

NON-TRADITIONAL MILITARY THREATS TO SECURITY: CHALLENGES FOR BANGLADESH

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INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus in Bangladesh over what constitutes a major threat to its national security. Security analysts suggest that internal threats are more significant than external ones. Lower level socio-political cohesion, feeble resource base, demographical pressure, periodical natural calamities, etc. are the inherent weaknesses of Bangladesh. Coupled with these, social conflicts, armed violence, alarming escalation of weapons and explosives, smuggling of drugs and nexus of politics and violence are the challenges that have moved to the top of our security agenda.

Presently a large number of illegal weapons are possessed by organised crime gangs due to which there is a gradual increase in militant activities in the society. Elements of under-ground left leaning political parties operating in south-western districts also possess considerable number of illegal weapons. Although these under-ground elements have lost their appeal as a political alternative, presently they sustain themselves by resorting to organised crimes and extortion. Similarly, some militant Islamic organisations are also reportedly in possession of lethal weapons and are engaged in armed violence and militant training in different areas of the country. The insurgents of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) were recipients of large quantity of weapons from abroad. While some of these weapons were handed over to the government during the Peace Accord of 1997, a large number of these have been kept aside in caches, some of which have gone to different criminal gangs. Insurgent groups of the North East (NE) states of India and Southwestern tip of Myanmar (especially Rohingyas) are also active in the vicinity of our border.

There has been an increase in shooting and killing incidents along Bangladesh-India border in recent years. Dispute over cultivation right in un-demarcated stretches of the border, extraction of stones from the disputed areas along mid stream river boundary, border crossing of illegal migrants and rampant smuggling often induce shooting/ killing of poor people and border skirmishes. Bangladesh is also confronted with tremendous rise in drug abuse

and the abundance of cross border drug supply. With the rise of narcotics related crime and offences, the law and order situation has deteriorated significantly in recent times. The alleged piracy in Bangladesh's maritime territories has affected negatively not only the country's image internationally but also its largely sea-dependent trade. International Maritime Bureau (IMB) puts Bangladesh as 'one of the most dangerous *points of the world*'¹ due to repeated and ill motivated publicity of piracy related incidents over the last few years.

Individuals, groups, society and the nation as a whole are frequently afflicted directly or indirectly by aforesaid ethnic, religious ideological conflicts and socio-economic violence. All these issues being dependent on arms have military implications, though not in traditional senses. These are non-traditional security issues, yet over the years gained more prominence. Keeping the same in consideration, it is pertinent to raise certain questions: What are the sources of non-traditional military threats to our security? What are the reasons for rapid expansion of violent crimes in the society and whether those have any link with the escalation of arms? What are the impacts of such non-traditional military threats on individual, society and the nation as a whole? Finally, what are the measures that the government and the society can take to enhance the nations capacity to deal with such non-traditional military threats?

Keeping in perspective the foregoing questions the purpose of this study would be to analyze the current and potential security concern of Bangladesh emanating from non-traditional military threats within the conceptual framework of non-traditional security. An attempt will be made to identify the issues pertaining to non-traditional military threats, conditions/causes that lead to the escalation of armed violence, their linkage with arms and drugs and the possible nexus among the criminal gangs, police and unscrupulous politicians. The study will also look into the impact of all these elements on individual, societal and national security and suggest some measures to address such security challenges.

1. 'Pirates rule the Bay', *The New Age*, November 03, 2003.

CONCEPT OF NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS TO SECURITY IN BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

The concept of 'national security' had purely military and defence connotation after Second World War. It was intimately linked with the 'traditional' thinking of security concept and seemed to be appropriate for the Cold War period. Since the end of Cold War the concept of security has gradually been changed. In the post Cold War period we witnessed the emergence of inevitable process of globalisation and multi-dimensional threats to security, which have very little relevance to 'traditional' military power. Today, the non-military threats arising out of cross border insurgency, border skirmishes, ethnic conflicts, proliferation of small arms, drug trafficking, ideological differences, political instability, social degeneration, nexus among criminals, police and politicians, environmental degradation, etc. impinge more upon the over all security of a nation. This transformation of the concept of security basically denotes a broad shift of concept from traditional 'state and military' centric to the 'people' centric security'.² Presently 'security means protecting people's life from various kinds of threats'.³ Basing on this security connotation it is important to identify the threats that we are currently exposed to and likely threats that we might have to encounter in foreseeable future. Much of the threats to our national security stem from perennial internal problems and even many of the external problems virtually crop up because of our inability to address the internal ones. Today a nation like ours can be said to have assured its own security when it is economically developed, politically stable and socio-culturally cohesive. For us, establishment of internally secured political order, mitigation of social deprivation, addressing the grievances of ethnic/minority community, etc. are the essential preconditions for cohesion of the society and national stability. However, this socio-economic approach to security cannot be taken to undermine the other dimensions of it, particularly issues related to the protection of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. We cannot forego the need for a credible deterrence and ' must be prepared to deter the prospect of physical security threat whatever be the source'.⁴

2. Azim, Lieutenant Commander, Kazi Mesbahul, 'Non-Military Threats to Security of Bangladesh', *Mirpur Papers*, December 2001, p.3

3. Quoted in Khan, Muhammad Shahedul Anam, 'Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century' in *National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century*, ed, Kabir, Mohammad Humayun, p.16

