The Daily Star

POINT 综COUNTERPOINT

An anatomy of SAARC Dhaka Declaration | Panic is not the solution



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HE two-day 13th SAARC Summit held in Dhaka ended on November 13 with the issuance of the Dhaka Declaration, just as has each of the previous 12 summits did with a declaration. Also, this time, as has been done in the preceding summits, agreements reached previously have been reiterated, some new decisions taken, and some new proposals put forward. It is of particular significance that this 13th summit marks the ushering in of the association's third decade. On this occasion the Heads of the State or Government very aptly emphasized their commitment to making constructive "cooperation an enduring feature and thus contribute to the region's peace, progress and stability" (Para 3). These are indeed very

encouraging words. It may be recalled here that the various key commitments and agreements reiterated, renewed or made at the 13th summit include those that relate to such important matters as combating terrorism; establishment of South Asian Free Trade Area and expansion of the agreement in this regard to include services, enhanced investments, and harmonized standards; promotion of education (primary and secondary in particular, but also science, technology and higher education); control of trafficking in women and children; strengthening transport and communication links across the region; establishment of a SAARC Development Fund (SDF) and a SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund (SPAF); collective SAARC response to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS; a regional initiative with regard to basic health care services and sanitation; cultural exchanges bringing the peoples of South Asia closer; promotion of tourism in South Asia; working together in international forums to enhance the interest of the regional countries; and carrying the cooperation process further through SAFTA and South Asian Customs Union to South Asian Economic Union. But has SAARC arrived? The

answer is an emphatic no. The summiteers themselves have also recognized as much, as reflected in the following statement in the Dhaka Declaration (Para 51): "In view of the new challenges facing the region, pledges and commitments made in the last two decades should be trans-

ever. Given that people are not consulted in any of the countries through available democratic means in remanifestoes, referendums, etc), the agreements reached and pledges made in SAARC summits are the commitments of the summiteers, shaped with the help of the associated bureaucrats and advisors. The leaders don't feel obliged to and they don't in practice explain these agreements and proposals to the people so that the people don't have an opportunity of

centred than otherwise and the political leaders may be expected to be genuinely committed to deliver on the spect of SAARC matters (i.e. election regional commitments made and agreements reached

> It is the ordinary downtrodden people who are generally at the forefront of violence and terrorist attacks; endure the ignominy of trafficking of women and children; suffer from poverty, derivation, and disparity; face the brunt of natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis; and bear the BEHIND THE FACADE

If a people-first, inclusive, and equal-opportunity approach is adopted by the SAARC

member countries, a people-based driving force would emanate across the countries

that would propel the various pertinent agreements and pledges made by the

summiteers at the 13th as well as the previous summits and those that may be adopted

later into proper implementation for the mutual benefit of the peoples of the member

countries. Otherwise, summits may continue to be held form time to time ending with

highly pertinent declarations, but nothing much will happen on the ground.

can be undertaken along with how much costs will be incurred by whom and how much benefits will accrue to whom, and recommend possible solutions to other related questions. The decisions are taken and implemented by the governments i.e. Track 1. So, it is the governmental process that must be people-centred to truly act on behalf of the people. Interestingly, almost all the SAARC summits so for held including the 13th have recognized people-to-people contact as essential to provide the basis for a

to include and empower the excluded (i.e. the poor and the disadvantaged). But, without adoption and implementation of strategies to that effect sustained poverty reduction is not possible. This is particularly important given that all the regional countries are pursuing free market and globalization paradigm, which is inherently divisive and disparityenhancing. Indeed, disparity has been accentuating in the countries around the world, which have adapted this paradigm.

A core component of effective empowerment is equity. Everybody should be provided with equal opportunities to develop themselves. But this has not been called for. Even in Plato's Utopia, which was essentially elitist, we find that equal opportunities were to be provided to all, thereby giving everybody the chance to become what they could: guardians (rulers), business people, soldiers and so on. Those who would achieve the best qualifications for the job of the guardians would be the guardians, while others who could not make it to the class of guardians would be soldiers, business people and so on depending on their respective aptireduction of disparity and accelerated poverty alleviation. But the Dhaka Declaration has failed to grapple with this key moral-ethical but also practical issue of inclusiveness, ignoring the quagmire that is prevailing and accentuating in the regional countries, with its consequences of persisting high

If a people-first, inclusive, and

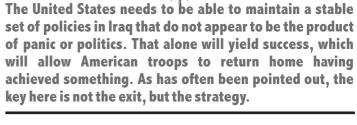
footing, the political dynamic in aware that if American forces left Washington could move toward a panicked withdrawal.

