

IN MEMORIAM

Ambassador K M Shehabuddin

An intrepid patriot

MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

APRIL 15, 2016 will be the first death anniversary of Ambassador K M Shehabuddin, who served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Poland, Kuwait, France and the United States. The news of K M Shehabuddin's death came as a profound shock to me. He was the first ambassador I served under as a young and junior officer of the Bangladesh Foreign Service from 1988 to 1991 in Kuwait.

Ambassador Shehabuddin defected from the Pakistan Foreign Service on April 6, 1971, before any of his colleagues did, and started working for the liberation of Bangladesh. The Mujibnagar government was yet to be formed and the Liberation War was yet to be organised. He was then serving as Second Secretary in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi. After defection, he started serving as the head of the Information Centre established in New Delhi, which was practically the first diplomatic mission of Bangladesh there.

In Kuwait, I once asked him how he could take such a decision fraught with peril. "It was easy for me because I was a junior officer," he retorted in his tongue-in-cheek manner. His defection showed the brave patriot in him. He quit his much-craved-for job to express allegiance to and work for his motherland at that crucial juncture of its history. Vis-à-vis the calls of his conscience, stepping into extreme uncertainty and joblessness for the sake of his country was of no consequence to him.

If I had acquired any insight into his mind from my close association with him for three years, I would say his defection was not a careless act on his part. He clearly visualised that the massive crackdown of the Pakistani army on Bangladesh and the genocide that they started was the final nail in the coffin of the Pakistan that embodied East Bengal as a part of its territory; he knew that there was no option for the Bangladeshis

but to fight back and liberate the country.

I was witness to another dazzling instance of his intrepidity and innate commitment to his work when Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait overnight on August 2, 1990. Early morning the next day, which was a Friday and a weekend, he asked us (all officials of the embassy) to attend the office for an urgent meeting to review the drastically changed circumstances and the course of action we should take to face them. When we reached the embassy, driving our cars hesitantly through patrols of heavily armed Iraqi soldiers and the checkpoints set up by them, we learnt that the ambassador was already waiting for us there for quite some time. It was obvious from his countenance that he was annoyed with us for being late. "Why are you given diplomatic plates if you can't drive out to do your job? You can't afford to sit at home when you have 75,000 Bangladeshis in peril. Can you?" he said angrily. Instead of feeling unhappy at being chided, I instantly felt a surge of reverence for him.

In the face of increasing pressure and intimidation from the Iraqi administrator in Kuwait to close down the embassy, we continued to function, up until one and half months into the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, especially to issue travel permits to our expatriates and ensure their safe repatriation to Bangladesh, as well as to defy the Iraqi claim of sovereignty over Kuwait. By mid-September, under the able and courageous guidance of Ambassador Shehabuddin, we had successfully repatriated all those Bangladeshis in Kuwait who wanted to return home. Ours was the last Asian embassy to suspend operations and move out of occupied Kuwait.

On one of his periodic visits to South Yemen (a poor Marxist country, defunct since its unification with North Yemen in May 1990), to which Ambassador Shehabuddin was concurrently accredited, I accompanied him. We were flying Alyemda - the flag carrier airline of South Yemen



K M Shehabuddin

and were seated next to each other. The aircraft looked old, decrepit and badly maintained. When it took off, the partition that separated us from the cockpit started to wobble in a way that filled me with foreboding. I felt scared and, despite myself, shifted uncomfortably in my seat, muttering to myself, "Why do we have to travel by such an aircraft?" My nervousness did not go unnoticed by the Ambassador, and with an affectionate smile, he tried to reassure me, "Don't be afraid, Aziz. None of us will die even a minute before our predestined time." Although that did not bring me much comfort, it showed his profound faith in God.

Ambassador Shehabuddin was the epitome of an amiable, elegant, honest, diligent, unpretentious and patriotic diplomat. In a *do*

mafil held after his death last year, a retired foreign secretary and contemporary of Ambassador Shehabuddin told us, "Ambassador Shehabuddin could have become anything he wanted to. But he never craved anything." He had remarkable networking and negotiating skills. His personal relationship with many dignitaries of the countries he served in helped him protect and promote Bangladesh's interests in those countries. Sometimes I heard our seniors depict him as "a king maker who never graced the throne himself". Such remarks were reflective of his high negotiating skills that came naturally to him.

Hot on the heels of the liberation of Kuwait on February 25, 1991, Ambassador Shehabuddin led us, all his officers, back to that war-ravaged country; and in two days' time, we could see the then Kuwaiti Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad, thank the Ambassador for Bangladesh's steadfast pro-Kuwait role following the Iraqi invasion. Sheikh Saad assured us that Kuwait would take back all the Bangladeshis who had been serving there before the Iraqi occupation within a couple of months. It was also because of Ambassador Shehabuddin's strenuous and persistent efforts that the Bangladesh Army, along with military contingents from a few other select countries, could participate in the reconstruction of liberated Kuwait. That enhanced Bangladesh's image in the Arab world.

