

# Bold decisions required at the Kathmandu summit

FAROOQ SOBHAN

SINCE the first meeting in Dhaka in 1985, the ten SAARC summits thus far have been fairly predictable occasions. They have been heavy on ritual, with the inevitable speeches singing the glories of regional cooperation and lamenting the slow progress thus far. Meanwhile, while everyone else has marched forward, the incidence of poverty in South Asia has increased. So much for the eradication of poverty by 2002. While everyone readily understands that in this age of globalization there is no alternative to building a strong regional grouping, we South Asians will insist on doing everything possible to ensure that we remain a divided region. Who will our leaders blame this time? Years of misgovernance have come home to roost; there is no one other than ourselves to blame for the sorry mess we find ourselves in; the heads must wake up to the fact that they must join hands to give the 1.3 billion people of the region a better future.

True, 11 September 2001 and the global recession will make life infinitely more painful for all our countries, although more so for some than for others. But the WTO ministerial conference at Doha nearly two months ago made it clear that there are certain things South Asia must do to get ahead. We must work more closely together as a regional group-

ing and move swiftly to a free trade area; we must develop our infrastructure on a collective basis; we must remove all the existing barriers to trade and investment; and we must function as a single economic market if we are to survive and escape from this quintessentially South Asian poverty trap.

No longer, therefore, can we afford to let this be yet another SAARC Summit that is heavy on rhetoric and poor on substance. The people do seek a miracle, and that is to see bold and imaginative leadership. Of course we are all painfully aware of the many bilateral differences that exist. We cannot wish these away, but we cannot any longer afford to wait to resolve all these differences in order to make progress on a regional basis. This, then, should be the first decision of the Summit that, come what may, SAARC will be put on the fast track. Or, to be more precise, the process of regional cooperation will be put on the fast track, but there will be some differences this time around. The SAARC leaders should acknowledge that the primary role of Governments will be that of facilitators; they should agree to join hands to remove the bottlenecks that impede cooperation in all spheres, and provide the infrastructure. And, rather than government, it will be the private sector, civil society groups and NGOs that will be encouraged to move forward.

**One of the first things the seven heads of state/government should do when they arrive in Kathmandu is to sit down together in a closed door meeting, foreign ministers included. At that meeting, they must acknowledge the fact that SAARC is facing a serious crisis, one which requires several bold decisions of them. The heads and the foreign ministers need to generate not only political will but also economic will, which comes from an understanding of the economic tasks that lie pending before the entire region.**

undertaking joint projects and developing new networks. Let the SAARC heads of state/government meet at Kathmandu separately or even collectively with business leaders, civil society representatives and the media for a free-flowing dialogue on breaking barriers and moving forward. If this should not be possible now, in Kathmandu, let the heads agree to such a dialogue in the near future. The heads must recognize that the past mechanisms have failed. The Technical Committees, the Standing Committee, even the Council of Ministers, have so far shown very little capacity for imaginative thinking, and even less for action on the ground.

Implementation, implementation, and one more time implementation... should be the mantra for the revival of SAARC itself. The organisation, thus far, has been the cumulative reflection of this regional handicap, which is our inability to implement and convert pious words into action. We all

about delivering good governance and corruption-free societies, and thus far talking seems to have been sufficient. In the new world order as it is evolving, we simply cannot afford the luxury of doing things in our own traditional South Asian way. We must all change, and this of course applies to SAARC and South Asian regionalism. We cannot perform miracles with a half-baked Secretariat and a Secretary General who is little more than a messenger between the capitals and their foreign ministries. To be truly effective in a region such as ours, the SAARC Secretary General must be at the level of former Foreign Minister, with access to the top-most echelons in each country. And he must be allowed the freedom to take a variety of initiatives, to be proactive.

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facing a serious crisis, one which requires several bold decisions of them. The heads and the foreign ministers need to generate not only political will but also economic will, which comes from an understanding of the economic tasks that lie pending before the entire region.

