

## Inculcating Professionalism in Defence for National Development: the Bangladesh Perspective

Lieutenant General Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy BB SBP ndc psc  
Commandant, National Defence College, Bangladesh  
sarwardy2004@yahoo.com

**Abstract-** Professionalism warrants something more when it is dealt with in respect of Military or Defence Service. The nature of the service having involvement with warfare necessitates extreme level of discipline, commitment and skill, which the personnel of the Defence Service should inculcate in them. Discipline, being in the centre, is revolved around by the personnel's commitment to the country, to their service and ultimately to each other for successful completion of the mission they are assigned with. Skill combines discipline and commitment to bring in the ultimate result of defence professionalism. Besides these three apparent characteristics of military professionalism, a professional soldier must also possess the intangible qualities like ethics and trust. Ethics helps distinguish right from the wrong to make a decision, and trust that is built upon each member's core identity evolving on shared values and ethos. Hence, military professionalism must have the attributes like discipline, commitment, skill, military ethics, organizational skill and many more that makes defence professionalism and good soldiering inseparable from each other. Bangladesh Armed Forces exhibited professionalism from its birth through the patriotic urge to liberate the motherland amidst the turbulent days of the Liberation War in 1971. 44 years having elapsed after the Liberation, all men and women of Bangladesh Defence Forces have matured much with professionalism to meet the challenges of the 21st century through sustaining sovereignty of the country. Many such exemplary instances uphold the Forces' higher level of professionalism for the national development. Professional Defence Forces' dealing with the insurgency problem in Chittagong Hill Tracts of the country resulted in signing the Peace Accord with the Government thereby sustaining sovereignty of the region. Success of Bangladesh Armed Forces in UN Missions as the highest peace keeper contributing country is a testimony of its worldwide acceptance of professionalism. This Liberation War winning professional Force has put its marks in multitudinous national developments also. In times of natural calamities to do relief and rehabilitation works, infrastructure development, to sustain the democratization process through election by playing the vital role of maintaining the law and order situation Bangladesh Armed Forces have been proven to be highly

professional. In assisting the government in accelerating socio-economic and communication development, in boosting quality education of all levels, in social welfares, in conservation of environment or helping the government in implementing mega projects like issuing National Identity Cards and Machine Readable Passport and Machine Readable Visa Bangladesh Army has emerged with enviable degree of professionalism. Hence, inculcating professionalism for Defence Forces remains as a prerequisite for national development as it is applicable for war.

Professionalism is the key to any job, but perhaps it warrants something more when we talk about professionalism in Armed Forces. The nature of war itself is possibly the most brutal, destructive and life-risking, and personnel who are involved in war necessitate extreme levels of discipline, commitment and skill. Therefore, not only knowledge or experience but for Armed Forces the essence of professionalism must also include discipline, commitment and skill. Out of all these, Discipline is the main characteristic of military professionalism. All other soldierly virtues must be built and revolve around discipline.

Commitment may be the second essence of military professionalism. Defense Forces must be committed to the country, the organization, their unit, and ultimately each other for the mission they are tasked to complete. Often military assignment requires long hours, in dangerous environment, with little or no comforts. Commitment allows members to overcome hardships and continue to go on when their bodies are indicating them to quit.

Next is Skill. Without Skill; discipline and commitment cannot bring absolute result. Skill allows members of the military to complete missions assigned to them and complete those with utmost satisfaction. In this context, in totality, the basis of Defence professionalism signifies - how an individual, a group, and as a Defence Force itself act to accomplish its mission. Therefore, discipline, commitment and skill have to be inculcated unitedly as a base, to be a professional military member. Samuel Huntington describes that **professionalism distinguishes**

**the military officer of today from the warriors of bygone ages. He mentioned three characteristics, these are: Expertise, Responsibility and Corporateness that distinguish military profession as a special type of vocation.**

However, there are also some abstract aspects of military professionalism. A professional soldier must possess the intangible qualities of ethics and trust. Soldiers guided by ethics can easily distinguish right from wrong to make a decision. This teaches a professional military personal to provide selfless service to the state. Ethics should be seen through the eyes of professionalism. In the present context, our ethics helps us understand not only what we can or cannot do, but it tells us what should be done.