4. *Ibid.*, p.18

SOURCES OF INSECURITY EMANATING FROM NON TRADITIONAL MILITARY THREATS: CONCERN FOR BANGLADESH

Bangladesh, as a small third world developing country, faces wide range of non-traditional military threats of serious nature to her security. The current and projected non-traditional military threats are appended below:

Threats From Non-Traditional Military Sources

External

Trans-border Insurgency
and Border Skirmishes
Arms Smuggling
Drug Trafficking
International Terrorism

Internal

Ethnic Issue

Socio-Economic Violence
Ideological Violence
Piracy

External Threats

Trans- border Insurgency and Border Skirmishes. The trans-border security dimension of insurgency in CHT arises from the fact that NE states of India and Arakan state of Myanmar are infested with chronic insurgency. This has the potentiality of spill over effects across the state boundaries and in the process it may lead to a straining of inter- state relations with serious security implications. The CHT insurgency could develop so much due to the fact that it received full external support of big neighbour. Similarly, India and Myanmar often accuse Bangladesh of harbouring insurgents of respective countries. When the contiguous ethnic groups draw material and moral support from each other, the domestic insurgency gradually may acquire a trans-border character and likely to deteriorate inter-state relationship. On the other hand, due to India's decision to erect barbed wire fencing along the zero line, illegal border crossing and unresolved border disputes, border skirmishes and shooting incidents frequently take place along indo-Bangladesh border. Records from Bangladesh Rifles authority show that more than 150 Bangladeshis have been killed in border shoot out from July 2002 to April 2005.

Arms Smuggling. For quite sometime it had been alleged that Bangladesh is a transit route for illegal weapons, whatever may be its destination. The massive seizure of modern arms and ammunition at Chittagong Urea and Fertilizer Factory Limited (CUFFL) jetty on the night of 1st and 2nd April 2004 have jolted us into realising that how vulnerable the country has become to subversive activities of arms dealers. The location of our territory adjacent to insurgency-laden neighbourhoods makes for vulnerability as an arms conduit in the region. Our low surveillance status might have made us into favourite transit route for arms trafficking. It may be mentioned here that there had been arms and ammunition haul at Bogra in June 2003, at Uttara, Dhaka in October 2003 and at Kuril, Dhaka in November 2003.⁵ In all, there were 25 major arms smuggling incidents in 2003-2004 and the motive of any of such incidents could not yet be unearthed. The sooner the authority get the answers "for whom, by whom and from whom" of the seized weapons, the better it will be for our over all security".⁶ 'Easy access to these weapons, criminalisation of the society, the socio-economic violence, nexus of guns and drugs, truck between the criminals and politicians have all had their respective inputs in the situation obtain today in Bangladesh'.⁷

Drugs Trafficking. Geographically Bangladesh is located at the heart of the drug-producing region- in the east the golden triangle, in the north the golden wedge and in the west across India the golden crescent. Bangladesh has direct air, sea and road communications with the major drug producing countries in the region. Its multiple communications with the poppy growing countries has made Bangladesh a major consumer and geographical crossroads for illicit drugs from Myanmar, India, Pakistan and Nepal. As a result of this development Paris based Interpol organization in 1996 suggested that roughly 5% of world drug trafficking is 'routed through Bangladesh'.⁸

5. Zamir Muhammad, 'Arms smuggling must be stopped', *The Daily Star*, April 01, 2004.

6. Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brig Gen (Retd), 'Chittagong Arms Haul: ome queries', *The Daily Star*, April 05, 2004.

7. Quoted in Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brigadier General' *The Menace of Small Arms and Light Weapons: Challenges for Bangladesh*', paper prepared for National Consultation on '*Small Arms and South Asia: Challenges for Bangladesh*', Organised by BISS and South Asia Partnership on February 12, 2001, p.6

8. Haq, M. Emdadul, Prof 'International Drug Traffickers and Security Concerns in Bangladesh', *The Daily Star*, December 06,m 2003, P.1

This has led a big number of our youth to become drug addicts and compelled them to engage in criminal activities. 'Possession of illegal weapons by drug traffickers is contributing to the spread of fear and violence making the overall social condition vulnerable'.⁹

International Terrorism. International terrorism around the world is gradually increasing despite concerted efforts against it. Since it is not confined to any geographical area, we can't expect to remain immune to it. Though there is no substantial evidence of international terrorism in Bangladesh yet it is argued that there are some extremists who are engaged in terrorist activities in Bangladesh. These extremists consist of persons from religious or leftist groups. Besides, there are millions of unemployed youths who are currently engaged in criminal activities and violence in the name of ideological struggle. There is also thousands of Quowmi Madrasa students who have practically very limited employment opportunities. These people have the potentials to become terrorists unless appropriate measures are taken to generate enough employment opportunities for them. The recent incidents of bomb blasts in various places of the country are a matter of great security concern for Bangladesh.

Internal Threats

Clashes between Indigenous and Migrant People. The CHT Peace Accord of 1997 has brought an end (at least theoretically) to the 23 years old insurgency, but the dispute over Bangalee settlement continues to remain. Tribal people viewed Bangalee settlers as their opponents due to the dispute over ownership of land and sharing of scarce resources. Bangalees have come under repeated attack from Shanti Bahini (SB) from the time of their settlement. For their survival they have also been organised and gained some capability to retaliate. Thus, it can be said that the armed violence in CHT is likely to continue till the time maximum of the weapons possessed by the insurgents/non-tribal are recovered and disputes over land use are settled.

