

Strengthen Saarc's institutional structure

SAMAN KELEGAMA

THE 18th Saarc Summit will take place in Kathmandu, Nepal on November 26-27. As usual, the centre of attention will be the Saarc Declaration, which will have many high sounding goals and the emphasis on the need for goodwill and cooperation to achieve the set goals. People in the region have heard this narrative for the last three decades with limited ground level achievements. It may be time to look back to look beyond.

Saarc now has eight members and seven observers and has experience with economic cooperation for two decades. Yet its economic achievements over the years have been far from satisfactory. Intra-regional trade in goods remains at 5%, intra-regional trade in services is at 0.2%, while intra-regional investment flows are at a low level with a weak nexus between trade and investment. When Saarc trade flows are compared with other comparable regional groupings like Asean at 26% and MERCOSUR at 15%, it becomes clear that Saarc is relatively lagging far behind.

Existing literature points to a number of factors for this scenario in Saarc: (i) the uneasy political situation between India and Pakistan; (ii) heavy bureaucratic layers and non-tariff barriers; (iii) poor connectivity among Saarc member countries; (v) poor follow up of Saarc decisions, and so on. The first issue is not unique to Saarc. In the EU, there existed political problems between France and Germany during the early

years of European integration but they got over-shadowed by the overwhelming desire for peace and economic benefits from cooperation.

The second, third, and fourth issues of non-tariff barriers, poor connectivity, and slow follow up of decisions were prevalent in Asean also during the 1970's and 1980's, but these were overcome under a strong regional institutional framework to facilitate smoother flows of trade and investment in Asean. Decision making was strengthened by having a strong Secretariat with enough powers to drive the Asean during crucial times. Clearly, the problems facing Saarc are not insurmountable.

Recent research has shown that trade facilitation closely linked to (ii) above and economic connectivity linked to (iii) above can play a significant role in enhancing trade and investment compared to preferential tariffs. Time and again, Saarc has made reference to implementing trade facilitation measures and improving economic connectivity but the progress has been slow. Lack of a strong institutional structure to take forward multiple initiatives is a major lacuna in Saarc. According to a recent study by the ADB, Saarc is 'institution lite'.

It is not that Saarc lacks institutions. It has a number of regional centres focusing on energy, human resource development, agriculture research, tuberculosis, etc. It has many technical, standing, and working committees. In other words, a heavy bureaucratic set-up with several layers of decision-making characterises the Saarc institutional structure.

This situation is further complicated by three other factors: (1) the Saarc Secretariat lacks necessary resources to implement projects and monitor the progress of activities being implemented; (2) the Directors of the Saarc Secretariat are not appointed according to subject specialisation (e.g., trade, investment, transport, energy, etc.) but on usual foreign ministry appointment basis; and (3) the Saarc Secretary General has limited powers to drive the Saarc process between Saarc Summits.

The problems of the Saarc institutional structure were identified as far back as 1998 by the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP). It has also been highlighted by heads of states. Reference can be made to the statement at the 1997 Saarc Summit from the then Sri Lankan President where she posed the following questions: "Does the proliferation of activities in the last decade signify anything more than the growth of barren foliage in a vast tree? What fruit has Saarc truly borne? Do we need to prune those activities which do not bring any significant yield and more carefully nature others that do?" But hardly any action has been taken to revamp Saarc's institutional structure since then.

In 2010, in an article titled "Saarc Programmes and Activities: Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation," Professor Mahendra Lama of JNU, India, concludes: "Given the current situation, if drastic measures are not taken to both enhance the capacity of the Secretariat to operationalise the announced projects and also ensure strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to verify

implementation of decisions taken at various Saarc meetings, a situation may emerge in which leaders will year after year talk about the need to have effective implementation, while progress remains stunted."

It is time to reform the institutional structure of Saarc if the regional mechanism is to provide better results. A recent study by the ADB outlines several steps to strengthen Saarc, viz., create an autonomous Secretariat equipped with stronger agenda-setting and surveillance power, ensure adequate financial and human resources, provide clear legal mandates and enhance decision making rules, build stronger links with existing institutions and with national agencies, establish more objective membership rules, etc.

With the improvement of India-Pakistan relations in recent years, the political environment may be conducive for Saarc member countries to commit themselves to reform and strengthen Saarc's institutional structure. If this is not done soon, improving connectivity among Saarc countries will be a slow process, so would implementing trade facilitation measures. This in turn would mean that the trade and investment flows will also be slow and Saarc will as usual lag behind all other regional blocs in taking forward the economic cooperation agenda. It is high time to act and make the necessary changes, if not, Saarc will remain the least integrated region in the world for many more years to come.

