

# The highway of hope

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

INDIAN Foreign Secretary has served notice on Bangladesh. Rarely has Indian expostulation been so candid as was Shyam Saran's speech on "India and its neighbours" at the India International Center. It was meant to wake up those neighbours who are still sleeping like Rip Van Winkle totally oblivious of the changes in the surroundings and the world at large. In no uncertain terms the Indian Foreign Secretary has expressed Indian opposition to let SAARC being used as a vehicle "primarily to countervail India or to seek to limit its room to manoeuvre". India is not seemingly prepared to countenance South Asian countries seeking to promote linkages outside the region if these attempts are "patently hostile to India or motivated by a desire to contain India in any way". Shyam Saran assures SAARC members that India is an opportunity and not a threat. Neighboring countries should not suffer from siege mentality and like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan should take advantage of the immense market that India provides. In this age of globalisation, he stressed on South Asian regional integration that should ensure natural flow of goods, people, and ideas. But there is a caveat. India's neighbours to take advantage of Indian offer have to be responsive to India's vital concerns relating to allowing the use of their territories for cross border terrorism and hostile activities against India by insurgents and secessionist groups. "India" warned Shyam Saran "can not and will not ignore such conduct and will take whatever steps are necessary to safeguard its interests".

Given incessant Indian complaints that Bangladesh is being used as sanctuary for Indian insurgents (consistently denied by Bangladesh government) and cross border infiltration across the line of control in Kashmir (now reportedly reduced) this warning appears to be directed against Bangladesh and Pakistan. E Bhutanese and Myanmar's cooperation with India in flushing out the Indian rebels from

their territories should be a matter of immense satisfaction to Delhi.

One, however, wonders if the tenor of the warning does not sound familiar with Bush security strategy of 2002 and the doctrine of preemption which the Americans claim is in line with the spirit of article 51 of the UN Charter as the threat posed by non-state actors have totally changed the character of threat which was the basis of the UN Charter when it was being framed. Regardless of this debate it is unclear if the warning is a result of India's realization of its growing military and economic power or because India has lost patience with neighboring countries' refusal to heed India's repeated requests relating to its concerns.

A few years before another Indian Foreign Secretary J N Dixit observed that despite shortcomings in Indian foreign policy, India had sustained a working relationship with most of her neighbors and even where adversarial relationship had existed with one or two of India's neighbors, India managed to prevent them from degenerating into military confrontation. Dixit's remarks were made before Kargil episode and then increased cross border infiltration along LOC. Dixit's advocacy of "nurturing at least a non-adversarial if not friendly relations with our neighbors" does resonate with Shyam Saran's exposition of the fact that SAARC has been unable to undertake even a single collaborative project in the twenty years' of its existence. He attributes the barrenness of SAARC to "narrow nationalism" displayed by some member countries and also to cover failure of governments of some countries to deliver political goods to its people.

For any regional organization to get shared security threat is essential which was totally lacking in the case of SAARC. One could argue that in the cases of the African Union and the Latin American countries there were no security threats looming. But then again these countries despite internal squabbles did not go through the trauma that three members of the SAARC had to go through and at least two of the members are even today locked in a territorial dispute.

Unlike SAARC the European Coal and Steel Community, the precursor of the European Union, fleshed out due to cold war and now has been further strengthened with the disappearance of the cold war with many countries of the former East Europe having joined the EU, a paradox that the same countries who so zealously guarded their narrow nationalism as combatants of differing ideologies have voluntarily now agreed to surrender part of their sovereignty to the EU for the economic betterment of their people. ASEAN too was formed due to perceived communist threat during the Vietnam war and now includes Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (notwithstanding Sihanouks failed attempts to keep

