

SAARC's attempts at regional poverty alleviation

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EVER since its formation in 1985, SAARC has made several attempts to address the issue of poverty. The SAARC Charter, drafted in 1985, referred to enhancing the living standards and improving the welfare of the people via regional cooperation. Initiation of Integrated Programmes of Action (IPAs) incorporated this people's welfare related objective in the Charter by forming IPAs in Agriculture and Rural Development, Human Resources Development, and Social Development. When the 6th SAARC Summit took place in Colombo in 1991, the Heads of States of SAARC countries decided to appoint an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA1) to study and recommend policies to address this pressing issue of the region.

In late 1992, ISACPA1 came out with a report titled 'Meeting the Challenge' with the key recommendations of enhancing of regional economic growth and engaging in micro-level intervention by social mobilization. The Commission argued that the poor are proactive and agents of social change and therefore, the poor should be empowered by social mobilization. The Commission highlighted a number of projects in the region where social mobilization had been effective in empowering the poor, viz., Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committees, Agha Khan Rural Support Programme of Pakistan, SEWA of India, etc. The Commission argued that if the suggested strategy is pursued by all member countries of SAARC, poverty could be eradicated in the region by 2002. However, none of the ISACPA1 recommendations were achieved by 2002 and poverty remained a key issue with South Asia sheltering 40% of the world's poor.

At the 11th SAARC Summit in 2002, due cognizance was taken of the poverty situation of the region and there was a reluctant admission that the region is far from achieving significant progress in addressing poverty despite ISACPA1 based initiatives. The SAARC Leaders noted that global conditions have changed since the mid-1990s with international institutions like the UN coming up with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and thus there is a need to have a fresh look at poverty in the region. Accordingly, a decision

was taken to appoint a new ISACPA (hereafter indicated as ISACPA2) with new terms of reference.

The key recommendations of the ISACPA2 titled: 'Our Future Our Responsibility', which was published in 2003, were as follows: mainstreaming the informal economy, reviewing laws and policies which impact on the livelihoods of the poor, enhancing gender equities, prudent macroeconomics, sustainable development, and mobilizing the power of the poor. It highlighted the regional best practices under the theme 'Garden of Hope'; and required regional initiatives such as developing a poverty data base and documenting best practices, promoting rural technology, experience sharing, etc. Halving poverty in the region by 2010 was the main objective of the strategy.

The 12th Summit requested ISACPA2 to continue as an advocacy body and submit to the next summit, a comprehensive blueprint setting out SAARC

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Development Goals (SDGs) for the next five years in the area of poverty alleviation, education, health, and environment giving due regard, inter alia, to suggestions made in the ISACPA2 report. In the 13th Summit, the SAARC leaders requested the Commission to further elaborate on SDGs and identify indicators, and benchmark them with projected targets for the next five years and to develop a credible monitoring and evaluation framework. Besides this step, the 13th SAARC Summit declared the period 2006 to 2015 as the 'Decade of Poverty Alleviation' and the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) was formalized.

Over the last two decades we have seen a plethora of poverty related declarations, high-powered Commissions, Plans of Action on Poverty Alleviation, setting SDGs, promoting regional projects, preparation of SAARC Poverty Profiles, establishing SDF, and so on, to combat poverty in the region. When one looks at

SAARC Declarations, it can be seen that there is reference to poverty alleviation in all of them. The intention of SAARC Leaders for poverty alleviation needs nothing but praise; however, most of these intentions have far from been achieved. The implementation has been poor and monitoring weak and as a result, none of the set targets on poverty alleviation by SAARC leaders could be achieved.

The key issue here is the limitation of regional projects/programmes in reducing poverty in individual member states. It was due to this limitation that ISACPA2 emphasized the need to look at regional best practices by individual member states. Such programmes can be emulated with due adjustments to initial conditions, country specific factors and implemented if politically feasible in individual member states. Such attempts by member states can be more effective than regional projects. For implementation of such projects, especially by LDCs, some seed capital can always be obtained from the SDF.

One of the most effective ways of addressing poverty under a regional framework is to enhance and deepen economic integration. Existing regional frameworks such as SAFTA and SATIS (South Asia Trade in Services) need to be deepened and broadened for further economic integration in the region. Such a process will enhance regional overall economic growth and contribute to some degree of poverty reduction.

It is high time that SAARC Leaders recognize the limitations of poverty alleviation through regional projects and put a freeze on further Commissions and on setting poverty targets. Strengthening the existing mechanism in SAARC for implementing policies agreed upon in the Summits and deepening economic integration under the existing frameworks can be far more effective in combating poverty in the region than any new regional poverty specific initiatives. South Asia has a long road ahead in poverty alleviation and SAARC can only play a facilitating role in achieving the set targets by individual member states. A host of declarations will not be a substitute for concrete action at the ground level.

