

## The economics of transit

*Make the core committee report public*

HAVING gone through a patchy period of ups and downs for sometime, Bangladesh-India relations at the moment are poised for a positive trend, which we feel must be sustained. Towards that end there is a very strong rationale for the two countries to develop an environment in mutual dealings that will bring about positive outcomes for both the parties in equal measure, with perhaps a slight tilt towards Bangladesh since it has more severe development challenges to overcome.

And no one would disagree that in this arrangement of a win-win situation for both the countries trade is a vital component and will be central to the entire gamut of our relationship. And, in turn, transit becomes the core issue for the two countries to address.

It must be emphasised that Bangladesh has been rather more open to the idea of transit, and indeed to regional connectivity now more than ever before. There is a need for us to look at the issue rather more dispassionately than we have been inclined to in the past. And in this regard we would do well not to look at the past provisos like the trade agreement of 1974 and all those that followed therefrom, but look anew at the issue.

The point that we want to stress here is that our geographical position accords us an endowment that we can take advantage of for reaping economic benefits. However, before everything else we must work out the econometrics of transit. And this was the predominant view underlining the dialogue recently on the issue of transit and transshipment to India. We feel the planners must work out the cost benefit analysis of operationalising transit and devise a comprehensive framework.

And in this context there are a few things that should be addressed sequentially. The legal framework for transit should be prepared based on which the regulatory directives would emanate. But these would be meaningless unless we addressed the issues of infrastructure and determined the charges first.

We understand that the econometrics of transit have been worked out by the core committee. The government should make it public immediately, both for transparency and public knowledge.

## NCC polls

*Power to the people*

IF there is one lesson learnt from the Narayanganj City Corporation mayoral polls, it is that the people are the ultimate master of politics. Because the people willed it, the maneuvering and manipulation by the ruling party -- including the ruling party candidate's attempt to spread panic through warnings of a possible militant attack -- had no bearing on how the people cast their votes. Indeed, the NCC polls are a testament to the fact that a genuine political leader, one with strong public support, cannot be ignored, that too, without damaging party credibility.

The media too have been vindicated in the process for their stance against the ruling party candidate, his controversial past and alleged links to the underworld and a range of illegal activities, in contrast to whom the mayor elect was seen as a hero, especially when she failed to get the backing of her own party in the elections.

During the election process, the ambiguous and angular relationship between the Election Commission and the government came forth, however. The government's decision not to deploy the army -- which many feared would cause violence and vote rigging during the polls -- may ultimately have come as a boon in increasing public confidence in the police, Ansar and Rab, who assisted in the holding of a free and fair election without the presence of the army. Even so, the government's decision not to accede to the request of the Election Commission to deploy the army, which has been labeled a constitutional violation, clearly undermines the Election Commission as an institution.

There have been many warning signs for the ruling party since its landslide victory almost three years ago. The NCC polls results come as a significant message yet again that, no matter what, power ultimately lies with the

# 17th SAARC Summit: 'Building Bridges'

FARIDUL ALAM

THE 17<sup>th</sup> Summit level conference of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) is going to be held in Maldives on November 10-11. The theme of this year's Summit is "Building Bridges."

South Asia is a region where there are more than 100 languages, 10 main religions, one-fifth of world population and various types of regional, bilateral and multilateral organisations. The intention of establishing this regional body was "to cooperate regionally, to work together towards finding solutions to common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual understanding and to the creation of an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits" (Dhaka Declaration, 1985). It was hoped that through the creation of Saarc economic, social and technical cooperation among the countries of South Asia would contribute significantly to national and collective self-reliance.

