

## Opening remarks at PRS forum

*Hands-on approach from govt imperative*

THE donors' involvement with our development process has been, by and large, rewarding for the country though some questions about their role cannot be brushed aside.

There is a consensus between them and us now that Bangladesh has done well in certain areas over the years in terms of some indicators of socio-economic progress. Bangladesh has fared appreciably well compared with other countries in South Asia. And we must build on this huge gain, and that's exactly where we have roadblocks and impediments to remove.

Corruption, lack of governance and politics of confrontation keep bedeviling our national development efforts. Not surprisingly therefore, non-economic issues characterised the donors' approach to poverty reduction strategy (PRS) on the opening day of the forum. But the important thing to remember is that they are not the donors' concerns alone, rather they are our people's concerns, our concerns.

We could really make an economic breakthrough with a five per cent plus growth rate increased to seven or eight per cent per annum, provided corruption is eliminated substantially, poor governance ended, and politics of confrontation stymied.

On the principal issue of corruption which eats away two per cent worth of GDP growth, may we ask, what initiative has the government taken to meet the concern of the business community and the people, let alone that of the donors over the malady? Look at this red herring of the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) which remains a non-starter even to this day! In reality though, what can the ACC do when the executive control is absolute, politics gets the better of economic judgement and corruption in high places is an open secret? With such halfhearted steps like having a limping ACC, nobody can be made to believe that corruption can be rooted out, far less the development partners who are well informed.

There is little doubt that the implementation of PRS will stumble against three problems, namely corruption, mis-governance and confrontational politics as it gets underway. As for confrontational politics, the onus is on both the ruling and opposition parties to come to terms with each other. But on the questions of corruption and poor governance, the responsibility lies solely with the government to set things right.

In today's and tomorrow's sessions at the PRS Forum, we expect that substantive and fruitful discussions will be held on these important issues so that effective corrective steps could be taken to move things forward in terms of financing national development.

## Mopping up operations touching on the fringe

*Seek international assistance to catch terror masterminds*

IN recent times, our law enforcement agencies aided by the intelligence network, have captured a number of suspected perpetrators of bomb blasts. Some were even caught in the act. Much as the capture of field level operators is on the rise and the 'wanted' list gets longer, the terror supremoes like Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai (with a misplaced sobriquet) remains at large as before. As the investigations keep snowballing, the dragnet goes peripheral missing out on the main figures and actors behind the scenes.

Given the density of our population and the demographic situation we are placed in, it should really work as an advantage for our intelligence agencies to gather appropriate information leading to the hideouts of the masterminds resulting in their ultimate capture. Questions have arisen about infrastructural capacity, professionalism and commitment of those responsible for capturing people who instigated and mentored the bombing operations. From the slender result, it seems that tenacity, sincerity and political will are in short supply within the powers that be.

We must move fast and track down the leaders and planners of these bomb blasts. In this regard our administration should consider drawing on British expertise, particularly in the areas of forensic and other high tech methods of criminal investigation, in response to the offer made by the visiting UK Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Kim Howells, MP. While tackling terrorism and bomb blasts through police and intelligence gathering followed by swift and stern actions against the perpetrators is a top priority concern, the government is well advised not to lose sight of the need for monitoring institutions and organisations that have potentials for breeding extremism.

# 13th SAARC Summit: Time to act



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

FOR three days Dhaka was almost hermetically sealed.

The extended Eid holiday may have come as a welcome gift to some, but to many, who manage to scrape a daily living, it was difficult three days. To most Dhakaites, cooped up in one's house, having to shutter completely down, particularly those houses that had the misfortune of being located along the VVIP motorcade route, it was a unique experience. And all these were endured with fortitude to allow a trouble-free holding of the SAARC Summit that was twice postponed and seemed it might be postponed for the third time when the Delhi blasts killed more than 50 people, only a fortnight before the Dhaka Summit.

Never before had we experienced such a security blanket over the capital, and never before were so many security personnel employed to ensure the security of the Summit. But never before had we experienced five hundred near-simultaneous blasts in the country either. Given the experience that we have had over the last several years, no security measures was more than necessary.

