INTRODUCTION

Like any other country, challenges to the security of Bangladesh emanate both from external and internal sources, encompassing both military and non-military issues. While many of Bangladesh's security concerns are generic in nature, some are very specific to it, which have been conditioned by its geographical environment, demographic structure, resource base, socio-economic conditions, and its historical evolution as a nation state.

Although Bangladesh is a country with a large population, from the security point of view it is a small state. The demands for the security of small states are more complex and difficult than those of the large states. The country is poor in terms of natural resources endowment. At the same time, Bangladesh is one of the economically weakest of the third world countries of the world. In this way, vulnerability of the country in terms of geography, economy, military and polity often narrows down its choices in the handling of contentious issues with the stronger neighbour—India.

Thus, in view of the complex and multifaceted challenges to the security of the country, it is absolutely necessary that the country's security concerns are accurately and rationally identified, analysed and redefined in order to give policy framework for addressing the actual and potential challenges to its security.

Security issues in Bangladesh before its liberation in the context of a geographically divided Pakistan were West Pakistan centric. The war with India over Kashmir in 1948 led to the strengthening of the military capability of Pakistan and an
arms race started between the two countries immediately after the war. Pakistan devoted nearly 70 per cent of its public revenue to defence expenditure in the first three years and it was more than 50 per cent as late as 1961. The defeat of Pakistan in the war against India in 1965 led to further strengthening of its defence capability. The long drawn military rule in Pakistan also facilitated the strengthening of military based approach to national security.

However, the strengthening of the military was considered by many as a ploy for appropriating resources of East Pakistan for the development of West Pakistan and deny Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) any share in military expenditure and political power. This point is amply proved by the fact that 'all military preparations and installations were also from that part of the country.' Indeed, President Ayub Khan while stepping down from the office was honest enough to concede that military rule denied any share of power of the Bengalis. The gulf between the two regions of Pakistan widened not simply by economic disparity but also by military rule, which was essentially unalloyed West Pakistani rule. The major demands of Bangladesh as a political unit of Pakistan further prove the above argument. First, the right to vote should be ensured and parliamentary democracy established. An end to open or covert military rule was sought; in fact democracy was considered the anti thesis of martial law. Second, parity in per capita income of the two regions should be ensured as quickly as possible. This meant provincial autonomy in economic management; halt to

3 A. M. A. Muhith, "Security Issues", in Muhiuddin Ahmad (ed), Bangladesh Towards 21st Century (Dhaka, 1999), p. 120.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
resource transfer to the western region and accelerated development in the eastern region. Third, regional capacity for self-defence should be built up and military expenditure should be substantially trimmed by reordering diplomatic initiatives.

When Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state in 1971, its security concerns changed drastically. The country had good relations with its immediate neighbours—India and Myanmar (then Burma). There was no threat to its territorial security from external aggression. Consequently, diversion of resources from military spending to economic development was recognized as a necessary option. But the military uprising that resulted in the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then President of the country, on 15 August 1975, changed the situation overnight. Major General Ziaur Rahman took over power and ruled as a military dictator. His power base remained in the military establishment. The military regime typically identified an enemy and theorized a threat perception and added to defence preparedness even though it did not make any sense in the case of Bangladesh.

India was considered as a plausible enemy and the quality of Indian imports and diversion of water at Farakka were popular points of resentment; still later insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) became another issue. There was a ruthless suppression of coup attempts or dissent and political opponents, increase in military budget. The elite civil servants as well as loyal military officers were inducted in civil administration. The same trend continued during the regime of General Ershad. After long sixteen years, the military rule ended when General Ershad stepped down from the office of the President due to public revolt against his dictatorial rule. However, the damage had been done. Even after ten years of restoration of
parliamentary democracy, there has not been any major change in security thinking. The military is still very powerful and their budget, whose details are state secrets, is on increase. The cantonments and military camps are completely isolated from the general masses and they do not reflect the ‘real’ security concerns of the country.

‘Security is perceptional, it is how we perceive it. Strategy on the other hand, is the mechanism to overcome our perception of insecurity. It is the way to fight and minimize insecurities.’ For the ruling political elite, regime security has always prevailed over national security. In order to consolidate and strengthen their power they have been creating non-existent external threats. The anti-India ruling elite in Dhaka in the post-Mujib period has been branding India as a threat to their country. They have adopted ‘multilateralism’ as their security strategy. The main political objective of this strategy has been to put an offensive counter force against the so-called military threats from India. This group represents the Islamic fundamentalists. They have been creating threat perception among the general masses against the dominant Indian influence in the region. They take a strong anti-India stand in the public and forcefully subscribe to the view that India is hell bent upon annihilating Bangladesh economically as well as politically. The seeds of anti-India feeling and threat perceptions were contained in their ideology right from the period of liberation struggle of the country. Because of their controversial role in the liberation struggle they remained isolated from the general masses. Therefore, they naturally project India as a threat to Bangladesh in their bid to capture power.