To oversimplify, after two years of Iraq today is no worse off than it was three months ago, or a year ago. Nor has there been a sudden spike in the numbers of American troops being killed. In fact, in some ways things have improved recently. What's driving this debate, however, are events in America. President Bush's approval rating has plummeted, battered by Iraq but also by Hurricane Katrina. The Democrats, sensing weakness, are trying to draw blood. But the result is a debate that is oddly timed. Iraq is in the midst of fullscale political campaigning and is three weeks from a crucial election, the first in which there will be large-scale Sunni participation. This will also be the first election to yield a government with realand lastingpowers. (It will have a four-year term, compared with the last two governments, which had six months each.) Why and how we got into this war are important questions. And the administration's hands are not clean. But the paramount question right now should not be "What did we do about Iraq three years ago?" It should be "What should we do about Iraq today?" And on this topic, the administration has finally been providing some smart answers. Condoleezza Rice, who is now in control of Iraq policy in a way no one has been, has spearheaded a politicalmilitary strategy for Iraq that is sophisticated and workable. Many Democrats are understandably activity and growth. enraged by an administration that has acted in an unethical, highly partisan, to Sunnis have vielded some results.

through a united Iraqi position that partisan fashion they could well included support for the right of resisprecipitate a tragedy. Just as our Iraq tance. It's purely symbolic. The Sunni policy has been getting on a firmer leaders I talked to in Baghdad are well

and largely incompetent fashion in

Iraq. But in responding in equally



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their nationalist credentials and also pretending that it was not engaged in brought in other Arab states that so far nation-building in Iraq, the administrahave been sitting on the sidelines. That tion has accepted reality. Instead of Washington did not overreact to the hot simply chasing insurgents or hunkering air coming out of Cairo is a sign of its down in large armed camps, the milinew maturity. tary is now moving to "clear, hold, and build," in Rice's words. If this trend aggressively pursued, it could actually continues. it means that securing the be compatible with some American population and improving the lives of troop withdrawals. For obvious political people has become the key measure of reasons, it would be far better if the success in Iraq. This shift is two years "hold" part of the policy was done by latecall it the education of Donald Iraqi forces. And, in fact, this has been Rumsfeld and Dick Cheneybut better happening. Najaf and Mosul are now now than never. To understand the patrolled entirely by Iraqi Army forces. change, look at the airport road to Baghdad. For two years, when reporters would ask how it was possible that the mightiest military in history could not secure a five-kilometre stretch of road, the military responded with long, jargon-filled lectures on the inherent weakness of long supply lines and the complex nature of Baghdad's urban topography. Then one day this summer the military was ordered to secure the road and use more troops if necessary. Presto. Using Iraqi forces, the road was secured. Similar strategies have made cities like Najaf, Mosul, Tall Afar and even Falluiah much safer today than they were a year ago. The next great shift will have to be the protection of infrastructure. It remains mindboggling that Iraq is producing no more electricity and oil today than under Saddam. The US military does not want to protect power plants and refineries, but success in Iraq requires it. It is not just a "clear and hold" strategy. "Building" will bring much-needed economic On the political front, the overtures

Even Kirkuk, which is politically sensitive, has fewer American troops in it than it did six months ago. This trend could accelerate, which would mean that three or four brigades could be withdrawn in the next year. Current talk of a withdrawal, properly done, could actually serve a useful purpose. The most dysfunctional aspect of Iraq right now is its government. The Shia leaders don't agree on much. They refuse to listen to the United States on issues ranging from subsidizing energy (a large part of the reason oil supply is so weak) to making concessions to the Sunnis. If Iraq's leaders begin to realize

tomorrow, the insurgents would kill

them all. But the outcome bolstered

If Washington's strategy is more

that they could be on their own, without the United States to blame and without the American Army to protect them, they might have a greater incentive to start making tough decisions. But for any of this to work, the United States needs to be able to maintain a stable set of policies in Iraq that do not appear to be the product of panic or politics. That alone will yield success, which will allow American troops to return home having achieved something. As has often been pointed out, the key here is not the exit, but the strategy.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International. © 2005, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.



