

## Landmark Kyoto treaty in operation

US must see reason to join it

EVEN though an incomplete Kyoto Protocol to the self-willed exclusion of the USA, the largest carbon monoxide producer in the world, and Australia, with her wide-ranging coal mines, has taken effect, there is no way we can fail to acknowledge the far-reaching significance of what has come about. There is a framework now in which 141 signatory countries will cooperate to slow down global warming, if not stop it within a foreseeable future.

The world is heating up at a tremendous pace by the holing up of the ozone layer and the warming of the atmosphere and the seas. Whereas the average global temperatures rose by 0.6 C during 1900 to 1990, wreaking havoc with climatic cycles over time, these are even more dreadfully now projected to rise by 11 C by the middle of the century. Only progressive slashing of green house gases could ensure survival of mankind.

Thirty-four industrialised countries by virtue of their ratifying the Kyoto treaty stand committed to cutting green house emissions by 5.2 percent before 2012, but they will be meeting targets set on the basis of their 1990 levels. So, the slash in emissions in real terms would work out to less than 5.2 percent eventually. Yet, this does not detract from the fact that they have taken the first step forward. As for the developing countries, significantly including China and India, the two fastest growing economies in the world today, they will be asked to make commitments in the next phase of Kyoto negotiations beginning later this year.

With the US and Australia opting out of the treaty -- the latter country would be the worst hit by sea surges -- despite their accounting for nearly a third of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions, the Kyoto Protocol is off to a wobbly start. But the detractors must know that economic advancement cannot be sustained; in fact, it might be foredoomed to reverse, if cooperation in matters of environment, a patently trans-border phenomenon, is not forged on a truly global scale. Exclusionary policies have no place there.

## Post Hariri scenario

Omens for deeper trouble

THE spontaneous outpourings of public outrage and grief at the funeral of the slain former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri have been a measure of the high esteem in which he was held by his people. The almost hysterical mourning of the crowds bidding him farewell blended with heart-felt condolences from the dignitaries from the region and beyond in a tribute-filled requiem to the dead.

Lebanon with its track-record of violence and proclivities to it, attributable to some inner political contradictions and neighbourhood complications, went through a relatively peaceful, balanced, constructive and modernist phase of administration during Hariri's incumbency.

Four months before his assassination, he had stepped down in what was perceived to be a row with president Emile Lahoud over Damascus' role in Lebanon's political affairs and presence of Syrian troops in the country.

The regional and international repercussions of his brutal murder have not remained confined to expression of condolences, these seem to have entered the realm of geopolitics, so to speak.

There have been suggestions from the West that the Syrian government was to blame for Hariri's death. Damascus' arch-foe Israel thought Syria had a hand in it. The assassination has raked up US allegations of Syria having 'allowed busloads of jihadis into Iraq to try to defeat US forces'. The Syrian association with Hamas has been referred to in connection with Israel. Ramsfeld has spewed out a litany of charges against Syria in a congressional testimony following the killing of Hariri.

Whilst Syrian representatives abroad keep vehemently refuting suggestions Damascus was responsible for the death and speak of 'constructively engaging the US,' Washington seems bent upon mounting pressure on Syria to behave. Rumsfeld keeps reeling off the charges against Syria whose behaviour, in his words, was proving harmful to US interests in Iraq. Damascus has been alleged to be facilitating with Iran Hezbollah's operations into 'Lebanon and Israel'.

On the other hand, Syria and Iran appear poised to from a common front 'against external threats'.

The Middle East is teetering at the edge of deeper trouble.

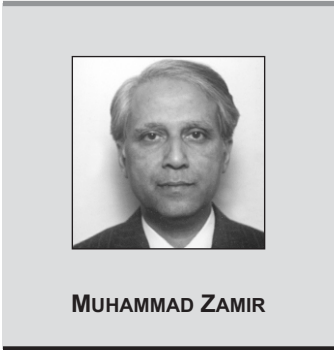
Mr. Kibria, has also been raised by the victims. The inherent message is clear: no cultural functions or national ceremonies or political rallies ( except of fundamentalists and their collaborators) will be tolerated. The perpetrators have already achieved a good deal of success by terrorizing society and not many will feel comfortable to attend or participate in celebrations or functions the Bangalees hold dear to their hearts. If the increasing grenade and bomb attacks cannot be stopped, the democratic environment of the country will be destroyed. And that might lead us towards a civil disorder.

