

# **AN OVERVIEW OF CAPSTONE COURSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

## **Introduction**

1. Many wonder what the Capstone Course is all about? Who all are the participants and how they are selected? What are the types of education imparted to them? What is the modus operandi? And many related questions. As per the Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, one of the meanings of Capstone is "the best and final thing that somebody achieves, thought of as making their career or life complete".<sup>1</sup> Thus Capstone Course stands for top level learning, experiencing and achieving professionalism, meant for students or professionals who have already received graduation / gathered experience on particular arena of knowledge and need to integrate learnt knowledge and professionalism. The Course is also meant for top-level officials from the upper strata of the nation, who contribute to the state functioning and policy making.

2. Worldwide the course is being offered from different perspectives, not only in military arena but also in civil educational institutions. However, there is a gulf of differences between Capstone Course conducted in military and civil institutions. Capstone Military Leadership Programme Offered in the National Defense University of USA, is a joint service professional military education course for newly promoted Brigadier Generals and Rear Admirals serving in the United States military.<sup>2</sup> In Pakistan, in the name of National Security Workshop (NSW) a Capstone endeavour is made, and that is conducted in National Defence University (NDU) since 2003.<sup>3</sup> Similar Courses are also conducted in NATO Defence College, Italy and at RCDS of UK but in different names and magnitude.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Other meaning of Capstone is "A stone which caps or crowns" (as per The Oxford English Dictionary, Volume II, C)".

<sup>2</sup> "Capstone Overview / Policies, National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., 29 June 2012", available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capstone\\_Military\\_Leadership\\_Program](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capstone_Military_Leadership_Program), accessed on 15 May 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis (ISSRA), National Security Workshop", available at [http://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/courses\\_issra\\_nsw.php](http://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/courses_issra_nsw.php), accessed on 15 May 2015.

## **Capstone Course in National Defence College (NDC), Bangladesh**

3. In Bangladesh, the Capstone Course on National Security and Strategic Studies at NDC is designed to impart advance knowledge, skills and networks related to multilateral security cooperation in Bangladesh among senior law / policy makers, security-practitioners, judges, executives, civil society representatives and other distinguished personalities of the society. The course intends to disseminate a common understanding of national security, stimulate strategic analysis and understanding of major security trends and challenges of the century taking into account both internal dynamics and the external influences.<sup>4</sup> The course aims at encouraging selected participants to discuss and debate on subjects which are relevant to update their knowledge on various elements of national power for development and governance of the country and how those national interests are safeguarded through inter or multiagency cooperation. During the discourse, endeavours are made to create ideas to enhance capacity building, conflict resolution and crises management for both internal and external matters on security and development related activities.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the course is designed to encourage enhancing individual leadership skill in critical thinking, communication, cooperation, collaboration and decision making in complex and critical security environment. Therefore, the aim of the course is to enable higher level leadership / elites of various strata / segments of the society to have common understanding of major national challenges connected to security and development of Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup>

### **Course Objectives**

4. Following objectives are intended to achieve from the Capstone Course conducted in NDC, Bangladesh<sup>7</sup>:

- a. Help the higher level management to understand the constitutional responsibilities in safeguarding the core national interests of the country.

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<sup>4</sup> Brochure of National Defence College, Bangladesh; published in 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

- b. Help participants develop their understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of national security.
- c. Examine security trends and challenges within the country, region and study problems of security co-operation between different stakeholders.
- d. Help the higher level management to understand development strategies, impediments and preconditions for sustainable development in the context of Bangladesh.
- e. To promote mutual understanding and confidence amongst policy planners and other members of the community including media to generate synergy in collective accomplishments.

### **Course Duration and Curriculum**

5. Capstone is an intense two-week course conducted in NDC since 2010. The course is designed to have four different modules. Each module includes lectures / presentations followed by discussion / interactive session on different selected topics. Different Modules and likely subjects / topics are as follows<sup>8</sup>:

- a. **Module – 1: Bangladesh as a Sovereign State**. This module is designed to provide a comprehensive insight into the constitution, evaluation and future of the constitution, pillars of national power and core national interests of Bangladesh as a nation state. Following topics preferably be discussed:
  - (1) Bangladesh and its Constitution.
  - (2) Foreign Policy Vision for Bangladesh and Concept of Security.
  - (3) Military System of Bangladesh.
  - (4) Civil-Military Relations: Bangladesh Perspective.

