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Future of Saarc



There is a huge euphoria in Dhaka about the Saarc meeting. Leaders are proclaiming that the Saarc is the only way; that Saarc will bring prosperity to the region, but what is Saarc? There is this huge India in Saarc which dwarfs all the other countries. Saarc's population is 1.5 billion, whereas India's population is 1 billion plus, so basically Saarc is India. India and India alone will be the great beneficiary of this Saarc and compared to India, Pakistan's population is only 150 millions. The enhancement of Saarc will favour Indian industries and it is evident now that Bangladesh has become the dumping ground for Indian goods and the balance of trade is 10 times in favour of India. Now in case of Pakistan, most Pakistanis are distrustful of this Saarc circle. Saarc means trouble



for Pakistan's industries. India is just waiting in the wings that Saarc would somehow allow it to dump its products in Pakistan. We, Pakistanis, have to pay this price. Pakistan is a separate country, has a separate identity, and its people have different aspirations. After the recent earthquake, which struck Pakistan, who came

to Pakistan's rescue? The Turkish Prime Minister came to Pakistan with a team of helpers and he pledged a sum of \$150 millions. The Saarc nations did nothing. Now we Pakistanis are hearing of this word integration. Do we like this new buzzword? The answer is an emphatic no. Many people have cited the

success of European Union and that Saarc should be like it, but they forget that in the European Union there is no country like the huge India. **Jamilla Razzak, Chicago USA** ***



Saarc summit. They are organising a so called "Security Blanket" in the major areas of Dhaka city where the summit will take place and in the hotels and rest houses where the valued guests will reside. We are prepared to go through the hardships of walking as vehicle movement is restricted in

many areas for the sake of national image i.e. Bangladesh or the BNP government can in fact maintain security in the country. But what about the unimportant places? What if the terrorist groups are actually waiting for such a situation? It is wrong to presume that they will not take advantage of this to spread fear in

Chittagong, or in Feni or in Comilla, Rangpur and other small towns? Shouldn't our government take this possibility into account? **Faisal Khair Chowdhury Ramna, Dhaka** *** After reading that the major topics of the Saarc summit will be pov-

Deepsea port

Being a seaman myself, I take keen interest in everything relating to the marine sector. I came across the article on the captioned subject published on 1 November in the DS. The author of the article I guess is a feeder vessel operator as his article reflects the interest of the feed operator's interest. Most of what Mr. Chowdhury has said in his article is true today but what he has not said is very important. To start with he has not said that it takes at least 15 to 20 years time to have a fully operational new port starting from the ground breaking. In 15 to 20 years the economic scenario of this part of the world is not going to remain as it is today. The very fast growth of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries gives us an idea of things to come in near future. Bangladesh is also going to be benefited from the spill over effect of the developments of the BRIC countries. Two of the most resourceful regions that have remained largely untapped are our immediate neighbours

namely, North-east India and Myanmar. Mr. Chowdhury has dismissed highly resourceful North-east India to be a mere exporter of tea. It is so because their access to sea is both difficult and costly, if we offer them port facilities then this region will also develop fast and that will be to our mutual benefit. Myanmar's development is stuck because of the tight grip on power by the military junta but this will also change and Myanmar will also develop very rapidly. Myanmar do not have modern port facilities which we could provide them. Mr. Chowdhury has himself said the there is no deep sea port in the Bay of Bengal region. This means that if we start a main line service from our new deep sea port then we can expect cargoes of the region to come to our new port and the new port will be a hub port of the region. Mr. Chowdhury has rightly said our location is outside the main sea lane but I would like to add that it does not stop us from making our own new port as the hub port for the region. The hinterland of the port may extend to as far as China besides

