

Book Review

Political Economy of Today's SAARC as a Regional Alliance as well as a Global Operation: Problems, Prospects and Proposals

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South Asia in the New World Order: The Role of Regional Cooperation (Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series) (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), xiii + 210 pp, £30.00 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-78478-9

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Abstract

In his assessment of this solely-written book, which is about cumbersome challenges, prospective opportunities and future directions for South Asia as an integrative identity towards regional sustainable development as well as a cooperative process targeting global policy engagement amid the cutting-edge century globalization gyrating relentlessly around international relationship politics and intergovernmental agreement economics, the reviewer has sharply disagreed with the author's ideas, insights and arguments to live up to his expectations. In the volume, for instance, he covered every member country of the SAARC but committed to none of them as a focal case. Seemingly, the writer with his carping approaches did not answer any of many lurking questions he himself posed. Yet, he somehow succeeded in his ordinarily suited goals. Undeniably, he has come up with some valuable suggestions that are sensibly made more significant by the evaluator. Because of its timeliness, fondness and seriousness, this title compared to the available similar publications might fittingly contribute to the related academic literature. In sum, the innovative, impartial and interdisciplinary piece as an outcome from cerebral interaction between the reviewer and the author both of whom were awarded internationally outstanding commendations in acknowledgement of their respective professional excellence could surely spellbind many foreign affairs readers across South Asia and the world at large.

Keywords

South Asia, SAARC, Bangladesh, India, world, globalization, political economy, international relations, regional integration, development cooperation

The Introductory Contexts

The ‘who vs whom’ contradistinction really matters for a review of any book in terms of sensible reasoning and excellent quality. In such a point of fact, I have a long track record of substantial, groundbreaking and meaningful research accomplishments, which received an exceptionally high-profile international academic recognition, when winning Asia research scholar awards named after Japan’s two most renowned prime ministers (Yasuhiro Nakasone and Masayoshi Ohira). Precisely, most of these rewarding works are concentrated immanently upon relationship and partnership of South Asia with such extra-regional great power as Japan, while my extensively diversified areas of expertise circumscribe global governance, international relations, political economy and sustainable development of a thriving Asia amid the increasingly globalizing world today. Moreover, I have recently founded and created the Dhaka-based Bangladesh Asia Institute for Global Studies (BAIGS), which has already proved itself as a top-notch research institution inside and outside Asia. This is mainly why I took interest in reviewing this volume.

The book is actually the outcome of the author’s research project completed with an awarded fellowship at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) of National University of Singapore (NUS). As the writer acknowledges, he was grateful to this institution for its logistic support as well as many of his colleagues (senior South Asia scholars and researchers) at this institution for their sustained encouragement and enlightened recommendation. In the publication’s ‘Prologue’ (Chapter 1), he also enthusiastically rhapsodizes about the details of his incredible personal life with both academic career and professional history. Educated at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar and at Harvard University as a Mason fellow, he has in fact served for the World Bank in various senior positions from 1974 to 1999, including regional vice president (for Latin America and the Caribbean). This seasoned economist, who is also a former finance minister of Pakistan, is currently acting as chairman of the Bukri Institute of Public Policy (BIPP), a Lahore (Pakistan)-based independent think-tank after his own name. However, as I have read his book to the furthest extent, it is better to revolve around its ‘more weaknesses’ than ‘less strengths’.

Blurred and Imprudent Title

Seeing its heading, I thought that the book would have lucidly investigated whether and why the South Asian regional cooperation is considerably efficacious by this time as well as how and when it could assume a serviceable contribution to South Asia in the midst of the 21st century world order. But I have become bewildered, after unearthing the contents of this publication. Out of its eight chapters, four chapters (Chapters 4-6 and 8), which are not directly related to

the thematic stream of this study, give the impression of being a nugatory inclusion. The last sentence of the book's last chapter reads: "The positive economic consequences of opening up to one another would be enormously significant. There would also be positive outcomes on the political side, but that is entirely different subject better dealt with by those who have greater competence in that area" (p. 182). This statement sounds quite contradictory, because a major position of the volume deals with a complete breadth of concerns covering political (and even strategic) concerns in addition to social and cultural facets of all countries of South Asia. For example, Chapter 4 deals completely with history's many burdens confronting this sub-region of Asia. In words of the author himself: "I have focused so much attention on the importance of history for understanding why people and nations behave in certain ways" (p. 1). Indeed, he believes that one of the most crucial reasons South Asia has not been able to progress as a region is that history weighs heavily on the countries in the area. Also, a full-fledged chapter is concentrated on the three national elections (in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) locally, which he regards as good indications for democratic advancement and the main priorities of the people in this region other than religion and politics, principally involving insurgencies rooted in ethnicity in Sri Lanka and Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan.