Clashes between Insurgent Groups. After the signing of Peace Accord, factions of three hill organisations, which differed with Jono Shonghoti Shamity (JSS) on the Peace Accord, e.g. Pahari Chatra Porishod (PCP), Pahari Gono Porishod (PGP) and Hill Women Federation (HWF) formed a political party namely United Peoples Democratic Party (UPDF) and started working against the Peace Accord. Thereby, tribal leadership has been divided into two

9. Ibid., p.3

fractions i.e. Pro-Peace Accord Group (JSS) and Anti-Peace Accord Group (UPDF) Currently JSS and UPDF are carrying out killing and kidnapping the members of each other. Non-tribal people are also involved/ affected.

Violent Crimes conducted by Criminal Gangs. Killing, robbery, extortion, mugging, arson, etc. have been on the rise for quite sometime. Especially the syndicated criminal gangs who have made a haven of their own by flexing their guns and muscles throughout the country subject the life and property of the ordinary citizen to a great threat. The organised criminal gangs having sophisticated armouries, a well-organised multi-layered security perimeter and communication network, and alleged link with political godfathers are carrying out uninterrupted atrocities throughout the country. The situation has further been aggravated by the poor law enforcement by the concerned agency and in some cases by their direct involvement in extortion and other activities.¹⁰ However, the current operation of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) has brought some positive impact on law and order situation.

Killing by Under Ground Left Leaning Extremist Parties. While the whole country is witnessing proliferation of arms and lawlessness, the people of south-western districts are subjected to a special kind of insecurity. There, the underground left leaning extremist parties such as various factions of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) and Shorbohara Party are carrying out atrocities indiscriminately. Besides, there are some followers of PBCP (Jonajudha), and PBCP (Lal Pataka), who have links with Naxshalite movements in India and are operating in the southwestern districts. It has been learnt through different press that people of those areas are passing their days in panic due to the ever-rising terrorist activities.¹¹ The reports say that people have become hostage of different outlawed parties and are forced to pay toll under gun threat. If any one denies paying the fixed toll, his life is threatened. Besides, the outlawed parties are also engaged in inter-party fighting due to which a number of armed cadre have lost their lives in recent times. Almost everyday there are some reports of killings of armed cadres in those areas. The armed cadres also killed few police and prominent journalists.

Violence generated by Militant Religious Organisations. There has been an allegation that some extremist religious organisations are working in some part of Bangladesh. Notable among those are Hijbul Tawhid. There are other similar parties namely Harkat Ul Jihad al Islam, Jamiatul Mujahedin,

10. Rahman, S M Matiur, 'Crushing Crime Network', The Independent, March 09, 2004.

11. Editorial, The Independent, April 04, 2004.

Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh, Muslim Rakkha Mujahedin Dikhya Porishod, etc. It has been alleged that the bombing incidents at Udichi function, Paltan meeting, Ramna Botmul, Mymensing and Sylhet cinema hall, Mazar of Hazrat Shah Jalal (R), Hotel premise at Sylhet, etc. may have some links with extremist religious parties. The grenade attack on a political gathering on 21st August 2004, which killed approximately 20 and injured more than hundred, has been the most devastating incident.

Piracy. Chittagong, which handles 80% of Bangladesh's export, has been marked by IMB as world's second most vulnerable port to piracy. The types of piracy witnessed in Bangladesh is mainly seaway robbery and are usually conducted by smaller groups who rob the crews and depart quickly or at times steal valuable cargos and removable equipment of the ships. The ships operating in the Bay of Bengal have also suffered from some serious lethal pirate attacks as a result of which the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard conduct regular patrols around Chittagong port.¹² It has been reported that the pirates have some links with arms smugglers and drug traffickers and their combined actions pose a great threat to our national security. On the other hand, there are incidents of piracy along the coastline where the pirates loot the vessels carrying cargo. They also snatch away the cash and valuables belonging to the crews. The fishing trawlers are also the lucrative targets of the pirates. These incidents are the direct result of inadequacy of coastal police patrolling.

REASONS FOR THE RISE OF ARMED VIOLENCE

Spread of Small Arms. *'The small arms are being increasingly used as the final arbiter of unresolved issues between individuals, groups and political parties in Bangladesh today.'*¹³ The availability and use of weapons were first witnessed during our war of liberation. After the independence many decided to retain the weapons and ammunitions once call for surrender of their weapons were made. That was the beginning of proliferation of small arms in Bangladesh. Then, during the signing of CHT Peace Accord *'a sizable proportion of the SB members have not surrendered arms.'*¹⁴ Some of the weapons held by the insurgents had been reportedly sold to the criminals. Moreover, *'a string of large arms haul in recent times suggest that insurgent groups in South Asia are targeting Bangladesh as a transit point for gun running*

12. Arrow I Ltd, <http://www.arrowi.co.uk/Piracy.html>.

13. Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brigadier General (Retd), *op.cit*, p.5

14. Khan, Abdur Rob and Barai, Munim Kumar, 'Defence-Development Dilemma: The Bangladesh Perspective' in *National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century*, ed, Kabir, Mohammad Humayun, p.48

