The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Wednesday, July 29, 1998

Summit Expectations

This year's SAARC summit beginning in Colombo today marks the 13th year of the regional body with only one more summit to go before the advent of the new millennium. While the crowding economic cooperation agenda with their loose ends need to be shorn of superfluities and firmed up to acquire clear-cut directional thrusts a new grist to the mill has come about in the shape of a challenge posed since the tit-for-tat Indo-Pak nuclear tests in May.

!f !t was collective political will that created SAARC it is the same spirit that is being vindicated now, primarily by the two nuclear players in South Asia seeing the wisdom, in fact, a dire need for the Colombo summit to be held on time. The SAARC's intrinsic resilience and fall-back efficacy in times of crisis are proven afresh after the Ayodhya-related temporary setback to the continuity of the summitry cycle in 1996.

But the mere latching on to SAARC as an outlet of the last resort to relieve our acute anxieties and tensions, ultimately hope-giving as it is, cannot be something we should rest content with. For there is so much dividend we can reap from this basic collective instinct for stress mitigation.

The Colombo summiteers owe it to their one billion-strong audience across the region to prove at the end of their historic interaction that mutual trust and confidence have been enhanced from the level these slid to after the nuclear tests; (b) the economic agenda on the active list have not gone out of focus; and (c) the momentum on forward footholds already reached in many areas has been maintained.

For a fillip to the confidence-building process in the region we are critically depending on Vajpavee-Sharif talks for an early defusion of their bilateral tensions boiling since the nuclear tests and the shadow these have cast over the Kashmir issue. Although the draft declaration does not contain a reference to nuclear disarmament we would like a regional commitment made to it in the final draft.

The Colombo summit has to decide on a realistic time-frame for the conversion of SAPTA into SAFTA which was earlier scheduled for completion in 2001. Subject to satisfactory implementation of the preferential trade agreement, we should aim for a free trade zone, say, by 2003-4 in time for the next millennium.

Persons of Probity for NCBs

Whoever coined the word 'default culture' couldn't have done better to describe the insidious worm eating into the vitals of our national economy. But this approach, addressing only a half of the greater diabolical whole, is foredoomed. These infamous defaulting personages and houses did not open the bank vaults and helped themselves to satiation. Bank directors and managers are the other half of the default game. The supremely doable thing at the moment is to ensure at the time of induction of new persons at these levels that they be of highest recognised probity.

This is the main content and also the main thrust of the Banking Reforms Commission Chairman's letter to the government, reported in Monday's Daily Star.

The terms of all NCB boards of directors are going to expire and new boards are to be named. It is to the credit of the present government that soon after its induction to office, it constituted the boards of nationalised banks opening the door to non-banking persons of achievement and integrity. No doubt, in one or two cases the government was, on hindsight, found to have chosen wrong people. But that is mistake and there is no question of compromising the principle of putting in social watchdogs on the NCB boards. And here is too a sterling chance for defaulters and all bank manipulators to get their men in on the boards. And they have far-stretching and powerful tentacles. The first and most important step to take would be for the government to desist from putting in persons who may be helpful in raising party funds.

Much depends on the reconstitution of the NCB boards and the appointment of the Bangladesh Bank Governor. This will be crucial to the recovery of our banking sector - the linchpin of our national economy. "Honest and competent persons of high moral standard and experience", to quote from BRC chief Wahiduddin Mahmud's letter, must be named to lead the NCBs.

Aren't These Murders?

We seem to have made peace with death by road accidents. Murders as they logically are for the plenteous presence of human error as a contributing factor, this endless saga of irreparable loss of human lives does not seem to bother us anymore. But what happened on the Dhaka-Tangail road Monday last was probably too much even for this impregnable collective apathy. A head-on collision of a bus with a tempo (autorickshaw van) left all ten passengers in the latter killed and some 50 passengers of the bus injured. It was broad daylight, and obviously visibility, a crucial factor in driving ,was not a problem. So what led to this terrible disaster? In all probability it was the killer bus which got into the way of the tempo while trying to overtake a vehicle ahead of it. The bottomline is lack of adequate training on the part of the bus driver which brought darkness at noon for ten persons and their families.