In any case, I expected that the author would have determinately furnished a separate chapter on the theoretical literature for 'international political economy', which is the mixture of politics and economics intricately crisscrossed with international relations. But he, who is an expert basically on economic history, did not do it for this interdisciplinary research. Besides, although this volume's title has run my eyes over the subject, the phrases 'World Order' (in the main title) and 'Regional Cooperation' (in the sub-title) are explained neither analytically nor prescriptively. In this respect, it is still unclear why the phrase 'Economic Integration' (as an economic arrangement between different countries, sub-regions or regions) apart from or instead of 'Regional Cooperation' is not applied. Moreover, 'East Asia', 'rising Asia', 'Asian century', 'bipolarity', 'multipolarity', 'superpower', 'globalization', 'global economy', etc., are chiefly used without justifiable elucidation of any of these locutions. Lastly, viewing that the main title seems less applicable or too enthusiastic, it is unconnected with the sub-title to many extents.

Indo-Pak War vs Bangladesh

To be more comprehensive, the adverse implication of intra-regional strife between India and Pakistan in South Asia on regional cooperation and economic integration is traditionally explored in this study. Obviously, an already countless and expanding number of productions on each of these aspects are available in the related domain of academic literature. Anyway, I wanted to know more specifically how Indo-Pak tug of war over Kashmir as the flashpoint for armageddon

in addition to the reportedly regional 'hegemony' of India and the 'hypocrisy' of Pakistan might bring a severely destructive ramification on South Asia, as both countries with their nuclear weapons constantly threaten each other and thereby escalate tension among other nations of this region. Some strategists foretell that India and Pakistan will fight against each other and a nuclear weapon-free Bangladesh that with the deepest sincerity is opting for peace will gain. Although the writer at the same time provides the readers with a gnomic report on the state-to-state disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he contrastingly commends that Bangladesh carries its own weight of history, which is different from the one Pakistan has borne.

Nevertheless, understanding that 'civil war' in the simplest term is a war between citizens of the same country, the author (as a Pakistani citizen) abruptly obfuscates the issue of Bangladesh's 'liberation war' as a 'civil war'. He himself describes that this civilian war was fought between a regular force from West Pakistan and irregulars popularly known as 'freedom fighters' (mukti bahini) by the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). I am really wondering to see how he hides the historical facts that the West Pakistani armed forces particularly with their 'operation searchlight' as a planned and targeted attack ferociously murdered thousands of unarmed and innocent civilians in erstwhile East Pakistan to curb the Bengali nationalist movement here, when they were allegedly guilty of their atrocities for mass rape and sexual violence. I do not think that punishment simply as the act of punishing these West Pakistani military offenders will be enough. According to him, the people of West Pakistan treated East Pakistan's freedom fighters merely as 'miscreants' (wrongdoers or lawbreakers) who similarly act in many civil wars. But he should have openly urged his nation, in which many Pakistanis in the new generation have still a very poor understanding of not only the never-forgettable contribution of these truly courageous and ultimately life-sacrificing martyrs to the emergence of Bangladesh but also the history of a united Pakistan, to formally apologize to Bangladesh for the world's most heinous war crimes against humanity and the unprecedented genocide (of as many as three million people killed) committed by the Pakistan military junta, their suppression of brutality and Pakistan's shameful surrender eventually in the 1971 war's end. Also, he says that Pakistan was able to make quick economic adjustments of its own to the loss of East Pakistan, and he was summoned back from Harvard University to lend a helping hand with the process. But he avoids saying how the rulers of West Pakistan extremely deprived East Pakistan during 1947-1971 that consequently led to the liberation struggle. So, it would have been acceptable if he had fairly lighted upon the truth that Bangladesh, which as a 'heroic nation' won its glorious independence (incredibly supported by India) from Pakistan in the 1971 historic war of bloodbath is the only exceptional example in Asia in such a successful revolution for any sovereign state worldwide.