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AL in power: Blessing or curse for JP?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

JATTIYA Party (JP), the opposition in parliament, has plunged into another spell of turmoil. Two of its MPs, state minister for LGRD Mashiur Rahman Ranga and opposition chief whip Tajul Islam Chowdhury were dropped from the party's presidium, the party's highest policy making body. And Ershad and some of his party loyalists boycotted JP's parliamentary party meeting held on Sunday. Raushan Ershad, also the leader of the opposition, held the meeting and extended support to Ranga and Tajul. The meeting also foiled Ershad's so-called move to force the party MPs to resign from the Sheikh Hasina-led cabinet. The meeting decided that those who are in the cabinet will not resign from their office until fresh decision is made reversing the latest one. There may be further developments in the party in the coming days and it will not be unlikely if the Raushan-led faction of the party takes more steps to sideline Ershad further.

Ershad, who has been facing a number of criminal cases including Gen Manzur's murder, may be unable to consolidate his position in the party as his rival faction has been enjoying the blessing of the government since the one-sided January 5 parliamentary election. This has brought fortunes for many in the JP. The party has emerged as the main opposition in parliament and Raushan the leader of the opposition with status of a minister, thanks for the blessing.

One may argue that Raushan was rewarded by the government for her stance that foiled Ershad's bid to quit the January 5 parliamentary election. JP MPs, who were inducted in the Sheikh Hasina led election time cabinet and some other leaders, had backed Raushan, thus preventing Ershad from taking JP out of the electoral race. Even he could not quit the race himself. Those days were full of drama. Ershad may not find any other alternative but to accept more humiliations in the coming days for his failure to stick to any decision.

The fast growing crisis in his party has triggered the question whether JP will experience fresh split? Past records strongly suggest that history may repeat itself. The party has faced several splits in the past when Awami League was in power. And every time JP faced the split because of its decision to join the AL-led cabinet and supporting the Hasina-led government.

Ershad, who was ousted through a mass upsurge in December 1990 and put behind bars on various corruption charges, extended his party's support to Hasina-led government in 1996 from jail. Even his party's secretary general Anwar Hossain Manju was made a minister in Sheikh Hasina's cabinet. That decision brought fortunes for Ershad who was eventually released from jail on bail and joined the parliament. But it brought curse for his party finally. Centring that decision, his party broke up for the first time when Manju refused to quit the cabinet. Some of the JP MPs extended support to Manju. Ershad formed an electoral alliance with BNP and started street agitation against the AL-led government. But he could not maintain his relation with the BNP-led alliance. Under reported pressure from the then AL-led government, Ershad announced to quit the BNP-led alliance. His announcement resulted in another split in his party before the 2001 parliamentary election. This time Nazir Rahman Manzur led the revolt and formed another faction of JP.

When BNP assumed office through 2001 parliamentary polls, JP MPs maintained good relation with the then government and did not follow the main opposition AL in boycotting the parliament. Following a series of events Ershad rejoined the AL-led grand alliance at the fag end of the BNP-led government's tenure. The AL-led grand alliance won a landslide victory in the December 2008 national polls. JP under leadership of Ershad joined the cabinet. His brother GM Quader was made a cabinet minister. This time Ershad seemed to have emerged with a different strategy. He did not allow any other of his party MPs to join the cabinet. Many in JP believed that Ershad had opted for this strategy as a means to avert any further split in the party. But this did not work successfully. At the end of the immediate past AL-led government's tenure, intra party conflict got momentum due to Ershad's decision to join the Hasina-led election time government. Ershad was accused by the dissident leaders of breaching his earlier announcement that his party would not join the polls if other opposition parties did not join. Ershad expelled his party's senior leader Kazi Zafar Ahmed accusing him of leading the dissidents in the party. Kazi Zafar and a group of dissident leaders formed a new party in November 2013.

The ongoing turmoil in the JP has raised an important question: will the party experience another split? The crisis the party is facing now will in no way yield any positive result whether the party split or not. This will in no way boost the morale of its leaders, supporters and activists countrywide. The turmoil will also prevent the party from playing any constructive role in the parliament as the main opposition. The crisis, on the other hand, will further empower Sheikh Hasina to increase her control over JP as some of the party leaders have already sought her interference in resolving the party stalemate. Even Ershad, who has been facing challenge within his party, to pick the deputy leader of the opposition in parliament, has met the premier to settle the dispute. Ershad and Raushan have severe disagreements over nominating a party leader to the post of the deputy leader of the opposition. Given the prevailing situation one may question whether the assumption of office by the AL is a blessing for JP or a curse for it? Blessing perhaps for those who want to enjoy power anyhow, and curse for others.