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8 Ibid., p. 401.
At the same time, India’s specific security outlook and doctrine in South Asia has also contributed to anti-India feelings in some quarters of Bangladesh. With regard to its immediate and vital interests, India has generally been hard line and uncompromising in projecting its influence and power in the sub-continent. Moreover, frequent intervention in the domestic affairs of its small neighbours has also led to creation of anti-India feelings in Bangladesh. Furthermore, India’s security doctrine is based on the pattern of ‘extended frontier’ approach. It means that India will take interests in the security needs of its small neighbours and will not allow extra-territorial intervention in this region.

However, from the perspectives of India’s territorial extent, population size, geostrategic location, elaborate defence establishments, abundant resource endowment and great civilizational depth; such a doctrine is not anything unexpected. All the great and superpowers do behave in the way as India intends to do in South Asia. This is just a fact of geography, history, economy and technology. Bangladesh should know the fact that the great power syndrome is present throughout the world.

In this context it is pertinent to dispel some misperceptions prevailing among the fundamentalist political formations of Bangladesh that India is a military threat to their country and it needs to deal with India military. First, it should to taken into consideration that Bangladesh will not be an asset but a liability to India. With its vast population, innumerable economic difficulties such as poverty, unemployment and a huge foreign debt, Bangladesh is already facing challenges that are enough disincentive for a foreign takeover. Therefore, the possibility of Indian invasion and

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\[1] Ibid., p. 391-392.
\[2] Ibid., p. 392.
annexation of Bangladesh sounds unwise. Second, the Indian perception of
Bangladesh is that Bangladesh merits little attention to India. As a matter of fact, the
Indian factor has significance for Bangladesh politics but there is no corresponding
Bangladeshi factor in Indian politics. Third, it should be kept in mind that the physical
invasion of a country has now become an obsolete strategy in security doctrine.
Fourthly, at the present level of military preparedness Bangladesh can hardly defend
itself against external aggression. Moreover, it cannot build up a huge defence
machine by sparing its meager resource to match the Indian defence capacity. In short,
Bangladesh can not afford to harbour non-existent military threat from India both
in rational and practical grounds. Bangladesh does not have any military threats from
India and at the same time, it does not possess significant military power to withstand
aggression emanating from foreign countries. Therefore, the country needs to identify
the genuine threats to its security and plan its security strategy accordingly.

Bangladesh is a region of extreme environmental stress and the most important
threat to the security of the country and its people are environmental scarcity of
resources. The country has a subsistence economy. It is highly dependent on natural
resource base for its socio-economic development. However, the scarcity of natural
resources caused by overpopulation, environmental degradation and change,
environmental hazards and developmental activities, is producing grave socio-
economic, which are having security implications for the country and its citizens. The
main socio-economic problems caused by environmental crisis are enumerated below.

1. Economic decline and growing incapacity of the country.
2. Decline in the quality of day-to-day life of the population and relative deprivation.

3. Loss of environmental foundations of life and population displacement.

4. Disruptions of legitimate social relations and institutions.

Bangladesh is an economically underdeveloped country. Its agricultural system is undiversified and of subsistence nature. The country lacks sufficient mineral resources for industrial development. The infrastructural and industrial bases are weak. The level of human and technological development is very low. Its political and administrative institutions are very weak. There is high level of dependence on foreign aid and donor's domination in decision-making. The heavily stressed natural resource base of the country is frequently devastated by environmental hazards that also damage the infrastructural, industrial and agricultural bases.

Economic development is one of the most important factors for integrating the alienated and dissatisfied sections of the population into the existing social order. However, in the context of shrinking domestic productive base, chronic underdevelopment, massive unemployment, low income and widespread poverty, the level of internal resource mobilization is obviously low. Economic deterioration is weakening the state and its institutions, which in turn is generating growing conflicts along class, communal and regional lines which are detrimental to the viability and governability of the society and the security of the country and its people.

In the contemporary Bangladesh scarcity and hardship are conditions of life for large segments of the population who make their living on their limited natural resource base. They do not have access to basic amenities for a dignified life like safe
drinking water, sanitation, health and educational facilities, and electricity. There is widespread prevalence of hunger, malnutrition and diseases among them. For them, the risks to survival are acute and immediate. Their immediate economic imperative of survival is forcing them to undermine and destroy ecological and natural resources system on which their future depends.