Myanmar and North-east India. I do not know if Mr. Chowdhury is aware of the fact that Pakistan, a country outside the main shipping lane, is already having a deep sea port at Gwadar, hitherto a sleepy fish harbour on the Lasbela coast of Beluchistan province with the help of the Chinese to cater to the trading needs of central Asian countries, Afghanistan and South-west China. It is not without reason that Pakistan has made such massive investment in building of a port in the middle of nowhere. Mr. Chowdhury ignored the fact that if we can send our cargo from our own hub port then the cost of feeding will be eliminated and the cargo will reach destinations in Europe or America at least seven days earlier, besides saving at least US\$ 500 per TEU. This I am sure will give a big boost to our exports, as it will make our goods more competitive in the international market. If we can make our new port an efficient one, then there will be no dearth of cargo and the port will very soon be a viable one. So far we have only discussed about the

containerised cargo but if we look at the bulk cargo sector then we see that millions of dollars are spent every year in demurrage and lightening of the mother vessels at the outer anchorage. A deep sea port can dispense with the whole lightening operation and save the country from millions of dollars of unnecessary expenditure every year. In order to minimise our young men going abroad for jobs we could create jobs for them within the country rapidly by declaring the southern coast of the river Shangu a "special economic zone." Port facilities nearby and availability of good communication and logistics will make the economic zone an attractive destination for the investors. Finally, I would like to mention here that the Jamuna Bridge was not considered by many as feasible but after the bridge was opened it has been conclusively proved that it is indeed a viable one. Now the question is not if a deep sea port is necessary for Bangladesh, but how soon we are going to have it.

Finally, I would request the people concerned not to make an issue of it, but rather we should wait for the report and findings of the consultants. **Salahuddin Ahmad** *One-mail* **Time for new leadership** The leaders of the two major parties have proved their worth in leading the nation. It is time for them to step aside graciously and make room for new leadership. Such examples were laid by Lee Kuan Yew, Nelson Mandela and Mahathir. New leadership may bring welcome changes in the country. **Shafiq Rahman, On e-mail** **Healthcare in Bangladesh** I am writing this letter to you after all the experience I had in Bangladesh healthcare system. My mom broke her hip bone in Kushtia, and she was admitted to a Trauma Centre under a renowned surgeon. I joined my mom after the operation was done and I can't know about the treatment that

she was getting there. The doctor would visit mom with a cell phone in hand and would never check the report, as if his presence was enough. The clinic would refer to other doctors, though we don't live in Bangladesh and we had no clue who they were, and every time their presence with cell phone in hand would cost us Tk 500. I have a very simple question to ask: does the Bangladesh government ever monitor this kind of clinics, which are nothing but money-making machines? I urge upon the Ministry of Health to kindly look into matter. I am willing to answer any question they might have regarding these clinics. **Taiful Huq, Hicksville, New York** **Motorcycle on pavements** Pavements are for pedestrians. But nowadays, whenever there is a traffic jam, we see motorcycle riders moving on to the pavements to save time. This practice is not only uncivilised but also dangerous as people may be hurt. Even the traffic policemen remain nonchalant about this. There should be strict laws to prevent these unruly motorcycle riders from treading pavements. The government should look into this matter seriously. **Syed Towhid Hossain** *Lalmatia, Dhaka* **Late Ambassador Rezaul Karim** I just came to know, through your newspaper, about the death of Ambassador Rezaul Karim, and I wish to add my personal memories to the tributes expressed by all those who had the privilege of knowing him. My first meeting with Rezaul Karim was in May 1973; he was then Director General (West European Desk) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I had come to Dhaka from New Delhi, accompanying the first Ambassador of Belgium accredited to Bangladesh. On that occasion, we met several times and we were very impressed by his high professionalism and by his natural courtesy. We were also surprised that we could conduct most of our conversations in French, a language that Mr. Karim had mastered to near perfection. Later, when I came back to Dhaka to open the Belgian Embassy, my contacts with Mr. Karim became more frequent and more personal. On several occasions, he even helped me to navigate smoothly through the administrative complexities which I had to face to set up a new Embassy. Our relations became even more personal when, in 1975, the first Belgian resident Ambassador in Dhaka decided to rent the newly built house of Mr. Karim for his official residence. It was in that beautiful house that, in May 1981, the late King Baudouin of Belgium accompanied by Queen Fabiola, had a grand reception. In 1993, when my wife and I wanted to observe the 20th anniversary of our posting in Bangladesh, we were so happy to associate Karim and Salma to our celebrations. And again, when the time came for us to leave definitively Bangladesh in 1998, Salma and Karim had the extreme courtesy to arrange a touch-