Most of the bus drivers who literally make light of the responsibility of so many lives on their hands were once helpers or assistants to drivers. There is no harm in a helper graduating into a driver. But the problem is they have very little notion of road rules and the sense of responsibility which a trained driver would have had. With corruption being so rampant and enforcement so lax, getting licenses is no problem at all. Add to this unscrupulous owners' profiteering mentality; their tendency to employ rookie drivers to minimise maintenance cost, and you have a perfect recipe for disaster. Authorities seem to have vowed not to get a move on to stop this quiet tale of murder.

M E Peace Process

Assad's Visit to France and its Implications

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Political leaders everywhere face constraints of one sort or another, but the role of the US and the European Union leaders is especially great as they have to take much of the blame for their policy inertia. Archimedes famously said, "Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough and I will move the earth." On the question of peace in the Middle East the leaders of the major powers are yet to discover that place to stand.

first visit to the West in 22 years. The Syrian President is frustrated with the efforts to pursue peace with Israel on the basis of "land-for-peace" deal. west Asia that borders on the The return of Syrian territory Mediterranean Sea in the west. Golan Heights is a condition for Damascus is its capital and is peace with Israel. The rightthe world's oldest continuously wing Prime Minister of Israel inhabited city. Reserves of oil Mr. Netanyahu has turned back are not large but enough to the clock of peace in the Middle make the country self-suffi-East and refuses to return the cient and to provide three-Golan Heights to Syria. The quarters of the nation's export Oslo process which began in earnings. Syria is a Republic 1993 revolves around the whose President is elected for a principle: land in exchange for seven year term. He appoints peace. Since his coming to the Prime Minister and the power in May 1996 with a thin Cabinet. An Assembly is elected majority, Mr. Netanyahu has for a four-year term. The offievaded Israel's commitments to cial language is Arabic but most implement peace on the basis of Syrians speaks French or Enthe agreed Oslo principles. His intransigence and arrogance Israel is Syria's south westhave become the name of the

RESIDENT Hafez Al -As-

sad of Syrian Arab Rep-

ublic paid a two day visit

16-17 July) to France. It was his

game.

foreign aid every year.

Background

times bigger than Bangladesh

in area, with a population of 12

million. It is situated in south

Syria is almost one and half

NCE a man approached Prophet Muhammad

(peace be upon him). "I

want to commit adultery", he

said. The Prophet asked him to

sit down. "Do you want your

mother to commit adultery?".

the Prophet asked. "No", the

man replied. "Do you want your

wife to commit adultery?", was

the Prophet's next question.

reply. "Your sister?. The

answer was still a firm "no!

Finally, the Prophet asked, "Do

you want your daughter to

commit adultery?". "Absolutely

not!", the man was emphatic.

Then the Prophet said: "Do you

realize that every woman is

someone's daughter, sister, wife

sion of civilized men more than

the news that their women are

under attack. To counter the

African-American's civil rights

movement in the 1950s and 60s.

southern white supremacists

circulated the following bizarre

story to scare the southern men:

"In their headquarters, the

NAACP (the civil rights organi-

zation, "National Association

for the Advancement of

Coloured People") has keys to

the bedroom of every white

were raping Muslim women in

Bosnia is what galvanized Mus-

lims throughout the world into

how the news that the Pak-

istani soldiers had touched our

women drove us insane in

1971? Islam is the first religion

to give women their rights. Is-

lam's holy Prophet emphasized

that the mother is three times

more important than the fa-

Finally, have we forgotten

action, in the recent past.

The fact that the Serb men

woman in America!

Nothing inflames the pas-

or mother?"

"Of course not", was the man's

ern neighbor and Syria fought wars with Israel in 1967 and Prime Minister Netanyahu lost its territory - Golan has racked up an extraordinary Heights — to Israel. In an armed list of "achievements" which conflict. Golan Heights is include (a) the destruction of strategically important as it peace process in the region, (b) offers a clear advantage over the collapse of confidence in the the other party from its height. peace efforts among the stake-One can monitor the activities holders. (c) pampering of the exof Israel or vice versa from treme right-wing religious Golan Heights. It is no surprise party in Israel and (d) the that Israel does not want to give splintering of Israelis into rival up this territory to Syria. Mr. and antagonistic groups. Mr. Netanyahu realises the impor-Netanyahu wants a peace tance of Golan Heights and agreement with Syria without probably wants to negotiate a pulling out Israeli troops from deal whereby he can keep a porthe strategic Golan Heights. It tion of the Golan Heights for Isappears that Mr. Netanyahu rael's strategic interests and wants to have the cake and eat therefore keeps insisting on it too. It is interesting to note 'negotiating' a deal rather than that all his antics are being tolcommitting to the land-forerated by the US which supports peace deal... Israel and financially provides it with the largest amount of

