once again underlined the need for

the effective implementation of the

SAARC Plan of Action on environ-

ment. The longer-term objective is to

draft a Regional Environment Treaty.

taken important decisions to combat

Furthermore, the Summit had

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY OCTOBER 24, 2005

Kudos to BPC for its tough stance

Some heads should roll

OTWITHSTANDING a last-minute trouble-shooting deal between Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) and Biman, Bangladesh Airlines over the huge arrear fuel bill owed by the latter to the former, we cannot let the thick-skinned Biman default culture go uncommented.

Biman took for granted the BPC largesse and ran up an arrear of Tk 508 crore foolishly hoping that it being a matter between two public sector corporations, the government will bail it out and allow the gross financial indiscipline to continue. Biman needed a heavy dose of shock therapy to be jolted into realising the culpability of what it has been doing to BPC which, thankfully, the energy adviser has administered to

BPC not only has to pay cash to buy the fuel, it also has to count the interest that accrues due to non-payment of its bank loans taken for the purpose. It has been grossly immoral for Biman to have attempted to transfer the burden of its losses on

In fact, there is more than merely the rise of cost of aviation fuel that is responsible for the national airliner's losses. Poor management, avoidable system loss, and a very high aircraftto-manpower-ratio for example, are things that cannot have escaped the notice even of the sightless management, but which the Biman management, including the state minister for civil aviation, chose to do nothing about.

We are constrained to say that the competence of the state minister should now come into question. His only preoccupation seems to be to buy new aircraft, one can understand. Why, without making the least bit of effort to bring in a modicum of efficiency in the running of the national carrier?

It is hard to believe that he did not see the storm coming; why didn't he, if he had an honest, clear and practicable vision of how he was going to pay up, negotiate a rescheduling that would have met the concerns of BPC? In fact, we want to question the minister's ability to run the national airlines. Biman's top management too has to answer for the pervasive internal corruption, heavy-handed trade unionism and monetary waste in the operational and maintenance areas.

Somebody must account for all these and the lessons of the latest Biman expose should not be lost on it.

The mentally sick need attention

A healthcare imperative we can't ignore anymore

E are deeply moved by the photograph, published in our newspaper day before yesterday, of a mentally disturbed young woman chained to the waist having a bath on a riverbank. It bespeaks not only a personal tragedy for the family but also reflects on the attitude and the overall state of our society in general. Mental illness is just like any other illness. It is a debilitating affliction not only for the individual concerned but also a tragedy for the extended fam-

Over the years there has been an alarming increase in the incidence of mental disorder. Because of the prevailing attitude towards this kind of illness, people often hesitate to disclose cases of individuals suffering from it. In the extreme sense, a mentally sick person may be viewed as a reflection of the "mental health of the entire family".

Considering the spread of the affliction and its overall impact on society, we need to take concrete measures to contain the phenomenon.

The administration should launch a massive awareness campaign on mental sickness alongside providing adequate medical facilities to treat it. Our health directorate will have to set up separate units for mental care in all public hospitals including upazilla health complexes. Alongside drugs and physical facilities need to be provided to this sector. There is also a serious dearth of support and technical staff. Government ought to seek external assistance through organising appropriate training programmes both within and outside the country in order to build up qualified technical staff.

We are passing through rather difficult times and the overall situation is not at all conducive to our mental health. The social unrest is on the increase, not just due to physical and material pressures but also because of opposing social standards and "conflicts" of all dimensions. That way, the stage seems set for a rise in the number of mentally sick people.

SAARC in the third cycle: Make it functional and effective

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

HE twice-postponed thirteenth Summit of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will 2005. There were some uncertainties about holding of the Summit on these dates in view of the recent devastating earthquakes in Pakistan and India. The confusion seems to be over as spokespersons of both these seriously affected countries have now made statements expressing their support for the holding of the SAARC Summit in Dhaka on the scheduled dates.

It may be recalled that the thirteenth Summit was originally scheduled to be held in early January this vear. It was postponed the first time because of the tragic tsunami that had seriously affected three SAARC members while important political developments in Nepal and the security situation in Bangladesh led to the second postponement.