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not only because of its strategic location but also because CHT has 172 km porous border with India and Myanmar'. A considerable portion of these arms and ammunition finds its way into the local market is evident from the recent arms hauls by the security forces from different places. Criminal gangs rely entirely on the force of arms to exist. 'There are between one and two hundred thousands illegal arms in the country of which fifty thousands are in Dhaka city alone'.¹⁵

Ineffectiveness of Law Enforcing Agencies. It is alleged that the armed violence currently prevailing in the country is the product of ineffective police system. Every police station maintains a list of criminals, but most of the known criminals maintain liaison with the police of their own areas. Police usually are reluctant to take any action against the criminals for different reasons. Telephone calls from political godfathers frequently silence the police. On the other hand criminal gangs cannot continue their operation for long without giving the share of extorted money to the police. The ineffectiveness of law enforcing agencies also owe much to the lack of accountability, corruption down the chain of command, lack of modern arms and equipment, and non-availability of police force for actual law enforcement duties. 'Only 38% of the total force are actually involved in duties like prevention, detection and investigation of crimes, prosecution of criminals and maintenance of the law and order, which concerns the common men. The rest (62%) are engaged in various other activities, such as protection of VIPs and dignitaries, key point installations, escort and other miscellaneous functions'.¹⁶

Cross Border Linkage of Criminals. The criminal gangs of Bangladesh are reported to have good relations with the criminal gangs of neighbouring countries. The porous border provides an added advantage to the criminals to cross over the border after committing a crime to avoid arrest. Police authorities in West Bengal asserted that the kingpins of criminal gangs operating along Bangladesh border are based in Kolkata.¹⁷ During 'Joint Operation Clean Heart' many of the top terrorists crossed the border and took shelter in West Bengal. Kolkata police arrested some of them but they were not handed over to Bangladesh authority on flimsy ground. The privilege of having shelter across the border provides added advantage to the criminals to evade arrest and prosecution.

15. Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brigadier General (Retd), *op. cit.*, p.7

16. Husain, Neila, 'Small Arms and Violence in Bangladesh', in *National Security in Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century*, ed Kabir, Mahammad Humayun, p.170

17. Haq, M. Emdadul, Prof. 'International Drug Trafficking and Security Concerns in Bangladesh', *The Daily Star*, December 06, 2003.

Complicated and Prolonged Judicial System. Due to complicated and prolonged judicial system the criminals in most of the cases can evade punishment. This gives a carefree attitude to the terrorists. A case usually takes about ten to twenty years on average from date of filing to date of judgement. Due to unlimited delay and uncertainty about disposal of cases, involved criminals remain on bail and in turn lives of the victims become more vulnerable. It is reported that a total of ten million cases are now pending in different courts of the country. The criminals are aware that they can get away with any crime through the large holes in the net of judicial administration.

Nexus among Criminals, Police and Politicians. In Bangladesh, criminals are increasingly getting political patronage. 'Politicians directly or indirectly support and sponsor terrorism or engage themselves in criminal offence in order to come to power, remain in power, to take revenge or simply to get rid of an adversary. Hence, the politician's personal or party interest demands links with the criminal underworld'.¹⁸ The nexus between criminals and politicians is mutually beneficial. The criminal is ensured of political cover for his crimes and the politician's power base is assured by the muscle power of the criminals. On the other hand once the criminals are taken in police custody for any alleged crime, they immediately receive instructions from the political masters for their release. Taking advantage of such situation the corrupt police release the criminals reaping some financial benefits.

Extremist Movement. Many analysts feel that the rise of extremist movement and the violence generated by the extremists is due to a general change in peoples' attitude towards authority. It may also be called the only means available to a weaker group for fighting a stronger opponent. There is a requirement to study the political, ideological and economic factors - any of which may have provided the cause for the movement. Factors contributing to armed violence generated by the leftist extremist groups in the south-western districts may be attributed to the lack of dispensation of social justice, poverty, unemployment, inefficiency of the administration and law enforcing authority.

Inadequacy of Intelligence. To combat the criminal gangs and extremist cadres, the need for a reliable and timely intelligence is critical. If the intelligence is weak, the law enforcing agencies cannot act- they can only react. Penetration into the underworld environment and countering their activities need real time and accurate intelligence. For this, what is most important is better coordination amongst various intelligence agencies, closer and expanding

18. Husain, Neila, *op.cit.*, p.171

contacts with the local people where criminals or extremists meet and operate, background information, exploitation of the captured activists/criminals through speedy interrogation, etc. But unfortunately in our country these essential elements are very much missing. Resultantly, intelligence obtained is wasteful, being duplicated or is belated and quite often unreliable. The authority is yet to nab most of the culprits responsible for repeated bomb attacks, which has shaken the credibility of the intelligence agencies.

Cultural Degeneration. The kind of violence and obscenity currently shown in the movies and electronic media is largely responsible for the degeneration of social values and consequent increase in violent crimes in the society. 'Boma Hamla', 'Khaisi Tore', 'Dhor', etc. are the names of some recent movies, which can give little idea about their contents.

