SECURITY OF BANGLADESH: THE SOCIETAL ASPECTS

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Introduction
The basic question confronted in this paper is: security for whom in Bangladesh? If in the ultimate analysis it is the people that are to be secured, and if people can be regarded the quintessential element of the national strength, what are the main aspects that draw the attention in a security debate? What, in other words, are the societal dimensions of threats to the security of this country?

It has indeed not been too frequently that problems of security in Bangladesh have been discussed in proper perspective. The subject has largely been viewed, rightly or wrongly, as a taboo whilst at the policy level considerations have focused almost exclusively on the state as the referent object of the problems of security. National security indeed refers to issues at the state level, but even in trying to comprehend security at that level it needs to be borne in mind that state is composed of individuals tied together as a collective political body. This in turn raises the question as to what it is that one is trying to secure at the level of the state. And there the inter-connections between various aspects of the national life become prominent and thus, although the term security essentially has a military connotation it cannot be wholly understood without referring to many other related sectors like political, societal economic and, as in recent times, environmental.

In Bangladesh, however, like in the rest of South Asia there has been an almost blind approach of identifying the problems of state or regime security with that of national security. As a result, there have been two-way distortions in the response to the problems of security. Domestically, the
masses of the people whose security the state is essentially supposed to ensure, have been alienated, if not left further insecure. The potential human strength as a vital part of the intrinsic deterrence capability has on the other hand remained ignored. Externally, issues of security have been viewed almost exclusively in terms of military threats so that strengthening of military build-up has been perceived as the only appropriate answer. Yet for the countries of South Asia problems of security is more intrinsic than can be treated by such conventional means. Security and survival of these states are challenged more from within -- by unstable societal fabric and political system, underdeveloped economic, technological and industrial structures, and a wide variety of issues related to nation building.

Today's South Asia, to be sure, is a mosaic of old nations which for reasons of political history, ethno-religious dispersion and geographic reality have been exposed to deep-seated crises of old nationhood in new statehood. The states of the region are also typical of societies where the linkages between problems of internal socio-political stability and economic development on the one hand, and those of national security on the other, are intense. External factors of insecurity closely and often instantly interact with more dominant internal ones. The task of managing security, is thus rendered immensely complex and, as the linkage between goals of state building, socio-political stability and economic development with those of national security often tend to be missed, the strategies that tend to be followed become superficial, if not counterproductive. This in effect has resulted in the tendency to deal with security from the position of “perceived” rather than “real” vulnerability. In the process, people are left behind which only adds to the extent of insecurity.

The main burden of this paper is to indicate the primacy of the people in the security agenda of South Asia by way of highlighting the above linkage with particular reference to Bangladesh. The main theme of the paper is simple and rather obvious: “putting the people first” should be a vital element of the security agenda of Bangladesh. Any initiative that fails to recognize that the ‘people’ is central in security is
bound to remain incomplete. There is no attempt here to treat security in purely non-military terms, it is intended rather to reinforce the argument that there cannot be any alternative to the integrative approach which binds together all related sectors and levels including societal, economic, political and military as well as individual, national, regional and international. In developing the above theme, a brief conceptual sketch on the security of Bangladesh is first provided. The subsequent section in its two main parts, political and socio-economic, outlines the nature and process of alienation of the people from security considerations. And finally a people-based approach to Bangladesh's security is proposed.

The Conceptual Outline

Conventional wisdom, based mostly on western literature takes the term security essentially in military or defense parlance. Recent literature on the subject, however, convincingly indicates that security cannot be properly understood, nor can the issues related to it be comprehensively approached without due focus on such other factors as societal, political and economic.¹ Some of the noted works on the security of the developing states have found poverty and socio-economic underdevelopment as an important source of threats to security and conversely social and economic uplift has been identified as almost a universal pre-requisite for achieving "real security".² This socio-economic approach to security cannot be taken to undermine the other dimensions of it, particularly issues related to the protection of national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The point that is intended to be made is that security, if viewed only in traditional military sense, "cannot have enduring appeal for hungry masses", and while poverty constitutes a major source of insecurity of the vast majority of the developing states, security cannot be ensured without ensuring the elimination of poverty and underdevelopment.³

The process of overcoming economic underdevelopment is an arduous and protracted one and the period of transition can in most cases be turbulent and unstable posing major challenges to the socio-political system per se. The social factors may become major contributor to the insecurity in the
developing countries as failures to resolve social problems weakens not only the vitality and strength of society as a corporate persona but also the authority and legitimacy of the state. Consequently the ability of the state to mobilize its own resources—most notably human resources—as component of the national strength is reduced while the motivation of the people—deeply frustrated by the failure of the state of "deliver the goods" - to contribute to the building of the same is damaged. The security dimension of the social and economic problems is thus brought into sharp focus and there the "security of the people" takes the prominence.