Perhaps our history, mainly "the trauma of partition, the growth of assertive nationalism" as Shyam Saran puts it, has been partly responsible for the slow growth of SAARC integration. Indo-Pak contest over Kashmir has been an added factor. Religion has been another. India, despite its constitutional adherence to secularism, is perceived as a Hindu dominant country where BJP ruled at the center from 1998 till the other day, where Gujarat riot described as the passage to fascism established the principle that the majority community could seek retribution from the minority community without due process of law, and where Nanavati Commission took more than two decades to submit its

report on the anti-Sikh riot following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In Pakistan where Islam has been consistently promoted by successive regimes as a national unifier to rival the so-called Hindu India has seen the electoral success of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a combine of Islamic religious parties, and now top US intelligence officials fear that if President Musharraf is assassinated or otherwise replaced extremist Islamist politicians would gain greater influence because according to the Director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency majority of Pakistanis hold a favorable view of Osama bin Laden. In Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami not only improved its electoral strength but has joined the government as a coalition partner. This was a long walk for the Islamist party as it had to cope with the ban on religion based politics in the post-liberation period when it took the tactical decision to reorganize the party faced as it was with wrath of the people for not only opposing the war

of liberation but also for collaborating with the Pakistani occupation forces. But convinced of the irreversibility of the Bangladesh state Jamat in the post-1975 period onwards in collaboration with the conservative establishment gradually integrated itself in the political life of the country. The point being made is that at least in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh religion might have been an impediment in the growth of SAARC.

What then is the solution? In some quarters it is believed that there is an inverse relationship between economic development and religiosity. In other words, secular environment fosters development because it lessens man's dependence on divinity for his success and failure.

synonymous to "freedom". It would, therefore, follow that to foster development the regional governments will have to promote freedom as well. There is a common belief that democracies do not go to war among themselves. The reason being that unlike autocracies democratic governments have many checks and balances which prevent the executive or a group of people in power to embark on military adventures. Since absence of war and conflict are essential for economic development it is equally necessary for democracy to prevail for sustainable development. Success of command economies lauded in the past particularly during the cold war period has now been found wanting and development in these economies

process. One wonders whether Shyam Saran has called upon India's neighbors to accept India's preeminence in the region. Kenneth Waltz has defined power as the capacity of a country to influence other countries to behave as it wants them to and to resist the unwelcome influence of others through Joseph Nye's "hard and soft powers" i.e. military and economic power, and values, culture, ideologies, and institutions. India's military might inspires awe more than it inspires admiration among neighbors. Benefits of its economic power are not felt in the region as the core EU countries' economic strength helped raise Spain, Portugal and Ireland from comparatively modest economic level to the level of present day prosperity which fresh entrants into the EU aspire to have in the future. To be fair UN Human Development Index ranks India at 115 out of 162 countries, estimates per capita GDP, measured in purchasing power parity as being half of that of China and almost third compared to Brazil. Possession of nuclear weapons per se does not add to India's power as it did not help France in Algeria, US in Vietnam, Soviet Union in Afghanistan and China vis-à-vis Taiwan.

On the positive side India's democratic pluralism and a vibrant population taking advantage of liberal economic policies are likely to catapult India into the category of great powers. IMF calculations indicate that by next year India's GDP will be larger than those of Italy and the UK and by 2025 it will surpass those of Germany and France making India the fourth largest

economy in the world behind the US, Japan and China. India's neighbors must acknowledge these scenarios and come out of the shell of self-imposed myopic nationalism.

Fifty years of confrontational policy has given some of the countries of this region abject poverty and decades of SAARC cooperation has proved to be barren. India now demands of her neighbours recognition of her core security concerns which she insists must be addressed. It is not an illogical demand to make of one's neighbours. But then demands can not be one sided and must be reciprocated in kind. India has to demonstrate that she is an opportunity and not a threat, she too must acknowledge the legitimate concerns of her neighbours, open her markets, offer export facilities as befits the level of development of the neighbour and given to her by the international community (for example not being arms given by EU), invest in cross-border infra-structural development, address the complaint sometimes made by importing neighbours that Indian exporters send sub-standard materials, and should be the first to extend help should any of the neighboring countries fall prey to natural calamities. It is not known whether Delhi realises the extent of influence exerted by Bollywood and Star TV on the youth of the sub-continent and how the democratic institutions entuse other people to emulate them.

