

People

Remembering Neelan
TWELVE months have elapsed since the passing of Neelan Tiruchelvam. The cruel deed of a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bomber snuffed out the life of a great personality who represented all that was noble and great in human civilisation.

Nazia Hassan dead
PAKISTANI pop singer, Nazia Hassan, died in London on August 13 after a protracted illness. She was 35 and had been suffering from cancer. Nazia sprang into stardom with her Indian film Qurbani song Aap jaisa koyi meri zindagi mein aaye.

Death on blasphemy charge
A sessions court of Lahore has sentenced a Muslim to death on charges of blasphemy subject to approval by the High Court.

The Icon Dies
INDIAN Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has led the tributes to Lala Amarnath, the national team's first Test captain following independence, who has died at the age of 88.

High Court
The charge against the accused, Mr. Yusuf Ali, was that he had sought to project himself as 'Prophet of the God'. There has been a great deal of controversy in Pakistan on certain provisions of the blasphemy law with the critics arguing that it could be misused particularly against the minorities.

India-Pakistan

The Myth of Independence

By Mansoor Mamoon



INDIA and Pakistan, the two South Asian neighbours, celebrated their respective independence days on August 14 and 15, with verbal fusillade against each other, reflecting over half a century of acrimonious relations between them.

In his Independence Day message Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf called for peace talks with India. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee scoffed at the idea saying that Pakistan was inciting insurgency on the one hand and on the other calling for a dialogue.

Both the countries have assumed the status of nuclear powers while their economies are ranked as poverty-stricken and backward. Whatever developments have taken place are only cosmetic in nature.

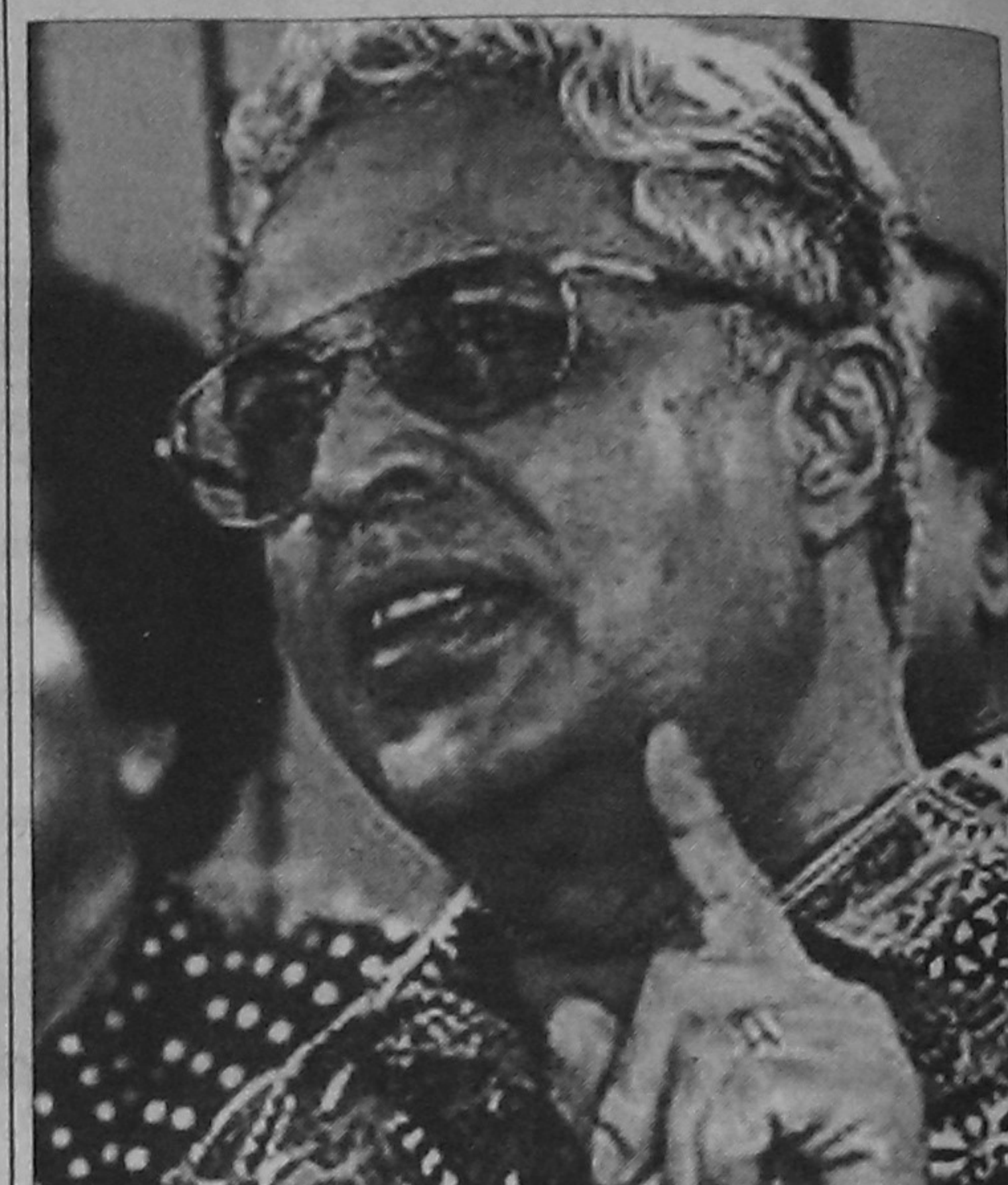
On August 15, General Pervez Musharraf expanded his cabinet with the induction of four more ministers and reconstituted the omnipotent Executive Council -- the main administrative organ of the state.