Another factor for the insistence of negotiations with Syria without withdrawal of troops could be the issue of Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights. However, peace agreements are about give and take. Unfortunately. Mr. Netanyahu is being supported by the influential

minor right wing parties who are refusing to agree to any peace deal in the region. It is sad to see that his self-interests in holding on to power at the expense of durable peace for future generations in Israel and the Middle East is being allowed to go unchecked. Basically Mr. Netanyahu is playing with fire. which may eventually consume his country.

Policy Inertia of the US

Although the US Secretary of State Albright visited Syria in connection with the peace process Syria has an uneasy relationship with the US. The US suspects Syria of helping 'terrorist' activities while Syria considers that Israel's military might and brashness derive from the total blind support of the US. Syria's involvement with its troops in Lebanon is not to the liking of Israel. The occupation of Southern Lebanon by Israel for its so called "security" is a direct af-

front to Syria and Lebanon. The Clinton administration is in a quandary. Vested interests remain deeply entrenched in US politics. The links between the US Republican dominated Congress and the Jewish lobby have been the mainstay of Israel. The US wants to please both Israel and the Arab countries which is an impossibility given the domestic political necessities of the US administration. Firstly, the Clinton administration cannot put too much pressure on the strident policies of Israel because of the strong and influential Jewish lobby. Jewish -controlled media and support from the Repub-

lican-dominated Congress for the policies of Mr. Netanyahu. Secondly, President Clinton wants Vice-President Al Gore elected from his Democratic Party as the President after him. This being the case, the US administration needs to be soft with Israel as the Democrats do not want to lose Jewish votes in the next Presidential election. The order of priority given to the domestic interests to the exclusion of peace process in the Middle East appears to cause deep resentment in the Arab world, in particular to the US allies — Égypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan - with Syria being a victim of this tip-toeing policy of the US.

European Role

Syria maintains that the US has been unwilling and unable to put pressure on Israel to agree to the Oslo peace accord to make peace with Syria, and the only other alternative to resolve this impasse is to entreat the European nations to become more involved in the Middle East peace efforts. It is important to note that the European Union (EU) is gradually asserting its independence from the US. In many instances the EU has not agreed with the policies of the US, such as US sanctions against Iran and proposed NATO military intervention in Kosovo without the authorisation of the UN. Economically powerful with 300 million people, the European Union is a force to be reckoned with and Syria would like the EU to play a much bigger role in the peace

France is historically attached with the Middle East as a

colonial ruler. After World War France held Syria and Lebanon as its "mandated" territories of the League of Nations. France continues to maintain close ties with these countries. President Chirac's visit to Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan in the early part of this year demonstrated the willingness of France to push for peace in the region. His earlier proposal for the convening of an European summit on the Middle East was rejected by Israel. Not surprisingly, Israel only accepts the role of the US in the Middle East peace process as it knows it can manipulate and coerce the US administration

for its own interests.

President Assad is a former

airforce general and a soft-spoken person. He is known to have a cool and calculating mind. (I had the opportunity to meet him at a bilateral meeting during the Islamic Summit in Kuwait in early 1987). The President has been in power for over two decades and is a pragmatic political leader. He is aware of the deep complexities of the peace process in the Middle East and now seeks a renewed relationship with France and with Europe. The fundamental determinant for that relationship will be the role the European Union wishes to play in brokering of peace between Israel and Syria. Moreover, President Assad wants the European Union to remind the US of its critical role in achieving durable peace in the region, and thus needs to put pressure on the Israeli government rather than being sidelined by Mr. Netanyahu.