My Counters to His Arguments

Notwithstanding, when it comes to the researcher's culminating arguments, I have my mixed reactions. In the beginning, he opines: "In Chapter Seven I will suggest why South Asia could do much better by adopting a regional approach, and become a part of the multilayered world that is becoming into being" (p. 6). As he continues, South Asia has two options as follows: it could pursue narrow national interests, or it could work as a region with the countries in the area prepared to step forward and devise ways of working as a cohesive and well-integrated region. He emphasizes that regional integration would help South Asia to find a place for itself in the rapidly changing global economy. As he also thinks, the full advantage of globalization might not be realized without integration, and South Asia, compared with other world regions, in particular those in an emerging Asia, will be left behind. I agree with such a conventionally held viewpoint behind the author's effort in the sense that reframing a 'regional approach' as against 'national approach' will definitely herald many successful economic development stories for South Asia, especially in terms of common commercial benefits from regional association, ie, an increase in the each individual country's economic growth rate. But I do not agree with him, because practicing a new regional approach might not be an absolutely single and novel idea about addressing the factors that bring about the regional dissection, let alone contributing to South Asia's engagement with the future multipolar world with a multifarious and multifaceted approach rather than the bipolarity between China as a would-be predominant superpower and the United States (US) as a long-held sole hegemon.

The research unfolds that an attempt to repair or improve the global system in a casual or desultory way will not be effective for solving the economic and financial problems the world faces in the concurrent millennium. Therefore, even though a set of arrangements established internationally for preserving global stability over a few decades after the end of the Second World War was practicable, it needs to be reformed fundamentally with the adjustable conditions for the humankind. In essence, the argument advanced in this work is that the emergence of a multipolar world is better aligned with Asia's interests. Nonetheless, the writer does not more persuasively examine the effect of such a framework on the engagement of South Asia with the globe as well as on the relationships among and controlling events of the countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), even by advancing a pathway for economic grounds. For instance, he does not indispensably ferret out why New Delhi seeks to find an option of dragging Pakistan to the dispute resolution body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for refusing to reciprocate for India's granting of the most favored nation (MFN) status to Pakistan, even after 20 years. In particular, a discussion about how Pakistan as India's nuclear-armed foe reacts to India's membership (only one from South Asia) at the Group of Twenty (G20) that helps the latter boost its

role in the global economic governance architecture is completely absent. On the other hand, the book lacks its answer to a question how India feels at a time when China as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) manipulates its veto power resistant to India because Beijing diplomatically uses Pakistan as a strategic alliance puppet against India. Whereas, the author easily guesses that such a development would take place if China and India, each with its own sphere of influence, work with rather than going against each other.

Anyway, the idea of the SAARC was first mooted by the then Bangladesh's President in Dhaka in 1985. But it is clear that this regional institution comprising eight member states created more than three decades ago has yet been able to develop a long-term and strongly coordinated stratagem to tackle the non-traditional security (ie, human security) issues including food insecurities, health vulnerabilities, natural disasters, etc., by enlarging its voice at such global multilateral organization as the UN. As the author confesses, South Asia is one of the few regions in the world where regionalism did not work, while this region has relatively made a weak attempt at regional integration. As also states in the book, the SAARC lags far behind other regional groupings notably in contrast to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in terms of not only per capita income level but also its dominance in the world order while integrating itself in the global trading system.

Besides, the writer sees Pakistan as a 'sick man' of South Asia now. But I like to ask him a simple question whether and why Pakistan's longstanding rival (India as a 'healthy man') will at all times come in a race to keep this sick man healthy. In this connection, he defines the word 'emerging' as a geographic entity (a country or a region) that has achieved political stability, social steadiness in addition to economic dynamism for a road towards its sustainable future. But he does not consider that this term could properly be related to any of the South Asian countries except India. In short, he poses the questions whether India's growth will be sustained and whether South Asia as a whole is emerging in a much more real sense. In opposition to these unconfident and downhearted thoughts, I (likewise many involved analysts and futurists) can posit a number of sanguine and reasonable opinions in favor of the SAARC. If we go into detail, the SAARC earlier dubbed as a 'poor countries' club' is currently walking up to redefine itself as a group of powerful and booming economies. As the time has changed and things have evolved over time in the world, so has the SAARC. The gravity of SAARC can be measured by the viabilities that it has so far become part of every locus of major global decision-making either as a participant or as an observer. As of now, all the global great powers are not only the observers to the SAARC but also they have incorporated the South Asian region in their strategic plans. However, although the researcher stresses the growing impact of South Asia's demographic