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<sup>8</sup> Mentioned topics are tentatively selected. All topics may not be put into the course curriculum based on the time availability. Moreover, new topic / issue may be chosen for the discussion basing on the situation and its requirement.

b. **Module – 2: Governance and Development**. This study is planned to provide opportunity to look for relationship of economic activities with national governance, security issues, and study influence of globalization on sustainable development. In this study / Module following topics are covered:

- (1) Sustainable Development - Concept for Bangladesh.
- (2) National Capacity Development.
- (3) Prospect & Challenges of Blue Economy.
- (4) Policy Formulations and Governance.
- (5) Issues related to Water Resources: Bangladesh Perspective.

c. **Module – 3: National Security and Strategy**. This study focuses on subjects related to internal and external threats to Bangladesh which are likely to facilitate the policymakers in formulating comprehensive national security policy. Following topics are generally considered:

- (1) Threats to National Security and National Security Strategy.
- (2) Other Actors Affecting National Security.
- (3) Geo-strategy, Geopolitics and Geo-economics of Bangladesh.
- (4) Non-traditional Security Challenges.
- (5) Maritime Security Challenges: Bangladesh Perspective.

d. **Module – 4: Higher Management and Decision Making**. This study mainly focuses on strategic management, higher level decision making and understanding of time-event relationship and timely management of national level crisis with prudence. Topics planned to discuss in this module are as follows:

- (1) Decision Making System in Bangladesh.
- (2) Higher Management and Functioning of the Election Commission to Conduct Elections in a Developing Democracy.
- (3) De-limitation of Maritime Boundary: Bangladesh Perspective.
- (4) Higher Management and Decision Making.

6. The course curriculum is quite broad with pedagogy ranging from classroom interaction to field visit. Therefore, the course curriculum incorporates visits to Armed Forces Division, Army, Navy and Air Force installations in different cantonments / bases. Visits and close interactions outside the classroom environment during the course are designed to strengthen mutual relationship, confidence building and mutual understanding. To create an academically rewarding environment, country's well recognized scholars in the respective fields are invited to have interactions and share their views with the Fellows<sup>9</sup>.

7. The Capstone Fellows need to have moderate personal involvement in the course through participation in discussions. There are ample opportunities for each Fellow to share their experiences and expertise with other members. Formal writing, presentation or research assignments are yet to include in the course curriculum. Based on the programme of study, required reading materials are provided to all the Fellows by NDC that involve light to modest reading which help participants for in-depth discussions. Fellows' length of experience, habitually gained in important and sensitive positions / appointments, qualifies them to serve as role models, to understand and interpret national / international events and security issues, and to provide insights which are not readily available from other sources. During the Course, Fellows get adequate scope to analyze the national challenges / issues. Opportunities are also accommodated to discuss various burning issues / ideas / concepts. This gives chance to the Fellows of different backgrounds to find joint, interagency, and multi-department capabilities, and discuss how these capabilities are best integrated to accomplish national objectives of Bangladesh.

8. All lectures / presentations and discussions at Capstone Course are protected by the NDC's non-attribution policy. As a result of this policy, nothing a speaker or a Fellow of the course says during a lecture and interactive sessions which is attributed to the speakers and Fellows directly or indirectly in the presence of anyone who is not authorized to attend the session. This policy is morally binding on everyone that includes

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<sup>9</sup> Participants of the Capstone Course are referred to as 'Fellows' perhaps because of the participants are top level policy-planners with special expertise and qualifications.

the guest speakers, Fellows, Senior Directing Staff<sup>10</sup>, officers / personnel associated with the course.

### **Selection Criterion of Participants**

9. An arrangement is made to accommodate 30 – 35 Fellows for the course, though it was bounded by maximum 20 participants in 2010, when the course was introduced for the first time. NDC is authorized by Prime Minister's Office (Armed Forces Division) to correspond and liaison with different ministries to nominate participants from different strata as appended below<sup>11</sup>:

- a. Parliamentarians.
- b. Bureaucrats / Technocrats (Secretaries and equivalent).
- c. Senior Military Officers (Major General and equivalent from other services).
- d. Senior Judges.
- e. Senior Lawyers of High Court / Supreme Court.
- f. Eminent Educationalist (Professor of Public & Private Universities).
- g. Business Leaders / CEOs / Industrialists.
- h. Journalists (Chief Editor, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) / Deputy CEO, Managing Director (MD) / Deputy MD both from electronic and print Media).
- j. Non - Government Organization Representatives.
- k. Senior Doctors (Policy Planning level).
- l. Engineers (Chief Engineer at Policy Planning level).
- m. Senior Police Officer (Not below the rank of Additional Inspector General).
- n. Banking and Financial Sector Leaders.
- p. Honorary Consul / Consul General.

Based on the prerequisite, concerned ministries recommend the names of potential Fellows to NDC, and in turn NDC gets those approved from AFD.