For Bangladesh the Summit was significant for several reasons. It was

here that SAARC commenced its journey, amidst hopes as well as uncertainty, twenty years ago. Hopes were infused with because never before did we think in terms of the region. Never before did we consider putting our efforts together to better the lot of the peoples of whole region, notwithstanding the many fissiparous matters that came in the way of our bilateral interactions. Uncertainty was built in, because there was that little

reasons of SAARC's non-performance have been due to the nature of Indo-Pak relations. This awareness is definitely a positive development for the region, particularly because both the leaders have pointed to the central reason, 'trust deficit' between India and Pakistan.

The most positive thing to have come out of the Summit was opening of its arms to its new member, Afghanistan. It seemed rather odd that a

Japan reflects the acknowledgement of the geopolitical and geo-economic reality of the time. When most of the SAARC countries have very deep economic and strategic relationship with either or both the countries, and where India itself has forged new relationship with China, and Japan is already associated with SAARC through the SAARC-Japan Special Fund, it is an incongruity not to involve them formally with the

cooperation in the field of energy, noticeable.

But how much cause do we have to celebrate the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit?

Although nothing about some pressing issues like a common power grid was put on the table, one hopes that SAFTA would be able to get off the ground by January 2006. Our awareness of the need to combat terrorism jointly is demonstrated by the SAARC Convention on terrorism,

**Try as much as we will, we cannot live in individual island of prosperity and excellence when the rest of the region is about to be engulfed by a sea of poverty and scarcity. Nothing but a common approach can help resolve common problems. If only the countries can break out of the aura of mistrust and not allow their bilateral matters come in the way of the region's closer interaction, we can perhaps be more successful in implementing the SAARC Charter.**

bit of apprehension in the minds of the two big members regarding the motivation behind forming the regional group. And here in the city of Dhaka, having the unique distinction of holding the Summit for the third time, the leaders of the seven countries were meeting to devise ways to make SAARC a more meaningful entity as it stepped into the cusp of the third decade of its existence. Nothing could give a Bangladeshi more satisfaction.

But what have we that we can take satisfaction and comfort from, out of the two-day Summit that cynics term as a mere talking shop, and the Association as a ship moving to nowhere?

To start with, there has been a candid acknowledgement by the leaders of the seven member countries, of the fact that SAARC has not been as effective as it might be. And indeed, both India and Pakistan have readily accepted that much of the

country that has physically and historically been a part of the region was not considered for SAARC membership, till now, although it was being mentioned, in both official and unofficial circles, as being a part of the South Asian construct. It is perhaps Afghanistan's political situation that kept it psychologically apart from the region. Some may question whether, given its current political and economic situation, Afghanistan can fulfil its role as a member of SAARC. But it is exactly for that reason why Afghanistan should be welcomed into SAARC's fold. One feels that being a member of SAARC would help Afghanistan transit to a new political and economic order that has so far not been possible to attain. This is where the other SAARC countries can be of tremendous help to Afghanistan.

On another plane, according to observer status to both China and

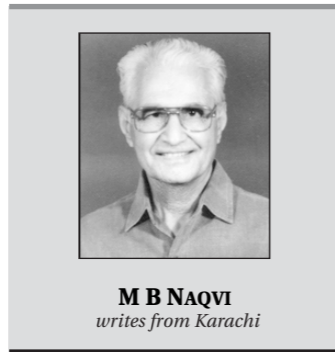
regional grouping.

While poverty alleviation and terrorism were the common themes in the speeches, individual thrusts, reflecting their unique concerns emphasised in the seven leaders' speeches were also noticeable. Thus understandably, Chandrika spoke of the need for a joint effort to tackle natural disasters. Bangladesh's concerns for protectionism and poverty as well as human trafficking, while India's need for transit and misgivings about anti-state elements using territory of other member states were appropriately reflected. Maldives' environmental concerns were rightly reflected in Gayoom's observations that progress in the area of environmental conservation has been far too slow. So were Nepal's concern for terrorism, Pakistan and Bhutan's concern for poverty alleviation and need for

drawn up in 1987, that predates 9/11 by almost a decade and a half. What one would have expected, apart from ratifying the Additional Protocol, was some concrete strategy to address the challenge. All other concerns that were articulated in the speeches and reflected in the Dhaka Declaration were related to issues already taken up for action previously, but not acted upon in full, regrettably.