**Malik Akram Hossain**  
The University of Hong Kong  
Hong Kong

**"See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil"**

Jameel Musa in his rejoinder of January 14, 2004, accuses me of devaluing Khaleda Zia and Sheikh

# No other alternative but SAARC



THE postponing of the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit has exposed once again the fragile foundation on which South Asian unity is trying to build its edifice. The Bangladesh Foreign Office, responsible for coordinating the Conference, reacted in the expected manner. Strong words were used to refute Indian charges. We disagreed with the Indian contention, termed it 'unacceptable' and 'rejected outright' that there was any cause for India to be gravely concerned or be troubled about what is happening in India's neighbour-hood.

India has been hasty in taking its decision, particularly in view of the fact that Bangladesh had taken special measures to ensure security and safety of all participants in the Summit Meeting. However, can we really say that they have no right to take cognisance of external events and their security implications? Have we forgotten how President Clinton's itinerary in Bangladesh was re-scheduled at the last moment?

What disappoints me however are the accusations and mud-slinging that have been going on since the postponement of the Summit Meeting. Responsible Ministers and political party affiliates of the ruling Administration have been suggesting that the Awami League is responsible for such a postponement. They have gone on

record and pointed out that the hartals called for by the Awami League were principally aimed at destabilising the Summit. This indeed is most strange. Do we really think that the political machinery of India can be so easily influenced by a political party in another country? The Indian authorities took note of what has been happening in Nepal and Bangladesh and then decided to attend the Summit Conference at a later date when things are more stable in the region. It was obviously India's own decision dictated by

also frittered away an opportunity to improve relations with Bangladesh.' In this context, they have also pointed out that such a step was contrary to the recent positive sign where Bangladesh had indicated its willingness to discuss a gas pipeline from Myanmar, passing through Bangladesh, to India.

Let us look at the positive side. Twelve Summits have been held since the inception of SAARC in 1985. This is despite the strained relationship that has existed between India and Pakistan. It is also not so unfavourable when

the gap created by divisiveness of political rivalry.

It was this spirit of cooperation that enabled Member States to agree on the establishment of a SAARC Economic Council, SAARC Infrastructure Fund, South Asian Parliamentary Forum and the proposal to create a Fund worth US Dollars 100 million for poverty reduction programmes in countries other than India. These are significant initiatives and suitable least common denominators for regional understanding.

SAARC leaders now realise that

coming to Dhaka and sharing with the Bangladesh government its concerns. It needs to be accepted that insecurity evoked from terrorist acts have to be dealt with on a regional basis. This will be consistent with the view that dealing with terrorist acts on an individual country basis might not be the best solution. There have already been reports of how perpetrators of violence in one country have sought refuge and found sanctuary in another. Cooperation in this regard will facilitate investigation, inquiry and eventual extradition measures.

question will also assist in poverty reduction within the region. We must not forget that poverty leads to suspicion and mistrust. The Nepalese Ambassador in Dhaka has correctly remarked the other day that poverty reduction can be made meaningful only through a holistic and sustained approach so that the poor and the destitute can be brought within the mainstream of development.

This is also the suitable forum for overcoming the difficulties that Member States are facing not only with regard to transportation, transit and communication links across the region but also pertaining to a trans-border power grid. These are elements which are vital for accelerated and balanced economic growth.

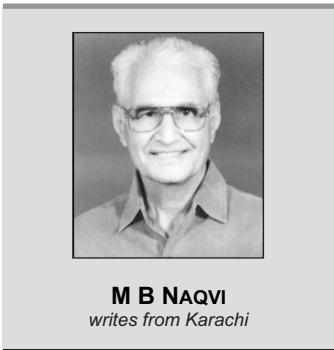
It must be understood that there is no alternative to a successful SAARC.

This postponement has highlighted once again political realities. Nevertheless, a collective response is needed to bring SAARC back on track.

The new Secretary General of the SAARC Secretariat (from Bhutan), who is expected to take over very soon from the present Secretary General (from Bangladesh), needs to discuss with the South Asian leadership the formulation of a mechanism whereby Summits can be held with unfailing regularity as in the case of the European Union. He will also have to ascertain how greater resources can be made available from the region for the SAARC Secretariat. This will be required to enhance the Secretariat's professional and functional capacities and facilitate meaningful inter-action with other international organisations.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net.