### **Course Evaluation**

<sup>10</sup> Senior Directing Staff is an appointment of Faculty at NDC, deeply involve with the course curriculum of National Defence Course.

<sup>11</sup> Projected allotment of vacancies for different ministries and departments acts as a guide-line and likely to vary.

10. Regularly NDC conducts evaluation of Capstone Course since its inception in regards of usefulness, course curricula, duration, management system, participants and other related issues. So far, 144 participants successfully completed the course from NDC, details are appended below:

**Capstone Course from 2010 - 2015**

Ser	Category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1.	Parliamentarians	07	04	06	03	06	06	32
2.	Senior Military Officers (Maj Gen and equivalent)	03	04	04	03	04	04	22
3.	Bureaucrats/ Technocrats (Secretaries and equivalent)	01	02	02	02	04	05	16
4.	Senior Judges	02	02	02	-	-		06
5.	Senior Journalists	02	-	02	01	03	02	10
6.	Non Government Organization Representatives	-	02	02	02	02	02	10
7.	Engineers (Chief Engineer at Policy Planning level)	-	01	01	01	01	01	05
8.	Senior Doctors (Policy Planning level)	-	-	01	01	-	01	03
9.	Eminent Educationalist (Professor of Public & Private Universities)	-	-	-	01	02	02	05
10.	Business Leaders / CEOs / Industrialists	02	01	03	02	06	06	20
11.	Senior Police Officer	-	01	01	01	01	01	05
12.	Senior Lawyers of High Court/Supreme Court	-	02	01	-	-	-	03
13.	Head/Senior representative from Government Autonomous Institution	-	-	-	-	-	02	02
14.	Honorary Consul/ Consul General	-	-	-	-	02	02	04
15.	Dir Gen from Ministry of Foreign Affairs	-	-	-	-	01	-	01
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>144</b>

Source: Briefing of National Defence College

11. On completion of 6<sup>th</sup> course, evaluation pointing is very high with positive result. Many alumni expressed deep satisfaction on the outcome of the course. The course becomes milestone for giving common but diversified understanding on national security affairs. It is very much educative, beneficiary and act as eye-opener for many participants

in regards of many security issues of the nation. The two-week intense interactive course brings the Fellows of different segments in a single platform to work for common goal. Developed interpersonal relationship help comprehend joint, interagency, and multinational capabilities and how these capabilities are best integrated to attain national security.

### **Capstone / Similar Course in Other Institutions**

12. Capstone / Similar courses or programmes of studies are conducted all over the world both in military and civil institutions. Military institutions' curricula are of analogous in nature. Some aspects of Capstone / similar courses conducted in military institutions are appended below to make a comprehensive idea in relation with Capstone Course conducted at NDC, Bangladesh:

a. **National Defense University - Washington, DC.** National Defense University (NDU) of USA took two pilot programmes respectively in 1983, and in 1984 for the Generals and Flag officers, and was approved a permanent annual Capstone Course of eight weeks in duration.<sup>12</sup> In 1986, the course length reduced to six weeks and increased the frequency to two courses per year. In 2012, Capstone settled into a 5 week programme.<sup>13</sup> The course's focus is on the highest levels of strategy, integrating the elements of national power to achieve national security objectives. In particular, the Capstone course reinforces new General and Flag officer comprehension of joint matters and national security strategy needed for the remainder of an officer's career.<sup>14</sup> The overall objectives of General / Flag Officer education designed for the course are listed below:<sup>15</sup>

(1) Analyze the national security policy process, to include the integration of the instruments of national power in support of the national security and national military strategies.

(2) Enhance the understanding of and coordination for Joint Doctrine and the Joint Operational Art.

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<sup>12</sup> Capstone Overview / Policies, National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., 29 June 2012, *Op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



- (3) Comprehend Service, joint, interagency, and multinational capabilities and how these capabilities are best integrated to attain national security objectives.
- (4) Comprehend how joint, service, and multinational battle space systems are integrated in support of theater strategies.
- (5) Comprehend the impact of defense acquisition programs and policies and their implications for enhancing joint military capabilities.
- (6) Analyze the relationship between the military and cabinet-level departments, Congress, National Security Council, Department of Defence agencies, and the public.

b. **National Defence University - Pakistan.** In the name of National Security Workshop (NSW) a capstone endeavour is made, and is conducted in NDU, Islamabad since 2003.<sup>16</sup> NSW is aimed at enabling the senior leadership from various segments of the society in understanding national security issues and policy formulation processes. Participants of NSW form a unique blend of notables including politicians / parliamentarians, senior civil and military officers and prominent members from the civil society. The scope of this workshop embodies threadbare discussion on fundamentals and attributes of strategy and statecraft, their relevance to Pakistan's security, elements of National Power and their impact on national interests, impact of socio-political environment and economy on National Security, role of Pakistan's Foreign Policy, role of Military Power in National Security and the formulation of Defence Policy and National Security Policy in the context of comprehensive security.<sup>17</sup> The aim of the course is to provide a platform to senior leaders from various segments of society for discussing national security issues.<sup>18</sup> The scope of NSW embodies:

- (1) To study the evolving dimensions of international, regional and domestic environment, take cognizance of the trends, identify the major drivers of change and understand the impact of different policy initiatives on the security of Pakistan.