IMPACTS OF NON-TRADITIONAL MILITARY THREATS ON INDIVIDUAL, SOCIETAL AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Impact on Individual Security. 'In Bangladesh, there is a general apprehension that there is not enough of individual security. Such fear is obviously not unfounded. The recent rise of crimes, terrorism, and violence is the principal cause for such anxiety'.¹⁹ The recent incidents indicate that almost all categories of people are victims of 'organized' crime. 'While it is true that the prime targets are political opponents, businessmen, industrialists, etc. today's terrorists also target the common men, such as the poor trader, the hawker, the passer-by and so on'.²⁰

Impact on Societal Security. Bangladesh is a society where social inequalities and cleavages are prominently visible. On the one hand there is abject poverty pervading the society, and on the other there is acute inequity in the distribution of wealth in both urban and rural areas. The vast segment of lower-middle and low-income working class, the unemployed, the near or total landless peasants and destitute and disadvantaged in both rural and urban areas are leading a sub-human life. This very socio-economic condition prepares the base for criminal activities to flourish in a particular society. The possession of weapons by the criminals, coverage of crimes by the political masters and inaction on the part of the law enforcing agencies compel the society to suffer from helplessness, defencelessness and unprotectedness. When majority of the

19. Ibid, p.172

20. Ibid

people living in a particular society feel the same kind of vulnerability and insecurity, one can assume that in that particular environment there exists 'societal insecurity'.

Impact on National Security. The gradual rise of armed violence, extortion at gunpoint, murder and kidnapping for ransom are posing as a great threat to country's security. Nearly every section of the society is experiencing a fear of violence and a sense of insecurity. Truck drivers are killed and truck along with the cargo looted; minor girl and a BUET student have been killed in cross fire; leading businessmen have been kidnapped for ransom; journalists have been tortured and murdered - all these incidents together contribute towards poor law and order situation and political instability. *'Political instability, nexus of politics and violence, proliferation of small arms, etc. are all recipes for disaster and, unless addressed, will impact on our national security adversely'*.²¹ Possession of illegal weapons by the criminal gangs is contributing to the spread of fear and violence, making the overall social conditions vulnerable. On the other hand funnelling of drug money also can help trigger terrorism and organised crime and eventually can destabilise the political system. Today, violence and politics has become synonymous. In CHT, JSS and UPDF are kidnapping and killing each other through indiscriminate use of weapons. Shooting and killing of persons along Bangladesh-India border develop tension very often. Last, but not the least is the impact of piracy. The IMB designated Bangladesh second in world, which has affected negatively not only the country's image internationally but also its largely sea-dependent trade. However, according to our Shipping Minister *'such reports are nothing but a concerted propaganda by certain international quarters to tarnish the image of Bangladesh and thus create a pretext to increase freight charges'*.²² Again, for three years in a row, Transparency International has ranked Bangladesh as the country perceived to be the worlds most corrupt. Side by side there is a propaganda campaign being pursued by the interested quarter to depict Bangladesh as a 'fundamentalist infested and dysfunctional country'. The deterioration of law and order situation coupled with increased violence in the society, tensed border, the image crisis and the hostile propaganda campaign are posing threat to our 'national security'.

STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO COUNTER NON TRADITIONAL MILITARY THREATS AND IMPACTS

21. Khan, Muhammad Shahedul Anam, *op.cit.*, p.18

22. 'Pirates rule the Bay' *The New Age*, November 03, 2003.

Restructuring of Police Force. It has been pointed out through various discussions that the police force are ill supplied in terms of both manpower and equipment. It is said that the criminals have more sophisticated weapons than that of the police. The recent recovery of weapons in various places provides necessary proof to the said statement. All these prompted for an immediate police reform. Accordingly the Govt of Bangladesh (GOB) has taken decision to increase the police strength and allotted additional budget to procure vehicles and equipment. Age old .303 raffle is being replaced. The govt has recently decided to establish separate investigation unit and law and order unit in Thanas of the country within their manpower and to work independently under the supervision of OC of the respective Thanas'.²³ System of training is gradually being improved.

Creation of Special Force. As mentioned earlier, the criminals are in possession of highly sophisticated weapons and maintain a very effective communication network. They also maintain multi-layered security parameter due to which they can evade arrest during police operations. Effective use of mobile phones added to their operational capability and security. To address these challenges GOB has recently formed special police force namely 'RAB'. Presently they are working in almost all over the country. Some members of armed forces have been sent on deputation to form part of these battalions. Their crucial difference from the armed forces is that they apply their military training under civil laws and regulations. They do not operate under battlefield conditions of engaging the enemy, but use their military training and technically advanced a better equipments to carry out normal police functions. With the full fledged functioning of RAB it is expected that the number and extent of violent crimes would considerably decrease.²⁴

Speedy Trial of Sensational Cases. To improve the deteriorating law and order situation government has promulgated an ordinance for speedy trial of six major criminal offences like murder, rape, possession of illegal arms, narcotics, explosives and hoarding. In the preliminary stage 6 tribunals have been set up in the divisional headquarters and 19 in other greater districts have been/would be established gradually. Special tribunals have disposed of some of the very sensational cases and helped to regain people's confidence in establishment of rule of law. However, due to the shortage of Judges the special tribunals have not been able to dispose the cases as expected.²⁵

23. Editorial, The Bangladesh Observer, April 12, 2003.

24. Discussion with Director, RAB, March 12, 2005.

25. Discussion with District and Session Judge, Sylhet, March 01, 2004.

Operation against Under Ground Left Leaning Parties and Religious Extremists. The GOB has launched a joint operation (Operation Spider Web) comprising members of police and para-military forces since 20 July 2003 to improve the deteriorating law and order situation especially in south-western region of the country. Since the launching of the operation many terrorists have been killed/ arrested and a good number of weapons recovered. But it is very difficult to combat these terrorist groups as after committing crimes in one district they quickly move to another district or simply cross over the border, where they have safe sanctuary.²⁶ Besides, the alleged police/ political patronisation of the extremists is acting as a great hindrance in combating the under ground terrorists. However, RAB is gradually extending its area of operation and situation is expected to improve. GOB has already banned two outfits of religious extremists and arrested many of their activists.