In General Pervez Musharraf's administrative setup, the Executive Council is all-powerful, while the cabinet plays a second fiddle in policy formulation as well as day-to-day running of the state.

As the peoples of India and Pakistan are celebrating 53rd anniversaries of their independence from long two centuries of British colonial rule they are likely to be introspective as to what they received in return.

Neighbour

Chaudhry in Delhi



Chaudhry in Delhi
THE ousted, ethnic-Indian Prime Minister of Fiji, Mahendra Chaudhry, has begun a ten-day visit to India aimed at rallying support for his demand that his government be reinstated.

Bangladesh

Time for Action

By Navine Murshid

IT'S coming. All the signs are there... actually, there is just one big sign: the rest are known.

Therefore, the steps to minimise destruction should include formation of disaster management committee at all levels; creating stocks of ORS at upazilla level; offering sanitation facilities in the embankment and other high areas where people are taking shelter.

With India facing one of the worst floods in years, Bangladesh is not far off. The Brahmaputra may appear to be behaving at the moment, but stakeholders believe that the river would ultimately overflow in Bangladesh.

The government, meanwhile, has undertaken several initiatives to contain the calamities of flood. The respective ministerial departments of the inter ministerial disaster management co-ordination team will open 24-hour control room considering the situation and will send report on their activities to Disaster Management and Relief Ministry.

Already, diarrhoea and cholera patients have started to come in at different hospitals in the city including Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Shomorita Hospital.

Health Ministry and Health Department will take necessary actions to tackle any kind of widespread disease. Disaster Management and Relief Ministry will take necessary steps through respective District Commissioners to provide temporary shelter and immediate help to homeless people from river erosion and flood.

With the Dengue 'epidemic' in full swing, the added flood-related diseases may turn out to be catastrophic. However, a flood this year would not come as a surprise to anyone.

The Public Health Engineering Department (DPHE) will take proper actions to supply safe drinking water in flood-affected areas and flood shelters as well.

Water Development Board, LGED, Roads and Highways



Flood has taken lives and property in northern India today. In no time, Bangladesh will have to face it too. Are we ready?

government-sponsored shelters for flood affected people. The government also has sectors allocated for flood and disaster management.

