

SAARC: Still limping after a quarter century

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THE 16th SAARC Summit in Bhutan from April 26-28 marked the Silver Jubilee of the organization that was first launched in Dhaka in 1985 to become the biggest regional organization in the world. It brought together at present estimate 1.6 billion impoverished people with the promise of a better future through regional cooperation.

Bhutan had given up three previous offers to hold the Summit due to inadequate infrastructure. If any region in the world is in urgent need of regional cooperation to accelerate development, then SAARC is the ideal choice by a long margin. Yet, 25 years down the road, SAARC summits are barely more than annual gatherings of the Heads of State/Government of the region. Even the annual gathering as required under the SAARC Charter was irregular. Eight summits were not held because of reasons that do not reflect well upon the organization and its future.

The Bhutan Summit was preceded by a number of positive developments for regional cooperation. The Sri Lankan Civil War has ended; in Bangladesh, emergency rule became history and an elected government came to power with a massive majority. In India, the Congress has been re-elected with a comfortable majority; In Nepal, the armed conflict with Maoists and monarchy have also become history although the country is facing teething problems in establishing democracy. Overall a fair wind is blowing in South Asia for regional cooperation.

These positive developments could have yielded rich dividends in cooperation in any other region but not in South Asia. The South Asian leaders deliberated in Thimphu on a very limited agenda for regional cooperation, no better no worse than what they had done in the past 15 Summits. The Summiteers agreed that after 25 years, they have little to show in terms of achievements. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underscored this disappointment with a cliché, suggesting that the SAARC cooperate in half empty and challenged the members to glass in a manner to enable free movement of people, goods, services and ideas.

In the end, the South Asian leaders adopted the 36 points "Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration" that is high on intent but without clear and well defined mechanism for delivery. The Summit adopted the "Convention for Cooperation on Environment" to develop an inter-governmental

mechanism for dealing with issues of global warming and initiatives related to water management and conservation of nature at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

To enhance regional trade and economic integration, the Summit also adopted an agreement on "Trade in Services." These two agreements aside, the Summit in its Declaration endorsed a number of ideas from member nations intended to enhance regional cooperation. These included emphasis upon the need to develop a "Vision Statement" and a "South Asian Forum" that would bring together eminent persons to generate debate to strengthen SAARC.

The Summit also endorsed steps to form a "Conclave of South Asian parliamentarians" in line with the Charter. It also endorsed Bangladesh's "Charter of Democracy"; Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" together with similar ideas from other member states for strengthening SAARC. The Summiteers underscored clearly their intention to make all future SAARC decisions action oriented.

The agreements reached in Thimphu and intentions expressed are important but they would bring the SAARC nations no closer in regional cooperation than they had been before the Summit.

SAARC's potentials for regional cooperation still remains hostage to the legacy handed down by the British colonizers reflected in the enmity between India and Pakistan, two nations whose friendship is indispensable to create the trust necessary for SAARC to succeed.

The other factor that has handicapped SAARC is India's size and dominance. From the very beginning, India has been suspicious of SAARC. It viewed SAARC as a forum for its neighbours to deal with it collectively for solving their bilateral and regional problems. Upon India's insistence, the SAARC charter prohibited discussion on bilateral and conscientious issues in the SAARC forum. Importantly, this embedded in the so-called SAARC spirit a lack of trust, obstructing its natural growth. Despite optimism and conviction of the leaders in the Thimphu Summit, the trust deficiency did not fail to surface as Pakistan declined to sign the agreement on response to natural disasters because it could land foreign troops on the soil of member states.

The Thimphu Summit, as expected, emphasized upon vague and lofty ideals such as Bangladesh's "Charter of Democracy" and



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Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" without any clear road map for enhancing socio-economic development of the region. The decisions will merely give the organization enough oxygen to breathe till the next Summit. Until Pakistan and India have normal relations, SAARC's development will be fundamentally impeded by the lack of trust between the two.

When India was apprehensive about SAARC, it had not yet emerged as the power it is today. This emergence should have encouraged India to play a bigger and positive role in integrating SAARC. Unfortunately, this has not happened. With positive wind blowing in India's bilateral relations with the other South Asian neighbours except Pakistan, it is time that India made genuine overtures towards its neighbours who have shown their friendly hands. India showed that intent in

the speech of its Prime Minister but very little of it has been reflected in the Declaration. While Pakistan must accept its fair share of blame for keeping SAARC from achieving its potentials, the bigger responsibility in this context is India's.

For the sake of the SAARC spirit and for India's emerging role as a major world power, it is time for it to renounce its insistence on strict bilateralism and to revive the Gujral Doctrine, a concept under which the former Indian Prime Minister wanted to give smaller neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan their interests with India without reciprocity.