Reform in Judicial System. To ensure quick dispensation of justice and enforcement of rule of law '*the govt enlarged number of magistrate courts, district courts and divisions of High Court for speedy disposal of cases*'.²⁷ In 2003 the Law Minister said in a seminar that '*the present govt is working relentlessly to establish an Independent Human Rights Commission, Anti Corruption Commission(ACC) and Ombudsman to ensure rule of law in the country*'. He also mentioned that '*the work is in progress of comprehensive reform for judicial capacity building, train up judges and lawyers and remove flaws from the judicial system*'.²⁸ The govt is also working for the separation of judiciary as per the directives of Supreme Court.

Weapon Collection Drive. From time to time the government has taken up special measures to curb the spread of illegal weapons like arms collection drive in various part of the country. But compared to the circulation of weapons throughout the country the recovery rate has been very insignificant. During 'Joint Operation Clean Heart' govt ordered to deposit all licensed weapons to the authority. Through this move circulation of a good number of weapons could be stalled for the time being.

Non-significant Change in Security Scenario. The security scenario of the country has not yet been significantly changed. Confrontational politics, politically linked violence, growing crime and corruption are holding back the nations' growth. In the Bangladesh Development Forum Meeting held from 8-

26. Discussion with Islam, Shamsul, DIG, Special Branch of Police on July 21, 2004 and Statements given by recently arrested top under ground cadres that was published in different dailies.

27. Yussouf, *op.cit.*

28. *Ibid.*

10 May 2004, Mr. Proful Patel (Vice-President of World Bank's South Asia Region and Head Coordinator of the Donor Community) commenting on the killing of a law maker said, "politicians can take care of some of the norms on which a healthy society relies - personal security, transparency, fair legal protection, a level regulatory playing field. Bangladeshi's will do the rest". Honourable Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, in her opening address explained the govt's position on the issues and said " *We have taken a number of measures to improve the law and order situation. The parliament has recently enacted a law for creating RAB in order to curb crime expeditiously.*²⁹ The battalion has gone into operation in Dhaka metropolitan city and its positive impact on the overall law and order situation is already visible" . Reorganisation of police force, effective employment of RAB, ongoing judicial reform, establishment of the institutions of good governance, dispensation of justice without any prejudice and effective control of flow of weapons, etc. if are executed with true earnestness, the security scenario of the country is likely to improve in near future.

SUGGESTED MEASURES THAT CAN ENHANCE NATION'S CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH NON- TRADITIONAL MILITARY THREATS

Controlling the Influx of Weapons. As has been mentioned earlier, poor governance has much to do with the 'weaponisation' of our society. Thus, political patronisation of criminals must cease. Anyone in possession of illegal weapon and engaged in armed violence should be taken into task irrespective of his party affiliation. Special courts that have been set up should be provided with adequate number of judges to deal with arms related cases speedily. Sale of legal weapons must also be monitored. Negative measures are to be taken at the borders and other entry points for controlling the influx of arms. Building up of database, coordination with neighbouring states and international organisation, sharing of information, etc. are essential in this regard. Local manufacturers of illegal weapons are to be severely dealt with.

From the human security perspective it is viewed that proliferation of small arms is related to poverty, under-development and despair. Thus, we must go into the root cause of this problem. Merely treating it in isolation without addressing the socio-economic-political aspects, may not endure the test of time.³⁰

Controlling Cross-border Insurgency. Insurgents and infiltrators, whether local or foreign, have been active carriers of small arms and light weapons.³¹ Whoever

29. Doners Concerned - - -graft' *The Daily Star*, May 09, 2004.

30. Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brigadier General (Retd), *op.cit.*, p.7

31. Husain, Neila, *op.cit.*, p.176

might be the user, it is certain that there is a well-organised group in Bangladesh, playing a part in a team of international illicit arms dealer. An exacerbation of the ongoing turmoil in our neighbourhood would have consequences that might be difficult for us to deal with in future.³² There is a need to identify and apprehend the involved syndicate and also take appropriate measures so that in future our territory is not used for arms trafficking. It is of vital strategic interest to Bangladesh that she ensures insurgents of neighbouring countries do not get any shelter inside her territory.

Police Reform. It is said that with the existing organisational structure and capability it is very difficult on the part of the police to address the prevailing scale of armed violence. Thus, there is a need for an immediate increase of police force and to provide them with modern weapons, communication facility and equipments to deal with the sophisticated weapons and explosives available with organised criminal gangs. Recent bombing incidents suggest that police should be provided with sophisticated surveillance devices to gather prior information. Both police and RAB should give more emphasis on developing their intelligence effort. They should be provided with appropriate and adequate number of vehicles to reach to the target within shortest possible time. Most important is that RAB and Police should be allowed to carry out their tasks without political interference. Their recruitment, posting and promotion should be on the basis of merit and not on the political allegiance.

