



Bangladesh & UN Peacekeeping Challenges & Prospects



On May 24, 2017 The Daily Star organised a roundtable on the prospects and challenges of Bangladesh Peacekeeping operations. The programme was attended by peacekeepers, UN peace mission commanders, former mission chiefs and diplomats. Here we publish a summary of the discussions.

MAHFUZ ANAM, EDITOR & PUBLISHER, THE DAILY STAR
We have felt over a long time that Bangladesh's contribution to the peacekeeping in the world is one of the untold stories to the people Bangladesh. We have heard about it from international media, we have written about it occasionally, but nothing comprehensive has been done. We haven't told the story of our peacekeeping in a comprehensive manner, neither to the people of Bangladesh and definitely not to the people of the world. With whatever shortcomings there are, I think this is one of the substantial ways in which Bangladesh has contributed to world peace.

BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN (RETD.), ASSOCIATE EDITOR, THE DAILY STAR
I thank all of you for being here this morning. For some of you it was very short notice. One of the achievements that has brought our country to international limelight is our achievements in UN Peacekeeping operations. While it has brought laurels to us it has also added increasing responsibilities to keep our performance level high. Despite many constraints at home, Bangladesh has always fulfilled UN requests to contribute to UN missions. The performance of our officers, as far as my experience as a Chief Military Observer go, wherein I had officers from Bangladesh too, was extremely gratifying. Even under the most adverse circumstances, like in Cambodia or Bihac we held firm against the most severe physical assault of some recalcitrant elements. For this morning, to start things off, we will start by three brief presentations on the Contributions of the three services and the Police. Not to forget the exemplary role our diplomats played in the UN in propagating our case for induction in the realm of peacekeepers, Ambassador Hemayet Uddin will give his experience as diplomat and former foreign secretary in this regard. We shall then ask some mission commanders to give us their experience and lessons learnt. We will end with an open session. The first to go will be Major General Ashfaq.

MAJOR GENERAL KAZI ASHFAQ AHMED (RETD.), FORMER MISSION COMMANDER IN GEORGIA
The Concept of peacekeeping was never

considered as an option of the UN when the charter was drawn up in 1945. It subsequently emerged when the need was felt to provide the diplomatic space to the belligerents to sort matters out by interposing UN blue berets between them.

At present we have 16 missions deployed in various parts of the world: Western Sahara, Central African Republic, Mali, Haiti, Congo, Darfur, Golan Height, Cyprus, Lebanon, Abbey in Africa, Kosovo, Liberia, South Sudan, India, Pakistan, Ivory Coast and the Middle East.

Bangabandhu reiterated firm commitment to world peace in his speech at the UN General Assembly in 1974. Bangladesh sent a medical team of 28 members to Syria in the aftermath of Arab-Israeli war in 1973. Our formal participation in peacekeeping missions started in 1988 with 15 observers in UNIMOG (Iraq-Iran). Till now, Bangladesh has participated in 54 of the total 70 UN Peacekeeping missions.

Bangladesh Army participated in 46 missions. Total number of peacekeepers from Bangladesh Army is 1,41,726.

We have so far lost 122 personnel in our quest to establish peace in various parts of the world.

Sierra Leone has declared Bangla as their country's 2nd language. Liberia has named their capital's major street after Bangladesh. And a few African countries have set up schools naming Bangladesh ie. Sierra Leone - Bangladesh Friendship School.

COMMODORE M N ABSAR (LPR), FORMER UN OBSERVER IN RWANDA
Article 25 of the Constitution mentions that Bangladesh will work for promoting international peace, security and solidarity. Bangladesh has been committed to this constitutional pledge, and now it is one of the biggest contributors of personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. As of March 31, 2017, Bangladesh Navy has contributed 6904 personnel in 29 UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh is now the fourth largest contributor.

The first independent Bangladesh Navy contingent was deployed in UNIKOM in 1997 to patrol the water ways, demarcating the Iraq-Kuwait border as a part of the demilitarized zone enforcement. Following that, Bangladesh Navy deployed its

independent four units in Sudan and boat detachment unit in Ivory Coast in 2005. It continued there for 12 years. Subsequently, Bangladesh Navy ventured into more enterprising undertaking with pioneer deployment of two ships as part of maritime task forces in Lebanon in 2010. Such deployment in the Mediterranean Sea, almost 8000 km away from home, is a testimony to the operational and sustenance capability of Bangladesh Navy.