Last week in Cairo, the Sunnis pushed

either shaping the regional cooperation or holding the leaders responsible for the non-filament of the regional commitments made. Once the top political leaders go back to the countries following a summit, the bureaucrats and technical people take over, who are usually cocooned into narrow national and subject-matter perspectives. They usually don't see the larger picture and create logiams; and the political leaders usually don't do enough to break those logjams. Moreover, a change of government in one country or another creates a further drag due to possible perceptional differences between the new and the outgoing leadership or the need of the new government for a period of familiarization. If the commitments and pledges were made with active participation and full knowledge of the people of the coun-

costs of non-cooperation. But they remain, as indicated above, excluded in South Asia from all the processes (social, economic political) of national evolution. Among the SAARC member countries, there is a wide variety of governance types such as monarchy, military or military mediated rule, democratic autocracy; and functioning, although perhaps not fully satisfactory, democracy. But, large-scale social exclusion is a reality in all the countries of the region. However, social exclusion is more and more entrenched, the less and less democratic and more and more autocratic is the governance. In the context of regional cooperation, though, people of all the South Asian countries remain totally excluded. That is so despite the fact that people of the regional countries are

tries, change of governments should not make a big difference unless other countries, their civil society organizations want to work together, sanctioned by the people through the electoral process in one country or and their academics and researchers another. That is, if the people of a are keen to develop ways for the regional countries to work together country support major reorientafor mutual benefits. It is plausible that, tion(s) proposed as election pledges left to themselves, pe he winning political party, then a process of renegotiation may have to cians and academic institutions, civil be initiated. Obviously, such a peoplesociety organizations, experts in centred process of regional cooperavarious fields, and news media may tion building would require that there come together to construct people's SAARC . But they, being outside the is functioning participatory democracy in the member countries. In that governments, often known as Track 2, cannot decide. They can only identify case, the commitments made and what can be done, and analyze and agreements reached by the governspecify how the potential activities ments will be much more people-

flourishing SAARC. The Dhaka Declaration states: "The Heads of State or Government reiterated that the peoples of South Asia are the real source of strength and driving force for SAARC and resolved to make regional cooperation more responsive to their hopes and aspirations' (Para 6). "The also agreed to encourage people-to-people contact and draw strength from their shared cultural heritage" (Para 42). But despite a similar call made again and again in the past, visa requirements still remain stringent and traveling difficult due to connectivity limita tions is relation to various modes of transport (air, road, rail, water) among the South Asian countries. Exchange of books, journals, and newspapers among the regional countries remain extremely limited. In other words, keen to visit neighbouring countries, people-to-people contact and knowlread books and newspapers from edge and information exchange remains as limited and disadvantaged

> as ever. Poverty alleviation has been identified as the top priority commitment of the SAARC, both at the national and the regional level. But, given the glaring and accentuating nlo acadomi economic disparity being the principal cause behind poverty persisting at high levels in all the regional countries, one would have expected to see a strong commitment made to reducing disparity and bringing it down to tolerable levels quickly. But, no such commitment has been expressed. Also, there is no mention of the need

tudes and abilities. Now, in the South Asian countries, where we talk of democracy, human rights, and morality, we do not walk the talk much in these regards and have not certainly created equal opportunities for everybody to find their socioeconomic-political calling through their own choice and efforts. Walking that talk and the creation of equal opportunities for everybody is the key pathway for establishing an inclusive society where democratic practices and values would be upheld by all. This process would lead to the evolution of participatory social, economic, and political processes, resulting in

levels of poverty and increasing socioeconomic-political differentiations.

equal-opportunity approach, as suggested above, is adopted by the SAARC member countries, a peoplebased driving force would emanate across the countries that would propel the various pertinent agreements and pledges made by the summiteers at the 13th as well as the previous summits and those that may be adopted later into proper implementation for the mutual benefit of the peoples of the member countries. Otherwise, summits may continue to be held form time to time ending with highly

FAREED ZAKARIA writes from Washington HE rising clamour in Washington to get out of Iraq may be right or may be wrong, but one thing is certain: its timing has little to do with events in that country.

lated into concrete actions in the form of regional projects and programmes and innovative initiatives." But, will this pledge materialize? Very unlikely, because the political problems arising mainly from the much discussed persisting historical burden of mistrust among the regional countries appear to remain as intractable as

pertinent declarations, but nothing much will happen on the ground in relation to building an effective, mutually beneficial regional cooperation regime for which large potentials exist in many respects.