After face to face talks with President Jacques Chirac on 16

and 17 July, President Assad reiterated that France considered the unconditional return of the Golan Heights vital to a peace deal. Mr. Chirac said that peace was only possible in the Middle East if Syria was included in the equation. France supports Egypt in convening a conference on the Middle East to facilitate the present deadlock in the peace process.

Conclusion

Mr. Netanyahu insists that his rejection of "land-for peace" deal will bring back security to Israel. Netanyahu's eyes may be shut but to the rest of the world one thing is clear that Israel is against the tide of world opinion in establishing enduring peace in the Middle East. His intransigence, arrogance and misguided views may lead to war in the Middle East. President Assad has accused the Israeli government of bringing Middle East peace talks to a halt. Before his visit President Assad during a television interview with French Channel One said, 'If we achieve nothing, wars will break out and spread to several countries, directly or indirectly.'

This is a grim reminder of what may come if the impasse on peace talks continues. But who will be responsible for Political leaders everywhere face constraints of one sort or another, but the role of the US and the European Union leaders is especially great as they have to take much of the blame for their policy inertia. Archimedes famously said, "Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough and I will move the earth." On the question of peace in the Middle East the leaders of the major powers are yet to discover that place to stand.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva

LETTER FROM AMERICA

A Nation that Does Not Cherish the Honour of Its Women, is Doomed

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed Writes from Princeton

If Bangladeshi men violate Bangladeshi women only because the latter is physically weaker, then the rule of the jungle will prevail in the country. It is ironic that with two women as the heads of governments in the last seven and a half years, Bangladesh has become almost as unsafe for women as it was during the nation's darkest hour in 1971.

Yet, in Bangladesh, Muslim men rape Muslim women. (For those men who cannot control themselves, Islam prescribes two remedies: marriage or fasting.)

Where are the religious leaders? Why, for instance did little Shazneen die in her own room, in her own house, in presence of her own parents, at the hand of the rapist? Where are our political leaders? Ultimately, it is the duty of the government to protect the life, property and honour of its citizens. If they cannot, they have no business being in power.

Criminals are not dumb. They draw their inspiration from the leadership of the nation. When they see that Bangladesh is a lawless nation, why would they deprive themselves of consequence-free crime? Miscreants with money get nomination for parliamentary seats. Industrialists get rich by taking crores of Taka loan from the government and never repaying. Members of the parliament maintain goondas on their payroll. High ranking government officers also maintain goondas to do their dirty work. Government officers bribe the government to win illegal favours. How can a nation. the majority of whose citizens are Muslims accept bribing, lying and cheating as a way of life - all of which are contrary to the teachings of Islam? On top of it we have roving band of mastaans and chandabaz. Like Somalia. Bangladesh is fast becoming a nation of war lords.

Punishment deters crime. The fear of losing a limb or being beheaded is why crime is so low in Saudi Arabia. In Bangladesh, criminals have no such fear. The police have been neutralized. If the police apprehend a criminal, and the criminal is released through the intervention of a "boro saheb". they will naturally be demoral ized. The police have to be given more facilities, power and authority to do their job. However, if they are corrupt on their own volition, punishment should be twice as harsh for the policemen. Judiciary must be impartial. If any judge is found to be corrupt, his punishment should be tripled. If the police are illequipped to disarm some MP's or Secretary's personal armies, the Army should be brought in to do the job.

No body should be above the law, not even the Prime Minister or the President. Any civilian should be able to take the highest executive of the nation to court, if the person believes that the head of the government is working against the interest of the nation. Sexual harassment of women is a serious crime in the US. Only recently, Senator Bob Packwood of Oregon had to resign when women in her staff accused him of harassment. Verbally harassing a woman at work is not considered funny; it results in the termination of the harasser's job! A low level Arkansas state employee, Paula Jones, accused President Clinton of propositioning her in an Arkansas hotel in 1991. Even the feminists believed that the "trailer park trash" was trying to damage the President politically and had no case. (Recently it has been revealed that contrary to Jones' claim that the incident took

record showed that Governor Clinton had left in the morning.) A female judge (President Bush appointee) dismissed the case. Everyone agrees that if President Clinton had sex with the White House intern Monica Lewinsky, it was consensual. Nevertheless, the "independent" counsel Kenneth Starr is expending enormous amount of the tax payers' money to investigate whether the President asked Lewinsky to lie about it!

