

Floods And SAARC

—Principal M.N. Karim

THE SAARC initiated by Bangladesh in 1985 seems to have become for all practical purposes a viable organisation. The more meetings and get togethers among the South Asian regional states of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are held at Secretariat, Ministerial and Heads of State levels, the more flood gates of understanding, co-operation and entente cordiale are destined to be opened among them for the solution of various problems—economic, social, cultural, political etc. that beset or are likely to beset the member states of the organisation.

The heads of state or government of the SAARC have already met thrice since 1985 and a fourth is scheduled to be held in Islamabad in December this year. The Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of the organisation have met many more times, besides a series of seminars, workshops etc. at study group, technical and professional levels. In spite of any possible ray of misunderstanding between any two states on political or other issues, it has evoked a sense of optimism in the member states for its success in various fields of national needs of the states. For example, the Third Kathmandu SAARC summit, held on Nov. 6, 1987 took some concrete steps on the burning question of terrorism in any part of the region. The member nations here undertook to suppress or refrain from assisting or participating in any kind of terrorism in member countries. Simultaneously they attached great importance to U.N. Resolution No. 2625 which requires each state to refrain from terrorism in other states. It also decided to set up the South Asian Food Security Reserve and stressed on closer co-operation among the seven SAARC members. Under such a proposed Reserve Scheme any member country in case of need can draw its necessary quota from the Reserve of 220,900 metric tonnes of foodgrains. India has the bulk of contribution, the other states have also their respective contributions, with significant contributions of Pakistan and Bangladesh in order of priority. Since food deficit and food crisis is almost a common feature of some members of the region, this reserve measure will have a beneficial effect on such member states. The recent fifth session of the council or conference of Foreign Ministers held on Aug. 11 and 12, 1988, at Kathmandu endorsed the Food Security Reserve set up by Kathmandu summit in 1987, needed against food shortage and scarcity

situation in the region. It also endorsed the concrete steps taken against terrorism in the region by the Kathmandu SAARC summit for their immediate implementation.

The Foreign Ministers' conference also finalised a proposal for the establishment of a SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC) in Bangladesh and requested Bangladesh to make necessary arrangement for the establishment of the Centre which will be the first regional institution to be set up under SAARC. It also approved the recommendation of the study committee to include education as an area of co-operation. The Ministers also appreciated the idea of Bangladesh on the establishment of a SAARC Friendship University in Bangladesh with SAARC chairs, fellowships and scholarships. It also took note of Bangladesh's suggestion for a regional forum for women and requested Bangladesh to present its proposal to the technical committee on women in development, one of the eleven of such committees. Since Bangladesh is in the throes of a devastating flood, the attention of the whole world is now riveted on it with its sympathetic and prompt helping attitude, the excellent ideas

and proposal adumbrated in the fifth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers may remain in abeyance for the present. We hope to see the realisation of such noble ideas in near future with the prospect of glorious participation of Bangladesh. Flood has already been taken as an area of study of the SAARC region for necessary co-operative measures for adoption.

In the said conference of Ministers it was also decided as per recommendation of the Study Committee that any country in the region subscribing to the objectives and principles of the Charter of the SAARC may be admitted as a member of the association by unanimous decision of the heads of the state or government. It, however, considered it premature at this stage to accept the practice of granting observer status to any other South Asian state. But above all questions, the menace of drug trafficking is haunting the region and this area needs immediate attention of the SAARC countries. The problem has become acute by its recent intensification in the countries of the region. We have every reason to believe that the SAARC is already sensitive to the question and will leave no stone unturned to save its people from the terrible effects of the

drug.

The present concern of the SAARC seems to be the devastating flood of some SAARC countries and particularly of Bangladesh which has referred the matter to the SAARC. Bhutan is said to have decided to release its entire share of the SAARC food security reserve of 180 tons (100 tons of rice and 80 tons of wheat) for the flood affected people of Bangladesh. India is also doing her best to help the people of Bangladesh in this regard though parts of India including Assam, are affected by flood. We hope the SAARC countries will find out a permanent solution of the flood which has become an annual feature of Bangladesh and of some areas of other countries of the SAARC.

The recent visit of our President to New Delhi and his formal talks with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi led to an agreement between Bangladesh and India according to which both are to set up a task force of experts from both countries to study the waters of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra towards a solution of the flood problem.

Bangladesh and Nepal have also agreed to form a joint study team to make recommendations on measures for multiple and optimal use of water resources and flood management of the region. This decision was made during President Ershad's visit to Kathmandu on Sunday last.