ing farewell dinner to which they had invited a few colleagues and close friends. My wife and I shall always keep the memory of a great diplomat, of a good man and a faithful friend. May his soul rest in peace! **Benoit Labrique** *Namur, Belgium* **Our politicians** Often we compare our success with that of India and always have excuses for not achieving similar milestones of success. Even thirty years ago, the difference between India and Bangladesh was similar to that between the US and Canada and today it is more like the US and Mexico (US being India for the sake of comparison). Why, it is very simple, blame our politicians. In general (with a bold underline under "general"), our politicians from ALL parties get involved in politics purely for monetary reason. There are no ifs or buts, it is plain and simple. Because of their educational background or lack of it, most would not make the cut to be successful in any area; however, doing politics is the quickest means of making a huge amount of money through corruption. The only criterion is how convincingly you can make everyone a fool. They don't care about the country whatsoever. Corruption and Politics go hand in hand, at least in Bangladesh. So if you are concerned about our ranking as the most corrupt nation, nothing will change unless or until we change our politicians of ALL parties. Our politicians including the PM and the opposition leader have failed to discharge their duties. Just think about the event related to the Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh. He was relieved of his portfolio over an allegation in a UN report that he was a beneficiary of illegal payoffs in Iraq's Oil for Food programme. Imagine it is just an allegation (many have expressed concern about the legitimacy of such a report) but the FM decided to step down. Is it thinkable in our country? **Shahriar Imtiaz** *One-mail* **Most corrupt country** My country has achieved the award of No 1 corrupt country in the world, but our politicians are not anxious about that. They are busy to gather more and more wealth. This is the real situation of our country. Some days back our lawmakers made a strict rule against smoking. After passing the law, our law and order officials acted strictly. But now if we look around us we will see that people are smoking freely in public places. As a citizen of Bangladesh, I want to ask the lawmakers why they make such laws that are not enforced properly. If such a situation goes on, our very existence will be threatened. If we all make up our mind to bring prosperity to our country, we have to be united. One day we might achieve the award of the best democratic country in the world. And it is not a cock and bull story because we have the greatest power, that is, manpower. **Saiful Islam** *Mirpur, Dhaka*



President Bush

Dr Richard said the Americans made a mistake voting for Bush, and he reasoned that lofty things could not be expected from a cowboy since they are more accustomed to horse neighs and cow language to get much time for normal education. No offence meant to any cowboys please. He also said that citizens could make mistakes. I agree with him, but how can a man make a mistake twice? It is a common trick to play with people's emotions to become the president of the US, it happens everywhere. Unfortunately, very few people understand politics amongst citizens. A highly intellectual tiny group rules the US. They did a good job helping to develop this country like many others and even made us win against the Japanese. Everything was perfect until news flashed in the headlines, which said, are there more Muslims than Jews in the US? Then suddenly Usama got pissed off and jacked the Twin Towers through the famous security, which hasn't had any glitches since the Pearl Harbour. And from the hills of Afghanistan all the way till the castle of Saddam the US troops followed him intending to destroy the root of terrorism, the biological weapons. I always wonder what a small country like Israel is doing with more nuclear bombs than America. They helped us build one day and now they are helping to destroy us. I don't have any personal grudge against them but I have to say something "Richard" if you look back at history their character was, whenever their positions were threatened they caught the rope of chaos. 'Doc' many things change but blood doesn't, so changing Bush won't solve our problem. Another thing worries me "Richard"; every empire has glorious days as well as downfall. I don't know where we stand today but like you and many others I hope things change. My instincts tell me as well as I have a gut feeling that things will worsen. I pray to Allah that He guides us to the right path and I also pray that peace return to America and the entire world. **Ubaidullah Awal** *On e-mail*



Help the earthquake victims

The recent devastating earthquake in Pakistan has rendered 3 million people homeless, killed more than half a lakh and one lakh people were injured. This is a great humanitarian crisis. Almost all countries (rich and poor) are participating in the relief work by sending men and material. We have also responded by sending relief goods but the need of the hour is the treatment of the countless injured. In Bangladesh we don't have any dearth of doctors and engineers at the moment. We also have exportable surplus of medicines. As such our govt. should dispatch immediately a team of doctors and engineers along with medical supplies to Pakistan to ease the sufferings of the fellow human beings. A great many of our people from different sectors will volunteer to join the relief work if a proper initiative is taken in this regard. Time is running out. Quick action is needed. Our participation in the relief work will strengthen bilateral ties and bolster the Saarc spirit, apart from serving the cause of the suffering humanity. **M Bazlur Rahman** *Uttara, Dhaka*

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