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the country neutral) all erstwhile enemies during the Vietnam war. In both cases shared threat perception helped formation of the regional groupings and the disappearance of the threat made the groupings more inclusive.

An invariant factor in the formation of regional blocks is geographical contiguity of the member countries. EU is for Europeans, ASEAN is for South Asians, African Union is for African countries. And therefore SAARC is for South Asian countries. It would be incongruous for a country belonging to a region, for example, Japan and Australia, to apply for EU membership. But then again it would be erroneous to assume intra-regional interaction to completely substitute inter-regional and global interaction. If that were so then concision of global cooperation would result in confinement of affluence in selected areas and poverty distributed among the rest of the world.

Secularism in this case, says George Holyoke, a proponent of this school of thought, is not an argument against religion. Secularism is manifestly that kind of knowledge which is founded in this life and is capable of being tested in this life. But since religion plays a large part in the daily life of the people of this region it would be utopian to hope for a secular regional construct more so as majority of the people live in abject poverty and are mostly illiterate. One may, however, wish that in South Asia the political leaders would avoid the exploitation of religion, however temporarily expedient, for domestic and external politics. Though world religions have provided a constant voice of critique against violation of human rights in all their forms, yet religions have too often been used to justify violation of human rights through postponement of temporal justice to divine judgment.

Right to development is a basic human right. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers "development" as

is now believed to have been distorted as well as afflicted by cronyism. President Bush has made "the forces of human freedom" as the main plank of US policy in his State of the Union address. But like many politicians he is quick to make compromises as he made with the military President of Pakistan at the expense of secular political parties because of short term gains in his war on terror. One hopes that the absence of democratic rule in Pakistan with the military calling the shots will not infuse bilateral issues in to the difficulties-ridden SAARC

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# Facing the flood

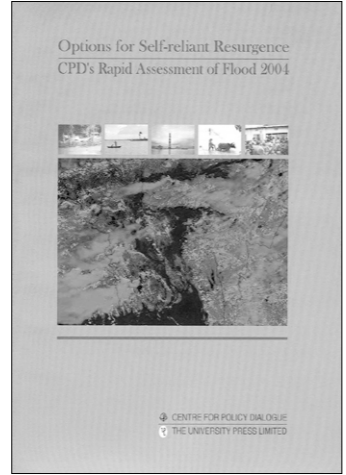
Book Review: Options for Self-reliant Resurgence/ CPD's Assessment of Flood 2004

M SYEED AHAMED

THE damage estimate of Flood 2004 was probably one of the most hotly debated issues associated with public policy discourse in Bangladesh last year. This debate originated when the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) came up with a damage estimate that was substantially lower from those projected by the government and the United Nations. However, as the reader may know, CPD's estimate was subsequently corroborated by other independent sources including the World Bank-ADB joint assessment team. CPD has now published the volume titled "Options for Self-reliant Resurgence: CPD's Assessment of Flood 2004" which provides a detailed methodology of its estimates, and also an in depth analysis of the overall flood situation and its consequences. The volume also presents the policy package to cope with the consequences of flood, which CPD had prepared at the time.

flood 2004 from a wide range of perspectives from this book as it details out the causes and phases of the flood and also offers a comparative viewpoint from the perspective of earlier floods. The volume reports on the responses to flood both from the government and non-government parts based on its field survey experiences, and proposes a public policy package to address the post-flood situation of the economy.

The book provides a comprehensive breakdown of its internationally accepted and clearly defined methodology of damage estimate. The book also remains transparent with respect to its sources of information as the author says, "CPD's damage estimate is... based on the published and unpublished data of various government ministries and agencies... CPD only supplemented this information with its field survey, focused group discussions with the flood victims, and consultation with experts". This is worthy of appreciation as in most cases often the readers are not able to validate estimates since no background materials and methodologies are provided. The book also provides sectoral



breakdown of the damage estimate by categorising it into economic classes, i.e. damages to agriculture, industry, health and education sectors.