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<sup>16</sup> Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis (ISSRA), National Security Workshop, *Op.cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

- (2) To understand the intrinsic and environmental driven challenges and opportunities for Pakistan, analyse policy options to mitigate challenges and capitalise on the opportunities to realise its potentials and stand tall in the comity of nations.
- (3) To study the concept of comprehensive national security, understand its different dimensions, process of national security policy formulation in some of the major countries and Pakistan.
- (4) To exercise participants in formulation of National Security Policy in the current international, regional and domestic environment with a view to consolidate understanding acquired during the workshop and hone their analytical and leadership skills.
- (5) Visit the provincial capitals (Governors, Secretariats & State Institutions), Services Headquarters, Strategic Plans Division and Defence Industry to gain firsthand knowledge of the organizational and structural aspects and gauge the effectiveness of policies and strategies in operation.

The workshop concludes with an exercise aimed at providing practical exposure to the participants in formulation of National Security Policy.

c. **Air University, USA.** The University's 'APEX' programme is conducted essentially for the civilian counterpart to the military's 'Capstone' programme, and is targeted to the Department's senior civilians and senior political appointees.<sup>19</sup> The objective of the APEX orientation course is to improve the newly appointed executive's effectiveness on the job through enhanced leadership and decision making strategies, an increased understanding of the Department's structure and processes critical to its operation, and by fostering a sense of jointness.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Strategic Leadership Studies", available at <http://leadership.au.af.mil/sls-link.htm>, accessed on 15 May 2015.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

d. **NATO Defence College - Italy.** NATO Defence College conducts number of courses having similarity with the Capstone Programmes. Some of those are as follows:

(1) **The Senior Course**<sup>21</sup>. The Senior Course (SC) is the College's core business. Senior Course's Study contents are the Global Security Environment, International Organizations, NATO: Present and Future, Global Security Challenges, Regional Issues, Regional Approaches, Crisis Management etc.

(2) **Modular Short Course**<sup>22</sup>. Modular Short Course (MSC) is conducted in conjunction with the SC, each MSC is designed to both inform and stimulate. They give participants the opportunity to improve their knowledge and develop their understanding of some of the key political, economic, socio-cultural, defence and security related issues which may have worldwide implications for global and Alliance security.

(3) **Generals, Flag Officers and Ambassadors' Course (GFOAC)**<sup>23</sup>. This high-level course seeks to enhance mutual understanding of security concerns and of NATO's interests and capabilities among Generals and Flag Officers and high-ranking civilians including ambassadors. It also provides opportunities for networking among one- to three-star officers and civilians of equivalent rank.

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<sup>21</sup> "NATO Defense College", available at <http://www.ndc.nato.int/education/courses.php?icode=9>, accessed on 16 May 2015.

<sup>22</sup> "NATO Defense College", available at <http://www.ndc.nato.int/education/courses.php?icode=13>, accessed on 16 May 2015.

<sup>23</sup> "NATO Defense College", available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO\\_Defense\\_College](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Defense_College), accessed on 16 May 2015.

(4) **Senior Executive Regional Course (SERC)**<sup>24</sup>. The current 10-week course is dedicated to NATO member states and their partners in the Mediterranean and the Gulf (NATO Regional Cooperation Course - NRCC). It allows representatives of the countries and organizations to meet regularly with their counterparts from NATO countries. Experts and prominent speakers address a different topic on each day of the programme, covering the major geopolitical changes that are affecting NATO and its partners.

e. **Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.** Defence Academy of the United Kingdom conducts two course of this nature. These are Defence Strategic Leadership Programme (DSLPL) and Collaborative Strategic Leadership Programme (CSLP).<sup>25</sup> The DSLP provides an opportunity for participants to assess their performance as a leader and manager, exploring the challenges they will face leading in the strategic environment, irrespective of their current employment area. The aim is to enhance strategic Leadership and management at both the corporate and strategic level across defence.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, CSLP is unique in focusing on leadership within the context of National Security. As such, all participants need to have experience of work in the sphere of National Security. The aim of CSLP is to improve the coherence, capabilities and performance of the national security community through the means of common leadership development.<sup>27</sup>