Bangladesh has become a country where honesty is a sin, punishable by death! An attempt was made to murder one of the most honest customs officer in Bangladesh, Mr. Manzoor Mannan, through a staged "traffic accident", a few years ago. The criminals killed his son and put Mr Mannan in coma for several days.

ii Bangladeshi men violate Bangladeshi women only because the latter is physically weaker, then the rule of the jungle will prevail in the country. It is ironic that with two women as the heads of governments in the last seven and a half years, Bangladesh has be-

ever, the government of Sheikh

Hasina has in the recent past

made a decision that the minis-

ters will not have to submit

their statement of assets to the

Income Tax authorities but to

her. She also informed the

Jatiya Sangsad that it would

not be wise to publish the min-

isters' statement of assets. She

has, however, refrained from

assigning any reason as to why

it would be pernacious to submit

such returns to the appropriate

The decision of the govern-

ment to put the ministers above

law is biased, partisan and un-

ethical. It sets a very bad exam-

ple of public accountability and

transparency which is so es-

sential to the running of

democracy. The public have a

right for know the details of the

ministers' earnings and expen-

ditures, as well as the quantum

of their assets especially as we

have been constantly hearing

charges and counter charges of

corruption by ministers on the

Fundamental rights

floor of the Sangsad.

Dr A Z Mia

Dhaka.

authorities.

come almost as unsafe for women as it was during the nation's darkest hour in 1971. when Pakistani soldiers jumped on our women like savages. A nation that fails to defend the honour of its women is all animal; it is devoid of a soul and is not civilized. Bangladeshis worry about environmental pollution; that, however, is far easier to reverse than mental pollution.

South Africans, black and white, cannot wait to tell the world that they look up to their President, Mandela. The Malaysians are proud of their Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. Do Bangladeshis look up to their leadership? Absolutely not. Why should they? Over the last twenty years Bangladesh has had only party and self-centered leaders. They were unwilling or unable to think beyond the need of their family and party.

They are incapable of comprehending the needs of Bangladesh in the new millennium. A decent education helps enormously. Fortunately for India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was its Prime Minister for the first seventeen years. The Pandit laid such a strong foundation for India's democracy that the attempts by others, including his daughter, Indira, to tinker with it have failed.

In a nation of 130 million people, how many Bangladeshis can one look up to? I can think of only one: Yunus Bhai (Dr. Muhammad Yunus). Why don't the other good people, the real patriots of Bangladesh, rise up and make themselves heard? If the good people are not willing to take over the country, the evil ones will.

I am shocked!

Sir, My shock knew no bounds when I read the news of the death of a brilliant IUB student under police custody. Being driven by my uncontrolled emotion, I can't help but writing this letter. The first question pops up in mind is that whether we are living in a civilized country or not. At the end of the 20th century when "human right" has become an unquestionable social issue, the fate of millions in our country is bound up with "Medieval" barbarism by our so-called "protectors". Unfortunately this is not the first time that it has happened.

Over the years several incidents associated with police violence have occurred. However, still our society is seemingly untrammeled by these kinds of police violence. One of the reasons of our social apathy might be that everybody thinks that he or she is safe and has nothing to do with this issue unless it directly falls upon him or

But we should remember one thing, if we continuously evade our social responsibility in such way and do not start raising our voice strongly against these crimes, who knows? — I or you might be the next victim!!! As a matter of fact it could be anyone peacefully living in the society!

So, we, the common people have the task to put pressure on government, political parties to set exemplary punishment for the culprits. Our political leaders who love to plunge into profuse promises won't do anything unless we, the common mass, compel them to do that.

My heartfelt sympathy and

condolence to the bereaved family of Rubel. May Allah bless his soul.

Dept of Urban Planning Los Angeles, CA 90024

Zafar Hadi

Flood situation

Sir. The nation is experiencing a flood. On 26/7/1998, 13 rivers were flowing above danger levels at 17 stations.

Indications of slow receding of the rivers are visible in the horizon. The next pertinent question is how long we in Dhaka are going to line in this situation?