Though 26 years have passed there are mixed views about the successes and failures of Saarc. The main successes of Saarc are first, for the first time the member states are legally obliged to respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Second, yearly meeting of heads of the states/governments bring the countries closer and prevent exacerbation of existing tensions, and also search for possible approaches to mitigate them. Third, the areas of cooperation identified by the technical committee facilitate the economic and social development of the member states. Fourth, the agreement to combat women and child trafficking is an important benchmark for such a regional forum. Fifth, considering climate change, "the leaders, deeply concerned by the extent of environmental degradation in the region, reiterated the importance of

sustainably managing environment and development through adoption of eco-friendly approaches and technologies, and that South Asia should become a world leader in low-carbon technology and renewable energies" (Thimphu Declaration, 2010). Sixth, to alleviate poverty, the 13th Summit meeting endorsed formulation of Saarc Development Goals (SDGs) and also emphasised regular monitoring of the process. Seventh, the inclusion of Afghanistan increases the acceptability of the forum.

The 14th Summit was particularly significant as it emphasised connectivity. According to Declaration 4, "the heads of states/governments recog-

other regional organisations like European Union or Asean. Although, as per Article 1 of the Charter, some of the main objectives of the organisation were to promote welfare of the people and improve their lives, and accelerate economic growth and social progress, the forum has failed to achieve these basic objectives and the members are mostly moving individually towards economic emancipation in spite of having broad-based areas of mutual cooperation.

Though, in principle, the member states agreed on sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, small

these problems as it states: "Bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations."

South Asia is a unique region as it has linguistic and cultural diversification, and is a geo-strategic location. Maldives is the lowest lying state in the region whereas Nepal is the highest point. Both the countries, along with Bangladesh, are in a vulnerable situation because of global climate change. This needs special attention, but Saarc has failed to address them. As a result, the theme of the 16th Summit at Bhutan in 2010, "Towards a Green and Happy South Asia," has become nothing but a slogan.

Because of the many problems within Saarc, it is of immense importance to make this body functional. Farsighted, democratic political leadership can solve the problems, but in most of the South Asian countries democracy is still developing.

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In the era of globalisation, only collective efforts can ensure national development. As development is a combined process, narrow national interest can only ensure short-term benefits, but creates numerous obstacles in the long run. The European Union is the brightest model of regional cooperation, and even Asean has been more successful than Saarc in many respects. Although it has a lot of potential, Saarc is still far from its destination. We the people are waiting to see a happy and prosperous South Asia. Hopefully, the dream will be materialised.

The writer is Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Chittagong. E-mail: mfulka@yahoo.com

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nised the importance of connectivity in fulfilling these objectives. It was vital to first have better connectivity within South Asia and then with the rest of the world. They agreed to improve intra-regional connectivity, particularly physical, economic and people-to-people connectivity. They agreed to the vision of a South Asian community where there was smooth flow of goods, services, people, technologies, knowledge, capital, culture and ideas in the region." The South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (Sapta) is another notable achievement of Saarc.

However, Saarc has failed to establish itself as an effective body of regional development as compared to

states like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are in many respects dependent on the will of the bigger state India. Almost all the countries in the region have bilateral problems with India. There are problems related to border, terrorism, arms competition etc. between India and Pakistan. There are problems related to water sharing, exchange of enclaves, border fencing, border killings etc. between Bangladesh and India while landlocked states Nepal and Bhutan have no options but to abide by the will of India. Without managing or minimising these, it will be very difficult to make Saarc an effective body. Article 10(2) of the Saarc Charter is a barrier in resolving

## | The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# The new Libya's first mistake

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

SURRENDERING to a feeling of deep impotence and slight absurdity, I borrowed an iPad on Thursday afternoon and used it to send my first-ever message by this means. It was addressed to one of those distinguished Frenchmen who have been at the fore in pressing the outside world to remove Muammar Gaddafi from the posture in which, for more than four decades, he has squatted on the lives of the Libyan people.

Please, I wrote, intercede with your friends on the National Transitional Council, plus any other revolutionary tribunal however constituted, in order to stop the killing of the Gaddafi family and to ensure smooth passage to the dock at The Hague for those who have already been indicted for crimes against humanity.

Simple enough? It is some time since the International Criminal Court in The Hague announced itself ready and open for business in the matter of Libya. But now Gaddafi is dead, as reportedly is one of his sons, Mutassim, and little has been said about the legality or propriety of the business. No Libyan spokesman even alluded to the court in their announcements of the dictator's ugly demise.