Department including the respective ministry/department are responsible for taking necessary actions to protect the erosion prone embankments and roads.

If the 1998 flood management is anything to go by, then we can surely tackle the flood as it comes this year, with an added advantage. This is an election period. Every political party will try to outdo one another in their rehabilitation programme.

At this time, the NGOs should get into a partnership with the government. Time has shown that this partnership can achieve. Let us not waste any opportunity to keep the disaster toll as low as possible.

No. But this means that the death toll would not be high. People are aware of the pattern of flood. They would have enough time to think ahead; to move off elsewhere; to resort to shelter centres. Some people would drown; some may die of snakebite; some people from water-borne diseases. As for property, homes would be destroyed. What has been built over the past few years will face the risk of destruction.

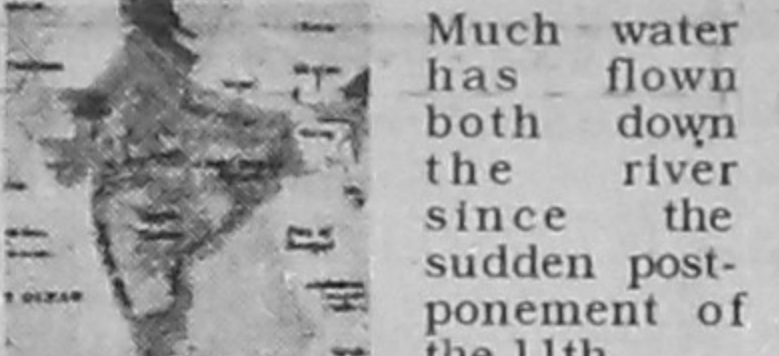
While considering the short-term to-dos, the long-term plans of action have to be ingrained too. While making sure that the flood next month does not affect us too badly, we have to make sure we have a protection mechanism to save us from a flood ten years later.

People may be aware of the calamities that lie ahead, but that does not mean there is nothing to do. At present, the problems have to be addressed on a short-term emergency basis. This is time to prepare for disaster management.

SAARC

It's Summit Time

By AMM Shahabuddin



Much water has flown both down the river since the sudden postponement of the 11th Annual Summit of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), which was scheduled to be held in Kathmandu in November last.

However, hopes have again been raised with the recent reports (DS 4 August) that new efforts are afoot to salvage the almost 'sunk' Summit. The report said that "a process is on to reactivate the SAARC and hold its next Summit", adding that diplomatic observers in Dhaka 'feel that the ball has already been set rolling to revive the SAARC activities in full swing, following a lull a about a year.