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In 2001 the Singaporean prime

privately that the generals were incorri-

gible and would never give up power

disagree with the eminent Singaporean

politician at the time -- or even now --

but all of them preferred to coax

Burma's top military leaders to change,

and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose

Ramos Horta has suggested that pres-

suring the generals in Rangoon was

affect on the junta except hardening

their position and forcing them to

retreat into isolation," the former Asean

general secretary Rudolfo Severino told

me at the World Economic Forum n

But Aung San Suu Kyi has persisted in

trying to convince the regime that she at

least was prepared to negotiate and that

meant making concessions. "What

we've always said is that dialogue is not a

competition," she told me as we chatted

Kuala Lumpur shortly before he retired.

"Threats and deadlines have had no

Even East Timor's foreign minister

rather than pressure them.

counter-productive.

Most Asian leaders probably did not

voluntarily

A US armoured vehicle came under roadside bomb attack near Baghdad on 28 November

Lady by the lake Burma's democracy hero to spend another year in detention

LARRY JAGAN

N Sunday Burma's prodemocracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the founder of modern Burma, General Aung San, had her house arrest extended for a further year. Local police officials visited the pro-democracy leader in her lakeside residence in Rangoon and read a statement outlining the government's decision to renew the detention order for another year, according to a source in the interior ministry.

The announcement came exactly a year after Aung San Suu Kyi was told her house arrest was being extended for 12 months. The charismatic opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has already spent more than ten of the past sixteen years in prison or under house arrest.

She spent six years under house arrest in her lakeside residence in Rangoon from 1989 to 1995. This was followed by a second period in detention between October 1999 and May 2002.

Aung San Suu Kyi is currently spending her third period under house arrest. She was taken into custody started on 30 May 2003 after pro-junta demonstrators attacked her convoy as she travelled through the countryside in northern Burma. She has been in detention ever since.

Over the last twelve months she has been held in virtual solitary confinement, according to the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinherio.

Both Burma's military leaders and the country's pro-democracy parties owe their allegiance to the man who

successfully led Burma's independence

movement. But as far as the future is concerned both sides remain diametrically opposed to each other. While the army Aung San created

stills holds tightly onto power, the multiethnic democracy he envisaged at the time appears to be as far away as ever. The general's only daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, currently under house arrest in Rangoon, remains pitted against the army -- a national symbol of freedom and democracy. For the Burmese people, trampled

for more than forty years by a repressive military regime, she represents their aspirations, and above all their desire for freedom and democracy. There has always been a self-effacing

touch to Aung San Suu Kyi. Since her return to Rangoon to look after her ill mother in 1987, she has always put her personal concerns aside for the sake of

the Burmese people. "I draw inspiration from the courage and sacrifice of the ordinary Burmese people," she often said to me in interviews on the phone during the few years she was freed from house arrest for the first time in July 10, 1995, after six years under house arrest.

But Burma's military leader, senior General Than Shwe cannot even abide hearing her name. "The mere mention of her name sends the old man into a silent rage," according to a senior military source close to the top General. Asia's foreign ministers were warned

by their Burmese counterpart at the Asean summit in Phnom Penh in 2002 to avoid mentioning her name in his presence. The former intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt frequently warned the UN envoy Razali Ismail to minimise the mention of Aung San Suu Kyi's

Aung San Suu Kyi is undeterred by the years of incarceration. When I met Aung San Suu Kyi on the day she was last released -- May 6, 2002 -- she confided that the isolation gave her plenty of time for reading, reflection, and meditation. As she sits alone in her Rangoon residence now, I am certain she is continuing to draw inspiration from her father and the sacrifices of the Burmese people.



name in front of the top general.

Indonesia's foreign minister Dr Hasan Wirajuda confided to UN officials that there was a marked change in Than Shwe's demeanour when he mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi. "His eyes glazed over and his facial muscles tensed; clearly our discussion had come to an end," he reportedly said.

> This remains one of the key obstacles to resolving Burma's political deadlock. Burma's top generals are not interested in a concrete dialogue with the prodemocracy leader. "We've been trying to get them to the negotiating table for fourteen years but they have never been keen on the idea," she told me the last time we met in March 2003.

> Aung San Suu Kyi on the other hand has repeatedly offered to discuss the country's political future with the Generals. Everything is negotiable if

they start meaningful talks, she told me weeks before she was detained for the third time more than two years ago following an attack on her and her entourage by pro-government thugs in what is now called Black Friday. about hanging on to power at any cost.