change thanks to this region's well over one fifth of the world's population on the global economy, he misses to trace that the world will add nearly 4 billion people (with 1 billion plus population of India alone) into its middle-class during the next decade with the fastest-expanding market that is shifting to the South Asian region at present. Needless to say, such a buying capacity-driven consumer market growth will attract many multinational corporations (MNCs) with their corporate social responsibilities (CSR) not just their amazing amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) with fresh marketing strategies. In addition, the writer himself identifies a number of ravishing potentials of South Asia as this region is set to design its better tomorrow, even though global warming has created some adversities for it, the scope of which differs from other parts of the globe. He evinces that the location of this sub-continent due to its large landmass (but somewhat smaller than a continent) on the physical world's fringes, which is endowed with huge hydrocarbon resources, has generated possibilities for a gradually energy-shortening world today. As he is also hopeful, South Asia's colonial experience under the British empire has left the SAARC member countries with a good working skills and abilities in English, which is the most dominating language in the universe not only to better help harness the competitive opportunities of the globalization process itself but also to interact with other states in Asia and the world as a whole. Very briefly, neither South Asia is any longer a region nor the SAARC is any more a regional bloc that can merely be neglected.

India's Leadership in Question

Getting to the point, the author develops one of the main messages of this volume, ie, the role of India in playing to shape South Asia's economic future. But he is simultaneously worried that it might be exceedingly difficult for India because of South Asia's troubled history to take the lead for nourishing a regional outlook to replace the country-centric approach in place today, and firmly re-position the region in the changing world order. As he also believes, some of the SAARC's smaller countries might deeply be fearful about the superpower stature of India as their neighbor and therefore will not be too ready to accept Indian leadership in organizing South Asia. Like many other phrases (as mentioned before), any clarification about the term 'leadership' is not given. But it is essential for us to know why and how India as a more operative state should/could shoulder its genuinely trustworthy and answerable role in leading South Asia not only to create a politically functional region but also to capture a reasonable amount of economic space for this region itself in the emerging global governance paradigm in such a manner as to achieve a desired result from now on. Even though the book's originator underlines the urgency for India's leadership for South Asia, he is at the same instant diffident that India might be tempted to go it alone. But he rightly maintains that this might not be possible for New Delhi, as India would

get constantly distracted from instability somewhere around its periphery.

Another most recurrent theme of the study is that South Asians would need to find a leader (or leaders) from within their own structure what happened in the case of some of the world's most successful regional blocs, such as the European Union (EU). However, he hesitates that if India could (or would not) perform this role for political reasons, the region might seek the involvement of another state as a catalyst. He prescribes a list of four possible catalysts (the US, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia) outside South Asia. He envisages that any of these four countries, which has a strong strategic interest in this region and is in favor of behaving a regional approach to guide its relations with the rest of the world, might be cast in such leadership role in South Asia. To me, as he remarks, it should not be a concern whether the smaller countries (such as the Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal) might welcome their intervention or India might be unwilling to countenance the presence of any of these external players on the South Asian stage. Rather, he should have more convincingly proposed how India, by fighting shy of New Delhi's orthodox and distorted belief besides inward-looking attitude that the region is its 'sphere of growing clout or interest', could attentively nurture a genuinely congenial and convivial relationship with its bordering nations and accordingly work together with all of them to develop South Asia for the days to come. Even though the researcher regards that the four countries mentioned above could take part in regional activities without containing Indian ambitions in the region for diverse reasons, giving an ineliminable space for any of these seriously controversial protagonists as the most prominent figure for a real drama of South Asia is likely to be problematic in the long run. It is because we have most recently observed how the two military hegemonic powers (ie, the US with Saudi Arabia as its duteous partner and Russia with China as its strategic ally) have led to disrupt West Asia (also called the Middle East as the Persian Gulf) for their own geo-political interests or geo-economic benefits while regretfully helping inflate Syria's civil war, the world's worst man-made disaster of our time. About Saudi Arabia, the author has illogically graded this middle power with the US, China, Russia as great powers. In fact, other SAARC nations are more and more skeptical of China's especial favoritism for Pakistan, since it has intentionally systemized a free trade agreement (FTA) only with Pakistan.

