

SAARC needs greater international interactions



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

A small but significant development has come as a shot in the arms of the seven-nation South Asian Association (SAARC), which is stepping into third decade of its existence. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has finally accepted this regional forum as an Observer in the world body. The decision gives SAARC a distinct advantage for interactions with the UN and its system. Multilateral forums like Commonwealth, OIC and the NAM were accorded this status by the United Nations. No doubt, for the SAARC it has come little late. However, bottom line is that the

MATTERS AROUND US

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) decision to grant "Observer" status to the SAARC has come at a right time -- just before the 13th summit conference of the leaders. This new-find status will enable the SAARC to place its points of view on different socio-economic issues before the world body. The UN agencies can also assist the SAARC in many ways, ranging from financial to technical aspects. It is necessary that the regional body derives maximum benefits -- diplomatic, financial and otherwise from the world body in its quest for further invigorating and embellishing itself.

recognition has been given. Evidently, the UN closely monitored the SAARC and finally reached the conclusion that it is sparing no efforts to develop effective cooperative mechanism among seven nations in the most densely populated region in the world even though the progress during the two decades of its functioning may not be anything remarkable.

The SAARC is in the threshold of beginning its course in the third decade. It was launched in Dhaka

in 1985 and it is through the coming summit in the Bangladeshi capital next month the assiduously nurtured regional forum enters a new phase. The SAARC often comes in for criticism for the reason that it has not succeeded in delivering the expected results in twenty years. Then again there are cynics, who believe that the forum has not made any mark at all. However, an overwhelming majority seems to feel that there is no reason whatsoever for being euphoric about the SAARC but

they are convinced that it is delivering -- albeit in a sluggish manner. There is hardly any denying that SAARC is often crippled by manifold problems, including political differences, but what is noteworthy is the fact that it's progressing surmounting the obstacles.

When SAARC was launched in Dhaka through the first summit, the most elderly leader -- Sri Lankan president (late) Junius Jayewardene -- cautioned that the new forum faced manifold problems despite potentials but hoped that it would go ahead weathering many a storm. Nearly nineteen years later, president Chandrika Kumaratunga of the same island state told the inaugural session of the 12th SAARC summit in Islamabad that the regional grouping now needs to swing more into effective action oriented welfare programmes. The signing of agreement in south Asian free trade zone (SAFTA) and stronger emphasis on unremitting efforts for poverty alleviation in world's one of the worst poverty-ridden region on one hand reflected the forum's eagerness to tackle critical issues inextricably linked with economic emancipation and protocol on curbing terrorism and, on the other, underlined the willingness to improve overall climate in the area as far as possible. But it is the core economic matters that will help improve the socio-economic conditions of the member countries, particularly the lesser developed ones. It should now catch the imagination of the SAARC leaders in a far bigger way in their future programmes. It is heartening to note that the SAARC is already seeking to turn its main focus on the specific issues that would help achieve this objective.

Islamabad summit had reviewed the progress of the SAARC made so far and succeeded in drawing several programmes on the hand. Despite slow achievements, there can hardly be any denial that seven countries have established cooperation in varied fields through the integrated programmes of actions (IPA) and the technical committees dealing with important areas have also performed reasonably well. But the inherent mistrust in the region, particularly between the two main players of the spectrum -- India and Pakistan -- seems to mar the expected development of the forum. The summits always leave a sobering effect on the political climate of the region. This is the Islamabad summit that produced a breakthrough in the Indo-Pak dialogue as the two nuclear-powered arch rivals broke the near-icy ties and since have held series of talks at various levels including at the summit to improve their relations. Dialogue which was absent between them for a long time no doubt helped clear misunderstanding although settlement of vexed issues is very difficult although not impossible.

Islamabad summit had taken up a series of programmes in the economic, social and other sectors and all these are commendable. It is imperative that the positive spirit is maintained through appropriate and timely follow up actions. SAARC with its resource constraints cannot do much but the achievements are not mean either. A major segment of the vast multitude living in the south Asia is mired in abject poverty and it is a kind of bounden duty for the regional leaders to spare no efforts for their economic welfare. The task is daunting but benefits can be visible even though in a smaller scale provided the forum moves in the desirable direction.

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The forum should also establish and widen its links with other effective regional forums and multinational bodies for cooperation since the task before the SAARC is massive and it needs international support and assistance to carry out the planned programmes. The Association on one hand must consolidate the gains and enhance cohesiveness among member nations and on the other widen its international interactions. After all, image in the outside world for a forum like SAARC is important because the region is sadly known more for negative conditions including political differences among the main players of the regional spectrum.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

O Amar Desher Mati

The story of Krishna Sen

M. AZIZUL JALIL

KRISHNA Sen is the wife of my friend Dr. Pratip Sen FRCS, a retired professor of surgery living in Calcutta. For some time Krishna was planning to come to Bangladesh to visit her ancestral home in Bikrampur. Due to two heart attacks, she had been postponing the visit. Last month she insisted on coming while her husband tried to dissuade her from undertaking an arduous journey in such delicate health. She would not listen and said she would come alone, if necessary. The following is an account of what happened to her quest to see her grandfather's home and her earnest desire to take back with her a handful of *desher mati*.

Pratip and I were friends since 1940 when both were students of class three in the Ballyganj Government High School in Calcutta. I had to leave him in August 1947, when at the time of the partition we moved to Dhaka. The separation was painful. I met him and his wife next after nearly thirty years in 1975 when he came to meet me and my wife in our hotel in Calcutta along with three of our Ballyganj class mates and their wives. We reminisced about olden days and exchanged notes on subsequent developments till late night when the restaurant had to

be closed. The only other contact I had with any of them was when in 1992 I needed a copy of my birth certificate from the Calcutta Medical College. Sadly, the one who sent it to me, Biswajit, is no more.

On arrival in Dhaka on December 1, I was informed of Pratip and Krishna's visit to Bangladesh. They were in Chittagong visiting Pratip's original home near Kotwali thana in Chittagong town. He called me from there on December 3 and we talked for a long time. It was agreed that we will meet with our other four classmates from the forties on December 6 for a reunion dinner in a restaurant in Gulshan. On return from Chittagong, Pratip and Krishna went to Bikrampur by car to visit Krishna's ancestral village home on December 5. It was a tiring journey and the house could not be easily located. She was not feeling well but persisted, and after a while was able to locate the right home. That was very satisfying as she had fulfilled her strong desire to touch and salute her *desher mati* and take back a bit of its sacred soil. She was warmly received by the current occupants who gave her a lau from the home, cut it into smaller pieces for her to carry to Calcutta. Indeed her dream had been fulfilled.

M. Azizul Jalil is a former civil servant and a retired member of the World Bank Staff.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ASIA PACIFIC (UAP) CONVOCATION

The Convocation of the University of Asia Pacific (UAP) is going to be held on Saturday, 12 February 2005. All the graduating students who have completed their Bachelor and Master's degree from UAP upto Spring 2004 are therefore urgently requested to pay TK. 3000 (three thousand) only by 'PAY ORDER' as the convocation registration fee at the Admission Office (Block-A, House # 73, Road # 5-A, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209) within Wednesday 29th December 2004 from 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.; Saturday - wednesday and 10:00 a.m. -1:00 p.m. on Thursdays.

The students are also requested to submit the original certificates of SSC and HSC, (degree certificate for MBA), along with their attested photocopies, 3 (three) copies of recent coloured passport size photographs for verification and souvenir purpose at the Admission Office during the above mentioned office hours within 29th December 2004. Those who have already submitted are not required to do so.

Students who will fail to submit as required above will not be allowed to attend the Convocation.

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Registrar

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