In other words, miracles are needed at the Kathmandu summit. A little bit of South Asian magic, or *jadoo*, is what is required, for there is no way but ahead for SAARC and South Asian regional cooperation, and the quicker each country wakes up to the fact the better. Once the magic has worked, and the heads and the ministers do decide to take some genuine action towards reviving SAARC, they may consider the following specific measures to emanate from the summit:

- Issue a strongly-worded statement reaffirming commitment of the member countries to SAARC and, in reflection of this, pledge to undertake some specific measures on a priority basis.
- Announce a programme for the

implementation of the convention to combat terrorism.

- Announce dates for a meeting of SAARC finance ministers to re-examine the strategy to combat poverty.
- Sign the convention to prevent Trafficking of Women and Children, including setting up a task force that would monitor implementation of the convention.
- Set up a task force to prepare a draft SAFTA treaty that would be presented to the next summit for signature.
- Set up a task force made up of both government and non-governmental experts to prepare a draft South Asian investment treaty.
- Announce dates for a meeting of ministers of civil aviation and tourism that would put forward a plan of action to promote tourism and further air links between the countries of the region.
- Arrange an annual dialogue between the SAARC heads of

state/government and the regional civil society leadership to exchange views on improving people-to-people contacts and strengthening regional cooperation.

- Announce the holding of an annual business summit in the Maldives along the lines of the Davos summit, to be jointly organised by the business and academic communities.
- Announce dates for the completion of work on a South Asian Social Charter.
- Examine ways and means to strengthen infrastructure and communication links in the region.
- Agree to strengthen the Secretariat, including upgrading the post of SAARC Secretary General.
- Set up a high level task force which will put forward specific recommendations on energy cooperation in the region.
- Strengthen SAARC's cooperation with the European Union, ASEAN, the United Nations and its specialised agencies.
- Request the Asian Development Bank to strengthen its support for regional and sub-regional projects.
- Stress the importance of presenting a common platform or position at crucial international conferences, particularly those related to economy and commerce, culture, environment, and the many social issues.

In order to ensure implementation of these measures, as well as to outline specific other measures to strengthen the Secretariat, the heads should announce a special summit, to be convened six months from now, to review the implementation of the above decisions and to consider for adoption a specific plan of action covering all of the above. A special task force made up of eminent scholars and experts along the lines of the Group of Eminent Persons (EPG) should be constituted within ten days of the end of the Eleventh Summit to prepare for this special summit.

This task force of eminent persons and experts will consider how best to implement the recommendations in the EPG report and will be required to complete its work in three months and present its report to the SAARC Standing Committee. However, on this occasion, the task force members would be invited to attend and participate in the work of the Standing Committee and subsequently in the work of the Council of Ministers, and then eventually at the SAARC Special Summit itself. Since the pro forma meetings of the ministers and bureaucrats have already been tried and found wanting in the past, this involvement of the eminent persons and experts would provide some chance for success of the new initiative to revive SAARC.

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# Unremitting violence shakes the soul of society

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

HORRIFYING reports of hijacking, extortion, killing and raping that fill the pages of the dailies with alarming frequency only lead one to believe that if anything the country has fallen in the grip of barbaric and uncivilised forces. The unprecedented violence that the country is witnessing has turned it into the most degenerate place even in Black African standard. This has raised the question if the law enforcement agencies in the country are really up to their task. The eroding public confidence in them could spell danger with ominous implications in different spheres of public life. To cite some of the gory incidents that took place very recently, On December 9 last, in the Kaptanbazar area of Dhaka city, desperate traders and pedestrians in the area, sure that the police will be able to do nothing, took the law into their own hands and beat four alleged muggers to death. The incident took place at about 7 and 8 a.m. when, reportedly, a gang of about 9 to 10 muggers after snatching valuables from passengers at nearby Dhaka-Narsingdi bus stand were fleeing through Kaptanbazar. In another incident, an alleged mugger who sustained fatal injuries caused by mob beating at Kalabagan area of the city on December 13 night died in hospital. Most shocking, during the first 15 days of the last month about 15 muggers were beaten to death and another 15 people were killed in Dhaka city. The victims include a college girl, house wife, cattle trader, car driver, garments worker besides four extortionists. The spectre of violence let loose in the country reflects that in the face of widespread rise of crime of various nature, people are taking the law into their own hands rather than seeking help from the law enforcement agencies. So says a desperate citizen in the Kalabagan area, "We have no choice but to take the law into our own hand to save ourselves because police patronise the muggers, terrorists and dacoits".