A Relief Distribution Intensity Index is also provided in the report which compares the intensity of flood damage with the intensity of availability of relief

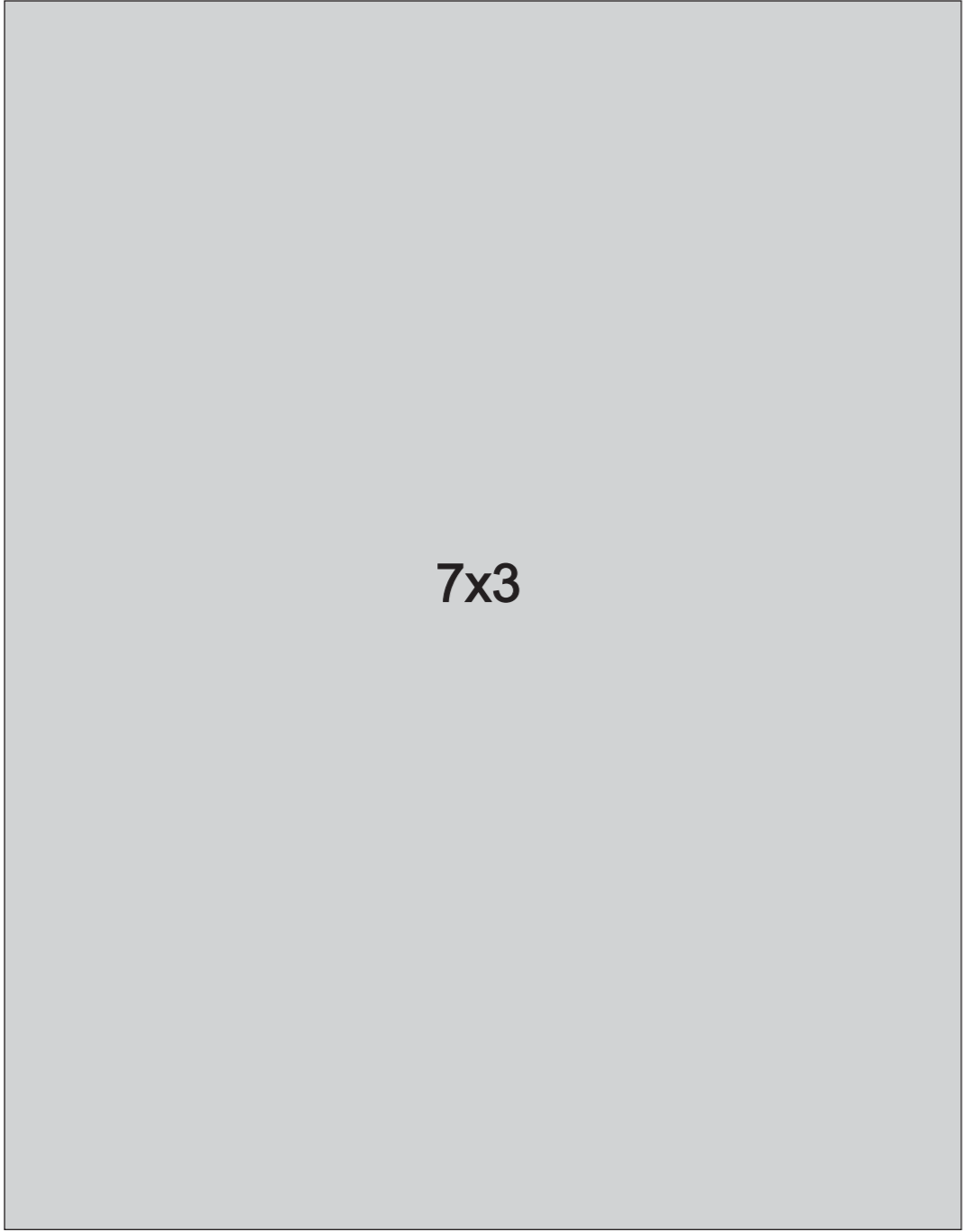
to ensure relative distribution of flood relief. However, the study reports that "there was a strong and significant negative rank correlation (-0.64) between flood damage intensity and the amount of per head relief availability". This essentially means that people in the most affected areas often received less per capita relief, while less affected areas got more per capita relief!