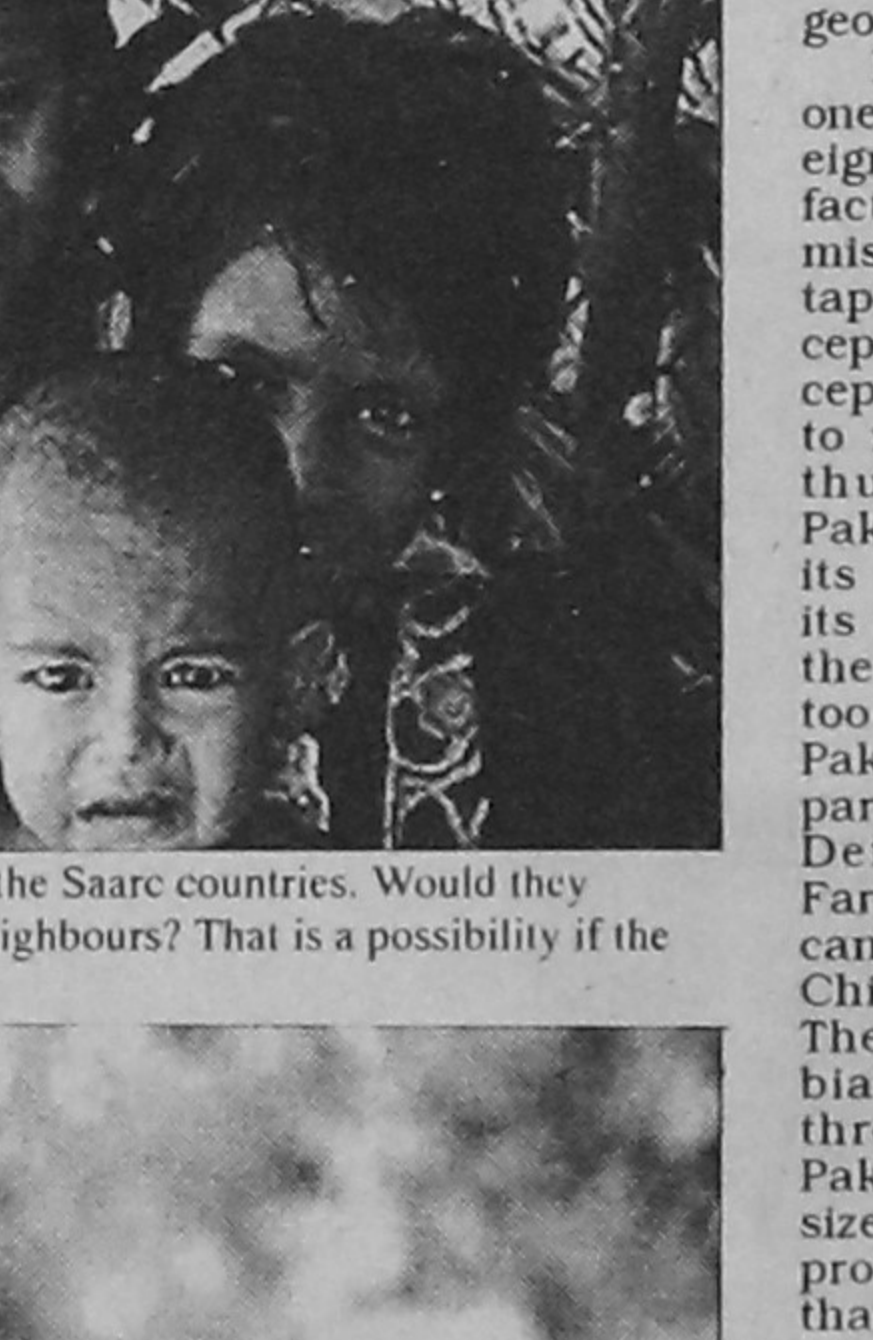
It is, however, not clear from the report the whether the ball has been set rolling with the nodding of Mr Bajpayee that he would now attend the Summit and was ready to sit on the same table with Gen Musharraf. We, however keep the hopes high, presuming it would be so, because there is no alternative or option than to hold the summit at an early date as Gen Musharraf will be holding power in Pakistan for more than two years, under a Supreme Court order, when general elections would be held to hand over power to elected leaders.

Main Purpose
The main purpose for which SAARC was established some 15 years ago at the initiative of Bangladesh, was to bring together seven South Asian countries -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka -- for their collective and uniform economic development. And to maintain the organisation's neutrality and integrity, bilateral issues were kept outside its jurisdiction. But it always provided an opportunity to the heads of governments and states to discuss their bilateral issues, in sidelines of the

What SAARC Charter Says

That Mr Vajpayee's stand vis-a-vis the almost forced postponement of the SAARC Summit was against the letter and spirit of its charter is an accepted fact. Because it has been clearly stated in the

India's posture as a 'big power' towards its small neighbours has been clinically analysed, in-depth, so to say, by The Daily Star Editor, Mr Mahfuz Anam, in a recent signed article, 'How is India as a neighbour' (DS 6th August). He had inter alia said: 'For India, there are only two neighbours -- China and Pakistan. The rest of us are just geographic entities....'