In the modern nation-state system the people depend on the state for their security while they can also constitute a vital element of the state power to ensure national security. On the other hand, the people can as well feel threatened by the state whilst the state can also view the people as the source of threats to its security. In either case it is the capability of the state to mobilize the power of its people to enhance the strength of the state and reduce its vulnerability which becomes critical. Debate on security is essentially one on a combination of its internal vulnerabilities and external threats and the two are interlinked. If Bangladesh, for example, is viewed to be having problems of security then along with any threats perceived to be arising from the powerful, 'hegemonistic' and 'interventionist' neighbour, its vulnerabilities in terms of relative size, geo-political disadvantages, indefensible boundaries are bound to be compounded by chronic socio-political instability and economic underdevelopment. Notably, Bangladesh's intrinsic vulnerabilities would have been of little security implications if the territory of India that surrounds Bangladesh were barren lands. Or conversely, the threats from India would have been of much less weight if Bangladesh would have sufficiently cordial ties with India and/or Bangladesh were a stronger state socially, politically and economically.

Security of Bangladesh in this paper is therefore, viewed in a totality in which the most important and visible indicator of a "secure Bangladesh" is a coherent, strong and resilient society, economy and polity. There is no contention here to under-estimate security threats of physical, geo-political or
purely military nature. The objective rather is to indicate the societal impediments like the country's massive poverty and underdevelopment and illiteracy which through their interface with the chronic political instability and crisis of governance perpetuate the country's internal vulnerability. The objective is also to indicate that in the ultimate analysis the strengthening of the society both in its political and economic dimensions, should dominate the security agenda of Bangladesh.

Problems of Security of Bangladesh: The Societal Dimension

In the light of the above, a critical question in any discussion on security of a least developed country like Bangladesh is how the ruling elites make use of its scarce resources in meeting the demands of socio-economic development which compete fiercely with those of managing the state. Both, but more often the latter, are mostly viewed to be identical with issues of regime security. Problems of development in countries like Bangladesh are so complex and options for the ruling elites are so limited that the choice focuses more often than not on questions of regime survival and issues of short-term stability and sustenance thereof.

Beside problems of severe resource shortage what counts most as challenges to the security are the issues of regime weakness, and thereby, chronic political instability on the one hand, and those of external vulnerability. In other words, the ruling elite’s judgment about the effectiveness of ways to protect its own survival against both domestic and external vulnerabilities defines the framework for options and decisions that are projected to be geared to the maintenance of national security. We assume that Bangladesh is no exception to this, and proceed here to argue that a process of alienation of the masses from the socio-economic and political process increases the vulnerability of the country.

An attempt to draw a security outline of Bangladesh will reveal, as in case of any other country, two broad categories of sources of threats to its security: external and internal. Any discussion on the external threats to the security of Bangladesh must refer sooner or later to the India factor. Dictates of geo-politics have rendered Bangladesh literally
India-locked. There is a wide gap between the two in relation to the external security perspectives leading indeed to mutual threat perception vis-a-vis each other. In addition, a number of outstanding problems continue to vitiate their bilateral relations. The irritants are well-known, and to be sure, except the first about four years of Bangladesh’s independence, relations between the two have remained far from cordial. In more recent times there have been indications of significant deterioration in bilateral relations, and virtually on all issues of discord there appears to be deadlock, if not further deterioration.