The volume also presents a public policy package for addressing the post-flood situation during the fiscal year 2004-05, which provides both short-term and medium-term measures. The policy suggestions cover a number of key macroeconomic issues including public finance, credit expansion, inflation and also the issue of safety net. However, this is not an exhaustive post-flood relief and rehabilitation programme as the book points out, "the policy recommendations are made in the areas where CPD has some competence". The annexes of the book are helpful in providing many key information. For example the chronology of flood

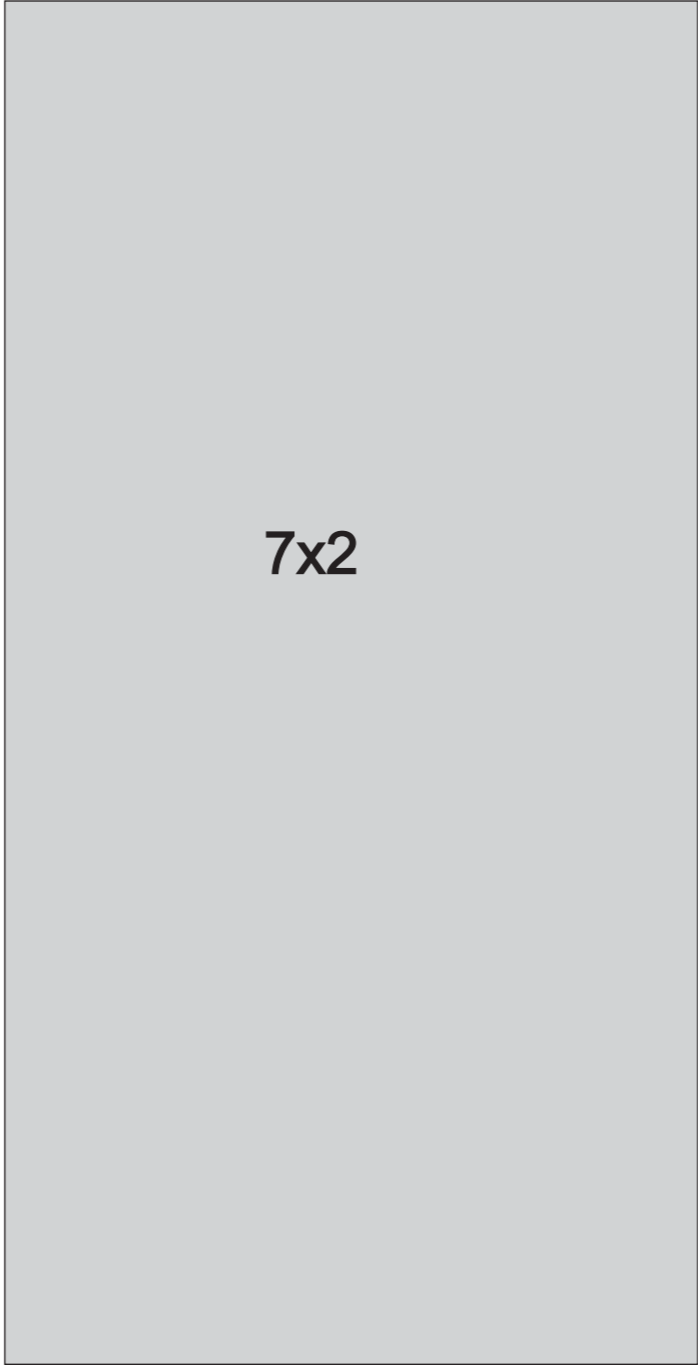
events will enable a reader to know about key dates related to flood 2004, where and when the flood started, and when the government first started relief. The coloured maps illustrated in the book will also help the readers to understand key features of flood at a glance.

CPD's Flood 2004 Study is definitely a demonstration of civil society's capacity to contribute to issues of national importance. Such a scrutiny on the part of non-state actors helps develop accountability and transparency in the development process, and thus deserves appreciation and encouragement. The book, jointly published by CPD and the University Press Limited, is expected to be an important contribution to the literature on flood and development in the context of Bangladesh. It is hoped that policymakers, policy analysts, developmental activists and others with interest in Bangladesh's development process will benefit from this publication.