After he passed away last year, I was saddened by the fact that Ambassador K. M. Shehabuddin was not honoured with a national award for his unique contribution to the country. However, it is gratifying to see the Swadhinata Padak posthumously awarded to him this year by the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. It is sad, though, that the Ambassador did not receive the award during his lifetime.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.

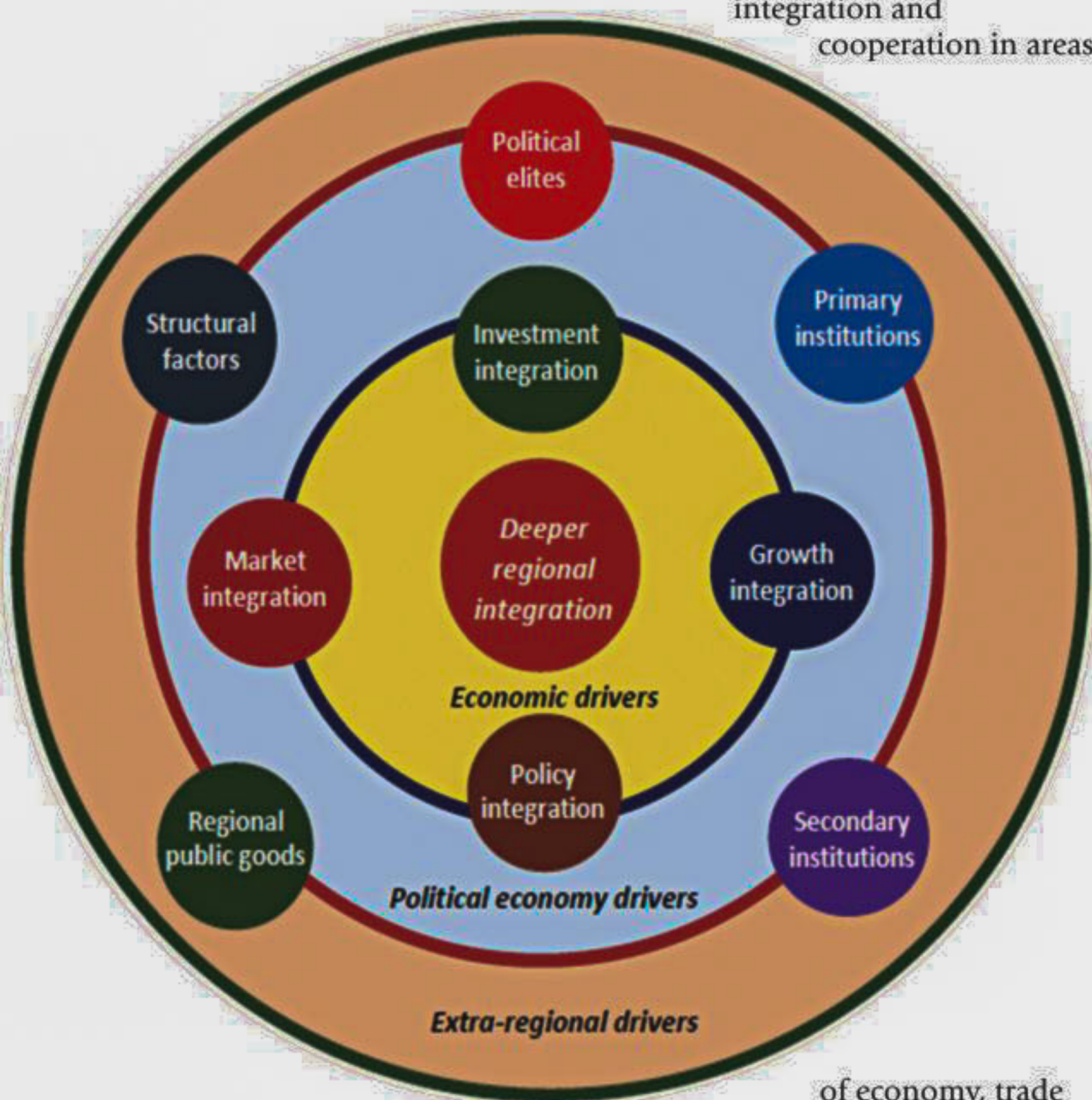
Ambassador Shehabuddin defected from the Pakistan Foreign Service on April 6, 1971, before any of his colleagues did, and started working for the liberation of Bangladesh.

Political economy of regional integration

Where do we stand in South Asia?

SELIM RAIHAN

THE aspiration for deeper regional integration is high on the political agenda of most of the leaders in South Asia. Since the early 1980s, SAARC has been working as an economic and geopolitical organisation for South Asian countries with the aim of deeper regional integration and cooperation in areas



of economy, trade and other common regional issues. Until now, there have been some achievements. Still, frustration prevails, as actual implementation of agreements often does not match the declared ambitions. The resulting implementation gap is most commonly attributed to the lack of political will and leadership, institutional weaknesses and capacity and

resource constraints.