Anyhow, while China as a 'rising star' of the global economy has been spotlighted throughout this volume, the writer has totally failed to notice some of the most important truisms related to Japan, and particularly the protracted official development assistance (ODA) contribution of this great global pacifist power to the national interest of each and every SAARC country over several decades as well as Tokyo's rapidly growing role in the South Asian region for the future. It is redundant to say that the notable visibility of this truly trusted friend of

Bangladesh in Dhaka's sustainable development paradigm ever beats the same of China. Evidently, Japan has many years ago underscored the geo-strategic weight of Bangladesh as a 'business hub' between SAARC and ASEAN. Additionally and seemingly, Bangladesh compared with Pakistan (and even India) enjoys a bargaining power to several occasions over the great powers inside/outside Asia. Perhaps, the author has a dearth of rigorous and punctilious academic knowledge on the Northeast Asian region, conceding that he has a long professional expertise on Latin America, another world continent that is geographically so far away from the Asian one.

This Pakistani writer further encourages that Pakistan due to its economy's size being only one-eighth of India's would have to change its stance from a competitor of India and become a collaborator with India as its large neighbor as well as well as this country's 'anchor economy' (accounting for 82 percent of total of South Asian product) in many economic fields, mainly trade. On the other hand, as he recommends, India has to realize that it can only gain the status of an economic superpower if it earnestly works with the countries in its immediate neighborhood. As he proceeds, when making the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) an efficacious organization is vitally urgent, India should not be tempted to leapfrog the smaller members of the SAARC to form distant associations with such group as the EU, because no large economy has succeeded without first developing strong regional institutions. As per him, greater intra-regional trade in South Asia would have a palpable effect on the fabric of the smaller countries, as they enhanced links with large enterprises in India. Although I agree with all of his rational points above, I am not satisfied with his assessments on the plausible impact on the rates of growth of South Asia as an outcome of its action as a region than a collection of countries that occur to occupy the same geographic space. It is because he shares with other economists who developed several conjectural predictions for South Asia's future growth scenarios with or without economic integration in the book's concluding chapter, rather than assuredly putting forward with some realistic counsels.

More explicitly, he in his book's 'Prologue' (p. 7) asks the following questions: Given the situation of South Asia today, what will this region's future look like? What could we posit for South Asia, say, in the next 10 to 15 years? His initial assumption is that the South Asian inter-state conflict will continue to define this region's landscape, if such a condition becomes apparent. On the contrary, he in the same part interrogates: If the South Asians get to work together, what kind of future could they produce for themselves by, say, the year 2025? He forecasts that, in between these two scenarios, the SAARC countries would continue to take advantage of the rapidly transitioning economic position of East Asia (strikingly China) in the global economy but are still not able to work in tandem. In

such a way, individual South Asian countries will become the partners of 'emerging Asia'. But, it is indubitable that many of the most illustrious predictions have spectacularly been proven misrepresented and flawed. For example: How will he evaluate his personal thinking about India's emergence to a limited extent in opposition to the popular divination that the 21st century will foreseeably be controlled by India?

Bangladesh as a 'Role Model'

When it comes to Bangladesh as a specific case, although the author admits that three countries (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) would have critical roles for SAARC in reshaping the world economy, he in his volume pinpoints the last two that have a long record of deep-seated mistrust and hostility. Even though he treats Bangladesh as one of the SAARC's most abominable examples of the state weakness caused heavily by substandard governance that will eventually result in considerable uncertainty about this country's bright tomorrow, he unfolds some of the most recent signs of Bangladesh's durable economic growth. As he cites, this nation's rate of steady gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged 5 percent a year over the last decade. But Bangladesh's economy recorded the highest GDP growth (8.2 percent) in Asia in fiscal 2018-2019. To quote him: "In many ways Bangladesh has surprised the international community. At the time of its birth in December 1971, it was dependent entirely on foreign assistance for its survival. The then United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger called the new country an international basket case. Now it is the second best performing country in South Asia after India" (p. 168). Given that Bangladesh is already set to surpass India in terms of per capita GDP, this country is currently trying to catch up with India in economic indicators as well. Anyway, he continues to admire: "Bangladesh's remarkable economic and social progress was the result of a set of circumstances entirely different from those of India and Pakistan, the two other large economies of South Asia" (p. 172). If these are the fact-based statements from the own perspective of the author as a Pakistani national, ie, Bangladesh's quality is higher than Pakistan when the former is doing better than the latter, it is clearly and contrarily his biased stance for more cynical negativism of Pakistan as against more genuine positivism of Bangladesh. Frankly, he has generalized all the South Asian countries (whether big, middle or small in size) rather than specializing a distinct nation like Bangladesh.