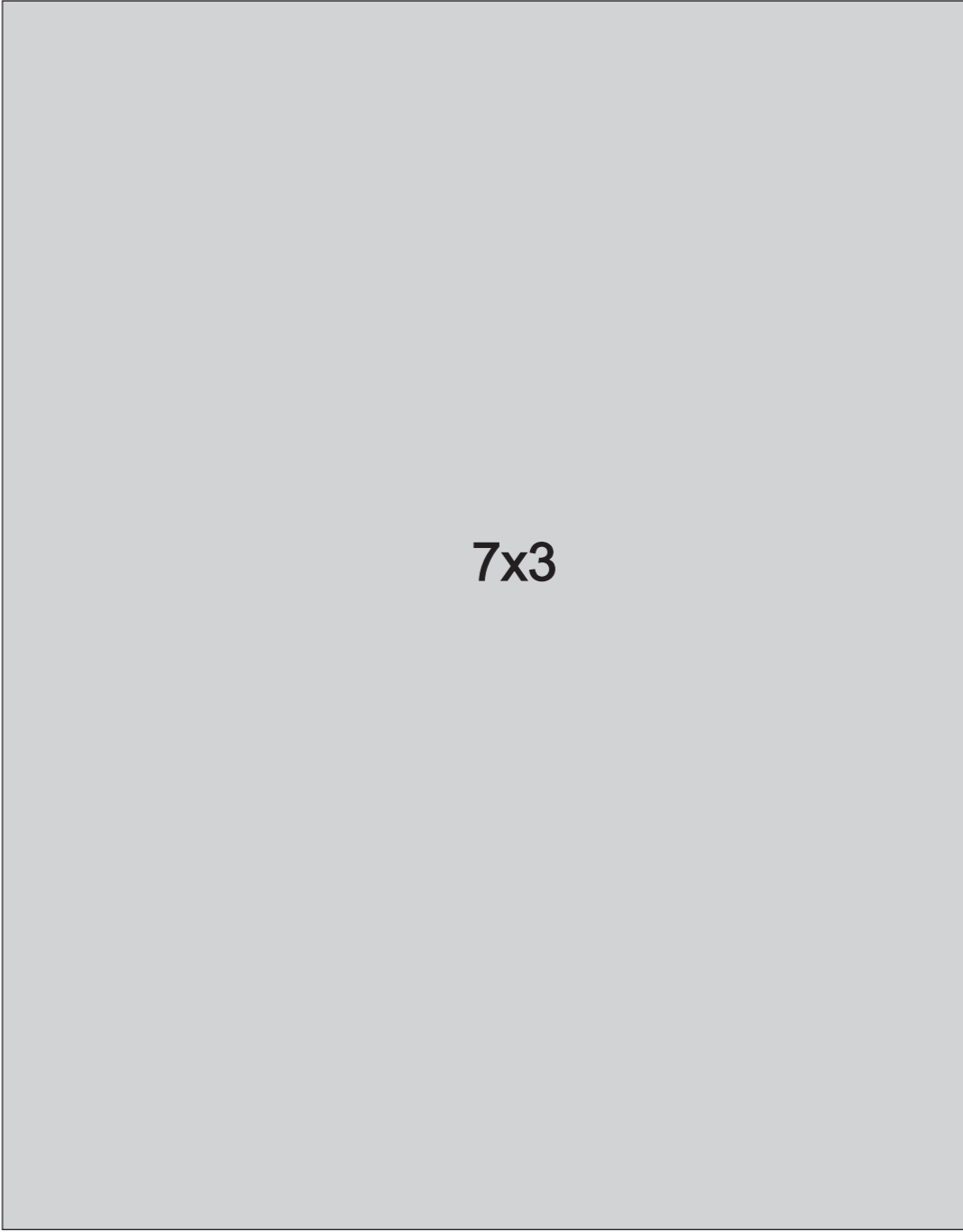
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