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Saarc rekindled

Saarc is the regional body of 1.4 billion people. For more than a decade, it was known as the 'community of poor'. Over the years, it has gained popularity in other regions of the world as an important means for promoting cooperation and development for mutual benefits of South Asian and other states. The inclusion of Afghanistan

into the regional body as the 8th member and the observer status given to China, Japan, South Korea, the USA and the EU clearly indicate the growing importance of this regional organisation as a vehicle for strengthening and widening cooperation among the countries. Security and development are the two crying needs of the hour. And it is

economic issues which have become more closely intertwined with security issues. It is imperative for Saarc to play its due role in changing the lot of the millions.

Dr. Nasima Zaman
Associate Professor
Dept. of Political Science
University of Rajshahi

Sheikh Hasina

As AL President Sheikh Hasina called upon her party activists to get to the streets with sticks on 28 October 2006, incidents of bloody street clashes all around the country occurred for several days that followed. I wonder why she should not be charged with hampering public security and provoking nationwide violence.

I wonder why she should not be held responsible for causing serious damage to the national economy by encouraging the spread of violence in society.
Razib Mohammad
Canberra, Australia

Anti-corruption drive

As an expatriate Bangladeshi, I am observing the anti-corruption drive in Bangladesh with cautious optimism. Today one of the biggest threats that Bangladesh faces is from the murderous religious zealots.

The failure to establish a democratic system of governance with the appropriate checks and balances will only strengthen the hands of the religious extremists and the corrupt opportunists. I do agree with most of the publicly stated views of the army chief. However, I would be more hopeful about the establishment of a free and fair civil society in Bangladesh if the army chief leaves it to Mr. Fakhruddin or Mr. Iajuddin to make the public statements.
Shahed Nasrullah
On e-mail

Irresponsible doctors at Suhrawardy Hospital

On March 31, I went Suhrawardy Hospital for treatment. According to the procedure, I took two tickets for two doctors. First I went to a doctor for wrist pain. When I entered the room he was talking with someone in his chamber. He took my slip and asked me what my problem was. I replied in a word that I had wrist pain. I thought he would ask me some more questions but surprisingly he didn't ask me any single question and started to write the prescription and within a few seconds he gave me the prescription and told me to come to him after some days.

I was so disappointed and went to another doctor for skin problem.

There was no patient in that doctor's chamber but there were some people from medicine companies (as I guessed). As soon as I started describing my problem, his mobile began to ring. He told one man to write down two specific medicines for me and went out. I was so upset and frustrated that I just sat in his chamber for several minutes and then came out with some questions in my mind-- Should I take those medicines they prescribed? What kind of service our poor people get from them? Do their prescriptions bring any positive change in people's health? What's the goal of the hospitals? To serve people or to give some extra opportunities to these irresponsible doctors?

Would the authorities concerned think about the matter?
A citizen
On e-mail

Where is JMB godfather?

Six top militants of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were executed for killing two Judges. The family members of the judges and people in general were happy. But people don't yet know who patronise the JMB and where is their godfather.

The law enforcers must delve deep into the matter and find out which political parties or individuals supported these killers.

Md. Mahabubar Rahman
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

BNP's misrule

Banning a political party is an extreme measure in a democratic system. But it has not been an uncommon practice in many democracies in recent years: political parties have recently been the object of legal and judicial bans in Israel, Turkey, India, and other non-Western democracies. In Western Europe, in some countries the government can ban a party based on the law or the constitution. In majority of Western European democracies, instead, a party can only be banned by a judicial decision: the government can only go to the court through the public prosecution service, and the court will then rule on the matter.

During the last five years a large number of BNP lawmakers, ministers, the close relatives and advisers of the PM were involved in corruption on a huge scale. Many

of them also worked as the godfathers behind religious militancy. The party desperately tried to retain power by holding an unfair election.

I believe many will join me in my appeal to our present law adviser and the law enforcers to set an independent body to inquire if what the BNP has done to the country warrants a ban on it for a certain period of time.
Dr. Mannan Mridha
Stockholm, Sweden

Good decision

I fully appreciate LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser's decision not to allow any new construction on Begunbari canal and convert the 265 acre canal into a lake.

SD Alam
Motijheel Commercial Area
Dhaka

General's observations

It is a pleasant break from listening to stories by the major political parties where they were busy making their opponents look bad in front of the general people and not bothering to tell the nation what lay ahead in the future. I am extremely delighted to see some forward looking statements from the army chief in the recent days. He is talking about the untapped possibilities and potential of Bangladesh. He is talking about opportunities, hope and a brighter future. Not many people can see a dream and very few can actually share it with others.