The dwindling of natural resources is forcing more and more people to live in disaster prone areas and marginal lands, leaving them even more vulnerable to natural forces. Thus, millions of people live on Char land and coastal belts of Bangladesh in spite grave danger of their lives from floods and cyclone. Their economic condition has always been delicately balanced on the subsistence margin. Their condition worsens almost invariably each year by recurrent natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, which cause them to fall below subsistence level. The loss of sources of living resulting from these disasters and the economic hardships and social dislocations caused by environmental degradation and development activities are forcing people to migrate to other areas within the country and to India which in turn is leading to ethnic clashes, insurgency and inter-state tensions.

Environmental crisis has reached alarming levels in many areas of Bangladesh. Rural areas are unable to support their growing populations. The poor are facing difficulties to gain access to land, water and fuel wood. On the other hand, the powerful local elite are appropriating these resources either by manipulation or by using physical force. The poor are trapped in a downward spiral. As a result, there is social upheaval and social conflicts along class and ethnic lines. Unable to improve their worsening conditions, they are migrating to urban areas in large numbers. The
concentration of these people in the urban areas is causing increasing demands on local institutions. Because of unequal power relations local institution are unable to fulfil even the basic minimum needs for a dignified life—sewers, electricity, running water, health and education. The poor slum dwellers are facing numerous socio-economic problems.

Thus, both the rural and urban poor are tapped between worsening environmental crises and inadequate investment in the physical and human capital that might eventually generate alternative employment opportunities. The failure of the state institutions to improve their conditions is leading to social upheaval and erosion of the legitimacy of the state and community institutions.

Thus, despite the rhetoric of fundamentalist political parties, the most important threat to the security of Bangladesh emanates from environmental sources. The applicability security concepts in Bangladesh is, therefore, not only irritation and illogical but also impractical.

Significance of the Study

Environmental crisis poses perhaps the gravest challenge to the security of Bangladesh. The major environmental problems confronting the country such as depletion of natural resource (e.g., land, water, fisheries, forests, etc) and environmental disasters have produced four causally interrelated social effects: economic decline, decline in the day-to-day living standard, population displacement, and disruption of legitimized social institutions and relations. These in turn have led to
various types of conflicts at the intra-state and inter-state levels, each with potentially serious repercussions for the security of the people and the country.

The country is facing severe domestic problems such as shrinking domestic productive base, chronic underdevelopment, mass poverty, sharp social inequality and social conflicts. In the face of inadequate supply of social and technical ingenuity conditions of the people are getting deteriorated, and at the same time the state and its institutions are becoming weaker. As a result, people’s faith in the adequacy and capacity of the state and its institutions is declining which in turn is threatening the viability of the existing social and political order. At the external front, disputes over environmental resources are getting intense. Bangladesh has many outstanding disputes with India over the share of common river waters and land resources. The delimitation of the coastal boundary is another issue of dispute between Bangladesh and its neighbours.

Thus, in spite of the fact that Bangladesh is facing severe environmental crisis with grave social, economic, political and security implications for the country, very few scholars have attempted to map out there linkages. Moreover, these studies suffer from serious limitations. Most of these studies have dealt with disputes between Bangladesh and India over specific environmental issues (e.g., Ganges water dispute, dispute over New Moore island, dispute over inflow of environment refugees from Bangladesh to India etc.). Other studies are over local level conflicts in Bangladesh over access to land and water. As a result, they have failed to note the linkages between environmental crisis and national security of Bangladesh. The central thesis of the present study is: environmental crisis leads to social, economic and political
turmoil, which in turn endanger the security of the people and country. To this effect, almost all the environmental issues (e.g., overpopulation, unequal access to resources, land degradation, water scarcity, depletion of fisheries and forest, environmental hazards, sea-land rise etc) that have generated security concerns of Bangladesh have been comprehensively dealt with.

Sources of Data

Although the linkages between environmental crisis and security in Bangladesh are complex, this study maps out the causal role of environmental crisis as a source of threat to the security of the country. As the nature of the research in enormously complex and the unit of study is very large, our analysis is faced with serious limitations in data quality and quantity. The study is mainly based on the research findings by scholars of different disciplines on the line among environment, demography, economy and security in Bangladesh. The relevant data and information have been collected from publications of different government and non-government organisations such as statistical yearbooks, annual reports, project reports (both published and unpublished) and information communications. The data may vary to some extent due to different sources of information.

Methodology

From an academic point of view, it is always a challenging task to demonstrate causal linkages between environment and security. As the subject stretches both in the fields of natural and social sciences, the methods and analytical concepts of any one
particular discipline will be inadequate to understand the complex relationships that exist between environmental and social processes. In order to comprehend these relationships, an interdisciplinary approach is needed.