The writer is the Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka.

Development of renewable energy in Bangladesh

MOHAMMAD ALAUDDIN

BEING aware of the finite stock of fossil fuels and their negative impact on the environment, countries across the world are now leaning towards renewable energies like solar energy, wind energy, bio-energy, hydropower, geothermal and ocean energy in efforts to ensure energy security. The use of renewable energy has risen considerably in recent times, both in developed and in developing countries. REN21's Renewables 2014 Global Status Report indicates that renewable energy provided an estimated 19% of global energy consumption in 2012 compared to 16.7% in 2010. More than hundred countries now have renewable energy policy of one kind or the other.

Keeping pace with the global trend, Bangladesh has also attached due importance to development of renewable energy. National plans -- Five Year Plan, Power System Master Plan -- and policy documents including National Energy Policy, Industrial Policy 2010 underscored renewable energy. Development of renewable energy has been identified as one of the programmes of Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Renewable energy options are also included in the Bangladesh National Building Code. A dedicated policy, Renewable Energy Policy of Bangladesh, has been in force since 2009, which envisions having 5% power from renewable energy sources by 2015 and 10% by 2020. The government has established Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency. To strengthen international cooperation, Bangladesh became one of the initial members of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the only inter-governmental agency working exclusively on renewable energy. Those endeavours manifest Bangladesh's commitment towards development of renewable energy.

Bangladesh receives an average daily solar radiation in the range of 4-5 kWh/m². Encouraged by the availability of solar radiation, Power Division has initiated a programme to generate 500 MW of solar-based electricity. Under this programme, projects for electrification of rural health centres, educational institutions, E-centres at union levels, religious establishments and remote railway stations are required to be implemented by authorities concerned. Private sector is expected to implement commercial projects like Solar Irrigation, Solar Mini Grid, Solar Park and Solar Rooftop applications.

The government is gradually meeting part of the lighting and cooling load of public offices by installing solar panels. The national capacity of solar power development currently exceeds 150 MW. Most of the capacity addition is from Solar Home Systems (SHS) implemented by Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL), a government-owned financial institution. Until recently, more than 3 million SHSs have been installed with aggregated capacity of about 135 MW. The international community recognises Bangladesh's SHSs as the fastest growing solar power dissemination programme in the world.

Today, hydropower makes up the largest share of electricity generated from renewable sources as the global capacity reaches 1,000 GW. The only hydroelectric power plant was established at Kaptai with present installed capacity of 230 MW. Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) identified two other sites at Sangu (140 MW) and Matamuhuri (75 MW) for large hydropower plants. Further exploitation of hydropower appears to be limited due to flat terrain of Bangladesh. Several studies have identified a few sites having potential ranging from 10 kW to 5 MW, but no appreciable capacity has yet been established.

Bio-energy is energy derived from any form of biomass, including bio-heat, bio-power, and bio-fuel. Bangladesh Agricultural University and Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) launched biogas technology in the country in early 1970s. Against an estimated potential of 4 million biogas plants about 70,000 plants have been established so far throughout the country. Tapping potential of biomass, two rice husk-based power plants of 250 kW at Gazipur and 400 kW at Thakurgaon, and seven poultry waste-based power plants at different sites with aggregated capacities exceeding 1 MW, have been established at the initiative of private sector with support from IDCOL.

Except for two pilot wind-power plants at Muhuri Dam (0.9 MW) in Feni and Kutubdia Island (1.0 MW) in Cox's Bazaar, comprehensive assessment of wind power potential is still ongoing. BCSIR, LGED, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, German Development Cooperation (GIZ) and Renewable Energy Resource Centre of Dhaka University assessed wind resource, at some length, in a few sites. Currently, Power Division is implementing a project with support from USAID to develop wind map for Bangladesh. Potentials of ocean and geothermal energy are yet to be explored in Bangladesh while global capacities reached 530 MW and 12 GW respectively.

Renewable energy is no more an ambitious expensive venture. Because of high research and development cost of renewable energy, it continues to lag in relation to conventional energy. For example, cost of solar PV panels declined more than 60% in the past three years. International Energy Agency projects that electricity generation from renewables may overtake natural gas by 2015 and perhaps coal by 2035.