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THE MIDDLE EAST

Balkanization and US' full spectrum dominance

SULTANA AFROZ

THE tentacles of the balkanization policy of fragmenting states into small entities has spread worldwide initiated by civil rights societies at first with protests which have the flare of popular uprisings against the incumbent governments for democracy, human rights, minority rights and secularism. More is yet to come in the Middle East using local collaborators and once the West has achieved its objective it will discard them as they did with Saddam Hussein and are now in the process of doing with Nouri Al-Maliki in Iraq. One must remember how Al-Qaeda had been declared enemy "Number One" by the US-NATO yet Al-Qaeda is fighting on the side of the US-NATO in Syria (Al-Nusrat) and Al-Qaeda groups (LIFG) listed among the UN terror list deposed Muammar Gaddafi and destroyed Libya, which ranked as the number one country in Africa under the UN Human Index.

Aside from the balkanization of Iraq, the Yinon Plan calls for a divided Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria. Lt. Colonel Ralph Peters assigned to the Office of the deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence had redrawn the map of the Middle East as far as Baluchistan, a province of Pakistan and called it "Blood Borders".

The creation of Kurdistan will change the existing map of Turkey, Iran and Syria besides that of Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Jordan will not remain immune from the New Middle East. A new Palestinian state may emerge in the existing Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which traditionally is greater Palestine. Israel will enjoy the entire Palestinian territory as it existed under the British Mandate. West Bank, the proposed territory for the Palestinian state is a reservoir for fresh underground water and Gaza offshore contains rich gas fields. Thus Palestine is never to be realized. The Palestinian Authority is fictitious as there is no Palestine since 1948. President Obama had said at the AIPAC Conference, following his selection as the Presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the US Presidential



The above map was prepared by Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters. It was published in the Armed Forces Journal in June 2006, Peters is a retired colonel of the U.S. National War Academy. (Map Copyright Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters 2006).

Election in 2007 that Jerusalem will remain as the indivisible capital of Israel. Every effort to have Peace Talk between Israel and the Palestinian Authority for a two-state solution since President Obama came to power is an illusion for there can be no Palestine without (East) Jerusalem as the capital. The Hashemite dynasty may find itself reverted to its traditional home in the Hejaz. Fred Halliday, the author of Arabia Without Sultans suggests that in the wake of any threat to the flow of Saudi oil to the West, there may be no kingdom but a divided Arabian Peninsula with its eastern section under direct US military control and the western section, the Hejaz with sacred cities of Makkah and Madinah under the Hashemite control. The map prepared by Peters is also indicative of independent states in the existing central and eastern Saudi territories and of an Islamic Sacred State along the Hejaz.

The Balkanization of the MENA region falls in line with Pentagon's Full Spectrum Dominance Doctrine", which aims for the dominance of the world in

every aspect: strategic, political, economic (agricultural and non-agricultural) cultural and military (nuclear and conventional) by the United States in the wake of a rising China as a global power in alliance with a reemerging Russia, and several multilateral blocs such as BRICS and SCO to name a few, challenging the western monetary system backed by a show of military power. For the implementation of the Full Spectrum Dominance, Pentagon has set up Command Centres throughout the world such as the EU Command, CENTCOM, AFRICOM and SOUTHCOM. With over 800 bases overseas, the Command Centres serve as intelligence headquarters for each specific region, promoting American and western economic and strategic interests. The Balkanization Plan, which ensures a better US grip over small states extends into the former Soviet territories in Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Georgia) and Central Asia, African continent covering Egypt, Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Kenya, and even includes the Peoples Republic of

China, which has seen disturbances in Xinjiang and Tibet. Since the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, the extreme western region of Xinjiang province of China, which borders Afghanistan, has seen repeated insurgencies in Muslim communities. The Chinese government has expressed concern about the security in that region and says Muslim extremists receive help from neighboring countries. Also of security concern for the Chinese is Tibet where Human Rights Activists incite pro-Tibet protests and a group called Reporters without Borders staged their protest at the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008. India which houses the exiled Tibetan government is suspected of inciting protests against the Chinese authorities within Tibet. Ralph

Peters echoed the sad consequences of the Balkanization Plan as envisioned under Pentagon's "Full Spectrum Dominance Doctrine" in 1997:

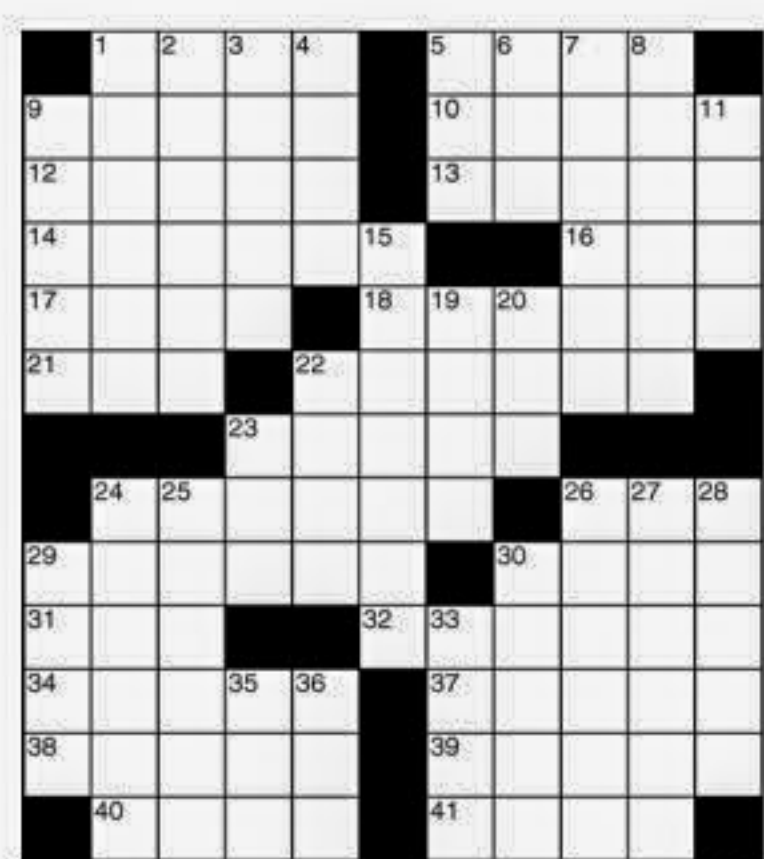
There will be no peace. At any given moment for the rest of our lifetimes, there will be multiple conflicts in mutating forms around the globe. Violent conflict will dominate the headlines....The de facto role of the US armed forces will be to keep the world safe for our economy and open to our cultural assault. To those ends, we will do a fair amount of killing.

With regard to the role of Israel in this mayhem, former Secretary Kissinger said when "the great Russian bear and Chinese sickle will be roused from their slumber and this is when Israel will have to fight with all its might and weapons to kill as many Arabs as it can. Hopefully if all goes well, half the Middle East will be Israel". Russian and Chinese veto at the Security Council against US-UK-EU resolution to militarily intervene in the Syrian civil war and the formation of the Palestinian unity government, which has received worldwide acclamation are perhaps, warning bells for Israel to wage an all-out war against the Arabs to maintain its hegemonic dominance in the MENA region, through the full implementation of the Yinon Plan.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Watered down
 - 5 Greek goddess of marriage
 - 9 Cost
 - 10 Singer Cara
 - 12 Supple
 - 13 In poor taste
 - 14 Greek goddess of wisdom
 - 16 Pub brew
 - 17 Golf pegs
 - 18 Poker ploys
 - 21 Make mistakes
 - 22 publicity acts
 - 23 Musical drama
 - 24 Canal setting
 - 26 "My country -- of thee"
 - 29 Game quest
 - 30 Of high quality
 - 32 Hockey's Bobby
 - 33 Greek goddess of the moon
 - 34 Tale tellers
 - 37 Snooped (around)
 - 38 Titled women
 - 39 Uses a towel
 - 40 Greek goddess of youth
- DOWN**
- 1 Novel creator
 - 2 Choice word
 - 3 Massage targets
 - 4 Acute
 - 5 Batter's goal
 - 6 Memorable time
 - 7 Get a new actor for
 - 8 Low joints
 - 9 Setting piece
 - 11 Facial pair
 - 15 Greek goddess of hunting
 - 19 Mystique
 - 20 One -- million
 - 22 Rigging support
 - 23 -- roll (doing well)
 - 24 Outcast
 - 25 Steep-roofed home
 - 26 Connects
 - 27 Wanting
 - 28 Garden starters
 - 29 Hawked
 - 30 Plant life
 - 33 Some linemen
 - 35 Yank's foe
 - 36 Compass dir.



Yesterday's answer

CARE SMART
ARIAS LONER
SATUP AMIGO
EMUEBB MIT
DIAPER JAMS
SLIDERULE
QUEEN
COUPDETAT
HONELATED
ARTAREHER
FRIARCETE
TAMPATONES
SLEPT BARS

CRYPTOQUOTE

ONKU TPL FRU XT KYNWRIWJF TPLZ FPKAE
WE JPU KE WBHPZUKJU KE ONKU TPL
XRYPRXT KYNWRIWJF TPLZ EPKAE.
-- QWF QWFAKZ

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FICTION AND REALITY? FICTION
HAS TO MAKE SENSE.
-- TOM CLANCY

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

