

Pravāda

Vol 1 No 1
November 1991

SL Rupees Ten

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Pravada in contemporary Sinhalese usage has a range of meanings which includes theses, concepts and propositions.

SAARC VI: A 'SUMMIT' SUMMARIZED

By the time diplomatic intelligence gatherers come out with a clear picture of who did what to prevent the Sixth SAARC Summit from taking place in Colombo, Sri Lanka's foreign policy is very likely to indicate a rapid and significant change. Even on the very first day of the aborted Summit, Sri Lanka's relations with India appeared irreparably damaged. Although President Premadasa stuck to diplomatic lingua in his speeches to the three heads of South Asian states who paid simultaneous 'bilateral visits' to Colombo, the pro-government press had no reason to hide the governments's anger and bitterness with India.

For President Premadasa, this non-event of the SAARC Summit could not have happened at a worse time. Convalescing from the impeachment crisis which he overcame barely a month ago, he was hoping for this crowning occasion as the most crucial opening for political damage-control. Now, it is yet another set back. In a political culture where galactic forces are frequently summoned to intervene in political disputes, one may perhaps rush to the conclusion that President Premadasa is passing through a particularly malefic phase.

This is not an entirely benefic period for the SAARC movement either. A gigantic exercise in patient diplomacy, accompanied by a well-grounded collective will among member states, will be needed to re-cement and repair this prematurely frail forum for South Asian regional co-operation. President Maumoon Gayoom of the Maldives, perhaps the only 'non-aligned' member within SAARC, may find that his

two immediate neighbours are in a quarrelling mood again. They may even look beyond the region in search of friends, allies and other forms of co-operation.

Incidentally, only a little thought has so far been given by many of us to changes that have in a way already made South Asian co-operation profoundly problematic. Surely, procedural difficulties and errors in protocol may also have affected the decisions of some Heads of States to stay away from the Summit. Yet, organizational lapses alone do not explain why, for example, India, as the Colombo press has chosen to call it, "sabotaged" the Summit. Sabotage or not, the movement is at cross-roads. The failed summit is its most telling signal.

The idea of South Asian regional co-operation originated in the late seventies and was executed in the mid eighties. Since then, the world in general and South Asia in particular has changed tremendously. The Cold-War world order is no more and the post-Cold War world is still shaping itself. The Soviet Union, which had its military presence in Afghanistan during the formative years of SAARC, has left the borders of South Asia, and it is not the world power it was any more. The Non-Aligned Movement, which provided the general foreign policy framework for all South Asian states, is no longer as effective in world affairs. Today, South Asian countries do not have an enduring policy line of inter-state relations, commonly subscribed to, as they did a few years ago. It seems now that some countries are unto themselves, without much concern about the responses of their neighbours. ➔