Critical to the external dimension of Bangladesh’s vulnerability is, therefore, the India factor and more particularly divergent Indian position on issues of mutual concern. A typical Bangladeshi outlook in this respect, debatable or not, is that India has the scope and means to capitalize on Bangladesh's geo-politically locked situation on the one hand, and domestic weakness on the other, to do everything that compounds the insecurity and vulnerability of the country. Other, aspects of external vulnerability are broadly similar to those relevant to Third World countries in general, like international, economic and political environ, etc. There are of course as elsewhere and as always, the possibility of exogenous factors like environmental threats, crop failure, issues related to aid and influence, and the like. In terms of priority and incidence, however, the India factor overshadows the rest of the sources of external threat to Bangladesh. Bangladesh's external security problems are, however, beyond the scope of this paper, and we now turn to the exposition of the process of alienation of the people which is understood here to contribute to the vulnerability of the country and thereby compound the elements of external insecurity.

**Political Alienation**

Central to Bangladesh's internal vulnerability scheme is the chronic political crisis and instability resulting from ceaseless dissensions on core national issues. Problems are mostly associated, as common for the vast majority of post-colonial states, with the process of nation-building. Nation-building in the literal sense of the term is, however, hardly a
problem in the context of Bangladesh. Unlike most other developing states of the Third World which have been aptly described as nations not in being but only in hope, Bangladesh is a new state of an old nation.

The fact that Bangladesh's nationhood preceded its achievement of statehood is well-documented and undisputed. Long before the new state was formed in 1971, a strong sense of nationhood took deep roots and the independence of the country marked the congruence of the nationhood with the statehood. At independence Bangladesh appeared a rarity in the modern age state system: a state which happened to be a nation linguistically and culturally homogeneous and united by the spirit and experience of a people's centuries-long resistance against foreign and alien aggression, domination and exploitation. Eighty-five per cent of this nation also happened to have religious homogeneity—they are all the Sunni Muslims with an untarnished record of toleration and cooperative existence with votaries of all religious under the sun.

Thus, because of its near homogeneity in ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even religious terms, in case of Bangladesh, nation building becomes a non-issue. On a closer focus and from what its post-independence history has revealed, however, it cannot be disputed that despite advantages of homogeneity and shared glory of the past, very little has been achieved in the way of nation building. The point is brought home if nation building is viewed to cover the "vast range of human relationships, attitudes, activities and social processes…. the development of a sense of nationality; the integration of political units into common territorial framework with a government which can exercise authority; the integration of the rulers and the ruled; the integration of the citizens and various social groups into a common political process, and …. the integration of individuals into institutions of purposive activities."

Viewed from such a multi-dimensional and comprehensive perspective Bangladesh is indeed to be considered still in the continuum of the nation building process. The nation is blessed with advantages rarely found in most of its Third World counterparts. It nevertheless continues to be far
from having achieved the objectives of nation building. The critical factor appears to be the endemic weakness of the state and deep-rooted “crisis of governance” faced by the successive post-independence regimes. Factors that have made up this crisis include a pseudo-conflict of national identity. In the backdrop of the country’s glorious history of national assertion and the indomitable struggle for liberation, controversy over national identity was not amongst the problems that could be normally anticipated before 16 December 1971 when the country achieved independence. The reality is however different, and after two decades since then the search for a consensus on the issue continues. The identity travelled from Bangalee to Bangladeshi in a state which has swung from secularist to Islamic, thereby exacerbating the process of political instability in the country.10

The other most important factor that contributes to chronic political instability and thereby to endemic crisis of governance is undeveloped state of political institutions. Very few, if any of the numerous political parties active in the country are strictly organized, well-knit and spread upto grass-roots level having definite policies and programmes of action.11 Intense factionalism and polarization among social groups and classes which are formulated along the prevailing inequitable distribution of wealth and power coupled with a widespread network of patron-client relationships pervading the whole society have resulted in a system devoid of institutional virtues.

Parties are born of factions and party politics is almost universally characterized by factional and parochial interests while policies and decisions reflect strong subjective bias. Such an outline of political activism, if anything, leaves the interest of the masses of people at bay. Whether in the government or in the opposition, parties and their organizational set-ups lack democratic values and practices and the leadership caters to the maximization of the interests of the most influential sub-groups and power bases at the cost of the interests of the common people.