In fact, gruesome incidents of violence and terrorism stalk the country in a manner that no sensible citizen could comprehend. Sadly true, notably the capital city and even small towns and rural areas of the country seem caught in a frightening coil of fear and trauma. In a report carried by The Daily Star in the recent past, it was learnt that armed miscreants killed 80 people in Khulna Division alone beginning from October 11 to December 7 last year. The victims include political activists belonging to both AL and BNP, traders and student leaders.

Most alarming, the new surge in crime has believably peaked mostly

with the backing of political masters and godfathers who do have a pretty share in the toll other than the fact that they employ these thugs at the convenient moment to eliminate their rivals. While in most cases newspaper reporters, columnists and editors write ponderous articles; politicians who are still left with human values shriek in public speeches, and police officers often leak stories about political interference destroying their morale, the dastardly acts of the hoodlums that continue to play havoc with the citizens' lives go unabated. With a temporary lull in such activities when this menacing trend stops being headlined we tend to feel once more that nothing had happened but most lamentably the spectre of lawlessness, extortion, looting and raping continues and no remarkable effort has been taken to improve police functioning. On December 10 last, as reports suggest, 10 bus passengers sustained grievous injuries when a long distance passenger bus was attacked by the dacoits in Magura. The dacoits, who boarded the Khulna bound Sohag Paribahan in the gap of passengers made good their escape with valuables and cash worth a few lakh taka. Even citizens moving under the protection of law enforcement agencies like Ansar and V.D.P. are not safe. A blind young girl who boarded an intercity train at Bahadurabad Ghat was reportedly raped by some members of the V.D.P. and Ansar deployed for guarding the train and protecting the passengers from the clutches of hoodlums.

Ironically true, the whole country is being held hostage in the hands of a limited number of criminals. Fed up with the increasing incidence of hijacking, extortion, dacoity, looting and even raping that brought no response from the law enforcement agencies, people at large and in many cases victims themselves out of pent up anger took law into their own hands. Because of police inaction and failure to give justice, traumatic, frightening and ghastly nature of crime waves are sweeping over the country. Just before Eid day extortionists had shot one bank officer presumably a man of very humble means in Dhaka to death for his failure to meet the full demand of 20,000 taka. While in another case muggers killed one cow trader in Aminbazar and took to heels with the booty. As of December 20 media reports indicate that mobs killed 30 alleged muggers and injured 20 more in the city.

Large sections of populace seem disillusioned with the court, police and administrative integrity. If the evidence is anything to go by, the criminal, the politician and the

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bureaucrat in the country have always been good friends. Each has a use for the other, a nexus that has time and again been shown as lucrative. Mentionably, the notorious criminal and ring leader of the Seven Star Group is still at large because the enjoys the protection of his godfathers belonging to influential circle. Even if a criminal is arrested, he often comes out of the prison cell taking advantage of the loopholes of law, mostly designed at the initial stage of framing the cases. Tragically, justice is rarely delivered. For, once off the front pages in the newspapers, the cases are forgotten.

Incredibly, no attempt has been made so far to reintrain our policemen to think of themselves as representatives of the community rather than instruments of a cynical government machinery. Now a change of attitude is the call of the hour. The administration must rise to the expectation of the people and not wash its hands of the challenges by hiding behind excuses here and there. The concerned ministry will have to realize the urgent need to modernize our police not just through better equipment and transport but in terms of modern methods of surveillance, neutrality, interrogation, investigation and integrity. The flipside of the story is that in most cases the investigation was so sloppy and shoddy, the courts released many of the arrested criminals because of lack of evidence. Admittedly law is necessary and more so commitment and unbiased attitude to nab the criminals. Presumably if the accomplice had powerful political links as is often known, why law enforcement agencies failed to catch the politicians involved? It needs hardly any further confirmation that our protectors most often are our tormentors. But reports made public in a Bangla daily on December 22 last also have it that a booty of 25 lakh taka snatched by the extortionists before Eid day from the office of the Akiz Group of companies was finally grabbed by two police sergeants who seized the microbus at Shahbagh corner. Dhanmondi police recovered Tk. 30,500/= from the microbus driver and helper arrested outside Dhaka out of their share of Tk. 40,000/= in the whole booty. Police in the meantime arrested the sergeants and recovered Tk. 12.20 lakh from their possession. True, commitment, sincerity and integrity of purpose can work a miracle. In a rare and adventurous

