW

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:

I HAVE FOUND THE PARADOX, THAT IF YOU LOVE UNTIL IT HURTS, THERE CAN BE NO MORE HURT, ONLY MORE LOVE.

- MOTHER TERESA

BEETLE BAILEY

ARE YOU GOING TO THE DANCE SATURDAY?

SURE, IF I CAN GET A DATE

BOY! THE NEWS SURE TRAVELS FAST IN THIS CAMP!

DING DING DING DING DING DING

HENRY

4-25

4-21

by Mort Walker

by Don Trachte

QUOTABLE Quote

"It is wonderful how much time good people spend fighting the devil. If they would only expend the same amount of energy loving their fellow men, the devil would die in his own tracks of ennui."

Helen Keller