The forthcoming Summit in Dhaka will mark the beginning of the third cycle. In order to make SAARC more functional and effective it is necessary at this juncture to reevaluate the existing practices. When SAARC was launched in 1985, the Summit was envisaged as a functional regional organisation to hasten the process of development and alleviate the poverty through regional cooperation. Unfortunately, instead of functional meetings these Summits have turned into ceremonial meetings with huge fanfare at a tremendous cost to the public exche-

The SAARC Summits became such an elaborate extravaganza that one of its members, Bhutan, has been unable to host any Summit because of limited infrastructure. A veteran South Asian diplomat had once commented to me, "Whom are we trying to impress? Don't we know

percent of the world's absolute poor live in South Asia. Enough fanfare has been done during the past two decades; it is time to cut down all unnecessary expenses and make SAARC Summits more functional

Incidentally, the richest countries of the world that are members of Group of Eight (G-8) or the European Union (EU) hold highly functional Summits without any fanfare. Their Summit meetings are short and professional, and their leaders come vith small delegations and spend the and sign agreements without working for their implementation.

particular interest to them and ignored their obligations on other issues. Such selective prioritisation has not promoted the cause of

Furthermore, conflicts and tensions between two South Asian nuclear powers and archrivals, India and Pakistan, have very often hindered progress in SAARC. However. there are now visible signs of that SAFTA would enter into force from January 2006. To that end, some meetings of trade officials were held to exchange export lists and to work

The SAARC Commerce Ministers were scheduled to meet in Islamabad on 18-19 October 2005 but unfortunately, due to earthquakes, the meeting had to be postponed. The Dhaka Summit should give a clear directive so that SAFTA could be launched from next January as scheduled. The basic aim of SAFTA is to broaden economic cooperation, ensure equitable distribution of

recognised "poverty alleviation as

the greatest challenge facing the

people of South Asia" and had

erment, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition, and protection of children. These are key issues for the welfare and well being of all South Asians. The UN Human Development Report has once again put the South Asian table and it should be in the common interest of all members to accelerate the process of human development

At the Islamabad Summit the South Asian leaders had rightly

terrorism and to strengthen cooperation in information and communications, agriculture, food reserve, cultural, and health areas especially to effectively control tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases. Turning to organisational issues. according to some reports, Afghanistan had expressed interest to join SAARC as a member and China has The Dhaka Summit has to take effective actions for the early implementation of important decisions and to give new also shown interest to be associated with SAARC activities in some capacmomentum to the moribund regional organisation. During my assignment in Paris, I had appreciated how patiently ity. Since there is no provision for and meticulously our European Union colleagues have built their regional organisation virtually on the ruins of inclusion of new members in the Second World War. Their examples should inspire us to strengthen our regional organisation for the benefit of South SAARC charter, no action could be taken in this regard. Expansion of membership is a sure sign of vitality

> sider all such requests objectively. Given these broad parameters, the Dhaka Summit has to take effective actions for the early implementation of these important decisions and to give new momentum to the moribund regional organisation. During my assignment in Paris, I had appreciated how patiently and meticulously our European Union colleagues have built their regional organisation virtually on the ruins of Second World War. Their examples should inspire us to strengthen our regional organisation for the benefit of South Asians who constitute quarter of humanity.

of a regional organisation. ASEAN,

EU and, for that matter, most

regional organisations have over the

period of years expanded their mem-

bership. Likewise, SAARC should set

clear criteria for inclusion of new

members and observers, and con-

Syed Muazzem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary.

In the past, each member attached

regional cooperation.