The president of the United States spoke as if the option of an arraignment had never even come up. In this, he was seconded by his secretary of state, who was fresh from a visit to Libya but confined herself to various breezy remarks, one of them to the effect that it would aid the transition if Gaddafi was to be killed. British Prime Minister David Cameron, who did find time to mention the international victims of Gaddafi's years of terror, likewise omitted to mention the option of a trial.

Among other things, this tacit agreement persuades me that no general instruction was ever issued to the forces closing in on Gaddafi in his hometown of Sirte. Nothing to the effect of: Kill him if you absolutely must, but try and put him under arrest and have him (and others named, whether family or otherwise) transferred to the Netherlands. At any rate, it seems certain that even if any such order was promulgated, it was not very forcefully.

At the close of an oppressive regime, especially one that has shown it would rather destroy society and the state than surrender power, it is natural for people to hope for something

a jail and thence to the airport. Indeed, a spell in the dock would probably hugely enhance the positive impact, since those poor lost souls who still put their trust in the man could scarcely have their illusions survive the exposure to even a few hours of the madman's gibberings in court.

And so the new Libya begins, but it begins with a squalid lynching. News correspondents have been quite warm and vocal lately, about the general forbearance shown by the rebels to the persons and property of the Gaddafi loyalists. That makes it even more regrettable that the principle could not be honoured in its main instance. At the time of writing, Seif al-Islam Gaddafi,

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like an exorcism. It is satisfying to be sure that he can't come back. It is also reassuring to know that there is no hateful figurehead on whom some kind of "werewolf" resistance could converge in order to prolong the misery and atrocity.

But Gaddafi at the time of his death was wounded and out of action, and at the head of a small group of terrified riffraff. He was unable to offer any further resistance. And all the positive results that I cited above could have been achieved by the simple expedient of taking him first to a hospital, then to

another of Muammar's sons, is said to be still at large. It will be quite a disgrace if he is also killed out of hand, or if at the very least the National Transitional Council and the international community do not remind their fighters that he needs to be taken into lawful custody.

This is not to display any undue sympathy for Seif, or others on the wanted list. But he in particular is the repository of an enormous amount of potentially useful information, about the nature of the dead regime and perhaps even of the whereabouts of strategic material -- to say nothing of

vast illegal holdings of money that are the rightful property of the Libyan people. In more senses than one, it would be a crime to be party to this destruction of evidence.

As for the usefulness of Gaddafi Sr. in the still-underdeveloped field of the study of megalomania, I should have said it was beyond price. And yet his numberless victims have to take such satisfaction as they can from seeing a blood-streaked and incoherent figure, handled roughly and in a panic and then put out of his misery by a shot that added exactly nothing to the security of the country.

I was in Romania on the day that Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu were hastily done away with, and I was in Mosul on the day before Uday and Qusay Hussein were surrounded and submitted to lethal shot and shell in a house from which there was no escape. In both cases, the relief felt by the general population was palpable. There can be no doubt that the proven elimination of the old symbols of torture and fear has an emancipating effect, at least in the short term.

But I would say that this effect is subject to rapidly diminishing returns, which became evident in Iraq when unpolished acolytes of Muqtada al-Sadr got the job of conducting the execution of Saddam Hussein. There are sectarian scars still remaining from that botched and sordid episode, and I shall be very surprised if similar resentments were not created among many Libyans on Thursday. Too late to repair that now. But it will be a shame if the killing of the Gaddafis continues and an insult if the summons to The Hague continues to be ignored.

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and *Slate Magazine*, where this column originally appeared, and the author, most recently, of *Arguably*, a collection of essays.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 1

**1922**  
The last sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed VI, abdicates.

**1953**  
Andhra Pradesh attained statehood on 1 November 1953, with Kurnool as its capital.

**1956**  
The Indian states Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Mysore state are formally created under the States Reorganisation Act.

**1973**  
The Indian state of Mysore is renamed as Karnataka to represent all the regions within Karunadu.

**1993**  
The Maastricht Treaty takes effect, formally establishing the European Union.

**2000**  
Serbia joins the United Nations.