On the contrary, trust is the intangible central attribute of a military profession. Trust in a profession is built upon each member's core identity, and that is developed over the time being associated with the profession. The trust is also evolved on shared values and ethos. These are exposed through the actions of an individual or a group in critical situations. Hence, military professionalism must have the attributes like discipline, commitment, skill, military ethics, organizational trust and many more. In this perspective, we can clearly conceptualize; Defence professionalism and good soldiering are inseparable for a true soldier.

Now, let me talk about the professionalism of Bangladesh Defence Force. Our Armed Forces was born through the profound patriotic urge to liberate the motherland amidst the turbulent days of the Liberation War in 1971. Our Armed Forces' calculative, well planned and decisive action crippled the occupation forces and accelerated our victory on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971. We got the independence, a country and a Defence Force under the dynamic leadership of the father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the liberation, he dreamt to have a professional, pro people Armed Forces, capable of protecting the country and nation at any cost. Therefore, Bangladesh Defence Forces' professionalism and motivation are based on the philosophical words of the father of the nation.

After the liberation, 44 years elapsed. Our professional Defence Force has also grown to a size with dreamt capability to appropriately defend the country. All men and women of our Defence Forces are on the way to inculcate professionalism and it's a continuous process. Our present Prime Minister who is also the Defence Minister and most gifted progeny of the Father of the Nation is on the right way to fulfill the dream of her

father to have a professional Defence Force in Bangladesh. Her government has undertaken a programme to further develop the Defence Force in the name of "**Forces Goal 2030**". The main essence of the development is the capability based professional Defence Force.

Very candidly, I can say that our military professionalism is already demonstrated by countering the insurgency problem in Chittagong Hill Tracts of our country. The Military played the pivotal role to compel the insurgent groups to sit at the negotiating table and ultimately signed the Peace Accord with the Government. Thereby, we could end the long two and a half decades' insurgency problem and brought the tranquility in the region that is one tenth area of our country.

It is well known that Bangladesh is the highest UN Peace Keeper contributing country. In establishing global peace, today Bangladesh has become a renowned name worldwide. Bangladesh Armed Forces have so far completed 54 missions with the participation of 1,19,980 members since 1988 successfully. Here comes the true testimony of our Defence Forces' professionalism in maintaining or keeping peace across the globe.

Now, our professional Armed Forces are no more the domain of men only but it's for both the gender male and female. Therefore, it has taken wider and multidimensional shape. This year, while taking salute in the passing out parade of the first female military soldier batch, our honourable Prime Minister urged upon to the newly passing out female soldiers "**.... You would serve the country and its people through your devotion, professionalism and integrity. You've been included in the Bangladesh Army as its proud members and you'll have to keep in mind that you're an integral part of this country...**".

A professional Defence Force can contribute tremendously to national development if employed, and our military is no exception to that. The people of Bangladesh also expect that the country's armed forces, created in the perspective of a great and pride taking war of independence, would effectively contribute to the national development. I shall make an endeavour to highlight some of those in today's august gathering.

**Role of Armed Forces During Flood and Cyclone.** Bangladesh is a land which frequently remains exposed to catastrophic visitations of natural disasters. The consequential enormity of destruction both in terms of men and materials leaves the civil authority functionally inadequate to cope with the complexity. And in such

circumstances the armed forces are called upon to do rescue, relief and rehabilitation works. The vicious flood of 1988 and 1998 and the devastating cyclone of 1991 and 2003 were occasions when the armed forces were found in such an exemplary role. Besides providing humanitarian assistance, we also take active part in post-disaster infrastructure development that is essential to sustain national progress.

**Conduct of National Elections:** The democratization process in Bangladesh has received substantial inputs from the Armed Forces. It remains an incontrovertible fact that the key military role in maintaining the desired law and order situation has ensured free and fair general elections in our country. On this issue, our Armed Forces are proven to be professional and trustworthy organization.

**Role in the Chittagong Hill Tracts:** Bangladesh Army implemented numerous programmes for the socio-economic and cultural development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, besides maintaining order. Such programmes have assisted the socio-economic development of the region and improved the living standard of the local people. Besides, huge efforts have been taken by our forces in building road networks across this difficult geographical region of the country that directly contributed to the upliftment of socio-economic condition of the general population.