13. From the above discussion or case study, it is distinct that all over the world issues like National Security, Strategic studies and related affairs are given due importance and considerations at policy planning level. Though the learning objectives, scope, duration varies from institution to institution but main theme and broader aim of National Security in different form is kept in the main agenda and forefront. It is praiseworthy and a wise decision and effort of the authority to introduce Capstone Course for the top- brass policy

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> “Defence Academy of the United Kingdom”, available at <http://www.da.mod.uk/Courses/Course-Details/Course/275>, accessed on 16 May 2015.

<sup>26</sup> “Defence Academy of the United Kingdom”, available at <http://www.da.mod.uk/Courses/Course-Details/Course/121>, accessed on 16 May 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

planners in Bangladesh with the aim of achieving similar objectives of other world recognized military institutions.

### **Recommendations**

14. From all corners and especially from the stakeholders, the course's utility is very positive. NDC earns praiseworthy reputation by conducting this course and contributing tremendously in national interest. However, to reach further perfection following suggestions may be taken into consideration:

- a. The course duration may be increased from two weeks to four weeks. Therefore, some more related issues would be put into the syllabus for discussions. It may be mentioned here that after the course most of the Fellows opine the same.
- b. To give scope to more participants / policy makers; annually instead of one, two courses may be conducted.
- c. With the existing modules and topics some additional subjects may be included like Judiciary system of Bangladesh; Fundamentals and attributes of strategy and statecraft; Formulation of national security policy and defence policy; Elements of National power and their impact on national interest; Impact of socio-political environment and economy on national security.

### **Conclusion**

15. Capstone Course or similar courses in different names are conducted both in civil and military institutions with diverse or similar magnitude and objectives. Basically, Capstone indicates top level learning, meant for students or professionals who have already received graduation / gathered experience and need to integrate learnt knowledge and professionalism. In Bangladesh, the Capstone Course on National Security and Strategic Studies at NDC is designed to advance knowledge, skills and networks related to multilateral security cooperation in Bangladesh among senior law /

policy makers, security- practitioners, judges, executives, civil society representatives and other distinguished personalities of the society. Therefore, the aim of Capstone Course conducted in Bangladesh is to enable higher level leadership / elites of various strata / segments of the society to have common understanding of major national challenges connected to security and development of Bangladesh.

16. The two-week course conducted in NDC, Bangladesh since 2010 are designed to have four different modules, each including lectures / presentations followed by discussion / interactive session on different selected topics. Subjects of different modules are Bangladesh as a Sovereign State, Governance and Development, National Security and Strategy, Higher Management and Decision Making. The course curriculum is quite broad with pedagogy ranging from classroom interaction to field visit. To create an academically rewarding environment, country's well recognized scholars in the respective fields are invited to have interactions and share their views with the Fellows. The Capstone Fellows need to have moderate personal involvement in the course through participation in discussions. On completion of 6<sup>th</sup> course, evaluation pointing is very high with positive result. It is very much educative, beneficiary and act as eye-opener for many participants in regards of many security issues of the nation.

17. National Defense University (NDU) of USA conducts Capstone Course since 1983 and presently it's a course of five-week duration. The course's focus is on the highest levels of strategy, integrating the elements of national power to achieve national security objectives. In NDU of Pakistan, a capstone endeavour is made in the name of National Security Workshop (NSW) since 2003. NSW is aimed at enabling the senior leadership from various segments of the society in understanding national security issues and policy formulation processes. Participants of NSW includes politicians / parliamentarians, senior civil and military officers and prominent members from the civil society. In Air University of USA the 'APEX' programme is conducted essentially for the civilian counterpart to the military's 'Capstone' programme, and is targeted to the Department's senior civilians and senior political appointees. NATO Defence College conducts number of courses having similarity with the Capstone Programmes. Some of those are: The Senior Course; Modular Short Course; Generals, Flag Officers and Ambassadors' Course (GFOAC); Senior Executive Regional Course. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom

also conducts two courses of this nature. These are DSLP and CSLP. The aim of DSLP is to enhance strategic Leadership and management at both the corporate and strategic level across defence. On the contrary, CSLP is unique in focusing on leadership within the context of National Security.

18. Capstone Course has, by now created a positive impression and contributing positively in all sectors in our country in terms of national security and development. Therefore, its magnitude in relation to duration, number of courses in a year and inclusion of some more subjects may be taken into consideration. NDC will stand ever high by contributing for the nation through providing Capstone education to more Fellows.

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