move on December 22 last State Minister for Education Mr. ANH Ehsanul Haq Milon foiled a tender-snatching bid by some hoodlums in the Madrasah Education Board at Bakshshibazar, Dhaka. Conspicuously, the police team deployed there reportedly stayed away from the scene because of their alleged involvement in the scandal.

Cast a look around the world, we see that even in South Africa torn by infighting and savagery for years, optimists now find a jubilant example of the victory of democracy and a return of normalcy that the end of the cold war has ushered in. But out of our country come warnings how our struggles may unfold in the next generation. A sense of alienation of youth force from the humdrum of national activities, a grotesque feeling of deprivation and a seemingly lack of participation in the national rejuvenation programme are primal reasons for the country's slide to crime, drug addiction, trafficking in women and children, abduction and extortionism. Suppressed public anger and frustration about the failings of the concerned administration are finding outlet in such form as leading to a situation where disrespect for law and social ethics has hit the nadir.

Even if we condemn such violence in the strongest language at our command, we cannot remain oblivious of the cracks and tremors that have developed in the society over the years. People have hardly any knowledge as to how many of these rapists, abductors or extortionists have ever been tried and brought to justice. Rather the victims have stories full of anguish, shock, horror and harassment. Because police has draconian powers, Rape victims have been known to be raped often by the people whose help they seek and this causes so much terror that in rural Bangladesh affected families prefer to stay away from police stations. With societal norms torn apart, people are now increasingly restive. In the face of adversity, calamity and unrest threatening them one after another there is little for them to hold on, to hope for and to be proud of. The administration is yet to wake up to the tragic consequences of these shocking episodes of sinister crimes. But to a whole generation growing up with psychological trauma, shock and grief, there must be a ray of hope.

In analyzing the crime-situation

that has swept over the country in a virulent epidemic form, one gets the impression that these terrorists or criminals enjoy the blessings and protection of their godfathers that encourages them to ride roughshod over the laws of the country. People obey laws because of defiance or breaking laws invites punishments. Precisely true, criminals by themselves can never defy the forces of the state unless they are protected by the influential quarters. A careful look will bring to the fore that a section of political elements are in some way or other involved in unlawful activities in our society. Even after so much damage inflicted on the society, we tend to forget the alarming implications and grave consequences of the linkage between terrorism and the degenerating politicians. Sweden Islam and other ring leaders of terrorist groups who were arrested in the past disclosed that they had enjoyed the patronage of some godfathers cum

politicians.

The sad part of the game is that once a person is hooked up to a criminal activity, it becomes difficult for him to get rid of the evil forces even if he wishes because of the Damocles sword that hangs over his head with the likelihood of severe punishment either from the state authorities or from his gang members. Faced with the spectre of unemployment and hard life on one hand and staggeringly increasing wealth at lesser effort as well as risk, on the other, he chooses to remain a criminal at least in the Bangladesh perspective.

But a failure to bring crime of any sort under control could cost not only the image of the government but its whole experiment with democracy. Peace loving citizens hate chaos and the unremitting violence they see every day has shaken them to the core. The growing loss of confidence could even

produce sudden political swings most people do not cherish. In fact, most people exhibit their frenzied behaviour as a protest against the helplessness and inaction of the government in dealing with crime.