On the other hand, in the determination of party policies and strategies concern for managing relation within the groups or factions often prevails over that for political
programmes or objectives. Hence politics is determined largely by narrow individual or group interest. Political postures, activities and performances are determined by factors of personalities, influences, patronage and prestige rather than by specific political issues or alternate political programmes. The value orientation and activism of the political elite reflect their urge for enhancing their social prestige, political power and economic status at the cost of national interest, allegiance to which is minimal. The end result is that the character of the state elite and sub-elites of the country is too weak to create a national consensus capable of creating a strong, legitimate and resilient state authority.

The latest political events in the country also bear sufficient witness to this effect. The year 1991 began with happy notes and high expectations about the political future of Bangladesh. The exit of long years of autocracy in the face of massive popular uprising towards the end of last year and subsequently a nationally and internationally acclaimed a free and fair election led to the formation of a government that today faces the challenges of sustaining the process of democratic transition in the country.

The installation of the new democratically elected government, like it or not, has not been, however, anything more than just one of the many more milestones that lie ahead before the real transition to democracy in the country. Democracy is of course never achieved overnight, it is a continuing process, and it builds, corrects and strengthens itself in an apparently endless process. Striking about this process in Bangladesh is that in the long years of its experimentation, despite very rich tradition of trading blood for democracy, its values and norms, institutions and premises have been thoroughly damaged.

Bangladesh's liberation struggle and independence as a spirit, as an ideal and as a means were essentially a milestone in the process of the nation's move towards democracy. It also started off with all the arrangements for establishing a limited and accountable government in the Westminster type sovereign parliament. But soon the political landscape underwent massive transformation creating the stage for authoritarian tendencies leading eventually to the
establishment of autocracy either under civilian, military, quasi-military or so-called civilianized military rule. In the process, the parliament was robbed of its sovereignty, office of the president or chief executive was made omnipotent, effectiveness of the judiciary was curtailed, and above all accountability of the government was absolutely lost.

Some major political reforms and constitutional amendments have since been introduced by the new government aimed at the establishment of an accountable government. The parliamentary form of government has been reintroduced under these changes. Subsequent developments have however shown that the issue is not merely the nature of government. Democracy can function under both parliamentary and presidential form of government. Neither a presidential form per se is associated with lack of accountability, nor a parliamentary form as such can ensure accountability of the government. There may be endless debate on the issue but the fact remains that democracy can function under both, provided the essential institutional arrangements are ensured.

What is critical and beyond debate is the constitutional guarantee of the limited and accountable nature of the executive. An essential element of democracy is that the government derives power from the people, exercises it as long as approved by the people to whom it also remains accountable. And the parliament as the forum through which people's voice is generated, mobilized and ventilated is the organ to which the executive, whether presidential or parliamentary, must remain accountable.

On the part of the parliamentary parties it's a question essentially of rising above narrow partisan interests and operating with each other for the sake of greater and enduring national welfare the way they did during the peak of anti-autocracy movement. The reality has however been different. The victory or defeat in election has largely been taken as a measure of loss or gain in a zero-sum format. The winning party has refrained from fully appreciating that their victory was no more than a chance proffered to it by the people to show its worth in facing the country's challenges. It should have also been clear that some fundamental level of
cooperation and understanding with the losers was indispensable to be able to run the government. On the other hand, the losers should have not considered that they have lost it all, rather it should have been borne in mind that they would now essentially constitute the part of the institution that would ensure the political check and balance.

This type of political behaviour was indispensable to avoid the continuing political crisis and violence. There had been hardly any reasonable ground to anticipate that the installation of the BNP government would bring overnight changes in the politico-economic scenario bedeviled by long years of autocratic role. What could be anticipated was a much greater degree of constructive cooperation between the government and the opposition towards strengthening of the process of institutionalization of democracy in the country. In reality, while the ruling party has adopted the traditional approach of monopolizing the credit for what has been achieved in the anti-autocracy movement, its main opponents, the Awami League, already in disarray in the wake of its shocking defeat, failed to consolidate itself to be capable of playing the role of active and constructive opposition. Apparently obsessed with a possessive psyche of considering itself the only party destined to rule the country, it failed to realize the need for reassessment of much of its political programmes.

