



AIR CDRE (RETD) ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

DHAKA recently witnessed a gathering of senior officers from the armies around the Asia Pacific region discussing the possible challenges that the armies face in view of the changing threat scenario. Jointly organised by the Bangladesh Army and the US Army Pacific (USARPAC), the 38th Pacific Army Management Seminar (PAMS) held on 14-17 September was attended by nearly 100 military officers, politicians, diplomats, policy makers and academicians from 34 countries. As a seminar facilitator, I had an active role in guiding the discussion, focusing on the issues and challenges and finding possible solutions. Although the seminar primarily focused on the role and challenges faced by the land forces, it was clearly understood that no army can operate on its own and that the need of close cooperation and coordination with other two services, namely Navy and the Air force, are higher than ever before. It was also evident that when the threat becomes transnational, the response too becomes multi-national, regional or even global.

In the post-Cold War era, the threat of one country invading another is diminishing. Notwithstanding disputed land or maritime boundaries, enduring ethnic and religious conflicts, conflicting claims on water and energy resources etc. nations seek peaceful dialogue, often under the auspicious of international agencies, to settle the differences. While the possibility of application of military force in traditional warfare has reduced, there have been new emerging threats that need military intervention, often beyond the border. These threats are lumped under non-traditional threats.

Non-traditional threats can be broadly put under two categories: manmade and natural. Manmade threats include: terrorism, arms and drug smuggling, human trafficking, organised crime, money laundering, cybercrime etc. Natural threats include: flood,

cyclone and tidal surge, earthquake, global warming, deforestation, pollution and pandemics etc. These threats can often pose existential crisis to the nation and may demand military assistance and intervention. While the traditional role of defending the country from external and internal enemies remains the raison d'être of the armed forces, they are increasingly called upon to play their part in the non-traditional roles. As such, defence forces have to bring in necessary changes in their organizational structures and force planning to fit in their new roles.

Let us take the case of terrorism. In our globalised world, the terrorism too is globalised. Terrorism has no frontier or nationality. Organisations like Al-Qaeda operate on global scale - recruiting, training, arming and launching their operatives on targets across the globe. Recent rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) has added a new dimension when the outfit occupied a huge chunk of territories of Syria and Iraq and established a reign of terror in the areas under its occupation. IS is attracting disenchanted Muslim youths from across the globe in what it terms as a "Global Jihad" against the 'infidels'. In Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and Mali, terrorist groups control considerable area and have imposed their writ on the population. Close to us, in Pakistan, the government forces are fighting to eject Taliban fighters from its territory who have for long virtually control a large swath of territories. Fighting these terrorist forces involve appropriate tactics and strategy, weapons and materiel, training and motivation. Lack of any of these elements will call for disaster, an example of which we saw recently in Iraq when its regular forces, suffering from poor leadership and motivation, crumbled in the face of IS attack. A well-coordinated multi-national force with a long term strategy along with appropriate tactics and technology is the answer. However, it is easier said than done; inter-state rivalry and distrust often hinder regional or international cooperation in countering a common threat.

Arms and drug smuggling often go hand in hand

with armed insurgency and terrorism. Taliban in Af-Pak border thrive on opium export and use the fund to buy sophisticated weapons in the black market. There is a strong nexus in our part of the world between drug and arms smugglers of Myanmar with the Islamic militants in Bangladesh and Maoist insurgents in India and Nepal. Ideological, religious and ethnic differences pose no barrier here. Those who are involved in arms and drug smuggling are often involved in human trafficking too. To support all their illegal activities, they have to clandestinely collect and transfer funds through forged documents and bank accounts. Therefore, keeping a check on money laundering is a major task of the security forces. Military forces have a clear role in supporting all these counter terrorism activities.

The crux of the matter is our army will have to work with other military forces which had been hitherto been classified as hostile. Imagine a scenario where the Indian and Pakistani forces are working together under UN flag and in case of need one force risking their lives to defend the members of another. Notwithstanding the national differences, there is a need to develop "Brotherhood in Arms" within the military psyche. We need to develop regional and international institutions that will focus on how best military forces of different nations could operate under a joint umbrella to combat common threats, be it natural or manmade. There is also the need to develop inter-governmental and intra-governmental coordination to better exploit the military forces inherent capability to combat non-traditional threat. In our region, we might hold joint civil-military exercises under the umbrella of SAARC, BIMSTEC, ASEAN etc where doctrines and interoperability could be tested and improved. Only being relevant to the emerging threats could the military forces justify its existence.

The writer is a retired Air Commodore.