I am not a politician, nor a political guru, but my gut feeling is that without a dream people will not be able to create alternatives to the big two political parties.

Syed Tanvir Husain
Texas, US

"No" to elective democracy

The army chief has made an excellent point to say NO to elective democracy. We have experienced democracy in the past 36 years and we do not want to go on experimenting with and experiencing it for centuries. We need to say YES to Selective Democracy. We need to define the democracy we need, and not follow the West blindly.

As proposed, the armed forces

should certainly be part of the National Security Council and I also suggest that the army and Rab take on the role of people's Ombudsmen so that the people can complain to them to control corruption and injustice.

I had proposed in an earlier letter that we should have a selected civil government as in the example of the CTG (caretaker govt), backed by our armed forces for the next 30 years.

No politics please. Please do not do politics with our future, or promote politics to ruin our nation again.

Qamruddin Chowdhury
On e-mail

Letter in response...

A letter entitled 'Power Shortage' by Siraj Haque, Houston, Texas, USA was published on 26 March, 2007. It deserves praise. The writer suggested that the conventional light bulbs be replaced with CFB. He pointed out the costs of such replacement, as well as the ultimate effects of such replacement. He showed the calculation that a conventional bulb costs 75 watts, where as CFB costs only 20 watts to produce the same light & lasts longer than a conventional bulb. So, we can see that CFB is capable of saving 55 watts to produce light. The writer also showed the net result of such replacement--having an extra 110 MW to the national grid. And this will be helpful to reduce the power bill to the customers. Considering he above facts, the energy ministry and other semi-governmental & private concerns should take necessary steps to implement the plan.

Shaheen Sonia
Dept. of Accounting & Information Systems
Dhaka University

A good initiative

We welcome the present government's initiative to ban politics of students and teachers on the campus.

Undoubtedly, student politics is one of the most disquieting issues, as it has been obstructing education.

Md Golam Mostofa
Bangabandhu Hall
Jahangirnagar University

Rules and alternatives

Firstly, I quote a line from Star City of 11 February 2007-- "Rajuk's building inspectors and other officials have long been cashing in on gross irregularities and fattening their wallets by overlooking hundreds of high-rise commercial buildings that violate car parking provisions within their premises as specified by building construction rules." This is something everyone (the government, Rajuk's high officials, the Ministry of Land Affairs, the law enforcement authorities, and the people who are responsible for constructing the building) knows. The question is: Why has the harsh truth been kept hidden all these years? Why have the authorities concerned allowed the illegal construction to go on keeping their eyes shut? The answer-- money speaks; and that is the truth. Therefore, I would suggest that the relevant authorities first run the bull-dozers over these corrupt officials who are responsible for allowing those illegal construction over the years.

Secondly, I appreciate the move the relevant authorities have made to evict illegal hawkers from the footpaths, allowing them to use specific areas on weekly holidays to sell their goods.

Thirdly, I am disappointed by the move the authorities have made in asking the make-shift bus ticket sellers to go away from the pavements where they had set up booths to sell bus tickets. Here I will strongly lay emphasis on the fact that bus is a mode of transportation

America and war

The victory is generally associated in our minds with war, and calls up visions of battles, bloodshed, and conquest by force. We think of war as a glorious thing because of victories and splendid triumphs. But when we think of the achievements of great men in different fields such as statesmen, scholars, scientists, philanthropists, explorers, discoverers and honest workers, we realise that the victories of peace are even more glorious than the victories of war. It is an irony that the American administration fails to realise the value of peace, and does not feel the necessity of making use of power in a good way. The mal-administration of Bush has been guided by the thought of imperialism.

Apparently, Americans make out the bitter truth that they love war, not peace.

Anisur Rahman
On e-mail



that 90% of the working-class people use every day to commute to work. Now the commuters have to face difficulty in going to work since most of the ticket sellers have no specific place to sit to sell the bus tickets, some of the buses the commuters use are off the road.

In conclusion, I would like to request the authorities to review the situation and construct bus stands in specified areas where the ticket sellers can sell bus tickets, whereby relieving the commuters from this harassment.

Peter Murphy
Dhamondi, Dhaka

Catch the real culprits

I was expecting some reactions on the column written by Mr. B Sen in the Prothom Alo on 29 March 07. Surprisingly, I've seen none or it may have skipped my attention. However, when I must commend the bold and courageous way Mr. Sen has detailed all pros and cons of the huge task our present CTG is encountering, I would, at the same time, like to point out to Mr. Sen to take the facts into account as to what would have happened if the State of Emergency was not declared and the armed forces had not come to our rescue. Again, Mr. Sen's demand as to why the names of those 500 loan defaulters are not published is, of course, fully justified. He has rightly said such opportunity to expose and defame these people is not available so often.