Most of its political slogans already lost currency. During the election of last year, it had intended, without any success, to push ahead with socialism at a time when throughout the world the concept and the system has been buried. Apparently it has yet to articulate its position on the subject. Secularism as a philosophy of life has never been unacceptable in Bangladesh and despite occasional setbacks it still remains a part of the national value-orientation here. The people of this country are essentially much more tolerant and progressive than their other South Asian counterparts from religious point of view and communal records are certainly far better here. The problem arises as much when attempts are made to over-blow the slogan of secularism as when religion is used as an instrument of political profiteering and exploitation. In either case, the history of
this country has shown that an essentially non-issue becomes over-sensitive and self-defeating.

In the context of rising influence of fundamentalist Hindu Bharatiyo Janata Party (BJP) in next door Indian politics, particularly after the death of Rajiv Gandhi and subsequent disarray in the Congress (I), it will now be increasingly difficult for Awami League to popularize its slogan of secularism in Bangladesh politics. Rise of Hindu fundamentalism in Indian politics, whether or not the BJP forms the next government in New Delhi, appears to be a reality by now. And this may contribute to the damaging of the prospect of a party that may insist on secularism as its main political slogan.

The AL has also to ask itself why it is identified with an alleged Indian design for interference in Bangladesh. Rightly or not, and for the good or for the evil, people voted during the 1991 elections largely against AL because of its continued prophecy of socialism and rather hard-line commitment to secularism. Conversely, they voted more in favour of BNP because of its success in a campaign to project AL's policy as a design for selling-out to India. Whether or not an AL government would really be more pro-Indian than pro-Bangladeshi and whether a BNP government can objectively afford or even need to be as anti-Indian as commonly understood are issues for separate debate. But the fact remains that with the switchover to parliamentary form of government the Awami League apparently finds itself with hardly and political cards for itself.

One other related issue that needs to be raised is that a significant element of politics in Bangladesh developed particularly as a fallout of long absence of democracy is negativism and mutual intolerance as displayed by the political organizations, specially at the leadership level. Recall the level of hatred with which the two major parties behaved with each other during the long period of anti-autocracy movement. It was essentially as an outcome of massive popular, particularly student pressure that they managed to demonstrate some degree of flexibility and accommodation during the past phase of the movement. The result of learning to live and work with political opponents
have certainly been realized in the form of the victory of the anti-autocracy movement. This has, however, not been carried forward ever since, particularly since the election of 1991. Neither the BNP nor the AL has shown any gesture to rise above narrow partisan behaviour. It hardly needs to be explained that the volatile and ever explosive situation at the student political front has its roots to a great extent in this renewed antagonism between the two major political parties.

For the ruling party it needed to be clear that the people’s mandate for it was merely an opportunity to show its worth in facing the country’s enormous problems. It should have also been appreciated that the party now faces a formidable opposition in a truly multi-party format in a way unprecedented in Bangladesh’s political history. More importantly, it must be borne in mind that the people’s power that brought the fall of the autocratic regime would continue to remain the ultimate watchdog.

The AL, for its part, has no reason to behave in a manner that manifested a loser’s psyche. It should be aware that as the largest opposition and the party that has the equal, if not a potentially higher level of public support (for being the party in opposition) holds the key to the pulls and pressures vis-a-vis the government. In reality, for lack of constructive political behaviour as an active and responsible opposition and for lack of intra-organizational discipline and proper leadership it has so far failed to place itself in a more advantageous position than it currently holds.

On the whole, the fact remains that fall of the autocratic regime and subsequent introduction of the democratic government including some of the basic reforms already introduced do not by themselves ensure the success of the process of democracy, nor does it come as a panacea to the myriad of problems faced by the country. If the changes are to really bear fruits, the understanding between the ruling and opposition parties must continue to persist above narrow partisan interests and egoistic manipulations. The political leadership, both in the government and outside, must demonstrate in deeds more than in words their firm commitment to help sustain the democratic process and refrain from trading long term national interests for
immediate parochial gains. The alternative to this is further sharpening of alienation of the political leadership from the masses which is bound to lead to the accentuation of societal frustration and instability.