AIR CDRE ANISUR RAHMAN (RETD.), FORMER BAF CONTINGENT COMMANDER MALI
Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) started its UN peacekeeping operations with only 26 members in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993 and till today we have contributed more than five thousand personnel in 17 countries. At present we are operating in 4 different countries with 6 helicopters and one transport aircraft. Our present contribution of personnel is more than 1000.

Bangladesh is now known to the world for the professionalism of its troops deployed in various UN missions. This contribution of Bangladesh has been recognised in the Security Council several times.

The UN engagement has increased our knowledge of working in different operational environment, even in warlike situation. It has increased flying-hour experience and maintenance capacity of BAF personnel. So far BAF has flown about 42,000 hours in the mission area.

There are also some challenges that need to be addressed to carry forward our effort.

Due to the increasing cost of aviation materials and maintenance, flying in support of peacekeeping operation under current arrangement is becoming difficult. Again, the ongoing global recession has also affected financial contributions to peacekeeping missions.

BARRISTER MAHBUBUR RAHMAN, DIG, (POLICE HQ OPS DTE)
Bangladesh Police started sending personnel to the UN mission in 1989. Our first mission was in Namibia. In 2005 we send police unit which was a major progress in our activities. At present we have 1152 officers serving in different missions among whom 164 are female police officers.

HEMAYET UDDIN, FORMER AMBASSADOR & FOREIGN SECRETARY

Diplomacy and peacekeeping are intimately interlinked. A proactive role calls for astute diplomacy in the part of the professionals on the ground and the foreign ministry. The link between diplomacy and peacekeeping begins from the conceptual stage and continues to the very end. During this entire period, it becomes incumbent to remain fully engrossed in monitoring the developments, both in the crisis area and elsewhere in international relations. Peacekeeping operation has two essential ingredients - diplomacy in the policy formulation and decision making and peacekeeping implementation with military and police commanders and other stakeholders on ground. As a troop contributing country it is our responsibility that we negotiate the best terms to meet our objectives before we commit our peacekeepers to any particular mission.

MAJOR GENERAL FAZLE ELAHI AKBAR, (RETD.), FORMER FORCE COMMANDER IN SUDAN

When Bangladesh was requested to contribute to the UN peacekeeping mission we were not sure about our responsibility because we had no formal training on it. Frankly speaking we did not have any understanding about the difference between peacekeeping force and observer mission. There was also reservation from various quarters of the army about the decision of sending troops to foreign mission. But it was the Army leadership that gave the go ahead.

Bangladeshi contingent is excellent in their behavior. They build friendly relations with locals. That's why you see Bangla as a second language in some countries. There are many schools that have been built by Bangladesh peacekeepers.

We are highly disciplined. This is one aspect we must say and of course, to be frank, the money the soldiers get has something to do with it because soldiers don't want to be thrown away from the mission. On the whole, we are disciplined compared to many other troops.

Our engineering core is very active. Wherever they go, be it mine clearing or

construction, they do their job efficiently. However, there is a scope of improving our intelligence capability in mission area. We should invest in this sector to improve our overall performance.

BRIG GEN ABDUL HAKIM AZIZ (RETD.), FORMER UNMO AT UNIMOG & CONTINGENT COMMANDER IN IVORY COAST

My first UN mission was UNIMOG. Then I served in Ivory Coast as a commander. Now I am a proud father of a peacekeeper. In the missions our main task was peacekeeping.

In the first mission I had seven tasks, and when I went to Ivory Coast the UN mandate gave us 18 tasks to perform; now I find the number of tasks to be performed has risen to 30. Now as far as Mali is concerned the mission has been named as Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission. The New York Times says UN mission in Mali is the organizations deadliest deployment in the world.

The challenges for our peacekeepers from mission to mission varies because of the different tasks, different scenario, different conflicting parties and different stakeholders' interests especially superpowers. Many of our seniors know how the role of superpowers have changed the rule of the game. The same report on Mali in the Washington Post says, "In New York headquarter the diplomats are debating, should UN forces be engaged in counter terrorism tasks at all?" And please note this is not the end this is just the beginning. All the future missions will be like this, like the environment in Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan. These are the likely situation our boys might find them in in future UN missions.

BRIG GENERAL SALIM AKHTAR (RETD.), FORMER CONTINGENT COMMANDER IN BOSNIA

Our battalion was deployed in Bosnia where we didn't have the luxury of what the UN missions enjoy today. It was a great thing that we committed a mechanized battalion in 45 days something that even the British admittedly would be very wary of committing.

At that time we saw a lot of politics by big power in deciding deployment of troops. We were told there were serious objections by some of the European nations in deploying