However, due to lack of clear knowledge base on renewable energy and their co-benefits, many people, even some energy professionals, are skeptical about the prospect of renewable energy. They mostly exaggerate the price of renewable energy and are of the opinion that renewable energy technologies are not mature enough to become viable options. Consequently, negative perception persists over renewable energy, hindering wider deployment.

Reliable information and best practices can overturn doubts, and show that renewable energy is the promising and sustainable energy option for Bangladesh, while newly established SREDA can play a vital role in catering to the same.

The writer is Deputy Secretary (Renewable Energy), Power Division. E-mail: mohammad_alauddin4124@yahoo.com

Pakistan: Ill-served by 'strong leaders'

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

FEW Research Poll (2013) found that Pakistanis prefer (66%-75%) "strong leaders," a euphemism for military rule/dictatorship, over democracy. To them, military is the only institution that works in Pakistan. Yet, Pak military lost every war against India, failed to snatch an inch of Kashmir, and lost "East Pakistan." If success is measured by failures, sure Pak military is a success!

"Strong leaders" have ill-served Pakistan. Field Marshall Muhammad Ayub Khan's ten-year (1958-69) dictatorship resulted in the break-up of Pakistan. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's eleven year autocratic rule (1977-88) introduced widespread drug use and Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. General Pervez Musharraf's nine-year (1999-2008) dictatorship spawned domestic terrorism and Pakistani Taliban.

Pakistan's founder Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a stronger leader who committed one monumental blunder. Addressing Dhaka University convocation on March 21, 1948, he said that while Bengali can be East Pakistan's language, "state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really an enemy of Pakistan."

In 1948, 55% of Pakistanis spoke Bengali, and were demanding that Bengali be a state language. West Pakistanis spoke only Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi and Pashtu. Therefore, Mr. Jinnah's proclamation defied logic!!

Bengalis realised that their majority did not matter. To the West Pakistanis everything in Bengal was small -- the land, its dark people, its fruits. East Pakistan's jute was Pakistan's lone cash crop, yet, very little was spent on East Pakistan's development, widening the already yawning inter-province economic disparity.

On February 21, 1952, police fired on pro-Bengali demonstrators at Dhaka University campus, killing five, triggering the "Language Movement" which fueled Bengali nationalism.

When "Jukto Front" annihilated the Muslim League in the provincial elections of 1954, the West Pakistanis raised the familiar alarm: "Islam is in trouble!" The election had nothing to do with Islam, everything to do with Muslim League's misrule. West Pakistanis anointed themselves the custodian of Islam, forgetting that the All India

Muslim League was founded in Dhaka (1906) and that Bengali Muslims spear-headed the Pakistan movement.

Pakistan's lurch towards dictatorship accelerated in 1954. When Governor General Ghulam Mohammad dismissed the Constituent Assembly, Speaker Tamizuddin Khan challenged the dismissal in Sind court and won! However, on appeal the Federal Court reversed the decision citing the dubious pretext of "state necessity," hurling Pakistan towards dictatorship.

Pakistan's 1956 constitution stipulated Urdu and Bengali as state languages, but declared the two provinces electorally equal -- wiping out East Pakistan's population advantage. In 1958, Ayub Khan staged a coup and banned political activities for the next decade.

In the death of Pandit Nehru in May 1964, Ayub Khan saw an opportunity to take Kashmir by force. The 1965 Indo-Pak war was a disaster for Pakistan that nearly cost them Lahore.

East Pakistan was left completely undefended during the 1965 war. Boasted a Pak minister: "Allah would have saved East Pakistan!" To Bengalis it was another manifestation of West Pakistan's total disregard for their welfare. In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced his "Six Points" for provincial autonomy. Although it reflected the aspiration of every Bengali, West Pakistanis dismissed it; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto ridiculed it.

After Ayub's ouster (1969), the new dictator General Yahya Khan scheduled universal franchise-based elections for December 1970. A cyclone devastated East Pakistan in November. The central government's foot-dragging on relief efforts convinced Bengalis that West Pakistanis did not care. Mujib's Awami League won an absolute majority (160 seats out of 300) in Pakistan's National Assembly. That's when the plotting began. Mujib was never invited to form a government.