The Socio-economic Alienation

Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation was the culmination of a long and traumatic process partly under the 'melting pot' of British colonialism and partly under the yoke of 'internal colonialism' of Pakistan. The post-independence period of the new nation's political consolidation and economic rehabilitation coincided with the deepest of the post-World War II international economic crises which began with the great oil shock of the early seventies. Regionally, the country found itself a part of a sub-system that dubiously distinguished itself for three main reasons: a) its massive poverty and widespread underdevelopment, b) its bedeviled inter-state relations, and c) weakest link among its component states in terms of positive interaction for cooperation and development. On a closer focus the traumatic experiences of immediate post-independence political turmoils impeded the healthy growth of socio-politico-economic institutions. As the backwash effect of all these, Bangladesh plunged into the series of crises that has indeed persisted till date with greater or lesser intensity.

As an archetype of a least developed country, Bangladesh today faces nearly all the conceivable problems of development. It is the eighth largest country of the world in terms of population size. With one of the highest densities of population, Bangladesh has virtually no resources except its vast under-utilized manpower and alluvial farm land. The potential of the latter is ravaged almost invariably each year by recurrent natural disasters including devastating floods in its mighty rivers belonging to the Himalayan basin. The difficulties are indicated as much by the damages of whatever productive efforts are undertaken, caused by these natural disasters as by the failure to negotiate a long-term viable regional solution to these along with co-basin states, namely India and Nepal.

The country has one of the lowest levels of per capita income, and is characterized by pervasive poverty,
malnutrition and illiteracy. The country has also inherited a poor infra-structural base and economic, industrial and technological deficiencies. With independence came the series of external economic impediments including loss of markets for the country's few exportable items and ever-declining price of the same thereby shrinking the possibility of sustaining the income and of supporting development and financing import requirements. While the inherited level of external economic dependence continued to grow and productive base shrank, pressure on scant available resources kept on mounting. The administrative and managerial inexperience coupled with distorted economic and social standards on the one hand, and political mismanagement on the other created socio-political disharmony and instability in the country. Series of political turmoils followed soon and this complex background continues to have its impact not merely on subsequent politico-economic development but also on all possible prognoses about the country's future prospects.

The alienation in the socio-economic plane, therefore, is as sharp as in the political arena. Any discussion on the state of the Bangladesh society, its socio-economic conditions and political challenges must refer sooner or later to the single-most overriding issue of poverty. Massive poverty, which has been noted by the Task Force as one of the three main characteristics - the other two being aid dependence and disaster-proneness - of the economy of Bangladesh must be identified as the greatest threat to the security of the country. The multi-dimensional approach to security adopted in this paper coincides with the holistic approach recommended by the Task Force in the understanding and combating of poverty. The report defines poverty as "the lack of certain basic capabilities to live a healthy active life free of avoidable morbidity and premature mortality, the capability to live with dignity, with adequate clothing and shelter, etc." As a corollary therefore, any strategy of poverty alleviation in order to bear fruits "must consider a range of quality of life variables such as nutrition, health and sanitation, housing, personal security, access to state distribution system, participation and institutional capability, crisis-coping capacity, etc." This marks a significant departure from a
uni-dimensional approach of viewing poverty simply as an outcome of lack of income or nutrition.

The Task Force data show a horizontal trend line of the overall poverty situation in Bangladesh for the past quarter century. The estimates show that ratio of poverty in 1988-89 was about 43 per cent while the corresponding figure in 1963-64 was 44 per cent. There have of course been some fluctuation on occasions around this horizontal trend. To be sure, the dislocation in the country brought forth by the war of liberation and subsequent natural disasters like floods and droughts of the 1972-74 period resulted in sharp rise in the poverty ratio. In the wake of chronic politico-economic instability of the subsequent periods the deteriorating pattern continued and by 1977-78 the poverty ratio reached nearly 80 per cent. The pre-independence level was regained by 1985 but it still remains alarming. With about 60 per cent of the people of the country living below the poverty line. Bangladesh is in much worse situation than most of its Third World counterparts including those closer home in South Asia. Recent estimates of poverty ratios show 23 per cent for Pakistan, 27 per cent in Sri Lanka and 35 per cent in India. Infant mortality rate in Bangladesh is 120 per thousand live births compared to 97 in India, 68 in Indonesia and 21 in Sri Lanka. It is beyond any dispute, therefore, that poverty alleviation must be the prime concern of any level of policy debate in Bangladesh. Conventional approach to the alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh would require, as estimated by the World Bank, medium-to-long term annual growth rate of 5.5 per cent compared to about 4 per cent achieved during the last year while over one million person-years of employment should be generated per year compared to 0.6 million person years per year created during the past decade. It is now widely recognized that high rates of growth and employment do not necessarily succeed in the eradication of poverty which needs to be combated by multi-dimensional and target-oriented actions and interventions in various aspects of social and human development.