As a thought, why could India not have helped adopt a decision in the Thimphu Summit on a visa free regime among SAARC member countries by agreeing to open its doors to its neighbours keeping in mind Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's

strong advocacy for free movement of people, goods, services and ideas within SAARC? On a reality check, there is no chance of such a thing happening in SAARC in the foreseeable future because instead of easing free movement of people, goods, services and ideas, India is more interested in building barbed wires on its borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

With such ground reality, SAARC can only limp towards its Golden Jubilee as it has up to its Silver Jubilee. Meanwhile, the neighbours of India, with exception of Pakistan, could justifiably say what the 19th century Mexican leader Porfirio Diaz had said of Mexican-US relations in the context of their present predicament in SAARC: poor neighbours of India; so far from God, yet so near to India!

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Surreptitious liquidation of sovereignty

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HISTORY taught us that through the passage of time hard earned sovereignty of a nation, state, empire, colony, union or even a republic could eventually crumble. We are not a union like the former USSR or a republic like the USA. We are a sovereign state with maximum homogeneity in terms of ethnicity and culture. However, it still remains vulnerable like all others, barely surviving or crawling towards maturity. To retain its sovereignty, a nation must possess a strong, tangible and intangible ideological platform. This is the area where feeble states perform poorly and eventually succumb. Enlightened leadership with sound civil and military bureaucracy and a professional and patriotic intelligence apparatus can strengthen the foundation and help keep a nation go forward.

Sovereignty is never cheap; it is always traded through sacrifice, dedication and perseverance. And it is never earned with an intention to lose one day. Gerald Celente, founder of Trends Research Institute of USA while commenting on US recession said, "When people lose everything and they have nothing to lose, they lose it". The question here is why people of a superpower nation have to lose everything and become homeless in large numbers? Was it the design of their founding fathers? If not, who has stolen their fortune, their dreams, and taken-for-granted affluence?

A look into some modern societies would reveal that it is due to the drift in attitude or perception. The surge in democratic atheism and free world philosophy has pushed religion far away from human understanding. Divine and human education has been deliberately wiped out from the academic/social curriculum. What is left is only materialistic education, which consequentially produces a bunch of educated creatures in different shapes and sizes! This type of education, without moral and humane touch, turns people totally materialistic and easy prey to brain washing by social engineers (psychological warfare experts). Thus the long and arduous task of individual subversion becomes redundant. It is about time we put on our thinking caps and use our intuitive/intuitive intelligence to understand the reality that surrounds us.

Ideological subversion is a legitimate process that is overtly conducted in a target country for social conditioning. And this is done with a view to achieving demoralization, destabilization, crisis, and finally normalization. The word demoralization does not mean only frustration and hopelessness; here it is to deplete the moral value of the society.

Destabilization stage takes 2 to 5 years when economy, politics, defense system and foreign relations become active target of hostile psychological warfare. The targeted country would be pursued to take decision economically or politically that are unviable or suicidal.

This is where the destabilization stage terminates and initialization of the crisis stage take place. At this point of time the nation will be under the control of a leadership lacking vision and wisdom encircled by non-professionals and hyper, personally loyal hypocrites. The general mass is absolutely

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hopeless about the future of the nation; administration is deeply penetrated by the turned agents of hostile intelligence service, and finally unbridled corruption.

The crisis stage may take up to six weeks to bring a country at the brink of a violent change in power structure or economy. At the end it is the period of normalization, which may run for an indefinite period. The word normalization is basically a cynical expression of getting the target country under full control.

If desired, lessons can be derived from our neighbors. China is very concerned about the process of demoralization; they often block different web links that propagate pornography. They have even blocked the free run of Google in their country to ensure that the people are not subjected to any counterproductive stimulus from cyber space. People of West Bengal cannot view cable TV program put on air from Bangladesh. Singapore, Malaysia and even Myanmar and Sri Lanka are highly sensitive about the type and volume of information getting virtually downloaded in the heart and mind of their citizens.

Now comes the fundamental question: do we have any policy to keep our citizens secure from hostile social engineers' psycho manipulation? The first question is, are we aware of this invisible threat? It is the responsibility of our own social engineers under the guidance of leadership to detect the success level of hostile active measures. That demoralization stage is over saturated and very comprehensible: we are downtrodden and corrupt, and patriotism is rated very low. These two signifies hostile social engineers have achieved commendable success against our failure.