Without a shadow of doubt, the Prime Minister also realizes that the unrelenting spate of organised crime is discrediting the state power and threatening the security of the country. But given the fact that little has been done to put teeth in the nationwide crime-busting programme, now the administration's full outpour of burst of energy would only vindicate its initiative to bolster the image that has eroded so much. Assuringly, the present government after assuming power realized the necessity of improving law and order situation in the face of eroding public confidence. But the soaring crime graph is only an indication that nothing has changed in

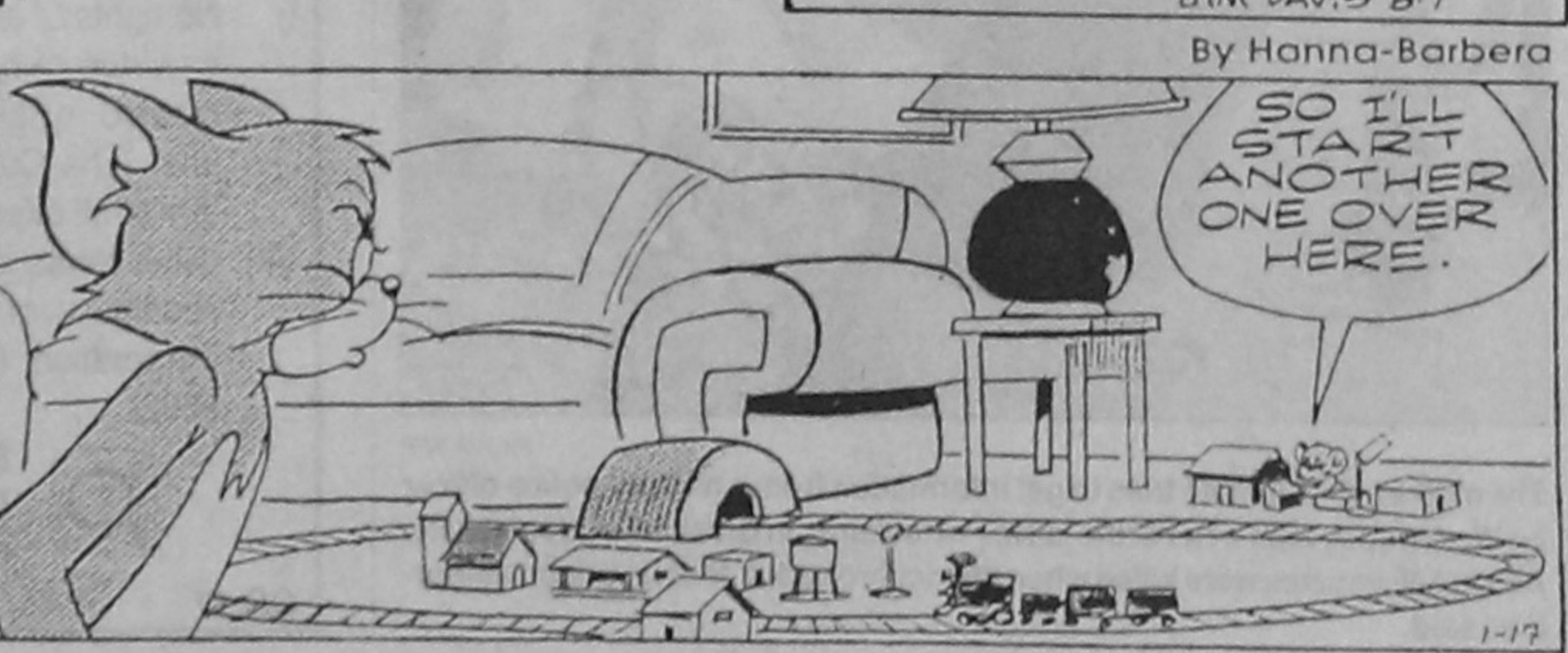
terms of governance in the public administration. Law enforcement agencies are hardly seen in the vulnerable spots like bus stand, launch terminals and market places during festival time or peak hours of travel and movement. More so, even if they are present in such spots and situation, their response to savagery and terrorism is famously passive. The state of that now prevails in the country warrants that the new government get down to some "genuine policy reform" in the police administration in all ranks. With the present state of affairs virtually crippling development efforts and threatening investment climate in the country, government may even consider deployment of special plainclothes forces in vulnerable and crime-prone areas.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN is Controller of Examinations, BUET

## Garfield®



## by Jim Davis



**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
 Directorate of Films & Publications  
 112, Circuit House Road, Dhaka  
 No: 3-33/2001-2002 (F) Dated: 27-12-2001

**Re-Tender No: 35 (F)/2001-2002**

Sealed tenders are invited from raw film importer/supplier firms for purchase of the undermentioned raw film.