Unfortunately, it is not a deficit of trust between India and Pakistan alone but its deficit generally in the region that has stunted the progress of SAARC. Thus, any suggestion that India makes is perceived with a certain degree of reservation, while the same is true of India when some of its smaller neighbours come up with a new proposal. There can be no doubt that we need to be physically connected, not only intra-

# The Natwar Singh affair



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

FALLOUT from Kunwar Natwar Singh's ouster from India's External Affairs Ministry the other day will not remain confined to Indian politics alone. It is obviously calculated to consolidate the America-India strategic partnership. We learn from Indian media that quite apart from the Volcker Committee Report's aspersions on Natwar Singh as well as the Congress of having indirectly benefitted from UN's Iraqi oil-for-food programme in the 1990s, the outgoing foreign minister of India had become an embarrassment for Manmohan Singh government. The PM disliked him as a relic from Nehru's non-aligned mode of thinking while he wholeheartedly accepted the BJP project of partnership with America. Natwar was even referred to as 'dense' in US official documents which in some Indian eyes made him totally unfit to be India's Foreign Minister.

The immediate issue is about India's vote on Iran's nuclear programme if the US moves the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors at its upcoming meeting on Nov 24. The Americans clearly want the IAEA to refer Iran's non-compliance with NPT complaint to the UN Security

Council so that mandatory sanctions can be imposed on Iran, if the US can muster a majority vote in UNSC. They have set their heads on punishing Iran. Meanwhile the wheels of international politics are churning.

Americans face a difficult task. No one really wants to see sanctions being imposed on Iran except the US, Israel and a few of US satellite states; even the European Three -- Britain, France and Germany -- are visibly

unhappy at the prospect of having to

earlier position that India had taken'. That scandalised the pro-America groups in and out of Indian government. It is also interesting to note that the Indian media have trained all their guns on Natwar, while the Volcker Committee had indicted the Congress party as another beneficiary from the Iraqi oil-for-food programme.

Even so it remains uncertain how will India vote. Indian media, on the other hand, appears to be relieved

but should not proceed any further. It should enrich it in Russian facilities inside Russia jointly with it. Initially it seemed as if this compromise will be acceptable to Iran. But as it happens, Iran and EU remain engaged in secret diplomacy. Iran still seems to stand by the letter of NPT, holding that enrichment of uranium is its NPT given right. The west, of course, refuses to recognise that right of Iran on the basis of its suspicions that Iran will cheat and that it will somehow go

gic alliance with the US in place of the earlier non-alignment. They both dislike the Left. Where the two alliances differ is in the definition of Indian Nationalism: UPA's is, by definition, Nehru's secular, composite Indian nationalism while BJP's nationalism is suffused with Hindutva; the difference is mainly theoretical and historical, without much practical distinction today.

If the present configuration of Indian politics lasts -- i.e the

regionally, but also with regions across the regional boundaries. The Indian PM's suggestion in this regard bears very strong rationale. That India has failed to access land transit from Bangladesh when it already enjoys river transit facility, is as incongruous as the fact that Bangladesh is yet to get the full and complete use of the Teen Bigha Corridor to access its enclave, even after 30 years of the agreement. In the same manner, the Bangladesh PM's suggestion of de-linking trade and commerce from politics merits serious consideration.

Held in the backdrop of two very severe natural disasters that have affected almost all the countries, and the spectre of extremism and terrorism that pervades the region, the only realisation that has become crystal clear is that the fate of the countries in the region is inextricably linked. And try as much as we will, we cannot live in individual island of prosperity and excellence when the rest of the region is about to be engulfed by a sea of poverty and scarcity. Nothing but a common approach can help resolve common problems.

If only the countries can break out of the aura of mistrust and not allow their bilateral matters come in the way of the region's closer interaction, we can perhaps be more successful in implementing the SAARC Charter.

The need of the time is for an undiluted follow-up of the plans and to address these issues directly, leaving aside old mindset and doubts and suspicious.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

**PLAIN WORDS**  
Among all the political reactions to the Volcker Committee Report, few regard it to be anything like a competent judicial determination. How much politics is in it is hard to say. Whether it was entirely free of US political purposes or expediencies is also hard to say. Anyhow, its pronouncements will lead to political action by Indian practitioners of realpolitik who are not novices in its arts and crafts.

vote for sanctions on Iran, if the latter does not relent on the issue. Russia and China, both veto-wielding powers, are opposed to punishing Iran and are trying to find a consensus solution. The US expects India to be ready to vote as the US desires.