Mr. Bhutto's party won only 81 seats, yet he declared: "There are two majorities; one in West Pakistan (81), one in East Pakistan (160)." Bhutto should have been charged with treason. Instead, West Pakistanis rallied around him. On the pretext of negotiating with Mujib in Dhaka, Yahya and Bhutto flew in military reinforcements and unleashed them on unarmed civilians on the night of March 25, 1971. Pakistanis preferred to settle political differences with

bullets, not negotiations.

Lakhs of Bengalis were butchered; thousands of Muslim and Hindu women were raped by Pakistani soldiers "saving" Islam and Pakistan. Local Jamaat-e-Islami party and Razakars collaborated with Pak army. Some non-Bengalis suffered retaliation, which was inexcusable. Not a single demonstration was staged in West Pakistan protesting the genocide of East Pakistanis! To the Pakistanis, Bengali Muslims were more Hindu than Muslim.

Benazir Bhutto admitted in her book *Daughter of the East* that Mr. Bhutto drank; Sheikh Mujib was a practicing Muslim who did not. Pakistani soldiers took their oaths on the Qur'an; yet when I visited Quetta cantonment officer's mess at 18, I saw every-one drinking! I don't judge people, but the Almighty who does, detests hypocrisy.

Bangladeshi Muslims are devout, but don't flaunt their Islam. They are far less communal than people in other sub-continental countries, and are happy to have Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and animists as compatriots.

With Mukti Bahini and India's assistance, Bangladesh was liberated in December 1971. Before releasing Pakistani prisoners of war in 1973, India requested Mujib's assent. Always generous, Mujib agreed, on condition that Pakistan try 200 Pakistani war criminals in Pakistan (Bangladesh gave the list). Bhutto agreed, and reneged! No Pak soldier was tried for genocide against Bengalis! Bangladeshis will NEVER forget Pakistan's genocide!

It does not matter to Bangladeshis, but an apology for the genocide of 1971 will be good for Pakistan's soul. Also, instead of lying to their children that the break-up of Pakistan was India-orchestrated, Pakistanis should tell the truth.

Bangladeshis wish Pakistan well. It pains them to see Pakistanis enter mosques, which are bombed regularly, through metal detectors. Pakistan needs an altruistic and courageous leader for the future.

I watched Imran Khan play cricket in Dhaka and Oxford. One of the world's best all-rounders, Imran is renowned for his unselfishness. He put the team first, and let others take wickets. Such selflessness is rare in politicians. As a Pashtun, Imran will be sensitive to the rights of religious/ethnic minorities. Imran Khan is Pakistan's best hope for a brighter future.

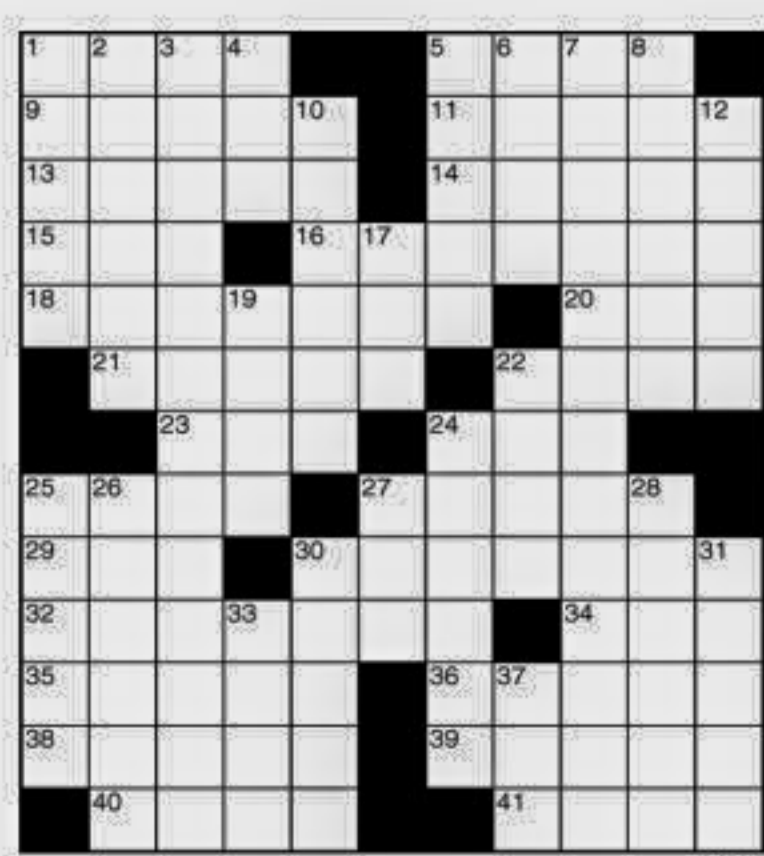
The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Wild guess
 - Do the decks
 - Loose garment
 - Longs
 - Augment
 - Allow to flow
 - Negative link
 - Experience
 - Searches the river
 - Moose coupling
 - Work byproduct
 - Affectedly cute
 - Mayo buy
 - "2001" computer
 - Writer Cocteau
 - Poison
 - Pendulum path
 - Eyeteeth
 - Annoying
 - "East of Eden" brother
 - Bright beam
 - Cache
 - Market buy
 - Like some roofs
 - Aard-vark's lunch
 - Cuts off