Prevention of early marriage: Bangladeshi style

A giant leap backward

DR. KANIZ SIDDIQUE

IN an effort to stop early marriage the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) is reducing the marriage age for girls from eighteen to sixteen. Any five-year old school going kid can tell that mathematically this makes no sense. GOB must have great wisdom and understanding of mathematics which is so profound that it can make two plus two equals to three. Let's assume that the government has profound arguments behind this historic and apparently moronic measure. The augment is that lowering of marriage age for girls is consistent with the socio-economic realities of the country. We all know this as a fact but how that prevents early marriage of girls?

This very argument makes any rational person feel that the government and the experts probably do not understand the inherent contradiction in this argument. Why are we trying to eliminate early marriage particularly for girl? It is basically to improve their wellbeing. Those who want to look at it in terms of gender dynamics can say that it is to ensure gender equality.

Let's address the wellbeing issue. The main wellbeing factors are expected to be (i) reduction in teen pregnancy, maternal mortality and improvement of women's health, (ii) improvement in girls' opportunities to get at least some functional education, (iii) improvement of women's position in the family, (iv) empowerment of women and girls in making decisions about their own lives etc.

If marriage age for girls is reduced from eighteen to sixteen by definition this will increase teen pregnancy, maternal mortality, and will adversely affect women's health. It is also will add to population growth. In terms of education, girls start to drop out of school by the time they hit puberty. If marriage age is kept at eighteen and even if it can be implemented half the time the possibility for a large number of girls to go to school remains wide. By lowering it, the window of opportunity for girls to go to school is going to be narrowed. Why government, on the one hand, is spending a large amount of public money for girls' education and on the other hand, narrowing the window of opportunity?

In terms of improving women's and girls' positions in the families, in all likelihood most of the girls, particularly from lower income families, will be married off at the age of sixteen. At this age girls are emotionally unprepared to get married and deal with the complexity of family-life in the context of Bangladesh's family structure. Therefore, in many cases there will be family feuds leading to violence against these young wives. Another contradiction with the government's other initiatives to reduce violence against women.

Finally in terms of empowering women and girls, a sixteen year old girl has little exposure and experience to make any major life's decision. In most of the cases marriage decisions are made by the parents and particularly girls have very little say on this matter. Lowering the marriage age is not going to help girls to make any informed decision about their own lives.

Let's address the gender equality issue. Within the existing social value system a girl child is less valued by families and the society and is considered as a burden to the families. This is the most important reason for girls being subjected to early marriage. By reducing marriage age we are reinforcing the existing norm of devaluation of girls. Efforts should be made to change such norms through nationwide and effective social campaign not to reinforce such norms.

Thus on many grounds this lowering of marriage age for girls makes no sense. Of course one can argue that by giving more leverage to the families to unburden girls it will be easier for the government to implement this law. One can also argue that it would be easier if marriage age is lowered to fourteen even easier if it is twelve. In fact easiest will be not to have any age restriction on marriage of girls. The government should: keep the marriage age at its present level; put in place effective institutions and governance and ensure effective implementation.

Meher Afroz Chumki the state minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in an effort to justify this law mentioned that in many western countries the marriage age for girls is sixteen. Can we compare the socio economic conditions of Bangladesh and with that of these western countries? Let's try to digress on some ground realities:-

- In the west boys and girls socialize with each other from an early age and usually gather some experiences about each other and perhaps are somewhat equipped to make a decision to get married.
- In the west the marriage takes place because girls and boys want to get married on their free will. The families are not forcing the girls to get married because they are considered as burden to the families.
- In the west, in reality the numbers of girls who actually get married at the age of sixteen are few and far between and not having significant negative impacts on girls.
- In the western countries, given the family structure, after marriage girls don't move in with extended families so they don't have to deal with a complex dynamic of family life.

This argument is totally irrelevant, misplaced, and out of context. The proponents and activists of gender equality usually perceive AL to be more socially liberal party. Perhaps if this was done by BNP/Jamat alliance it would have made some sense. Therefore, one can't but think that the government is pandering to some groups of people, who are not so happy with trials of the war criminals.

After years of women's movement and many progresses, how did we come to this point where we are making a giant leap backward on a very fundamental gender equality issue?

The writer is an Economist.

Is there still a way out for Iraq?

RUBI AMATULLAH

AMERICA, while occupying Iraq, had the power to do anything that was needed to be done. It could require all major groups to come to a consensus as to the basic rules of power sharing as it was done in Tunisia. A commission --consisting of leaders from all three groups as well as some international or UN experts as advisers -- could lay down some basic structure principles that would remain as the unchangeable foundation of the constitution to ensure partnership of all the ethnic groups: Shii'a, Sunni and Kurds. This consensus should have been done before the Constituent Assembly election.