These children are the representatives of the Saarc countries. Would they grow up ignorant and unaware of their neighbours? That is a possibility if the cold walls of silence continues.

defence expenditure continues to increase and youths increasingly become part of the military. If summits remain stalled, a generation will be lost.

Charter that "no one state, or a combination of members" would be allowed to impose its decision on the organization. It has been further clarified by Prof Shamsul Haq, who was Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, when the proposal of SAARC was initiated and launched in 1985. He had, inter alia, said some time back that "no one state alone or in combination with others can impose its decision, because unanimity, and NOT, consensus, is the basis of all decisions. Had it been wrongly interpreted by Mr Huq then it should have been contradicted long ago to put the record straight. But no such contradiction or rejection of this interpretation by members of the organization has been done so far. So it stretches their intact.

Pakistan Probes Leak

By Samar Halarnkar



THE Pakistan government is trying to find out how the Hamood-ur-Rahman Report on Pakistan's surrender in Dhaka in 1971, suppressed for 28 years, reached INDIA TODAY GROUP ONLINE.

The government is seized of the matter, Pakistan Information minister Javed Jabbar told The Dawn. He was quoted as saying the government would make an appropriate statement at an appropriate time about the facts surrounding the Report and its leakage.

Other official sources told The Dawn that the government was trying to find out if the report was "doctored". But Maj Gen Rao Farman Ali, former political adviser to the East Pakistan government, said the report seemed genuine, and contained everything he had said in his deposition to the War Inquiry Commission.

Asked how he thought the report reached India, Gen Farman Ali told The Dawn that originally 12 copies of the report had been prepared, two of which had been taken by the late Z.A. Bhutto. However, one copy was taken back when the military raided his Larkana residence following the 1977 army takeover.

Former army chief Gen Mirza Aslam Beg said the publication of the report by INDIA TODAY GROUP ONLINE was very embarrassing for the Pakistan government and every citizen of the country.

Gen Beg, who now heads a political party, said now the government should publish the full account of the report, along with other reports which so far had not seen the light of the day, like the 1965 war assessment, the inquiry report on the 1988 air crash which had killed Gen Ziaul Haq and many others, the Ojheri Camp and the Kargil episode reports should also be made public, Gen Beg said. He said there was no point in hiding facts.

Gen Beg said there was no justification for protecting the people who were guilty. In his opinion, instead of offering excuses and apologies, the government should publish all reports.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad, President of Bangladesh: "The name of Sheikh Mujib is inseparable from the history of creation of independent and sovereign Bangladesh. His immense sacrifices for welfare of people is unparalleled in history... Now it is the responsibility of all of us to materialise his dream of a 'Golden Bengal'. Unity of all is needed for that."

Anwar Hossain Manju, Communications Minister of Bangladesh: "I have doubts about holding of the national election as we are yet to ensure that polls would be held in the country after every five years. There was always such apprehension in the past and it still persists because we have failed to establish constitutional politics in the last 50 years."

Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India: "Borders could not be redrawn either in the name of religion or on the strength of the sword... Pakistan would not be able to get its way through the undeclared war that it has been waging against India."

Parvez Musharraf, Chief Executive of Pakistan: "The sacrifices rendered by our Kashmiri brethren for their right of self-determination, despite being subjugated to the worst form of atrocities and abuses by the Indians... is living proof of this... Pakistan stands united with its Kashmiri brothers and sisters in their just cause and will continue to extend all moral, diplomatic and political support to their indigenous struggle against state-sponsored terrorism."

Homage to Bangabandhu



TENS of thousands of Bangladeshis marched barefoot to the former residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in west Dhaka on August 15 to mark the 25th anniversary of the assassination of the country's founder. Men, women and children carrying black banners and flowers filed past the three-storey private home where Mujib was murdered along with close family members during a coup led by a group of rebel army officers.

The writer is a retired UN official.