**Communications Development:** The army has been playing vital role in the country's infrastructure development including construction and maintenance of roads. Soldiers of Bangladesh Army are now engaged in construction and repair of many roads all over the country. For the purpose, the Bangladesh Army has developed professional body named Special Works Organization. Our Army is also constructing flyover in the city and Marine Drive Roads along the beaches, which are expected to accelerate the socio-economic development of the region, besides boosting tourism.

**Dwelling House Project.** The government has entrusted the Defence Forces with the responsibility to implement a major part of ABASON Project, a project planned to provide shelter to the homeless people. Since its Beginning in 1997, we are constructing low cost barrack houses, where homeless families have been rehabilitated.

**Maritime Industry:** Bangladesh Navy is constructing ships in the Shipyard, which is a matter of great pride for our country. The first ever warship building project in Bangladesh is completed under Navy's

supervision. Besides, our Navy is contributing to the national economy through manufacturing and repairing of Ro-Ro ferry, Tug Boat, Inland Water Vessels etc. Bangladesh Navy Dockyard Technical Institute provides technical education to a considerable number of jobless youths and private Marine Academies every year to convert them into skilled manpower.

**Education Sector:** Armed Forces of Bangladesh have been imparting quality education facilities in primary, secondary and higher secondary level. Each individual service maintains schools and colleges inside cantonments. Besides, civil students are also getting admission facilities in Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) and Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC) etc. It may be mentioned here that Bangladesh Army recently established five Medical colleges and three Universities in different parts of our country with the greater intention of contributing in the country's education sector.

**Machine Readable Passport, Machine Readable Visa and National Identity Card Projects:** Bangladesh Army has been in close co-operation with the Ministry of Home Affairs in implementing Machine Readable Passport and Machine Readable Visa projects since 2009. Moreover, Bangladesh Armed Forces were given the project of preparation and issuing National Identity card to all citizens of above 18 years in coordination with the Election Commission. It was a unique project and our Armed Forces were applauded from all corners for the successful completion of this mega project.

**Conservation of Environment:** The armed forces personnel take active part in forestation program to conserve and develop the environment. It may be noted that different Armed Forces organizations received Prime Minister's Award for development of forest resources and conservation of environment by tree plantation.

**Welfare of Autistic Children.** For physical and psychological development of the retarded children, special autistic children school 'Proyash' run by Bangladesh Army and 'Ashar Alo' by Navy are making commendable efforts in this field.

Our Armed Forces professional involvement in the civil arena and contribution in national development is really praiseworthy. We have excellent civil-military relationship, and that helps in implementing different projects for national development including working in aid of civil power. In this connection, it may be mentioned that, for last couple of years we have faced a

number of major and often interconnected challenges where military and all the non military agencies operated effectively in the same environment. For an example, many of you know the tragedy of Rana Plaza, a garment Factory of our country that collapsed fully in 2013 which caused death of 1131 people. Bangladesh Army conducted the rescue operation which was one of the vivid examples where military, fire servicemen, police, various organizations and nonetheless, common people have participated as rescue workers, risking their lives and braving unbearable stench of rotting corpses from the debris. The life-risking, wholehearted operation could rescue 3553 personnel from the wreckage of Rana Plaza. This unique professionalism is inculcated from the philosophical words of the father of the Nation. He said, **“..... Armed Forces belong to the people and people belong to Armed Forces. It does not form a separate entity. All of you are son of the soil. Therefore, you will have to share the happiness and sorrow of the masses and stand beside them.”** Therefore, we, the members of Bangladesh Armed Forces, the motivated followers of

the father of the nation, are working shoulder to shoulder with people of all strata in national development activities with the spirit of Liberation War of 1971 in the heart.

*Now, you may have a glance on a video clip showing a unique example of Civil – Military cooperation. The duration of the video is approximately 5 minutes.*

To conclude, I want to say, the Armed Forces command goes down from the superior links of the chain of command towards the subordinate links which is reciprocated upwards with due loyalty. This loyalty alone makes a soldier advance in the face of a positive death. This quality depicts and ensures successful completion of a reposed assignment by the superiors. And truly inculcated professionalism makes it more distinct in all affairs, be it in war or may be in National Development activities. Therefore, inculcating professionalism in defence is much needed for both in war and peace.