1) 35 mm colour raw negative 21,350 metre

Each set of the tender schedule consisting terms & conditions will be available on cash payment of Tk 750/- at the Accounts Section of the Directorate during office hours on 13-1-2002 (30-9-1408BS). Tender will be opened on 14-1-2002 (1-10-1408BS) at 11:35 AM.

**Sardar Md Aminul Islam**  
 Director (Film) &  
 Member-Secretary, Tender Committee.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
 Establishment of International Mother Language Institute Project  
 Ministry of Education  
 Shikha Bhaban, 3rd Block (2nd Floor)  
 16, Abdul Gani Road  
 Dhaka-1000  
 Memo No. Shimo/Amai/Sthapattaya Naksha/25/2001/512 Dated: 30-12-2001

**Corrigendum of Notice Vide Memo No. Shimo/Amai/Sthapattaya Naksha/25/2001/452; Dated: 11.12.2001**

This refers to our notice no. Shimo/Amai/Sthapattaya Naksha/25/2001/452; Dated: 11.12.2001 published under the heading "Notice Inviting Proposals for Consultancy Services" in the daily newspaper "The Daily Star", Dt. 26.12.2001 and "The Daily Jugantar", Dt. 28.12.2001 (DFP No. 31288-19/12) inviting proposals for Architectural Design and Financial Proposals for the project entitled "Establishment of International Mother Language Institute". All interested bidders (Architectural/Engineering Firm, Renewed Architects/Engineers) are requested to note the following amendments:

The term "Architectural Design" will be replaced by "Preliminary Architectural Design". In this connection relevant documents will be available for sale from '09.01.2002 up to 17.01.2002 instead of up to 09.01.2002 on all working days during office hours. The offers will be received on "17.02.2002 up to 12:00 noon" instead of "26.01.2002 up to 12:00 noon".

All other terms and conditions of the notice will remain unchanged.

**Dr. Altaf Hossain**  
 Project Director  
 DFP-32150-31/12  
 G-18 Establishment of International Mother Language Institute Project

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
 Department of Immigration and Passports  
 Passport Bhaban  
 E-7, Agargaon Administrative Area  
 Dhaka-1207

**Short International Re-Tender Notice**

The Director General, Department of Immigration & Passports, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh invites short international re-tender from the internationally reputed passport manufacturers for supply of Bangladesh-Passport Booklets as follows:

1. Ordinary international passports (approx) 9,75,000.  
 a. special passports (approx) 1,50,000.  
 c. Diplomatic passports 1,000.
2. The tender documents containing the terms and conditions of the tender and specifications of the passports along with the specimen of the existing passports will be available from the office of the Director General, Immigration & Passports, Passport Bhaban, E-7, Agargaon Administrative Area, Dhaka-1207 on payment of Taka 1,000 (one thousand) only (non refundable) in cash within 1:00 PM on or before 20-1-2002. No tender documents will be sold after the said date.
3. At the time of purchasing the tender schedule, the buyer has to produce written evidence that the passport manufacturing organisation for which it is buying tender schedule had manufactured passports of ICAO approved standard and supplied to more than one countries. The name of the countries for whom it has manufactured and supplied passports must be stated in the written statement. The representatives of the local agent of any manufacturer must produce written letter of authority from its principal.
4. Earnest money or tender guarantee @2% of the total tendered amount shall be deposited in favour of the Director General, Immigration and Passports in the form of Bank Draft or Pay Order along with the tender. Conditional tender(s) and tender(s) without earnest money shall not be considered.
5. The tender proposal in two sealed envelopes (technical & financial) shall be sent by mail or hand carried by the representatives of the bidders to be delivered to the office of the Director General, Immigration and Passports, Passport Bhaban, E-7, Agargaon Administrative Area, Dhaka-1207 within 1:00 PM on or before 20-2-2002. The financial offer of the technically disqualified bidder will not be considered and returned unopened.
6. The tender(s) will be opened at 2:00 PM on 20-2-2002 in presence of the tenderer(s) who may like to be present at the time of opening the tenders.
7. A contract will be signed with the successful bidder in due course.
8. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

DFP-07-2/1/02  
**Director**  
 for Director General.