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drive through the lanes of minefields to reach the forward defended localities. On an average, we were required to drive 300 to 400 kms in a day to cover the entire AOR. So dawn to dusk working in battlefield area where there were risks of stepping into the minefields and drawing of hostile fire by mistake! It was really a great concern and challenge for us to overcome it daily. The job was yet not over. After finishing the patrolling, UNMOs had to wash, clean and refuel the vehicles to make it ready for next day's patrol.

The fourth was to overcome the language barrier. Arabic was the language of Iraq. On the ground it was difficult for us to communicate with local leaders as we could neither speak in Arabic nor could we understand it, though many of us could only read Arabic. As such we were dependant on Iraqi Army Liaison Officer to communicate with them and give our observation to local leaders on matters concerning mandated tasks where their actions were related. But not all Liaison Officers were good in English. So it was difficult for us to make them understand, and neither could we understand what they were talking about in vernacular.

ONUCI

Bangladesh sent a Brigade size force to Ivory Coast to participate in ONUCI in 2004. ONUCI had huge Mandated Tasks. It was 18 in 2004 and in 2015 it was 30. But the Main Task was to monitor the ceasefire and movements of armed groups. In Ivory Coast, there were two warring parties: one is Ivorian Government Forces, while the other is Forces Nouvelles. The first challenge was to establish full operational control on vast AOR. BANBAT AOR was one third the size of Bangladesh. That means, I had in total 850 troops deployed in 6 -7 camps located 150 – 200 kms away. Maintaining the Operational Readiness of the Unit and passing the Contingent-Owned Equipment (COE) Inspection was a herculean task for us. We faced real challenge to be operationally fit because our APCs were old and fast moving spares were not readily available. Many of the rubber items melted due to heat. But BANBAT logistic Officer Lt Col Mahbub, Artillery and the EME Officer Major Saif made lots of homework and did their best with their teams to keep the unit operationally fit during the entire period of my command of BANBAT.

Supporting the Camps logistically and operationally from neighboring Camps or Battalion HQ was a time-consuming affair. Maintaining discipline and morale of own soldiers, who were thousands of miles away from their families, kith and kin, and not well connected through mobile or landlines, was a matter of deep concern for a Battalion Commander. But Bangladeshi Battalion set a high benchmark in this regard. There was no breach of discipline during our tenure in ONUCI. The trick was: We kept ourselves engaged in lots of activities which contributed towards maintaining a sustainable peace in Ivory Coast. The activities like medical campaign, anti-malarial

campaign, minor children feeding and nutrition programme, distribution of water, plantation programme, vegetable gardening, sports events like football, marathon, and basketball competition with local Ivorians, and cultural exchange programme with ONUCI communication team helped us develop trust and confidence amongst all the parties.

Another challenge was the Language Barrier. Ivory Coast is a francophone country having numerous dialects at different regions. It was a great challenge to communicate and negotiate with the warring parties, locals and different stakeholders. Even our Ivorian interpreters would find it difficult to understand the local dialects of different regions.

Maintaining a balanced working relationship with all the stakeholders was necessary to work impartially in UN Missions. For example, along with UN troops, there were French troops known as Licorne Forces operating in Ivory Coast, who worked side by side with ONUCI and had a different role and different economic and strategic interests in the country. One of the mandated tasks was to liaise with two warring parties in coordination with the French Forces in order to promote reestablishment of trust between all the Ivorian forces. The sensitivity of this mandated task was that the Ivorians used to raise their eyebrows if they found BANBAT & Licorne force move together. It was noticed that the local Ivorians had developed a negative feeling towards the Licorne Forces. They used to consider them as occupation forces because of years of exploitation under their French colonial masters. Therefore, a delicate and balanced working relations needed to be maintained with both the French and the Ivorian Forces and the mass people, so that there remained no scope of misunderstanding about BANBAT's role.

UN MISSION AT MALI

Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa, hemmed in by seven countries (Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire). With a troop strength of 12600, MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali), a complex and extremely challenging UN Mission, began its operation from July 2013. The policymakers at UN Headquarters drafted the type of the Mission for Mali very carefully, and had drawn forces from the member states from various parts of the world and put them into counter-terrorism tasks, whereas main job of peacekeepers should be to protect a peace deal.

There was a report in Washington Post that diplomats were debating at New York Headquarters and around the world: Should UN forces be engaged in counter-terrorism tasks at all? And it is to be noted that this was just a beginning of such type of missions, which we might have to undertake in countries like Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and many other parts of the world. And the concern was, whether Bangladesh political leadership was at all aware of the fact that the country was

sending her boys to the Counter-terrorism Tasks, rather than to classical Peacekeeping Operations?