This was exactly how the most polarized groups in Tunisia -- the secularists and the Islamists -- came together to form the Ben Achour Commission to lay the ground rules of power sharing before electing the Constituent Assembly members to frame the constitution. The mechanism of Proportional Representation [PR] that was agreed upon before the election played a key role in maintaining the balance. Realizing what was at stake the Ennadha party, under the visionary leadership of Rachid Ghannouchi, compromised and accepted the terms that would compel this party-the most popular party-- to share power with others. Otherwise he realized that the secularists would boycott the election and everyone would

lose. They created a win-win state of affairs. The secret of this success is inclusive politics.

If America could rebuild the defeated and devastated enemy countries -- Japan and Germany -- after the World War II with its Marshall Plan within only 7-years of occupation why the superpower now failed in Iraq even after 9 years? Extraordinary situations require extraordinary measures. If imposing a democratic system and building infrastructures under the military occupation helped Japan and Germany raise a stupendous speed of recovery and progress why it could not be repeated in Iraq in our time when the know-how, capacity and logistics are immensely better now than ever before.

In the absence Ghannouchi in Iraq, if the commission would fail to come to a consensus America still had a choice of bringing in a group of political experts to help to lay the rules that would make the three groups interdependent in running the country. A similar step was taken in Kosovo to avert the strong propensity of revenge and further bloodshed by the Muslim majority against the Serb minority. The constitution itself was dictated and implemented under the leadership of Marti Ahtisaari appointed by the UN. In a very short period of time Kosovo changed and accepted peaceful coexistence.

The proportional representation [PR], a delicate balance between the central and local governments, highest offices

reserved for different ethnic representation on a rotating basis as was done in Lebanon effectively, term limits for highest offices, multi-party cabinet, among others, are some effective tools to promote a power-sharing governance. A bicameral legislative organ with the upper house based on equal representation of each group and the lower created

Iraq still can get integrated and become a regional power. Otherwise the oil rich region could be conflagration much worse than it is now. Good governance is the most effective way to fight extremism. An integrated Iraq is the best way to defeat the Islamic State.

through one-person-one-vote basis and an interdependent relationship between the two chambers could also be a power-sharing mechanism. The system of interdependence may become slow and difficult at times but in the long run this promotes national integration, constructive engagements, conflict resolution, stability and a rich political culture of

dialogue, cooperation and accountability.

America could have achieved most of its goals at the fraction of the price it paid if it could retain the trust it had six decades ago. America did not win the Cold War by pursuing the 'containment' policy and the proxy fights but by its visionary diplomatic undertakings of détente and reaching out to China in the 1970s. After all America still fails to walk on the path its founders laid down more than two centuries ago: liberty, equality and dignity are the inalienable rights of all human beings. That was the path America could have achieved its true greatness had the fear and arrogance not robbed its spirit.

America's duty now is to create a concerted effort with the international community to pressure the present Iraqi leadership enough to undertake the radical changes that is needed in its constitution, system, and mindset to embrace inclusive political system. Three ethnic groups should feel secure and indispensable in running Iraq and sharing its oil revenues. Then Iraq still can get integrated and become a regional power. Otherwise the oil rich region could be conflagration much worse than it is now. Good governance is the most effective way to fight extremism. An integrated Iraq is the best way to defeat the Islamic State.

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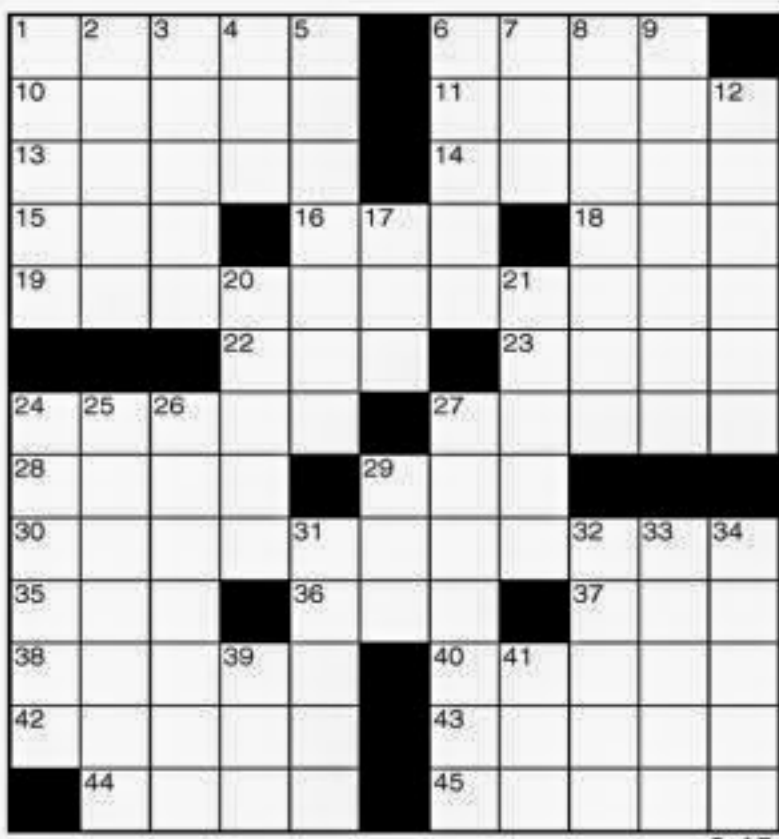
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Practices for a bout
- 6 Duck feature
- 10 Thus far
- 11 Bye, in Baja
- 13 Suspect's defense
- 14 Block, as a river
- 15 Ewe's mate
- 16 Old horse
- 18 Wedding words
- 19 Fashion pioneer
- 22 Sort
- 23 Tenant's fee
- 24 Deli counter sight
- 27 Lathered up
- 28 Book unit
- 29 Good times
- 30 Silky coated dog
- 35 Lynx or lion
- 36 Longing
- 37 Bullfight cheer
- 38 Steer clear of
- 40 Sea walls
- 42 New Jersey's -- Hall University
- 43 Build
- 44 Headey of "Game of Thrones"