Americans as well as his colleagues in the government saw Natwar in a politically compromising position: He not merely attended a Moscow SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) meeting where the issue came up and he went along with the Russo-Chinese position; he even talked with the Chinese Foreign Minister in which he agreed with the Consensus idea. Later, he left a statement on the record in which he said 'if the next resolution in IAEA Board was any harsher on Iran, he, as External Affairs Minister, would recommend to his government to reverse the

that Natwar is out and the way forward to stand united with America is clear. Still, the question is open: will Manmohan government vote for UN sanctions on Iran? There is little doubt that the good doctor leading the Indian government is anxious to vote as the US desires; he will be supported in this by India's mainstream media. What might restrain him, however, is the stiff opposition from the Indian Left to toeing American line. The September vote against Iran in Vienna was one too many for the Left. The whole Left disapproved it. Some 100 MPs in Lok Sabha bitterly oppose the pro-American policies of South Block.

Meanwhile there was a small window of opportunity when E Three made a compromise proposal, with tacit US approval, that Iran may convert uranium into Hexafluoride

on enriching uranium to the level needed in an atomic bomb. Given American determination to prevent any chance of Iran acquiring atomic weapons, the world still has a first class crisis on its hands in which US will demand India's support.

Although it is only a foreign policy issue, it meshes in with other social and economic policies. Natwar has unwittingly helped sharpen the Left-Right divide in India. Left parties generally oppose the World Bank-IMF policies -- the offspring of Washington Consensus -- that were so dear to the previous BJP-led government, are now wholeheartedly supported by the UPA government. After all, this economic paradigm had been initiated by Dr. Manmohan Singh himself in 1991 as Rajiv Gandhi's FM. Both much of UPA and NDA share the love of these 'reforms' as well as preferring a strate-

Manmohan government is able to square the circle of hunting with American hound and running with the Iranian hare -- everything will depend on Indian Left's threshold of tolerance: when will the UPA government moves too far to the Right to withhold cooperation? Its decision will not be easy. Most of the old communist certainties have disappeared except one: while there is no strictly definable Left programme, the emergence of the US as sole hyper power, going flat out for global domination, can be identified as the chief legitimate object of Leftist opposition. While imperialism and crude capitalism -- the leitmotif of Washington Consensus -- are still the demons to fight, though what socialist construction now looks like has become uncertain.

Manmohan government is not easily assailable on the assumption

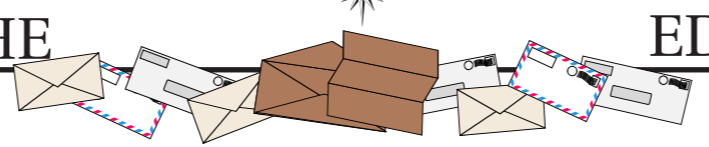
that the Left cannot afford to topple it; it will be too frightened by the prospect of NDA winning over a few of UPA constituents. While there is weight in this rather self-serving assumption of rightward-inclined Congress leaders, it is also too facile not to say cynical. The decisiveness required by the Left to implement such a decision cannot be taken for granted. Like everywhere else, the Indian left too is in a flux. India's CPM is now ready, really, to follow the example set by Deng Xioping in superimposing free markets over what was designed as a planned economy. WB Chief Minister is now welcoming fixed private development investments. Amidst other changes, they may not be able to ditch what was basically a Nehru's legacy? Anti-Imperialism will certainly be too difficult to drop. Natwar's departure from office and Left's acceptance of it in practice thus may not be easy.

Among all the political reactions to the Volcker Committee Report, few regard it to be anything like a competent judicial determination. How much politics is in it is hard to say. Whether it was entirely free of US political purposes or expediencies is also hard to say. Anyhow, its pronouncements will lead to political action by Indian practitioners of realpolitik who are not novices in its arts and crafts.

Indian Rightists will use the report to tighten their grip further over the Congress and the UPA Government. By the same token, the Left will be forced to take equal opposite action. Left-Right polarisation in Indian politics thus stands to be sharpened by another anti-Iran vote, while the process of Left's self-definition should quicken.

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.

### BUET exams

I do still wonder why the students of BUET suffer from exam phobia. Yes, I, being a BUET student, do know that it's quite tough to face exams, especially when the teachers have the habit of giving a so-called "bash" (common term in BUET when questions are tough). But the tradition it has developed of allowing a month or so for the preparation leave (PL) is definitely not good. It has to be stopped.