In the same report it was mentioned that in 2015, a panel of UN appointed experts said that peacekeeping forces were "not the appropriate tool for military counter-terrorism operations". But it noted that, they do deploy in areas threatened by armed extremist groups, and as such "and must be capable of operating effectively and as safely as possible therein".

In a recent broadcast the AL JAZEERA television mentioned that in Mali, ICRC did describe the United Nations peacekeepers as a "Party to the Conflict". If you become party to the conflict, you cannot work effectively as peacekeeper because your neutrality will be in question. This was exactly the perception of the population residing in the north of Mali. While they appreciated Bangladeshi peacekeepers for their good behavior and humanitarian work, they questioned at the same time: Why were they protecting Malian government? Though it was their mandated task.

A quick glance of the resolution 2295 (2016) concerning the situation in Mali gives an impression that MINUSMA has not yet achieved the required capabilities, as such, the Security Council has urged the Secretary General to take all necessary steps to enable MINUSMA to reach its full operational capacity without further delay.

The key questions that can be raised are: 1) Did MOFA and related organization carry out an in-depth study and assess the operational requirements of the mission before committing troops for UN? 2) Did we make a correct TO&E for undertaking counter-terrorism tasks that was required in MALI? 3) Did we select the right manpower for filling up the TO&E? 4) Had they been adequately briefed in details about the situation in MALI and trained to undertake the tasks? 5) Had we given them proper arms and equipment to meet the impending threat? 6) Does our constitution allow deployment of troops outside the country for counter-terrorism tasks rather than classical peacekeeping operations? 7) What about the Countries' representation in regard to the opportunities that the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali had provided for Bangladesh? 8) Was it for the armed forces only to participate? Why did other organizations not participate, as it offered opportunities? 9) Did MOFA bid for the Countries' representations in other branches of MINUSMA like Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, Women Affairs, Human Rights, Legal Affairs, Election Conducting & Monitoring Team, Civil Engineers, Climate Change expert, Media experts, NGOs, etc.? Addressing all these questions will give us the answer as to what we have done and what else we could do for effective peace keeping operations.

PROSPECTS

The opportunities that are provided in UN Mission in Iraq and Namibia are visible now. It started with simple observer mission; now we have experienced Force Commanders, Sector

Commanders, Contingent Commanders and thousands of troops who have toiled day and night to raise our flag high in the trouble spots of different parts of the world under UN umbrella. Over a period of last two and half decades we have been the leading nation in Peacekeeping Operations for a number of times. Currently we are the 4th largest troops contributing country. Apart from its contribution to national economy, this soft power of us has portrayed Bangladesh to world community quite differently; which is something other than a cyclone/natural disaster-prone country of bad politics, or a country of champions in corruption.

The prospect of UN peacekeeping operation is visibly clear as one keeps an eye on the print and electronic media. The UN has to conduct a number of complex multi dimensional stabilization missions in different parts of the world in coming days. Possibly this may be the reason as to why the UN has selected "Investment in Peace" to be the main theme of this year's UN Peacekeeping Day, that was celebrated on 29 May 2017. Keeping this in mind, the nation should invest more time, energy, money and resources for UN Peacekeeping Operations, so that our boys sent abroad can meet the demands of multi-dimensional and complex nature of peacekeeping operations, and our hard-earned image remains intact.

Bangladesh must appreciate that it has a huge strength which is yet to be capitalized on. Bangladesh had been the partner of peace with many countries of the world. Unfortunately, the partnership of peace was not extended to partnership for development, which is a dire necessity for a sustainable peace in a country that has just recovered from a civil war. Bangladesh has a vast hardworking population, farmers, garment and real estate workers; thousands of experienced peacekeepers from armed forces, police and civilian staffs; has the experience of sweeping mines and rebuilding Kuwait, has the largest NGOs of the world experienced in working in different parts of the globe, a rising and experienced business community, whose combined effort can formulate a viable strategy for future peacekeeping operation in any country in trouble, which will be beneficial for Bangladesh as well. Above all, Bangladesh is a great example of a nation standing on its own feet from scratch after a bloody War of Liberation. Therefore, Bangladesh should develop a holistic peacekeeping strategy and offer UN as a package to deliver at each and every phase of peacekeeping operation from chaos to stability, stability to peace and peace to prosperity through a sustainable development activity in any troubled country. That is where our diplomats, policymakers and business leaders need to work, and that is how we can contribute more effectively towards future peace keeping operations and remain as a role model before the entire world.

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