Asians who constitute quarter of humanity. entire time under one roof

The other objective should be to make the Summit proceedings short. The existing practice of weeklong preparatory meetings at various levels should be dispensed with. The Meetings of the Programming Committee of Senior Officers and of the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries should be held well before the Summit. Like OIC, NAM and Commonwealth and other Summits, the only preparatory meeting to the SAARC Summit should be a one-day Meeting of Foreign Ministers to finalise the In the past two decades, despite its

tremendous potentials, SAARC has produced few tangible results and has generally been ignored in the international circles. How do we reverse this trend and make SAARC effective? Well, the first requirement is renewed commitment of all members to the cause of regional cooperation. We must say what we mean, and mean what we say. Otherwise,

improvement of relations between the two countries, and it should be in the collective interest of all members to vigorously push forward the cause of regional cooperation. Enough agreements have been signed and declarations made during the past decades and it is now time to work for their implementation.

As the host and the prime initiator of the proposal, Bangladesh has a special responsibility to give fresh momentum to the SAARC in the third cycle. Our basic objective should be $not \, to \, hold \, the \, Summit \, for \, the \, sake \, of \,$ holding it or to take over its rotating Chairmanship, but to take stock of the situation and chart out a new plan of action for the coming decade.

Trade, economic cooperation, and poverty alleviation are the core issues in the SAARC. At the last Summit in Islamabad there was a milestone agreement among the members to elevate SAARC from SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement) to SAFTA (South Asian Free Trading Area) and it was agreed

benefits of trade and to cater to the special needs of the small and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by providing them with preferential

The ultimate objective is to create

SAEU (South Asian Economic Union) in line with what has been achieved by the European Union. To that end, the last Summit had taken important decisions for accelerated and balanced economic growth through strengthening transportation, transit and communication links across the region. Likewise, it had directed the working group on energy to undertake a study on South Asian Energy Cooperation including the concept of an energy ring. In this era of high oil prices and rising demands of South Asian countries, a collaborative effort is

Another important achievement of the last summit was the signing of the Social Charter with a view to addressing important social issues such as population stabilisation,

urgently needed.

declared poverty alleviation "as the overreaching goal of all SAARC activities" The Summit had directed the reconstituted Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) to submit to Dhaka Summit a comprehensive and realistic blue print setting out SAARC Development Goals for the next five vears in the areas of poverty alleviament. Despite recent GDP growth. 43 percent of South Asians still live below the poverty line and hence this issue must be given further momentum at the Dhaka Summit. The last Summit had also

emphasised the need for undertaking and reinforcing regional cooperation in the conservation of water resources, protection of environter preparations to face natural calamities. The recent earthquakes and the earlier tsunami have seriously affected a number of South

obligations the whole world sat up

in astonishment. "We do not want

friendship with one of the oldest civilizations of the world. An India vote at IAEA in favour of Europe-America would give the US Administration much needed boost to push through the legislation cur-

rently being debated with regard to

new dimensions of Indo-US rela-

Even as India more or less decided to play along with the US on Iraq nuclear issue it also seemed to have decided in principle to go ahead with the IPI gas pipeline of which India would be the biggest beneficiary. But the US opposed the project from its very inception. So few believe that it is anymore on track. But the world's sole superpower cannot be oblivious of the way India can be compensated for the loss. The multinational company Ernst and Young has already been asked to prepare a financial feasibility report for energy supply to India. In the meantime a 25-year long deal to import liquidified natural gas from 2009 was approved

In Nehruvian tradition India always took care of its relationship with the Middle East's Arab/Islamic ahead of Pakistan in promoting solidarity with this geo-strategic hub. The same sentiment lacked in its latest deal meted out to Iran. At IAEA as India was playing realpolitik the moral high ground was held by Hugh Chavez's tiny Venezuela which was only honourable exception to say an emphatic 'no' to the

Betraying an old friend at IAEA?



M ARDIII, HAFIZ

N 1947 the United States welcomed an independent hailed the latter as her future ally in Asia. India with Nehru at its helm had however its own world view and charted a different course to become instead the leader and spokesman of the newly emerged decolonised world still suffering from the trauma of the long years of colonial subjugation. The nonalignment being the cornerstone of her global policy she stubbornly attempted not to be identified with any of the power blocs. Indeed, as a founder-leader of Non-Aligned Movement, powerful voice of decolonisation and persistent promoter of nuclear disarmament India enjoyed enviable prestige in international arena. All these helped India developing an image of her own which gave the country a unique standing in the world community. Now in a major turn around India throws off the mantle of much of those credentials as she seems to be pitching her tent permanently in American camp.