- DOWN**
- Flea market unit
 - Henry VIII and family
 - Face on a twenty
 - Drill need
 - Taters
 - Cellar supply
 - "The Walking Dead" star
 - Darwin's ship
 - Tawny cat
 - Alarm trigger
 - Take in
 - College head
 - Curbside call
 - Upright
 - Lockups
 - Book boo-boos
 - Wool cap
 - Approached
 - Champagne poppers
 - Some coasters
 - Splinter group
 - Cinch



Yesterday's answer

G R I P P A R C H
R A C E D A L O H A
I D I N A N O M A N
N I N G D O G T A G S
D O G E A R N A E
Y A L I E D I L L
Y A K S E T A L
R E N T A C O
U S A D O G L E G
D O G W O O D O A R
E R R O L E L I T E
S N A K E S P R I N E
T O M E S S E N D

CRYPTOQUOTE

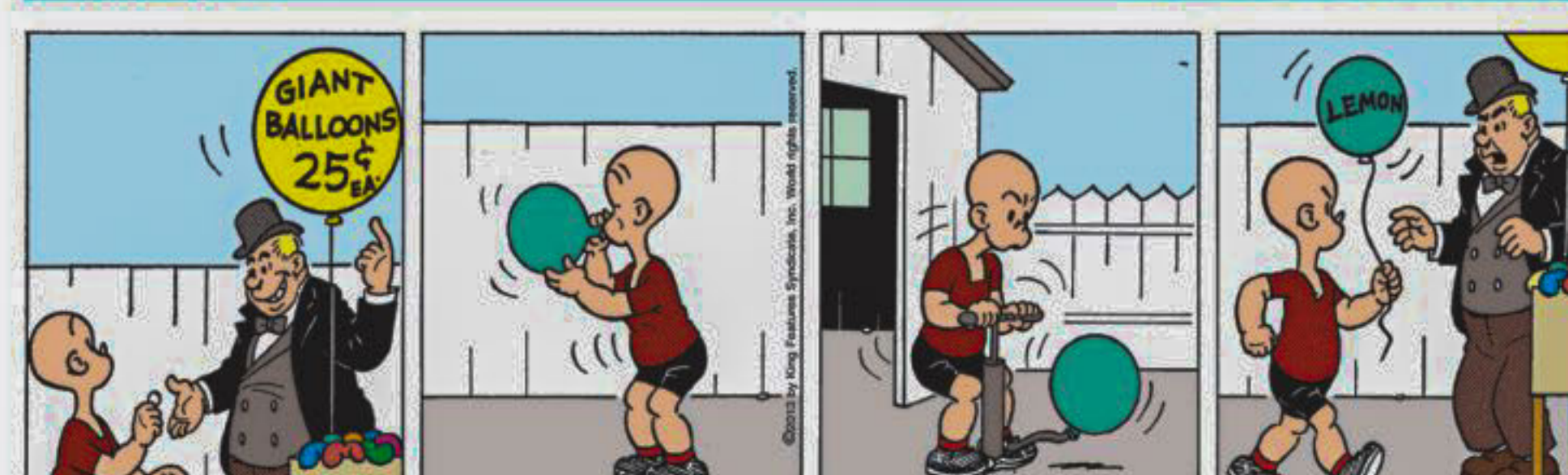
RUEPAB MSU US HB W RVOOBRR, HVU EWUYBE US HB SC AWXVB.
-- WXHBEU BPMRUBPM

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
A CLOSED FIST IS THE LOCK OF HEAVEN AND THE OPEN HAND IS THE KEY OF MERCY.
-- PERSIAN PROVERB

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.

George Bernard Shaw