Control of Drug Trafficking. In recent years the volume of cross-border drug trafficking has increased tremendously, creating a serious concern for the law enforcement agencies. With the rise of narcotic-related crime and offences, the law and order situation has deteriorated significantly. A significant number of killings are linked to disputes over drug business. A well-concerted effort needs to be given to curb the trafficking and use of drugs. We ought to consider drug trafficking as a threat to international security rather than dealing with it only in a traditional context of national security.

Patrolling of Coastal Areas to Control Piracy. Bangladesh has 2725 kilometres coastline in the Bay of Bengal. It is very difficult on the part of the police to have an effective watch on the coastline. Taking advantage of this situation piracy in Bangladesh's Maritime territories has surged rapidly, affecting its sea dependent trade. Whatever may be the nature of incidents, if

32. Khan, Shahedul Anam, Brigadier General (Retd), 'Chittagong arms haul: Some Queries', *The Daily Star*, April 05, 2004.

such incidents continue to take place, the freight charges of international cargo ships might go up, as they would prefer to avoid troubled maritime territories. The recent arms haul at Chittagong port depicts our weaknesses of the coastline security. The nexus of pirates, gunrunners and drug traffickers cannot also be over ruled. Thus, surveillance capability of the law enforcers and Coast Guard has to be improved to guard against illegal arms/drug trading and piracy. Helicopters and high-speed watercrafts would be of much value in this regard.

Addressing the CHT Issue in Right Perspective. Though overall situation in CHT is under control of the security forces, yet the situation may deteriorate due to increased number of incidents like killing, kidnapping, illegal arms dealing, drug cultivation/trafficking and other miscreant activities. The prime demand of JSS is complete implementation of Peace Accord. But it is argued that some of the provisions of Peace Accord being contrary to the constitution need to be reviewed. Besides, the JSS's demand for complete withdrawal of security forces and removal of Bangalee Settlers from CHT is an absurd proposition in the present context. Thus, the prime issues of the Peace Accord like settlement of land dispute, status of Bangalee settlers and transfer of rest of the Subjects to Regional Council should be immediately addressed. Land Commission should start functioning immediately. Border along CHT should be effectively controlled to deny arms/drug trafficking and movement of cross-border insurgents. Police and other law enforcing agencies should be made capable of handling the law and order situation in remote areas of CHT by providing them with modern equipment and training.³³ Small scale tea gardens may be planned which is likely to absorb a huge number of unemployed youth including ex-insurgents of CHT. Besides, micro-credit access for developing horticulture, livestock farm, etc and imparting of skill development training is likely to provide self-employment opportunities to the people residing in CHT.

Rehabilitation of Members of Under Ground Political Parties and Extremist Religious Organization. Due to the lack of job opportunity, surrendered armed cadres of under ground parties are compelled to engage themselves in various criminal activities. This situation is more dangerous for the society because of their skill in weapon handling. Unless efforts are taken to generate adequate employment, this segment of society is likely to be lured by the under world elements to resort to criminal activities taking advantage of their vulnerability.³⁴ The Govt should combine economic measures with other

33. Tawhid, Mohammad, Major 'Post-Conflict Situation in CHT and Prospect for Lasting Peace' *Mirpur Papers*, Issue Number 9, December 2003.

34. Husain, Neila, *op.cit.*, p.177

social welfare measures to create a sense of social and economic justice among the religious extremist and under ground elements. Govt in cooperation with private sector and Non-Government Organisation (NGO) can take up special initiatives to deal with the problem of unemployment.

The syllabus of Madrasha education should be reviewed to incorporate some technical and vocational training to equip the students for meaningful employment on completion of education. UNDP may be requested to undertake few projects (similar to CHT) to generate some employment opportunities

Curbing of Slum Development. It is alleged that the slums 'have become the safe den for the criminals and focal point for criminalities'. The slums are attractive places for the dishonest businessmen and criminal gangs for trading contraband items, drugs, weapons and trafficking of women. Many suggest that by evicting the slums, criminal activities can considerably be reduced. But eviction is not the solution as most of the slum dwellers are the internally migrated people who have either lost their homestead due to river erosion or have lost everything due to flood, drought or persistent unemployment and no other places to live and earn their livelihood. Thus, while taking decision not to allow slum development in the heart of the city or to relocate the existing slums, employment opportunities to be created in the vicinity of new location.

Legal / Judicial Reforms. The govt should ensure that rule of law is established without any prejudice and discrimination. Any criminal activity to be dealt without being influenced by interested groups. *'Whether the criminal belongs to the ruling or opposition party should not be the concern of law enforcing agency, rather they should investigate whether the defendant is guilty or not in the concerned crime'*.³⁵ The judiciary must ensure that the disadvantaged and vulnerable section of the society i.e. the poor, women and marginalized sections are not denied access to justice either because they are not aware of laws or they are unable to bear the financial or social costs of justice. More number of judges to be immediately appointed to dispose the arms related cases without much delay. Capital punishment given by the lower court to notorious criminals should be executed with bare minimum time with due approval from higher court, Office of the Attorney General and Public Prosecutor should be de-politicised.