In an ultra right political milieu

since the BJP-led coalition seized power in New Delhi, India, for the first time, started flirting with the United States. But in spite of the personal predilection of Jaswant Singh, the then external affairs minister of India -- thought to be responsible for Indo-US courtship after having to his credit ten rounds of talks with Strobe Talbolt during Clinton era, it was not easy to break clean from the past in India's external policy. While the domestic have capitulated by endorsing Bush's highly controversial NMD which entailed a renewed international arms race, a new wave of cold war, the weaponisation of outer space as well as the scrapping of 1972 ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) treaty each one of which was at one time opposed by India and still disputed even by the US' traditional

The aberrations caused by the RSS zealots who owed no moral

Congress Party and its major Left allies and make the grand leap towards pragmatism is a pointer. As the 35-member governing board of the IAEA in Vienna voted to censure Iran for 'non-compliance' with IAEA safeguards on nuclear installations India also cast its ballot in favour of the US-backed European Union-3 resolution effectively opening up the way for taking Iranian case for possible sanction

acutely etched in certain parts of the

another nuclear state in neighbourhood" Manmohan Singh said however adding that India still preferred that diplomacy be given another chance to succeed. But there was

George Bush & Co that Iran must abandon its secret desire to go nuclear and turn back from the red

hardly any difference in rhetoric. The Indian prime minister was saving much the same thing as

PERSPECTIVES

In Nehruvian tradition India always took care of its relationship with the Middle East's Arab/Islamic world. At times she seemed even ahead of Pakistan in promoting solidarity with this geo-strategic hub. The same sentiment lacked in its latest deal meted out to Iran. At IAEA as India was playing realpolitik the moral high ground was held by Hugh Chavez's tiny Venezuela which was only honourable exception to say an emphatic 'no' to the resolution.

policy evokes controversies and divisions the foreign relations remained by and large bipartisan based truly on national consensus and guided strictly by the country's principled stand. That tradition set by the country's founding fathers could seldom be dented by any

Yet overwhelmed by Bill Clinton's high profile India-visit during the final year of his presidency, a few flattering references of the US to India as its 'strategic partner,' later a phone call from Ms Condoleezza Rice, then President Bush's National Security Adviser and finally the US President's NMD (National Missile Defence) emissary Richard Armitage, India seemed to

obligation to preserve India's traditional foreign policy posture perhaps awaited redress with a change of guard in New Delhi. But belying such expectation the Congress-led UPA government of Dr Manmohan Singh has now gone whole hog to embrace the Uncle Sam by entering into a strategic partnership with Washington and turning India to be its comprador ally for the region to preserve and promote the strategic interests of the world's Sole superpower. By now India's baptism to realpolitik -- an eupheism for prag matism -- was complete.

The IAEA (International Atomic Energy Authority's) recent vote in Vienna where New Delhi was able to shrug off an old world morality so

to the UN Security Council -although India had been in the forefront of decrying the US attempts for such an action and there was in existence a formal nuclear cooperation agreement between India and Iran. When External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh visited Tehran in early September -- ten days before the Indian prime minister met Bush in New York -- he reaffirmed Iran's right to the peaceful uses of nuclear Earlier as Indian Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh bluntly told a New York audience that Iran, as a signatory to Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty must abide by its international commitments and

line it had crossed a few weeks before. For a country of India's moral stature which always stood by its Non-Aligned Third World friends for decades this somersault at Vienna was nothing short of ideological revisionism. Although India in selfdefence argued that it helped broker a postponed Iran referral to the Security Council, Iran was not convinced and accused New Delhi of betraving an old friendship.

But New Delhi couldn't care less In its reckoning it was none other than the US which only this July had gone out of her way to recast the international nuclear order by implicitly accepting India as the sixth nuclear power. So, India consciously abandoned a centuries old

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by Indian government.