Therefore, a full-grown independent chapter on the comparative and heuristic case study on Bangladesh with his answers to my following questions might have made this volume a really lofty and useful piece for the readers: First: Is it not true that Bangladesh owing to its reasonably well-done successes has portended its resilience even in the face of diverse political, social and economic hurdles spawned by both internal and external strains in the last 45 years and thereby

proved the then avowal of Kissinger fictitious, since Bangladesh is the second (after India) fastest growing economy within the SAARC? Second: Why is Pakistan lagging far behind Bangladesh in several economic sectors, consisting especially of the ready-made garment (RMG) that is the world's second (after China) biggest apparel exporting industry with the largest employer of women, although Pakistan has outshined Bangladesh as the second (after India) largest recipient of foreign remittances? Third: What lessons can the other SAARC states (Pakistan in particular) learn from Bangladesh whose economy has been listed among the 'Next 11' giants and termed as 'the miracle of the East' by Goldman Sachs (a leading global investment banking headquartered at New York in the US), recognizing that Bangladesh's economy is destined to overtake Pakistan's in 2020? Fourth: How can today's Bangladesh be definitely showcased for any country of South Asia and beyond this sub-region, just because this nation regardless of some constructive skepticisms has emerged as an example of not only natural disaster management and globally agreed sustainable development goals (SDGs) but also the UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) in many conflict-intensified zones throughout our real world? Fifth: Whether may Bangladesh's unique foreign policy pledge for 'Friendship with all and malice towards none' be well taken for peace-spirited cultural 'soft power' diplomacy by all kinds of powers worldwide, even though Dhaka's such a strategy was criticized in that this foreign aid-dependent country could not afford to antagonize any big power by joining other bloc(s)?

However, it is sad to say that Bangladesh remains a sharply 'divided nation' most ponderously from the viewpoint of varied self-limiting political dogmas on top of dirty politics with political culture gone extremely bad domestically against all of this nation's powerfully and mysteriously attractive potentials internationally. At the same time, this nation has unusually experienced frequent military interventions in its politics of self-destruction. Despite these facts, Bangladesh that is still struggling to become self-reliant and find its feet in a complex world order has already proven itself as a 'creative country' of which it can certainly feel proud. In sum, Bangladesh satisfyingly possesses abilities and qualities of a 'role model' nation not only from historical, strategic, diplomatic, financial, societal and cultural standpoints but also from local, bilateral, trilateral, regional, multilateral and global perspectives.

The Book's Negatives and Positives

Coming across that this book on account of its illusionary title evokes no admiration or inspiration, its makeup is in a mess. While lacking a conceptual underpinning, the research also does not think up any well-hypothesized argument or a focal point method. Visibly, the author poses a wide range of questions throughout the volume, which are not more convincingly answered as its ultimate

purpose. Besides, the publication has multiple oversights on what are actually the cases rather than interpretations of or reactions to them aside from some fanciful speculations without any firm evidence. It is undeniable that he offers a few worthwhile suggestions as well as future directions, but these are haphazardly misplaced in each chapter. In accordance, a complete chapter together with all these concrete proposals might have conveniently been helpful for the audiences, judging candidly that the study does not include any chapter on conclusion. In other words, the writer could not and did not come up with an integrated decision based on all chapters. In addition, he has shown his inclination for some nations or against others, when it has become apparent that the volume deals basically with economics as the basis of cooperation. Discovering that the long list of references (a few of which with erratic style) does not incorporate any work in any language of any South Asian country, it has some too old references published in the 1920s. For grammatical errors, omission of commas as punctuation marks everywhere in the book might be a particular problem for the readers. What is more, many parts of the book's every chapter are in the form of descriptive chronicles. In a nutshell, this volume cannot be ranked as a sedulous research with the highest level of intellectual stimulation.