Past records show that Buriganga at Dhaka took 11 to 16 days to fall below danger level from the peak in the flood years of 1988, 1987, 1974, 1971 and 1970. This year Buriganga has just crossed danger level on 26/7/1998 and may need another 6 to 8 days to attain its peak. With the present rate of rise the Buriganga may reach its peak at about 6.50 m/PWD.

Forecasts are always estimates and there are deviations, but some estimates are required for planning to fight the disas-

M A Matin 403 West Kafrul Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka-1207

Justice?

Sir, The law and order situation in Bangladesh has simply deteriorated and for ordinary people like us, there is no place to go and ask for help when you need one. The recent alleged murder of Shamim Reza Rubel by the law protectors(?) is no

more of a shocking news to us. Is seems the government is encouraging ordinary people to take law in their own hand.

This type of incidents have been repeating over and over again but where has the justice gone? One thing they tend to forget that they will also die one day and there shall be no injustice to anyone on that day of judgement.

Md Alam USA

Apology? Why?

Sir, It has been about eight months that no class has taken place in the BUET architecture department for no fault of the students. Nobody is ready to take the blame and admit the responsibility to break the deadlock. The VC said that just resignation could not be accepted, but he accepted joint resignation of 13 of the best teachers of architecture after a month of their joint withdrawal.

The VC also said that it was not a positive measure though by all means it appears. So, he also said that those teachers fall out of their commitment. This VC twice on record said if they appeal separately for reconsideration of the authority's decision to accept their resignation he would do that. They did that, and now new considerations are set that they have to seek pardon for their deeds. What did they do?

They fought on moral and ethical grounds to uphold their own dignity and freedom of the discipline of architecture while the authority and the teachers association repressed them and branded them with all sorts of

lies. And now they are to seek pardon from those who are at fault their for their reinstatement! What a farse!

place around 2 P.M., the hotel

Dr Abdul Jalil and other concerned guardians 14A, New Paltan Lane Azimpur, Dhaka 1205

Bombs' religion

Sir. "Bombs have no reli-

gion" — a statement made by Senator Akram Zaki during an interview with the DS on the 10th of July. Mr Zaki was absolutely correct when he mentioned that when Israeli American, French, Indian, British, Russian and Chinese nuclear bombs were exploded and none of them carried their national labels, then why should a Pakistan nuclear bomb be termed as "Islamic"? Or is it because 'Islam" is wrongfully associated with the term "terrorists"? What the Indians did by detonating their nuclear devices just shows that they have finally proved themselves as being the truly mad. Pakistan should have refrained themselves from reacting. As that would have been strategically wise. Now after carrying out nuclear tests by Pakistan,

Ministers' statement

about assets

country, every person having

an income of certain limit has

to submit an annual Income

Tax Return, and also a state-

ment of his/her assets. How-

Sir, As per the law of the

Shagor Dhaka

of defence personnel the tensions have intensified.

Sir. The above article published in the DU written by Major General Ibrahim (Ret) followed by a latter by Mr Hai from Jessore have drawn my attention. As it appears to me regarding depriving the defence personnel to go to civil court is just line the "Special Powers

If at all the defence personnel are allowed to go to Civil Court, in that case, the same

has to be incorporated in the Manual of Military Law. This initiative has to be taken by the Services Chiefs. But question lies here regarding honesty and sincerity on the part of decision makers at the highest echelon

in the Services. The gentleman (Mr Hai from Jessore) very rightly pointed out India as an example where defence personnel can go to Civil Court. Because no individual can claim that injustice is done to him. But in our armed forces it is rampant.

Ehsan A Haque Rahmatpur, Barisal.

Remembering Rubel

Sir. The police actions in Bangladesh capital that resulted in the death of Rubel, was appalling. As the police is an agency of the government of Bangladesh, the Administration bears full responsibility for the conduct of its law enforcement agency. Rubel's civil right was violated by the Administration's police agency. In course of few hours, this young undergraduate student's life was terminated unilaterally by the police.

The perpetrators of this crime must be brought to justice. The law abiding citizens of Bangladesh must demand an impartial inquiry into this incident. The criminal justice system should not only seek justice for the victim, but also establish the accountability of the police agency.

Anwar Ghazi 12241 Marilla Drive Saratoga, California 95070