Poverty Reductions and Employment Generation. The lack of remunerative employment and economic opportunities has led one third of our

35. *Ibid.*, p.177

youth community towards organised crime and violence. *"The emergence of Mastanocracy (local terrorism) imposing considerable 'transaction cost' on normal economic activity has been singled out as a major barrier to private investment and socially secure life"*.³⁶ Thus, efforts are to be made by the government to provide meaningful economic opportunities to the unemployed youths, so that they do not indulge themselves in criminal activities for earning their livelihood. Government in coordination with NGOs may undertake, among others, following programmes: (1) rural infrastructure development (2) re-excavation of canal (3) creation of self-employment opportunities through imparting skill development training and providing micro-credit access.

Curbing of Corruption and Promoting Good Governance. There is a general consensus that promoting good governance and curbing corruption can significantly improve prevailing law and order situation and arrest armed violence. Good governance will imply de-politicizing the state functionary organs (especially the civil administration and law enforcing agencies), separation of power of three branches of the govt, establishment of an efficient judicial system and not allowing the nexus among criminals, police and politicians to develop. Above all, introduction of a truly independent Anti-Corruption Commission and pursuing a policy of 'zero tolerance' in combating corruption and appointing an ombudsman and equipping him to carry out his function independently, would contribute largely towards promotion of good governance.

Social Resistance and Community Policing. Since almost all segments of the society is currently suffering from some kind of insecurity due to the violence generated by the criminals, the people should be united to resist the same and augment the effort of the govt in improving law and order. If people are united and committed to protect their own lives and property then the violence generated by few armed criminals will end up in a natural death. The civil society may also have a volunteer force of their own that should look after the safety of lives and property of the community. However, care should be taken, so that the volunteers do not take law in their own hand. Rather they should act as 'force multiplier' and put pressure on the local administration and law-enforcing agency to improve the law and order in their own area. In fact a strong community policing and effective social resistance can drastically reduce the threat of violence in a particular area.

Avoidance of Border Skirmishes, Peaceful Settlement of Border Disputes and Improvement of Intelligence effort. Border disputes to be

36. *A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development, GOB, 2003, p.17*

amicably settled, smuggling and illegal crossing of borders to be stopped and shooting/killing of poor people along the border should be averted through liaison and discussion at all level. Intelligence effort of the nation should be geared up to include organisational restructuring, establishment of intelligence network, and improvement of efficiency and procurement of sophisticated equipments. The network should incorporate sources from all strata of the society in all the violence-infested areas. A joint intelligence cell may be formed and made responsible for data collection, analyses of incidents and forecasting of probable events/vulnerabilities. A coordinated effort of all intelligence agencies is the prime need of time. Hostile intelligence activities must be effectively monitored. In essence, intelligence effort need to be pro-active and should be able to provide prior information regarding all sorts of ill-motivated activities/moves planned and generated by the anti-state elements.

Revival of Social Values. Our young generation to be imparted with good and meaningful education. Basic teaching should come from the family and everybody has a responsibility in this regard. Govt, opposition and civil society must ensure that modern and scientific education is imparted and educational institutions are not used/affected for any political gain. Sensor Board should ensure that violence and obscenity is not the prime ingredient of the cinema. Govt should device a prudent policy to protect the society from degenerated cultural invasion. Youths should be protected from the menace of drugs and degenerated cultural invasion.

CONCLUSIONS

The threats to the security of Bangladesh emanate from both traditional and non-traditional sources, but the main threat is socio-economic and from consequences of such socio-economic causes. However, discounting the possibility of traditional threats to our security would be misleading and disastrous. We must not ignore the prospect of physical security threats whatever be the source.

In the last few years the society has witnessed an abundant supply of illegal arms and a sudden rise of armed violence. The availability of arms has changed the nature of violence and made the criminals more organised. The nexus among criminals, police and politicians are mutually beneficial. Political interference, corruption, inadequacy of police force for enforcement duty and lack of modern equipment and facilities are the major causes of police ineffectiveness. Executive control over judiciary and inordinate delay in delivering justice has further aggravated the situation.

In CHT, extortion, kidnapping and killing are a regular phenomenon through indiscriminate use of weapons. Insurgent groups of neighbouring countries are also a constant source of threat to our national security. Armed cadres of under ground leftist organisations and religious extremist parties are frequently engaged in armed violence especially in southwestern districts. Recent arms recovery from CHT, Bogra and CUFFL jetty indicate that Bangladesh has become a preferred route for transit in the flow of illegal weapons. Alarming escalation of drug users has a direct bearing on the proliferation of weapons and increase in the organised crimes. While drugs are increasingly being used to induct the youths into the criminal syndicates, weapons are used to extort money to pay for drugs. The alleged piracy though unfounded, if continue to take place, our competitors would spare no effort to profess our ports as the most dangerous ports of the region. Vigilance in coastal area has become prime need of time. Moreover, there has been an increase in bombing incidents shooting/killing incidents and border skirmishes along Bangladesh-India border in recent times. Though these are non-traditional security issues, yet over the years gained more prominence especially due to their military characteristics. Individuals, groups, society and the nation as a whole are frequently afflicted directly or indirectly by aforesaid ethnic, religious, ideological conflicts and socio-economic violence.

Government has taken various steps to protect the citizens from the menace of armed violence such as: police reforms, creation of RAB, speedy trial of sensational cases, conduct of special operation to nab the criminals, reform of legal and judicial system, etc. The law and order situation has shown signs of improvement; many of the 'top terrorists' have been arrested/killed, and the cross border insurgency has been reduced. However, socio-political and economic issues are yet to be addressed in their right perspective.

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