DOWN

- 1 Begin
- 2 From the Arctic
- 3 Some Japanese film
- 4 Hold up
- 5 Cheat
- 6 Police ID
- 7 Lupino of films
- 8 Scarce
- 9 Turns up
- 12 Sleek and stylish
- 17 Inquire
- 20 Frasier's brother
- 21 Reliance
- 24 Kitchen rack items
- 25 Fast sailing ship
- 26 Stir up
- 27 Unthrifty sort
- 29 Try out
- 31 African scavenger
- 32 Game piece
- 33 Put in office
- 34 Takes it easy
- 39 Mafia head
- 41 Writer Levin



CRYPTOQUOTE

BJH KHUPF JGA MSB G MHOGFBI RO GFF
BJPOQA VH HOYRI PO FPZH. HPBJHD VH
ASZZHD PO JHGFBJ RD VH ASZZHD PO ARSF
RD VH QHB ZGB. -- GFXHDB HPOABHPO

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: MARRIAGE IS A MATTER OF GIVE AND TAKE, BUT SO FAR I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND ANYBODY WHO'LL TAKE WHAT I HAVE TO GIVE. -- CASS DALEY

Yesterday's answer

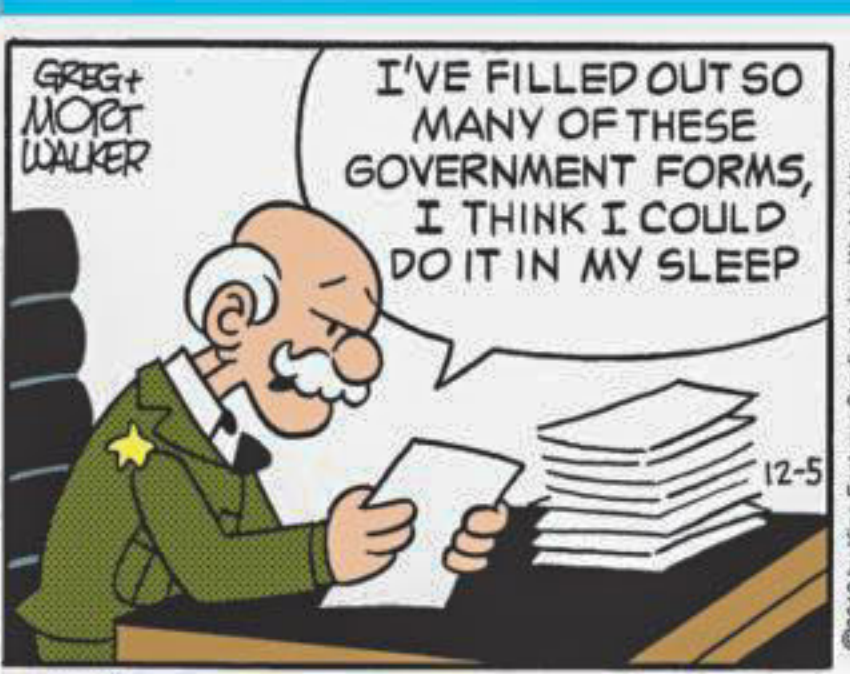


A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One 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.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

There's only one way to have a happy marriage and as soon as I learn what it is I'll get married again.

Clint Eastwood