Why doesn't the ACC publish these names, at least the names which are readily available with Bangladesh Bank instead of hunting for those who are to be proven guilty? The mindset that "One is guilty until proven innocent" appears rather draconic. Kleptocracy is an obstacle to the democratic process and steals prosperity from the people. The present CTG must go all out and wage a full war on it and bring those to justice who cheated their own people.

We should not even discuss election as long as the CTG is convinced that we innocent victims are not freed from the clutches of these demons.

Badr Chowdhury
Chowmuhani, Chittagong

Reforms by interim govt.

I have been observing the political developments of Bangladesh from Montreal, Canada for a while now. It seems that the reforms being brought about by the present interim government will indeed be beneficial for the country. However, I strongly feel that, unless these reforms are made permanent, Bangladesh will inevitably regress into a horrendous and intolerable socio-political and economic quagmire. I do not see any solid evidence whatsoever of this interim govt. taking the necessary steps to ensure that all their positive reforms have a permanent place in the future governance of Bangladesh. Not only do the reforms have to

have permanence, they also need to be un-changeable by any future political leader without accountability, and hopefully consent, of the people. In order to accomplish this permanency the caretaker govt. must also consult knowledgeable persons outside the sphere of the government. The media must also make this known and relate this directly to the govt. and the people, and bring about dialogue between the two, so that the government listens and acts accordingly. If the government is truly concerned about the country they will do their best to ensure that the positive changes are long-lived. I also feel that these efforts might take some time - definitely more than a year. So, why is the interim government giving a deadline for elections at the end of 2008? Is the country in a hurry to have any of the old leaders back at the helm? I think not. Is one year really enough time to do all that needs to be done? It definitely does not seem like it. What role is the media taking to ensure that the govt. does the needful? It is time to be proactive, only because Bangladesh just simply cannot afford to have a repetition of the past in any manner, shape or form.

It is time for true changes, once and for all.

Saad Huq, On e-mail

Take need-based steps

Soon after the emergency declaration in Bangladesh, if people were being asked, "are they better off?", Perhaps, the overwhelming majority would say yes. The support for the caretaker government comes as a result of the expectation that this government will deal with the following issues - a) Ensure the security of ordinary citizens in their daily life. b) Address rampant corruption in government and public institutions. c) Bring the corrupt under the justice system, whoever they may be. d) Develop a mechanism to remove anarchy such as those arising from confrontational politics. e) Eliminate local hoodlums etc and conduct a free and fair polls.

The issues listed above are all in fact structural weaknesses of our democracy. So to my view, it is very important that we work hard to strengthen it. Instead, after a while, the present caretaker government is doing exactly the opposite--at least that is what I am sensing now. They are trying to reinvent the wheel, which is a costly and totally unnecessary experiment.

To find some solution for our nation, we don't have to take many measures. We all know that the larger the government machinery the bigger is the corruption. Therefore, it is very important that we restructure our government machinery curving them with surgical knife just not to make them look good but to make them dynamic and functional. For example, is it really necessary to run a 5+ aircraft airline with 5,000 employees? What's the point of having a jute ministry? The list can go on, but to bring those changes, we must have the will and courage and a disciplined approach.

Mohammad Sarwaruddin
Calgary, Canada

Running schools

Every year we see the guardians and students rushing into some particular schools and falling victim to great hassle and monetary loss for admission of their children in a good school for good education. In my opinion, no school should be deemed inferior or bad in any respect. As far as our education system is concerned, no such impression should work that the institutions are good or bad. The differences (in many respects) among the schools, especially among the government-run schools should be eliminated first. To create a sound education environment in the country, all the educational institutes should be brought under a common and identical standard of teaching method.

All the government-run schools should have common and identical rules and environment of education, so that they are run as per the model determined and fixed by the education ministry/board.

The ministry/board of education should not give permission for private school until attainment and

fulfillment of the common standards and facilities determined and fixed by the ministry or the board required for a model school.

A school teacher's job like that of other government employees must be transferable and an affirmative undertaking in employment should be obtained.

The school committee and teachers shall remain accountable for educational improvement of the 50% mediocre and less meritorious students, which should be monitored from the district education office by the school inspector routinely.

AFM Hassanuzzaman
Retired banker

Caretaker government

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart the present caretaker government for giving the country's people a congenial environment. At the same time, I would like to thank our golden boys of law enforcing agencies for their cordial cooperation and all out efforts to save the nation from crime & corruption.

May be our so-called politicians forgot that we have got an independent country which was liberated by millions of martyrs. But the general public realize it. The present CTG proved that to control crime and corruption a huge number of ministers is not needed, what is needed is a good initiative.