# Second Bush term: The economic agenda



FEW can doubt the economic agenda of the Second Bush Administration. It is to take forward Globalisation and make it prevail everywhere, in all its major aspects. It comprises privatisation, de-regulation and freest possible international trade; its central tenet is opening up: all national currencies must become commodities to be freely traded at market-determined prices; free movement of capital is another facet of opening up. In other words, globalisation demands free convertibility of currencies at least on capital account, though if current account convertibility can also be ensured, so much the better.

As for free trade among nations, it is an old hat. They are beating this drum since Adam Smith's day. Today it means low or no tariffs and no government intervention to influence prices through subsidies or price controls, including national currency values that must freely float: the true value of the currency will be determined by the market. Gone are the older concepts of currency being the storehouse of national wealth or as a fair measure of individual success or failure. Stable currency values can arguably give a fillip to all round develop-

ment.

Free trade, like absolute virtue or other good things, is susceptible to mishaps. All of the third world, as former colonies of Europeans, has experienced the benefits of free trade for centuries; colonialists rigged the market, prices, and the terms of trade so that "free trade arrangements" between their metropolitan centre and peripheral markets resulted in metropolitan imperialists being enriched by pauperising the captive markets.

they also erect non-tariff barriers on foreign goods; third world exports are disadvantaged. This tragic farce -- the stated belief in free trade -- coexists with practices in OECD economies of protecting own exports while rendering third world's exports less competitive. It happens daily. Can OECD countries' agricultural subsidies and scarcely hidden discrimination against poor countries' exports disappear by the conduct of G8 or G9, WTO, IFIs (international financial institutions),

same after these palliatives.

Let's focus on what is required of Bush government to improve American economy in coming years. Most look at the strength of American economy. It constitutes 27 per cent world economy. Its resource base is astonishingly rich. The US is the mightiest power. And yet areas of uncertainty are frequently ignored. For more attaining power and riches, it has limited its trading advantage to the cutting edge of high technology -- some for civilian

debtor. Its net foreign liabilities are 24 per cent of GDP. Now, these deficits make dollar weak and less desired; hence its precipitate fall in value. Fearing a possible run on dollar, the US was forced to raise interest rates to make it worthwhile for foreigners to go on holding dollar assets. Budget deficit last year was 4.4 per cent of GDP.

That carries a cost. Economic transactions, including investments, become too expensive. Growth rates suffer; recessionary

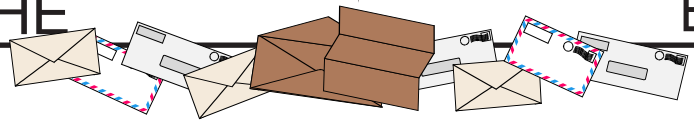
industries, has benefited from Afghanistan and Iraq operations. In fact, these big interests had it very good. Insofar as the Bush government loves oil and war industries -- and it does -- its preferred method to benefit them will have to be more Afghanistans and Iraqs in future.

Foregoing enunciation of the Bush government's general mission for the next four years made for Iraq war in his inaugural and later the State of the Union report is clear enough. Given this proven methodology, it seems that, one way or another, more Afghanistans and Iraqs may be on their way. The context of his strong desire to bring the blessings of democracy to more states is in tune with the conduct hitherto. Bush has given a broad indication of who his next victims may be: Syria, Iran and North Korea. There is not much about the UN or international law, the way world body was pushed aside for Iraq war in his inaugural or State of the Union. Nor did he involve UN in Afghanistan; lately though he has realised its utility.

Two points emerge. Realism suggests that the Bush plate is full with Iraq; spare troops in reserve are scarce. Even the US cannot have more Iraqs. World opinion wouldn't permit and an imperial overstretch might overtake. Bush may find he faces a dilemma: not following it up with new Iraqs may make his economic troubles worse by sheer weight of current policies while undertaking aggressively the programme of forcing tyrannical regimes to embrace elections may be difficult but at least it promises some economic goodies in the end.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Heading towards an uncivilized country?