Bangladesh also ranks very low among the least developed countries in terms of human resources development measured by such basic indicators as literacy, health and
nutrition. Adult literacy in this country is amongst the lowest in the world and enrollment rates in both primary and secondary school at roughly 58 and 27 per cent are significantly below levels achieved in comparable countries. Malnutrition of adult and child is widespread and incidence of easily preventable diseases is high. Massive poverty and socio-cultural factors add to the widespread discrimination against women in terms of access to services, employment and income. To render sense to poverty alleviation programmes women must be integrated into mainstream development activities. Programmes to improve the quality and coverage of basic services, particularly primary education and primary health care, and reach disadvantaged groups such as women can have very high benefits in terms of social and economic development.

Public expenditures for human resources development have remained roughly constant at about 2.5 per cent of GDP between 1981-90, which is below the amount required. Bangladesh has reached a shameful stage of internal resources mobilization and it hardly generates any revenue surplus to finance development. Indeed there is evidence that donors are now financing not just 100% of our development budget but also some component of our non-development expenditure. The poor state of national savings rate has been shown in a recent work as not only an economic issue but also a measure of overall erosion of national values and norms. The ratio of national savings as percentage of national income has been steadily declining in Bangladesh. In the decade of 1971-80 it was barely 2.2 per cent and although it was marginally better at 2.6 per cent in 1981-90 in the late 1980s it deteriorated further reaching 1.6 per cent in 1990 compared to 39.2 per cent in China, 33.9 in S. Korea, 44.4 in Singapore, 32.1 in Thailand, 21.0 in India and 13.2 in Pakistan during the same year. If savings can be considered as a synthetic expression and measure of national creativity and socio-cultural values, the state of savings in Bangladesh must be an indicator of an extremely humiliating and decaying portrait.

Bangladesh is also a society of sharpening social inequalities and cleavages. On the one hand there is abject
poverty pervading the society, and on the other there is acute inequity in the distribution of income and wealth in both urban and rural areas. The latest available data show 42 per cent of national income distributed to the highest quintile while its lowest counterpart gets only 12 per cent. In terms of land distribution the inequality is even sharper with the top 10 per cent of owners occupying 49 per cent of cultivable land while the smallest 10 per cent own only 2 per cent. The society is furthermore a specific case of 'intermediate-praetorian syndrome'. The intermediate class in the absence of well-developed capitalist establishments is at the helm of state authority with its power base in various elite sub-groupings dominated by the civil and military bureaucracy and the political activities, both urban and rural. The vast 'ruled universe' including the lower-middle and low-income working class and the unemployed, the near or total landless peasants and the destitutes and disadvantaged in both rural and urban areas sustain on what is left over. This ruled part of the society, however, forms the reservoir of political activism that is used as the instrument of whatever changes may occur from time to time.

Although poverty, socio-economic underdevelopment and sharpening inequity determine the composition and structure of the society in Bangladesh, the class character is hardly reflected in the social and political formations and behaviour of the disadvantaged sections, nor are they organized on the basis of class consciousness. Thus no real class-based organizations have practically grown in the society, nor have they any effective political lobby at the policy or decision level. On the other hand, there exist strong and well-knit patron-client relationships between the poor and the rich. From the poor's point of view such relationship is necessitated by the question of sheer survival for which they have been traditionally tied to the local landed and richer sections. The latter for their part have extended the facade of support to create and sustain the power base of their social, economic and political muscle. The outcome is that whether it is a political party, or a civil-military oligarchy that is in power, the platform is built not on the basis of long term socio-economic needs of the society as a whole but on mutual patronage criterion. In the
process the masses remain out of the corridors of policy and decision making. They are also virtually out of the process of participation in the mainstream of political and economic activities.