OPINION

Introducing unitrack secondary education

Quazi Afroz Jahan Ara

HE government has decided to introduce unitrack curriculum at the secondary level (grade nine and ten) of general education. Already a lot of arguments and debates have taken place on this issue.

In 2003 National Curriculum Coordination Committee (NCCC), Secondary Education Improvement Project (SESIP), National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) develoned general aims and objectives for the proposed unitrack curriculum. In November 2004, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board developed a curriculum for this system.

In the unitrack system all the secondary level students have to undergo a common curriculum. The major subjects specified for this

curriculum are Bangla, Mathematics, Social Science, General Science, Business Studies, Religious Studies, Agricultural Education, Home Economics and Computer Science. Thus this curriculum is replacing the existing multitrack curriculum of Science. Humanities and Business Studies. According to this new curriculum every student has to earn knowledge and skills on all the subjects men-The rationale may be, in the context

of our country, that many students fail to continue further education after secondary level. This level is the terminal level for many. After completing this level they get engaged in jobs. For this reason all students need

Develop a strong skills foundation in literacy and numeracy

• Learn to reason and solve problems • Develop an international perspective as well as an understanding and appreciation of their own and other · Become familiar with technologies

But now the question is, the way the government has taken decision to introduce this new system in 2006 -how far is it effective in our context?

In our country, in the case of sec-

that can make human interaction with

Learn to work co-operatively with

nature and knowledge more fruitful

ondary education, along with general education there are madrasah educatypes of English medium schools (one type follows the national curriculum and the other follows the overseas curriculum). If government thinks

that all students should come under the same education system, then this sort of discrepancies will have to be removed first. But it seems government has decided to introduce this curriculum only in the case of general education ignoring the real situation. As a result, all the secondary level students will not come under this system. The madrasah, technical education and the English medium schools will be left out from this new system. This seems quite strange. Why the government is in such a haste at introducing the system keeping these institutions out of the view? To develop or renew or modify a

curriculum, it is necessary to take the opinion of the education experts and stakeholders. The unitrack system must have been extensively discussed and publicised before coming to a fair

conclusion. In fact the government took the decision to introduce this new system without the stakeholders' and education experts' opinion. Even no discussion was held in the Cabinet or Parliament. Apart from this, the thing which was not taken into consideration is -- teachers. To introduce a new curriculum we require to think of the concerned teachers, because they are the ones through whom this curriculum will be implemented. According to the unitrack curricu-

lum, we need to teach skills such as thinking, reflection, solving, discovering, presentation, questioning. And for all these teacher-competency is needed, because the teachercompetency makes the difference in achievement. Therefore naturally the following questions arise -

-- Are the existing teachers aware of

implementing such a curriculum in

-- Will the teachers be able to manage and control the situation of teaching-learning process based on this curriculum? We still have dearth of well-trained

subject teachers in the country. The teachers are mechanically teaching the textbooks. Whereas, the existing multitrack curriculum is being taught by many of the unskilled and untrained teachers, after introduction of a new system -- would this new dish be a very good appetite for our crippled education system? No effort has before introducing the unitrack curriculum. For example, the curriculum which has been developed for general science (for grade nine and ten) in this new system most of the

teachers (except few) will not be able to cope with the approach of this curriculum. The new curriculum emphasises the importance of 'how to learn' rather than simply 'what to learn' and the importance of using an enquiry approach in the learning of scientific ideas. The new curriculum emphasises the importance of students participating actively, with their teachers, in the development of their

Before introducing this curriculum, we have to prepare our teachers. Otherwise, many of the things selected in the curriculum will not be possible to implement. And appropriate and intensive training of teachers is essential, as they are potential actors in the change process. They will have to know the teaching methods and assessment techniques, as most of the

teachers are not at all aware of these. So without mastering the new

curriculum materials and without sufficient training of teachers, hurried introduction of this unitrack curriculum will affect millions of students There is also shortage of science and mathematics teachers in the country Therefore we do not have sufficient number of teachers of science and mathematics. This is the difficulty to introduce this sort of curriculum with effectiveness. Due to all these factors not only the science education, the whole education sector may be affected rather than benefited by this

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