Geography forms a bridge between the natural and social sciences as its concepts and analytical tools have been derived from both the faculties of the sciences. Its special characteristics are its breadth of study, methodology, synthesis of work from other disciplines, including the natural sciences and the humanities and its interest in the management of people-environment interrelationships. The theme of environmental security has a strong politico-geographical dimension as it is concerned with the impact of environmental crisis on the well being of society and conflict over social and spatial distribution of environment resources and hazards.

This is an issue-based study from a politico-geographical perspective. An in-depth inquiry and problem solving approach have been taken. The major environmental problems of the country have been identified. Their impacts on the society and economy have been noted down. From the various socio-economic effects, the types and nature of actual and potential conflicts have been studied. The security implications of these conflicts on Bangladesh have been noted. Finally, some suggestions have been proposed which may help to solve the pressing environmental problems of the country.

Although the study is mainly based on the data and information collected from various government and non-government publications, it is also supplemented by the personal observations by the researcher of specific sites of environmental concerns, his informal group and individual discussions with experts of this field in Bangladesh.
Objectives

The objective of this research is to empirically demonstrate the environmental sources of threats to the security of Bangladesh. The main areas of enquiry are as follows:

(1) To critically examine the nature of threat perceptions in the context of national security of Bangladesh and the strategies the country has so far adopted to strengthen its security.

(2) To investigate into and analyse the nature and extent of environmental crisis in Bangladesh.

(3) To map out the socio-economic impacts of environmental crisis in Bangladesh.

(4) To identify and critically analyse the causal links between environmental crisis and conflict in the case of Bangladesh.

(5) To investigate into the nature future conflicts over scarce natural resources in Bangladesh.

(6) To prescribe some suggestions that may be effective to strengthen the environmental security of Bangladesh.
Hypotheses

The present study is an attempt to empirically assess the validity of the following hypothetical statements of interconnection between environmental crisis and security from the case study of Bangladesh.

1. As a country's environmental foundations shrink, its economy may steadily decline, its social fabrics may collapse, and its political structure may become destabilised.

2. Environmental crisis (and other crises) can erode the legitimacy of the representative governments and pave the way for the establishment of bureaucratic—authoritarian governments. In other cases, it may lead to the strengthening of the already existing authoritarian regimes.

3. The loss of environmental foundations of livelihood in a region may cause an affected group to shift its allegiance from the centre to the periphery, increasing the possibilities of political disorder, civil strife and even insurgency.

4. Environmental decline can reduce economic opportunities, causing population displacement within the state and across the international borders. This may give rise to intra-state and inter-state conflicts.

5. Environmental degradation faced by a country, which is caused due to activities across its borders, can deteriorates the bilateral or multilateral relations to the detriment of the regional security.

6. Environmental issues are often manipulated politically to serve narrow group interests which jeopardise the domestic power balance, which in turn causes political instability.
The decreasing supplies of physically controllable resources such as fresh water and productive agricultural land may produce competing claims and counter-claims between or among various groups within a country or between two countries.

**Organization of the Study**

Keeping in view the objectives, the study has been organized into five chapters. The first chapter begins by defining the concepts of environment, human-environment relationships and environmental crisis. It then appraises the concept of security keeping in view its changing meaning and contexts. The chapter also critically examines the paradigm shifts in the security arena and emphasizes the growing need to focus on the environmental component of human and national security in the third world countries.

The second chapter discusses the nature and extent of environmental crisis in Bangladesh. It begins by describing the geographical characteristics of the country and then maps out its natural resource base. It then focuses on the causes, nature and extent of environmental crisis. The chapter ends by identifying the main areas of environmental concerns and their major problems.

The third chapter analyses various socio-economic effects of environmental crisis and their implications on the human and national security of Bangladesh. The chapter begins by analyzing the decline in the quality and quantity of environmental resources which are manifested in increasing scarcity of good agricultural land, freshwater scarcity, dwindling of biological resources, decreasing air quality, loss of human habitat and disruptions of inland water transport. It then examines the impact
of resource scarcity on the society, demography and polity in the light of human and national security of Bangladesh.

The fourth chapter deals with the types and nature of actual and potential, intra-state and inter-state, and resolved and unresolved conflicts over environmental issues in Bangladesh. Some of the important conflicts with an environmental dimension have been studied in details. The security implications of these conflicts on Bangladesh have also been noted.

The last chapter briefly outlines three approaches to strengthen the environmental component of security of Bangladesh. These are (1) management of environmental crisis, (2) mitigating social impacts of environmental crisis, and (3) resolution of environmentally induced conflicts.