"We are in opposition to each other at the moment but we should work together for the sake of the country. We certainly bare no grudges against them. We are not out for vengeance. We want to reach the kind of settlement which will be beneficial to everybody, including the members of the military," Aung San Suu Kyi said to me in one of her last

 $interviews \, before \, her fateful \, trip \, in \, 2003.$ During Aung San Suu Kyi's second long period of house arrest, after she was detained trving to travel out of Rangoon in late 2000, the regime started tentative contact with the pro-democracy leader. The secret talks were largely brokered by the UN special envoy for Burma Razali Ismail. Although this contact was never really substantive, it raised hopes inside Burma and abroad that political reform may be the agenda.

A process of national reconciliation was started, ostensibly involving senior representatives of the military regime, pro-democracy leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the ethnic rebel groups, many of whom have been fighting for some form of autonomy for more than five decades

At the time there were high hopes, in Rangoon over two years ago.

although many leading Burmese dissi-"We don't want a dialogue in order to dents abroad and diplomats in Rangoon find out who is the better person or remained highly sceptical, believing the which is the smarter organisation. We Burmese generals had no intentions of have always said that the only winner, if we settle down to negotiations, the only negotiating and were only concerned

winner, will be the country," she said. Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly minister, Goh Chok Tong told me made conciliatory gestures towards the regime. As the daughter of the independence hero and founder of modern Burma, General Aung San, she understands the military mentality and is prepared to work with them.

"We have genuine goodwill towards the Burmese military. I personally look upon it with a certain amount of affection because of my father and I want it to have an honourable position in the country," she told me as we sat together talking at the NLD headquarters, weeks before the regime showed its true colours.

During yet another "honey-moon" period, after the newly appointed prime minister, General Khin Nyunt announced a seven-stage road map to democracy and the regime started plans to reconvene the National Convention to draft a new constitution, there was a glimmer of hope that Burma's military eaders may at long last include Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD in the process. Early last year, at the suggestion of the Chinese, Aung San Suu Kyi wrote to Than Shwe suggesting that they put the past behind and move forward in a new

era of cooperation. It fell on deaf ears.

Burma's top general is convinced that by keeping Aung San Suu Kyi in detention he can marginalise her and reduce her influence in the country. It is a vain hope as the protests and parties across the world will testify to. Aung San Suu Kyi is not only a massive icon in Burma, but throughout the globe.

Shortly after Kofi Annan took over as the UN secretary general he had to find some-one to lead the UN Commission on Human Rights. "I have a great idea," he told a close mutual friend, "We'll make Aung San Suu Kyi the head of the human rights commission." Whether he really meant it or not we may never know.

But of course Aung San Suu Kyi who at the time had just been released from house arrest for the first time would never have taken the post as her overriding commitment is to the cause of democracy in Burma.

At present Aung San Suu Kyi is being detained in intolerable conditions -though conditions which she is coping with admirably. She is in virtual solitary confinement -- she has not seen anvone other than her doctor for more than a

The Red Cross have been denied access to her for nearly two years despite concerted efforts to be allowed to meet her. The UN envoy Razali was the last international person to visit her in the firstweek of Marchlastyear.

Her fellow NLD leaders were allowed to meet her several times early last year in the lead up to the opening of National Convention on May 17 but since then they have been forbidden to see her. The doctor now only sees her around roughly once a month and is thoroughly searched as he enters and leaves the

Her two maids are not allowed to leave the family compound, and are photographed as they hand their shopping lists to the military guards at the front gate. The six young NLD activists who guarded his house inside the compound were removed by the authorities last November.

house.

It now seems certain that Aung San Suu Kvi will remain under house arrest until after a new constitution is drafted and put to a referendum. So it is more than likely she will be under house arrest for at least another year.

But Aung San Suu Kyi is undeterred by the years of incarceration. When I met Aung San Suu Kyi on the day she was last released -- May 6, 2002 -- she confided that the isolation gave her plenty of time for reading, reflection, and meditation

As she sits alone in her Rangoon residence now, I am certain she is continuing to draw inspiration from her father and the sacrifices of the Burmese people.

"I always have been strengthened and inspired by my father. Even now, sometimes when I go over his old speeches, they are as relevant now as they were then -- he was indeed a man of vision," she confided to me as I left the NLD headquarters in March 2003.

It is this humility, charisma, commitment and strength that make Aung San Suu Kyi the inspirational icon she has become for the NLD and the Burmese battle for democracy.

Larry Jagan, former BBC World Service News and Current Affairs Editor for Asia and the Pacific, has covered Burma for more than 20 years.