Granted that some upfront cynicisms do matter for beneficial utilization, this single-authored book deserves a number of credits. Of course, this work brings together several strands of thinking aligned with the current perplexing but heartening situations in South Asia. More categorically, the author does not conventionally contemplate the negative aspects of South Asian historical experience of nation-building. I agree with his views as follows: "To take advantage of the opportunities that are being created is, therefore, a major challenge for the leaders of South Asia. If they can overcome their prejudices and cast off the heavy burdens that history has left on their shoulders they will be able to ensure a better life for their billion-and-a-half people. If they fail, they will only prolong the misery in which more than one-half of this large population lives" (p. 7). In other expressions, by bringing a drastic change in the old mindsets that are built on a difficult collective history as well as without jeopardizing the business partnership deals, the South Asian political leaders would have to make a concerted initiative not only to synchronically develop a regional identity as against strong national interests but also to synergistically integrate the deserving regional economies for getting ripple benefits for their individual nations while carving out a place for their SAARC within the dramatically changing international economic trading system in the commonly projected 'Asian century'. According to him, in search of a humanistic and welfare state-oriented South Asia, a permanent set of institutions in place of the safety nets on temporary basis is a must for the states of this region to protect and provide for the poor. But he infers that albeit the SAARC survived, it did not triumph as envisaged.

My Key Views and Counsels

In line with the writer's responsible advice, I would however like to supplement my personal thoughts and recommendations as follows. The lives of millions of ordinary people around South Asia depend largely on their political leaders' art of giving noble desires. Many of these purblind leaders must be aware of the ironic reality that South Asia (including India) has more than 40 percent of the world's poor, and the income disparities in this region are one of the globe's largest. So, they should make the SAARC 'reliably sensible' and 'symbolically ambitious' for the less fortunate population rather than repeatedly making this regional grouping a rhetorical mechanism, even though South Asian nations pursue different political ideologies. By learning invaluable lessons from other regions of Asia and beyond, the SAARC countries would also have to unitedly (not separately) act now on their own (rather than largely relying on mercy of any external power) to bring about a paradigmatic transformation across this long trivialized region, when providing a visionary leadership in a rightful way that will take their region there where poverty is discerned as a historical feature, peace for every human being is secured as well as success will be a phenomenon of everyday life's dynamic process. By unlocking the political gridlock and creating viable governance system within all nations in the region, they ought to march forward.

In particular, India and Pakistan must be able to imagine that their bilateral strategic quarrels have not only made the SAARC dysfunctional but also made the whole SAARC region vulnerable to stability, peace as well as prosperity. More harshly but honestly, India and Pakistan should not participate in the nuclear arms race competition for each nation's supremacy in regional warfare. Instead, these two ever rivals must vindicate their contention by eagerly involving themselves in fighting the persistent hunger surviving millions of their population. Even supposing, it is hunger as a lack of 'sufficient' food (let alone 'nutritious' food) that fundamentally causes undermalnutrition made up of various health diseases, when, according to a report by the WHO (World Health Organization, 2019), about half of deaths of children under the age of five years actually occur in five countries across Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Southern Asia, and only India and Pakistan from the latter region are dismally listed among these five victims. More specifically, as the findings of a recent survey of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Times of India, 2015) warn, India alone accounts for the highest number (22% percent) of the total under-five children death from malnutrition globally, although it is tagged to a coalition of the world's rising powers.

In essence, a culturally rich South Asia by virtue of its vibrant civil society must try its best in unison to make itself thoroughly familiar with and be adroitly dauntless in an emerging multilateral global order. Irrefutably, the SAARC na-

tions were able to turn themselves into 'emerging economies' of a modern day miracle from 'unbending victims' of a colonial day injustice. With its massive diaspora worldwide, the masses of South Asia are today regarded as global citizens, and they with their marvellously meaningful actions have become part and parcel of an international community. But the industrialization and modernization of SAARC members ought now to be readily fostered to catch up with the newly industrialized economies (NIE) of Asia and elsewhere, by keeping step with the spirit of the 'rise of the rest' in the post-American world. This means that the SAARC should not move away from its original aim of and steadfast commitment in a cherished, appropriate and prepared course to bringing collective good for its people in a more developed South Asian region. Finally, I cannot but mention the following three very relevant and famous quotes as the words of wisdom made by two most influential leaders in the Indian subcontinent independence movement against the hegemonic rule under the British empire, the first two of which are stipulated for India and the third one is generally marked for all SAARC countries: (1) "India could not play an inferior role in the world, and it should either be a superpower or disappear" - Jawaharlal Nehru (People's Daily Online, 2009); (2) "One who serves his neighbor serves all the world" - Mahatma Gandhi (Shodhganga, Undated); and (3) "You must be the change you wish to see in the world" - Mahatma Gandhi (Brainy Quote, Undated).