If there were no system of such preparation leave (PL) or just a week of PL, then today the students would not have demanded 4/5 or even 6 weeks of PL. But there is a tradition and we do follow traditions.

But what does this show? Even, if a weak student labours for 5 weeks on just 5 subjects, he can get a good grade. So, how can we rate ourselves?

How is our GPA fair to our calibre?

It is still said that the students of BUET are meritorious and they are the very best. But isn't that an irony? If they are the best, then why do they need such a long preparation leave?

If we look at the universities abroad, they hardly give a week for studies before commencing the exams. And still the students achieve their best. So, can't this happen to BUET students?

And the funny thing is that the administration has shifted the date of this fall semester to 19th November because of Saarc holidays. But, still everyone believes that the exam won't be held before 26 November, or it might be shifted to the first week of December. So what does this mean?

I want to assure you that no matter how long the leave is, the students will not put their efforts in

studying, they will hang on with tuition and other income generating work.

The BUET authorities should look into the matter.  
**T. Islam Sumon**  
BUET

### Contain corruption

Enough is enough. My country has again been ranked the most corrupt in the world among 159 countries. We don't have any scope and place to hide our face. We cannot digest this consecutive national disgrace.

It is corruption, which has brought this bad name for the country. It is corruption that has destroyed the glory of the nation. We created a bright and unique example in the whole world by sacrificing our lives for the mother tongue. This nation achieved independence within nine

months. This nation has united the people of different religions under the umbrella of peaceful co-existence. This nation sends its brilliant sons to different parts of the globe where they invent and discover many new things. All these glories and fame have faded due to the corruption prevailing in the country in various forms, though all the people are not related and concerned with it. Now we must not let time pass any more. We must label the corrupt officials, corrupt staff both in the government and private sectors, and give due punishment to them. We must start hating the corrupt people.

Everybody is not corrupt. Every department is not fully corrupt. In every organisation some people are corrupt and they bring bad name for all. Can't we identify and teach them a good lesson?

Police, customs and education are known to be the most corrupt sectors of the country. Policing the police is a must. Now we don't have any plea to overlook this issue. We have overlooked the corruption of the police department, which has pushed us to this disgraceful position. A strong watchdog body must be established to oversee the corruption of the police department. If the corruption and malpractice of the police can be curbed, corruption in many other sectors will automatically disappear.

To curb corruption, it is not possible to transform all the people into angels. But there must be certain set of rules which should be known to the common people. If it is done, people will be aware enough not to give extra money to any person or agency.

Now corruption has emerged as the number one problem of the nation.

Let us come together to resist it, irrespective of our ideals and party affiliations.

**Md. Masum Billah**  
BRAC Head Office, Dhaka

### Human trafficking

Human Trafficking in Bangladesh is a major problem.

Every day hundreds of women and children are being trafficked out of the country. Poverty forces these poor people into this trade because they think they have no other alternative for survival. They trust the offers of work or marriage abroad, which promises security but lead them to slavery.

Studies show that over 1 million women and children have been trafficked out of the country in the past 30 years and many of them were forced to become prostitutes and domestic

helps. Among them, the most popular thing is to traffic Bangladeshi boys to the U.A.E. and other M-E countries for forced work as camel jockeys and beggars. Every day as I see articles about these boys being trafficked to Saudi Arabia at such a young age I become shocked. Are the traffickers humans or something else?

I would like to conclude by saying that human trafficking has become a moral and social problem. Therefore, I request the authorities to look into this problem and put an end to the heinous business.

**Labiba Rahman**  
Maghbar, Dhaka

### Grisly pictures

I have been noticing of late that the pictures of victims following gruesome events are being very graphically printed in our print media. The

tragic events in Jhalakati are a case in point. The last photos of Ivy Rahman were another example. I don't think we need to see the bodies of the fatalities in such detail; it offends our sensibilities, means we have hesitation showing our children the newspaper (which restricts their awareness of current affairs), and I think also the family members of the deceased may find it too painful. There is also the danger that we become sanitised to seeing this kind of violence all the time so upfront.

Perhaps, as is the case in many foreign newspapers, a written description without images of individual victims would suffice. We can use our imagination as to what happened; as God only knows we have too many examples to use as benchmarks.

**Sanjoy Kumar Nath,**  
Chittagong