On the other hand, the nation has been exposed to a critical level of dependence on external aid which has been in the ultimate analysis, according to expert opinion, increasingly denying the prospect of self-reliance. The fallout of this dependence is the expanding and strengthening network of the aid-sustained elite while on the other hand the poor continues to grow poorer and greater in number. The elite of Bangladesh maintains its exclusive position literally by trading poverty. The political aspect of this "poverty trade" has been manifested in the pernicious destruction of the representative institutions which at every level have been replaced by widespread use of fraud, corruption and malpractice. The concept of public accountability has withered away. Patronage from above, and not support of the people from below, has become the source of power. Delivery of patronage rather than programmes for societal welfare has in turn become the criterion for sustained popular support. Studies have shown that the external donors became active players in shaping the societal power structure and the administration participated in the corruptive practices contributing thereby to the breakdown of representative institutions. Political and administrative decisions became overly personalized undergoing arbitrary and subjective change while rule of law became inconceivable and easily negotiable. The interplay of all these factors contributes to a pervasive societal frustration, lack of social accommodation, growing tension and uncertainty within the state contributing to its vulnerability.

The Concluding Thought

The main theme that follows from the above discussion is that in the case of Bangladesh, the internal dimension of security needs to be understood in the context of the alienation of the people and the accompanying distortions in the societal structure and potential. The country's chronic political instability and socio-economic frustration in a
process of complex interface with its external vulnerabilities tend to seriously impede the process of development which in turn leads to further instability and further vulnerability.

A search for building up the internal and intrinsic national resilience capable of ensuring long term security brings forth the whole set of issues related to the process of nation-building and development pursuit. The point being stressed is that the polity and the economy have to be built so strongly as to develop an instinctive national resilience. A reasonable degree of social equity and spontaneous and active popular participation are indispensable in building of such a resilient society.

Since the polity and the economy are endemically fragile and because of the alienation syndrome as exposed above, an instinctive national resilience does not take root and national priorities and policies lack proper direction and vision. The imperative in this respect is a leadership under which the vast majority of the citizens would be spontaneously loyal and supportive of the policies pursued by the state and would accept its authority with the understanding that the policies and institutions provided would ensure enduring and self-sustaining welfare of the masses. Only then a sense of belonging may be expected to develop among the people at large and they would then constitute the source of instinctive deterrence against security threats.

The strategy suggested here is primarily societal motivation, a long term objective of building up national resilience. This will require a "minimum level of consciousness among the people concerning national goals and the means of achieving them, a degree of satisfaction with life and the present state of affairs in the country, a reasonably efficient government – and as result of all these, a sense of joy, pride and hope in the nation’s destiny .... determined will of the people to offer prolonged resistance ... social cohesion and solidarity amongst the people". In other words, it is the strategy of arresting the process of alienation of the people and taking them along in the real sense of the term in the process of building a strong and vibrant state – socially, politically and economically. In the context of the recent progress towards democratic transition in the country there
are some scope of optimism. "A return to authentic representative institutions, manifested through successive free and fair elections may possibly help ... ... (but) to undo the impact of years of misgovernance and to establish a new system of incentives which ... can integrate the deprived masses into the mainstream of development remains a heroic task whose dimensions increase in geometric proportion with each moment of delay". The alternative to “taking the people along” may be too volatile and unstable a turn-out, and hence too formidable threats to the security that the society, polity and economy can sustain.
Notes and References


3. Ibid.

4. For details see, Iftekharuzzaman, *op. cit.*

5. See for detailed discussion on the external dimension of threats to the security of Bangladesh, *ibid*, and Md. Nuruzzaman, *op. cit.*


8. Ibid., p. 194.


12. The Task Force was constituted in 1991 by the Interim Government that replaced the autocratic rule in Bangladesh. The Task Force
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composed of several hundred Bangladeshi experts and professionals who within a very short period produced a substantive report in four volumes dealing with various dimensions of developmental challenges facing the country. See, Report of the Task Forces on Bangladesh Development: Strategies for the 1990s, (UPL, Dhaka, 1991, Vols. 1-4).

13. Ibid., p. 25.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 26-27.
18. World Bank, op. cit.
19. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
24. Ibid.