The dominant literature has looked primarily at the narrow economic factors influencing regional integration. However, to have a better and systematic assessment of the factors driving and constraining regional integration, it is important to explore the political-economy dimensions. While policymakers and stakeholders are often aware of such dimensions, they are generally discussed only informally or in ad hoc manner. A systematic discussion of the political economy factors around the regional integration agenda can generate a broader awareness among stakeholders that may ultimately lead to more realistic and effective regional policy design and processes.

From a political-economy perspective, there could be three interconnected drivers for a deeper regional integration. These are economic drivers, political economy drivers and extra-regional drivers.

The economic drivers include four integration processes: market integration, investment integration, growth integration and policy integration. Market integration emphasises on the integration in trade in goods and services through the removal of tariff and non-tariff restrictions. Growth integration is the integration of economic growth processes of the respective countries in a way that growth in one country benefits growth processes in other member countries. Investment integration calls for promotion of regional investment and trade nexus. Finally, policy integration is the harmonisation of economic and trade policies of the countries for a deeper regional integration.

However, the aforementioned four integration processes need favourable political-economy (PE) drivers. The political-economy perspective considers how various players influence the national and regional decision making context, and what impact their actions (or lack of action) have on the integration agenda. The first PE driver is the primary institution, which are the official institutions at the regional level and in respective countries entrusted to carry out the agenda of regional integration. In South Asia, the SAARC Secretariat and relevant ministries in the member countries are such institutions. The second PE

driver is the secondary institution, which are private sectors, private sector associations, civil society organisations and media. Primary and secondary institutions are a combination of market and non-market actors that govern economic and political environments in the region. The third PE driver is the regional public good, which includes regional infrastructure and the status of regional trade facilitation. In South Asia, status of such regional public good is very weak. Structural factor is the fourth PE driver, which includes historical processes and geographic factors that shape the types of political, economic and socio-cultural institutions. In South Asia, land-lockedness of Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan, political rivalry between India and Pakistan, and huge differences

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in the sizes of the countries, where India accounts for around 80 percent of the regional GDP, trade among the South Asian countries primarily through land borders, are such structural factors. The final PE driver is the role of the political elite. Strong and visionary leaderships are needed from the political elites to eliminate any trust deficit, which can emerge as a result of a variety of the structural factors mentioned above. In South Asia, such trust deficit is often highlighted as one of the major barriers for a deeper regional integration. Also, there are concerns with regard to hesitant and inconsistent leaderships from the political elites of these countries, especially from India, in taking the regional integration agenda to a higher level.

Finally, the extra-regional drivers include a wide range of global economic and political factors that can have influence over the region. In South Asia, countries are at different levels and with different patterns of integration with the extra-regional drivers.

There are now convincing evidences that a deeper regional integration is needed for generating and sustaining economic growth and reducing poverty in South Asia. Intra-regional trade in South Asia has been low, but there are signs of huge potential. For deeper market integration in goods, full implementation of South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) is needed with emphasis on further liberalisation of intra-SAARC tariffs, reduction in the sensitive list, and establishing effective mechanisms to deal with the NTMs/NTBs.

Intra-regional services trade and intra-regional investment are also low in South Asia. Regional and sub-regional efforts have to be promoted for different trade and transport facilitation measures, for cooperation in energy generation and transmission, and for linking energy cooperation and trade and transport facilitation to investment and growth processes of these countries. Promotion of intra-regional investments and attracting extra-regional FDIs in goods and services sectors in general, and energy and infrastructural sectors in particular will be very crucial for South Asia to integrate further. There is a continued need for a greater integration in trade, macro, financial and industrial policies in the region.

A deeper regional integration in South Asia requires clear and visible leadership from the political elites in this region, especially from India, in taking the agenda forward. Regional institutions, like SAARC Secretariat, have to be institutionally reformed and reoriented with much stronger engagements from the respective ministries and relevant organisations of the member countries. Business associations, civil society organisations and media have to pursue the regional integration agenda in South Asia more pro-actively than ever.

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QUOTABLE Quote

EMILIANO ZAPATA
(Mexican revolutionary and leader of the peasant revolution in the state of Chiapas)

I want to die as a slave to principles, not to men.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Thick slice
- Scarlett's home
- Future oaks
- Historic times
- Walked boldly
- Has as a tenant
- Negating word
- Movie preview
- NYC subway line
- Lass's friend
- Mexican coin
- Field of films
- Neon and helium
- Factual
- Tour carrier
- Ulna's place
- Truck type
- chi (martial art)
- Piglet's creator
- Facial lens cover
- Mother of Castor and Pollux
- Placid
- Worship look
- Body shop challenges

41 Whirlpool

DOWN

- Begin
- Brewery product
- Sports setting
- French prison stormed in 1789
- Stood the test of time
- Cast member
- Neither follower
- Chums
- Sign, as a check
- Brawls
- Murder
- Medicated lozenge
- Declares
- Decked out
- Brothers (early film-makers)
- U.S. owned island
- Propeller parts
- Swoon
- Runs, as color
- Finished
- Sweet-heart
- Writer Deighton

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott