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South Asia

The concept of a pan-South Asian organisation has been emerging for the past few years and has been slowly gathering momentum. The present regional grouping Saarc has so far failed to be effective in any significant form of regional co-operation. Considering the new global political, economic and strategic context, regions with high economic potential, such as South Asia, should organise themselves towards better integration, rather than just cooperation. The European Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations or Asean and the African Union stand as testimony to this fact.

South Asian nations, most of which are Least Developed Countries or LDCs, have enormous potential to develop their economies. Every country has its own unique advantages. The region can become a Mecca for foreign investment in the energy, power, IT, tourism, media, telecommunications, construction, aviation sector etc. The establishment of a South Asian Economic Community can further boost the prospects for growth and perhaps so can a

single currency or central bank. The trading bloc can become an influential and vital economic powerhouse.

However, what makes South Asian nations differ are mainly political issues, notably the Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir. But if the countries commit themselves to making sincere efforts to resolve these issues, I am certain the obstacles can be removed. The need for a united South Asian organisation is also felt in maintaining stability, promoting cultural ties between peoples, injecting more egalitarianism and social justice into societies and, most importantly, reducing poverty. Free trade can have disadvantages in some cases but the long term and overall picture has proven to be positive which strengthens the need for a pan-South Asian organisation.

Therefore, the concept should be considered by South Asian nations if they are truly committed to achieving economic and social prosperity.

**Md. Umran Bin Kamran Chowdhury**  
*Gulshan, Dhaka*



**Liberation War Museum**

Referring to the letter from Mr. Shamim Ahmed, I would also request the caretaker government to allot a better location for the Liberation War Museum. It rightfully deserves respect and a well maintained museum is needed.

In a calm and serene atmosphere, people will remember our heroes and they would contemplate and cultivate the values for which the freedom fighters sacrificed their lives.

**N.G. Chaudhury**  
*Luxembourg*

**Reform issue**

The nation paid a heavy price to restore democracy in 1990. The BNP and the AL led the movement and many sacrificed their lives but ultimately what we have achieved? The people extended support to Khaleda and Hasina in good faith,

but they could not live up to expectations of common people. The BNP in its second term got 216 parliament seats which was basically a statement against godfathers, corruption & terrorism but the BNP failed to read the public mind, rather they thought they got a lease agreement for five years to run the country.

I remember the jubilation of the people when the Ershad regime was brought down in a mass upsurge and they thought finally true democracy would come to this country but after 15 years of democracy what we have got we have witnessed how democratic and state institutions were destroyed. The first attack came in 1991 when Article 70 was passed--it barred MPs to speak against their party leader and we have also seen how parliament was made ineffective, how parliamentary committees were made a showpiece, how the Public Service Commission was politicised. It even cannot hold

any public examination and how do we expect to find dynamic and honest officials who will lead the administration and represent Bangladesh in any forum? We have seen how the Election Commission was run and it could not even prepare a proper electoral roll despite wasting tax payers' money. We have also seen how the Judiciary was politicised. Even Bangabhaban was not spared.

The news of political bigwigs is coming up every morning; every newspaper is carrying scary news. What a gift to the nation!

We would urge the government to enact tough laws like banning convicts from running for any public office and holding any post in any political party.

We also urge that the price of essentials be kept within the reach of common people. Otherwise, the good deeds will fail to create any impression in people's minds.

**Abdul Gaffer Chowdhury**  
*On e-mail*

**Loss of passport**

I am an expatriate student in Australia. I am studying here for about three years. Unfortunately, I lost my passport. I went to Sydney University for my IELTS booking and somebody broke my car's glass and stole my passport and other important papers. I informed NSW police and immigration office and our High Commission. And I wanted to know how I could get my new passport. They said that I had to apply for a new passport along with the written police report.

This is not Bangladesh. The Australian police system is different. When I did collect the police report they gave me my police file number and asked me to convey it to the High Commission. If I need that police report, then I have to pay the money and fill up the application form and they will send it to me after three weeks. I contacted the High Commission and they asked me to collect the police report. Then I paid the money to the Australian police and they sent it to me after three weeks. I think it was the High Commission's job to collect the report.

I have not yet received my passport as I was told that they were waiting for the police report from Bangladesh! My future and everything depend on my passport. I have already finished my studies now I will apply for my permanent residency, so I badly need my passport.

What can I do now?

**A student**  
*Australia*

**Two leaders**

My question is, are Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia alike? Sheikh Hasina has struggled against the communal forces and religious extremism. These forces would like nothing better than to get rid of her as she is the major obstacle for them. She is a powerful symbol of a secular Bangladesh.

If she wanted she could have lived a comfortable life in London. She sacrificed her comfort for the interest of the people of Bangladesh and this caretaker government is the fruit of her long struggle!

**Md Farad Hossain**  
*Mohammadpur*

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I am a victim of filthy politics in Bangladesh.

I think this is the last chance to get rid of 'Paribartantra' which was deeply rooted into our soil with the label of democracy.

We need reforms in the political parties to overcome the on-going crisis. I earnestly request you to co-operate with the process of political reform.

**Akter**  
*A private service holder*

Motia's observations



It is quite astonishing to read how a firebrand leader like Motia Chowdhury could foretell that democracy in the country would be in jeopardy without the participation of the two leaders of the two major political parties. In regard to this I sincerely like the comments made by Tofael Ahmed in DS on July 8. May I remind our veteran AL leader Motia Chowdhury that nobody is inevitable in this world. Hence, if she thinks that without these two ladies democracy of the country would be ruined, she is totally wrong. We do have leaders who can very well fill up the vacuum. On the rise of

**Baridhara DOHS**

Recently, we received a letter that states that all our maids need to have a picture ID. Great! I thought. The caretaker government is taking the step to give ID to everyone, why not the maids. Well, it turned out that the letter was from Baridhara DOHS executive committee. And the ID is not for voting or national security. It is for the security of the residents. The letter also states that no 'service people' are allowed to 'loiter' around DOHS area after 22:30. The charade does not stop here. The executive committee also asks that we pay for all these IDs and make sure we keep our service people in close watch. I was surprised they didn't ask us to buy some iron chains along with it. How on earth are we ending up in this Orwellian nightmare?

DOHS as we all know stands for Defense Officer's Housing Society. Bangladesh Army allocates these plots to ex army officers. Afterwards, with the help of developers they build these humongous apartments inch next to each other and sell them at a steep price to civilians. There are hardly any green grasses or trees left. There are a few efficient guards who stop you to check ID when you are in a rush and the main gate with barbed wire closes at twelve. Now all is fine and good until some people got into the mind frame that they are the bosses of this housing society. They formed a committee called Baridhara DOHS housing committee. Mere mortals like us have never been invited for any meeting of this committee and no one can remember if they have ever elected any of these members. The letter they sent us has lines of strict instruction to contain our maids but no phone number to contact.

Since the independence of Bangladesh did any para, moholla or housing society ever had an ID for Buas and darwans? Since when have we given them the status of slaves and need ID to identify them? Why do we need to be protected from them? Who gives these people the authority to implement such atrocious measures? I asked my neighbour what he thinks about it. He anxiously replied, "Given the time...you have to do what they ask."

**Fawaz Rob**  
*Lecturer, Core Faculty  
Department of Architecture  
North South University*



Tigers?

Our cricketers are called Tigers. When they play well we call them roaring tigers, and when they cut a sorry figure what should we really call them?

Our public have reacted sharply to the shocking

performance of the 'Tigers'. Fighting with the lions of Sri Lanka, the Tigers were reduced to 'mewing' cats.

We must see seriously into what has gone wrong with our team that performs well in most ODIs. The players

don't have the confidence to play well in a Test match.

So, a lot of work has to be done to make them perform better in Test matches.

**Shaheedul Islam**  
*Gulshan, Dhaka*

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