A very long list of incidents like the grenade attack at a public meeting on 21 August 2004, 64 district explosion, 1/11, massacre of 57 military officers, unabated violent clashes in different public universities, sudden eruption of ethnic clash at Chittagong Hill Tracts, shortage of electricity and drinking water in Dhaka city signifies that we are passing a prolonged destabilization stage. If we fail to reverse the situation now, we may face the crisis stage any time soon.

When a nation enters into crisis stage, the chances are 50/50, either to hold out or to surrender the sovereignty. It is almost a point of no return. The situation will be normalized by the invasion of



foreign forces of neighboring countries or UN peacekeeping forces; the way when Soviet tanks entered into Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Brezhnev expressed; "Now the situation of our brotherly Czechoslovakia is normalized". Our subcontinent has so many examples of such kind.

Sensing and monitoring hostile brainwash is a highly specialized skill, either we attain that as soon as possible or run the risk of becoming history. "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence I conjure you to believe me, fellow citizens. History and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government." - George Washington.

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US says it has 5,113 nukes in its arsenal

The United States revealed for the first time May 3 that it has a total of 5,113 nuclear warheads in its stockpile, saying the move would bolster arms control efforts.

"It is in our national security interest to be as transparent as we can be about the nuclear program of the United States," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said as the Pentagon unveiled figures long shrouded in secrecy.

"We think that builds confidence, brings more people to an understanding of what President Obama and this administration are trying to do," she said.

Releasing the details of the arsenal would bolster arms control efforts as well as attempts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, she said.

Clinton acknowledged there had been "numerous debates" inside the administration over whether to reveal the figures.

"As of Sept. 30, 2009, the U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons consisted of 5,113 warheads," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The number included active warheads ready for deployment at short notice and "inactive" warheads maintained at a depot in a "non-operational status," it said.

The figure represented an 84 percent reduction from the arsenal at its peak of 31,255 in 1967 during the Cold War, and a 75 percent reduction from late 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell.

The Pentagon last disclosed details of the stockpile in 1993, releasing figures current up to 1961.

Clinton said releasing the figures was not "in any way in opposition to our nuclear security" and that experts had already estimated the U.S. stockpile.

A Pentagon official said the administration hoped more transparency from Washington would set a standard that would encourage countries to be more open.

"We hope that others will follow," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told reporters.

"In particular we'd like to see more transparency from China. We have really quite little visibility into their programs and plans," the official said.

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Indian Army seeks loitering missiles

The Indian Army wants to equip its troops with missiles that can loiter over a target for 30 minutes, and it sent a global request for information (RFI) in March, Defence Minister A.K. Antony told the parliament here in a written response.

The loitering missile would be able to send critical data on enemy installations and later self-destruct on the target.

In the RFI, the Defence Ministry has sought details from the vendors on the missile's cruising speed, the maximum range at which it can engage a target, its loitering time, the range of its data link, its accuracy, ability to attack from the top, and if it can abort after locking onto a target and be redesignated to a new target.

After receipt of the RFI, a formal request for proposals will be issued and the missiles are likely to be procured by the end of 2011, a Defence Ministry official said.

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France tells Syria to step up border security with Lebanon

France wants Syria to guarantee security on its border with Lebanon, Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said Sunday after Israel accused Damascus of supplying missiles to Hezbollah.

"The situation is serious, dangerous," Kouchner told Europe 1 radio.

"There is a stockpile of weapons, short-range, medium-range and perhaps even long-range missiles and we are concerned."

A US anti-terrorism assessment team visited the main Lebanon-Syria border crossing last week amid allegations that Damascus had allowed deliveries of Scud missiles to its ally Hezbollah.

"We are asking the Syrians to guarantee the security of that border," Kouchner said. "I am not saying that it's a sieve because a certain number of facts have not been established."

"But this is dangerous and reinforces extremism," he added.

Last month, Israeli President Shimon Peres accused Syria of providing Scud missiles to Hezbollah. Damascus has denied the charges.

Israel maintains that Hezbollah has a stockpile of more than 40,000 rockets, some of which have a range of more than 300 kilometres (186 miles) that would allow the Shiite militant group to hit major cities in Israel.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates last week accused Iran and Syria of arming Hezbollah with increasingly sophisticated rockets and missiles, saying the arsenal undermined stability in the region.

But Gates did not say if Syria was supplying Hezbollah with Scud missiles as Israel has alleged.

France has been spearheading moves to bring Syria out of diplomatic isolation since President Nicolas Sarkozy took office in 2007.

Hezbollah is the only Lebanese group that did not disarm after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, arguing that its weapons were necessary to fight Israel which it later faced off in a devastating conflict in 2006.

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