It is sad that our political leaders couldn't understand people's hopes



Our captain

I was totally shocked to see the performance of Bangladesh cricket team in the match against Ireland. The whole blame goes to one man-- that's Habibul Bashar. The way he played throughout the World Cup made me feel that he is the worst player the Tigers can have in the squad. He has no sense of running between the wickets which cost a lot during the tournament. Did he forget that he was not playing in Test matches? Bangladesh cricket team should learn running between the wickets from Australians as singles always keep the opposition under pressure and we couldn't do it in this tournament. I know expecting too much from the Tigers at this stage isn't fair, but they must get the basics right!

Tanvir Enam
London

& aspirations since 1971. After this clean-up operation, the nation expects honest, meritorious, meticulous & patriotic people as their leaders.

To fulfill this goal, the CTG should take a realistic period of time for a free, fair and credible election, so that people of Bangladesh can get their desired leaders.

I strongly believe that it will be a great lesson for the next generation of our country.
Md. Abdul Alim
Tongi, Gazipur

Dealing with corruption

We have been watching and enjoying the fruits of the actions being taken by the CTG. They have promised to wipe up corruption from Bangladesh which is a very difficult task, but they will be successful only if they are impartial. For example, most of the people

who have been arrested are either from the AL or the BNP. Most of these people may be corrupt. But the point that we must not miss is that people having other backgrounds may also be corrupt.

The government should follow an unbiased policy in dealing with the corrupt.

Gias Ahmed
Stockholm, Sweden

Illegal structures

Structures are still standing in public land as monuments of corruption, mocking the ongoing anti-corruption drive, and reminding us that corruption is part of the fabric constituting the nation. It is a question asked by the general people whether the drive is on the right track and gaining momentum or slowing down. If the govt. terms the drive against corruption as war, there must be a strategy worked out first. I believe that the following tasks must be taken into consideration before waging the war against the illegal structures and land grabbers Branding corruption of all sorts as No. 1 enemy of the nation.

Formation of an efficient national body to craft the required anti-corruption strategy and oversee its implementation Development and enactment of laws and infrastructures to ensure speedy trial to punish the corrupt Identification of the corrupt and their illegal structures and deeds countrywide.

Decision making on whether to

Shia-Sunni conflict

I am writing with reference to "The Iran Card," by Harun ur Rashid (April 4). Mr. Harun ur Rashid is absolutely right when he says: "Iran is a Shiite majority country, while its neighbouring Arab states are Sunni-dominated. The on-

going sectarian strife between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq makes it clear to Arab states that Iran will gradually overwhelm them with its power and influence, creating a new political architecture." In fact, the Shiite-Sunni conflict can engulf

the whole region if it is allowed to go unchecked.

Although the Sunnis are the majority among the Muslims in the world, they are mostly dispersed in non-Arab countries like Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Shiites, on the other hand, are concentrated in Iran and Iraq and this gives the Shias a strategic advantage over the Sunnis in the Arab world. As long the Sunni minority under Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq, it acted as a buffer state between Shia Iran and the Sunni Arab countries. But after the American-led ouster of Saddam and the rise of the Shiite majority in Iraq, the situation has changed dramatically. By dismantling Sunni minority rule in Iraq, the Americans might have paved the way for the rise of an imperialistic Shiite Iran bent on

dominating the Arab world.

This is why Iran's desire to acquire atomic weapon has sent the alarm bell ringing across the Arab world. It is feared that acquisition of nuclear weapons will enable Iran to intimidate the Sunni Arabs to surrender leadership to the long-oppressed Shiites. As Jordan's King Abdullah so candidly remarked that a coalition between Shia Iran and Shia Iraq would be like a Shiite crescent aimed at the heart of the Sunni Arabs.

The massacres of the Shiites by Sunni insurgents have added to the tension. Last week, Sunni suicide bombers killed more than 200 in the Shiite areas. In retaliation, Shiite policemen went on a rampage, killing scores of Sunnis. The pro-Iran Mahdi Army may be waiting to get rid of the Sunni minority once the Americans

leave. In any case, the Americans have proved to be totally incapable in stemming the sectarian violence. Unless the Saudi Arabia and other countries find a way to stem the Shia-Sunni bloodletting and stop Iran from going nuclear, the historic conflict between the Sunni and Shia sects may engulf the whole region.

In the aftermath of the failed American intervention in Somalia, Somali warlords have been slaughtering each other with no end in sight. Similarly, in the aftermath of the failed American military intervention in Iraq, the Shiites and the Sunnis are likely to slaughter each other, unless the Sunni Arabs and the Shia Iranians give up their historical hatred for each other.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