Conclusion

In the global publishing industry, there exist countless literary works realized by South Asian and non-Asian academics on both problems and prospects of South Asian economic cooperation and integration that are similar to the theme of this book. In contrast, I have for the first time read such a timely volume written in a panoramic fashion, which presents insights into South Asia's synergies with the international configuration, by particularly engaging the defined role of each individual country of this sub-region within Asia in the competitive global economy as well as its sensible response to the era of globalization. Because of its somewhat success in goals, this significant and pioneering work accomplished by a seasoned economist (unlike a traditional economist) who has a broadly diversified outlook on the global issues or affairs will definitely prove an enthralling reference for and contributive addition to wide-ranging involved and interested stakeholders including students, researchers and scholars apart from policymakers, professionals and activists in a number of fields covering South Asian studies, Asian policy studies, interdisciplinary global studies, international relations, political economy, multilateral governance, development cooperation, etc. Unmissably, I express my warm admiration to Bukri's indefatigable undertaking for this production and give my unrestricted approval for his cutting-edge volume.

Last but not the least, I firmly believe that all the publics, institutions and orga-

nizations that are immersed themselves in South Asia generally and Bangladesh particularly from the global milieu in the concurrent millennium would find this rigorously argued as well as completely methodized review piece of my scholarship not only originaive, informative and authoritative but also penetrative, compulsive and constructive. Also, I take a chance to append that such a representative article-length book review with my vociferous comments and unprejudiced reflections thanks to the intellectual freedom of media-imprinted debates will of course be of great worth to its producer (Routledge, and especially its 'Contemporary South Asia Series'), which claims itself to be the world's biggest academic publisher within the areas of humanities and social sciences. It is obviously because this so-called most prestigious press still has many rooms for drastic change, idiosyncratic difference and performance improvement in its forthcoming intellectual endeavors. In a brief and markedly expressed manner, Routledge as well as other global scholarly and research book/journal publishers must come to reasonably understand that quality (not quantity) matters for higher education system in today's knowledge-driven globalizing world.

Bio

Monir Hossain Moni is presently a Research Professor and Head for the Program on Japan & Global Affairs under the Division of Asia & Globalized World for which he is also managing his leadership as Director of the Dhaka-located Bangladesh Asia Institute for Global Studies (BAIGS), a distinctive, state-of-the-art, progressive as well as amazing 'role model' independent think tank beyond national and regional boundaries. He is superbly qualified with his Bachelor and Masters degrees in Political Science conferred by University of Dhaka, a second Masters in Asian & International Relations achieved from Tokyo (Japan)-based Hitotsubashi University and a doctorate in Asian & International Studies earned from Waseda University in Tokyo under the Japanese Government MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) Scholarship program. Dr Moni's widely expanded academic expertise area encompasses global multi-disciplinary, cross-comparative and area-specific studies generally on Asia with his attentiveness on Northeast Asia focusing especially on Japan as a traditionally established power neighbored closely with China as a rapidly emerging power and South Korea as a dynamic middle power in the midst of the inter-relational, intra-regional and multilaterally-cooperative strategic, political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technological aspects of the 21st century's cosmic system of globalization as both change-maker and challenge-poser. However, his research ventures have long and largely dealt with Japan's ever-increasing and all-round sustainable development cooperation South Asia with special reference to Bangladesh. In line with his long research interest and specialty, he has substantially contributed original, masterful and thus universally efficacious pieces to

the frontline journals produced not only by all the globe's higher education largest publishers but also by many promising presses inside and outside Asia during recent years. Professor Moni, who is zestful in research, has long been a regular grantee of overseas funding from renowned foundations for completing a series of innovative research projects. This worldwide traveled individual has extensively publicized his research outcomes among curious audiences at numerous conferences and workshops as well. A winner of several scholarships and fellowships mostly accomplished in Japan as well as a recipient of highly recognized and prestigious prizes named after Japan's two most influential ex-prime ministers (Yasuhiro Nakasone and Masayoshi Ohira), Professor Moni has actually proved himself as one of the world's top-notch Japan-specialist intellectuals worthy of advanced studies on 'Global Asia'. This 'world citizen' attributable to his great venture-backed vigor while having a global mindset with testament of care and conscientiousness in his duties always endeavors to contrive a most-desired value for helping build a 'better planet' (ie, a truly poverty-free, prosperous and peaceful humankind) made up of a sustainable future that kindles stability, change and difference in the real sense.

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