For the last few years Bangladesh has been experiencing a series of bomb and grenade attacks on cultural functions, political gatherings, cinema halls, mosque and recently on NGO offices. Scores of people along with former finance minister SAMS Kibria, have lost their lives. The image of the country has been tarnished abroad. The pattern of the attacks force us to conclude that these have been perpetrated by as well organised and highly trained militant group. Anyone can see what and who the targets are. All attempts to nab the perpetrators, however, have been proved futile. Sometimes government has seemed to be reluctant to go for tougher actions, for example the failure capturing Bangla Bhai. The allegation of destroying the evidence of grenade attacks on Awami League rally and

Hasina for stating "the main reason these two ladies find themselves at the top of the political ladder is Bangladesh's obsession with family names".É He justifies his accusation by pointing out that the Bush family in the US also has similar dynastic political legacies. However, he forgets one vital difference between the electoral process in the US and Bangladesh:É presidential candidates in the US have to go through a rigorous selection and a primary election process entailing numerous public debates.ÉIn most cases, they would have had to prove their leadership through lower public offices that they had to attain by ballot. Some of the fallacies of the Bangladeshi dynastic political leadership were aptly pointed out in AR Shamsul Islam's article titled, "Dynastic leadership and fallout" (DS, February 5, 2004):É It discourages talented individuals from entering politics since there is little scope of rising through the party

hierarchy. This creates an effective vacuum at the top and corrodes the spirit of democracy within.ÉIn turn, both party and the national leaderships become authoritarian, despotic, exploiting and persecuting. These leaders start to view the party and the nation as their exclusive fiefdoms ordained to be ruled by their families. Thus such parties attract self-seeking yes-men and repel conscientious and dedicated activists.ÉIn my opinion, these are not good value propositions for any country.

Mr. Musa unfairly blames me for thinking that Bangla Bhai is a real threat to the world -- I never stated nor implied this.ÉHe then draws a parallel between the threat posed by Bangla Bhai to Bangladesh and the threat posed by the fundamentalist Christian Evangelicals to the Muslims.É While I am no stranger to publicly expressing my strong distaste for religious fundamentalists wherever they may be, evangel-

icals in the west still have to abide by the law of the land.É On the other hand, renegades, anarchists and parasites seem to be making the most of the weak law enforcement in Bangladesh.ÉCollectively, militants like Bangla Bhai, PBCP and Harkatul Jihad reflect an atmosphere of lawlessness.É And that is a genuine concern for a sovereign nation.

Mr. Musa is wrong to think that the British public is pro-American since the vast majority of them voiced their strong opposition in hundreds and thousands to Bush's illegal invasion of Iraq.É Apart from the widely reported global anti-war protests in London and elsewhere in the UK, Blair was twice reprimanded on live British TV for planning to send troops without getting UN approval.ÉThe main opposition party continues to state that Blair lied about the pre-war intelligence. The third party is also opposed to the Iraq war.

Finally, I am grateful for Mr. Musa's generous praises for me. He and I both being respectful, responsible yet independent minds and strong believers in democratic values, may in the end have to agree to disagree. However, I do not for a moment question his patriotism and I assure him that I have Bangladesh's best interest at heart.

**Shabbir A. Bashar, PhD.**  
San Francisco Bay Area, California, USA

### Feeling from Kolkata

I am an Indian who was once based in Dhaka and used to subscribe to The Daily Star. I still read it, time permitting, on the net. Really I liked the beautifully described sense of frustration by Rubana Haq in her piece. The lady has managed to amplify the sense of frustration that I as a fellow Bengali and human being felt when dealing with the educated youngsters who could speak perfect

Americanised English but could not write two correct sentences.

Let us for once forget the fact that we as a race are divided and instead try and work towards enriching the future Bengali generation. Let us not design curriculum that teaches nothing and promotes mediocrity. We Bengalis are far better than that. Once again my compliments to the good lady, she sure struck a chord in me.

**Arijit Sengupta**  
Kolkata

### SAARC Summit

India's eleventh hour decision not to attend the SAARC Summit in Dhaka came as a bolt from the blue! Had there been any security lapses, India could communicate her concerns for necessary redress far before. And there was every opportunity of doing so. I was rather horrified to find Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, being a seasoned politician, took such a

thoughtless decision which lacks farsightedness and political commitment!

I am sure, had the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in power, he would not have taken such a decision at least for the sake of maintaining regional trust, understanding and friendship! Anyway, I sincerely hope that India would take immediate initiative to announce a fresh date for the SAARC Summit.

**Professor M. Zahidul Haque**  
Chairman  
Department of Language  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University  
Dhaka-1207

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