1. Introduction: Security in South Asia

Security can mean a number of things. In a broad sense of the word, it is confidence, the absence of fear of any kind. Traditionally, the tendency has been to concentrate on military might and defense. Of late, however, the question of human security has gained significance. In his article on International and Regional security, P.R Chari identifies five sources of security problems in South Asia. Non-military threats like cross-border movements of population, transnational sources of insecurity like arms and drugs smuggling, the impact of globalization on weaker economies, the widespread occurrence of poverty, and the crisis of governance constitute areas related to human security.

The most serious threats to security in the region are militancy and terrorism, on the one hand, and economic disparity and cross border movement of population, on the other. The legacy of the hatred and mistrust generated by the partition of British India into present-day India and Pakistan is
a major political cause for the security problem in South Asia. The Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, the often violent agitation by the MQM in Pakistan, and the insurgency taking place in Kashmir and the north-eastern states of India are some examples of South Asian security problems. The insurgency in Assam by the ULFA and NDFB has also directly affected Bhutan’s security.

The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) began its guerrilla campaign against the Sri Lanka government in 1983 following nationwide riots and clashes between Sinhalese and Tamils. In its cause for establishing an independent Tamil state, the LTTE uses terrorist tactics targeting government and military personnel, the economy and public infrastructure. Originally called the Mohajir Quami Movement, MQM in Pakistan is now split into two factions. Initially, it sought to portray itself as an organization of Mohajirs, Mohajir being an ethno-linguistic term referring to refugees from India who settled in Karachi and other urban centers. Clashes between the state and the Mohajir groups began in 1985, with the MQM indulging in terror tactics against the Punjabi dominated state.

Frustrated with poverty and corruption, the Maoists’ stated aim is to remove the monarchy and establish a Maoist people’s democracy in Nepal. The insurgency has directly affected many Nepali people including the claim on lives.
Nepal's Maoists are alleged to have links with similar activists such as People's War Group and Maoist Coordination Center in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar in India. ULFA and Bodo insurgents in India have infiltrated not only into Bhutan, but reportedly also in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Following counter-insurgency operations launched by the Indian army, they moved across into neighbouring lands and established camps. Their uprising first began as protest against the large influx of Bangladeshi immigrants into Assam. The exploitation of natural resources in Assam without consideration for its own development is another reason cited for the unrest. Their links to terrorist groups include those operating in the Northeast of India and in Myanmar with arms and ammunition being smuggled through the Indo-Myanmar border.

Population growth in the region is unmatched by economic growth and this has led to the displacement of huge populations, which in turn is cause for many conflicts and problems. People seeking political asylum in neighboring countries or even abroad is not a new development. Afghans, Iraqis and Indians have moved toward European countries and Australia. Lately, there has been a rising trend in Nepalis going to Britain, claiming to be fleeing from Maoists or the police in Nepal. Whether their cases are genuine or not, the fact of the matter is that these people are in search of better living
conditions. What can be deduced from these happenings and that of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal is that an increasing number of migrants are using internal problems and security issues to their advantage. For example, those seeking political asylum in Europe receive daily allowances while their cases are reviewed, regardless of whether they are approved or not. The time taken to make a decision is usually adequate for these people to "disappear" into the midst of cities. In the case of the refugee camps in Nepal, all the residents were admitted on the basis of their claim of being Bhutanese refugees while their actual status is to be determined through joint verification by Nepal and Bhutan. In all these instances, corruption cannot be ruled out. Issuance of fake documents and facilitating transport and connections are sources of huge and easy income for many.

Confidence building measures to ease the security problem in South Asia will have to address these problems. Economic prosperity and good governance are the best deterrents for militancy and armed conflict. Confidence building measures to overcome the prejudice, mistrust and hatred generated by past history in the sub-continent particularly through people-to-people contact and mutually beneficial activities like economic cooperation could also help in creating a more conducive atmosphere for promoting greater peace and security in the region.
2. Security Problems in Bhutan

While others in Asia were caught by the grips of colonization, Bhutan remained untouched. It never felt the impact of two world wars and that of the cold war. However, Bhutan is no stranger to political conflicts and power struggle. Before the establishment of the institution of monarchy, it was a field of constant feuds and battle for many of the regional governors within the country. The 17th and early 18th century witnessed several failed attempts at invasion from Tibet, while the 19th century marked the loss of the Assam and Bengal Duars to the British Raj. Political stability came with the election of Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary monarch in 1907, and peace has been the all-encompassing feature in Bhutanese society until the last decade of the 20th century.

Although Bhutan's self-imposed isolation served to preserve its independence and sovereign identity in the past, an isolationist policy can no longer be relied upon in this age of globalization. As a small, landlocked country between two of the largest countries in the world, China in the north and India in the south, Bhutan's perception of security is largely evident in its foreign policy. Its foreign policy, in turn, is an extension of its national interest. It's small size and relatively unknown entity has led to the need to promote its unique national identity and strengthen its status as a sovereign, independent
state. In this respect, Bhutan strives to strike a balance between modernization and its traditional values; it takes upon itself the challenge of achieving economic self-reliance in congruence with a process of sustainable development. As such, Bhutan's foreign policy is inclined towards developing mutually beneficial cooperation and promoting international understanding.

At present, two causes of immediate security concern in Bhutan are the problems of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal and the intrusion of ULFA and NDFB militants inside Bhutanese territory. Some progress has been made in regard to the former issue as the governments of Nepal and Bhutan have agreed upon a verification process that is already underway in the camps in Nepal. The latter, a complex situation requiring urgent resolution, could very well bring on armed conflict between the militants and the Bhutanese people. A third security issue concerns the demarcation of the northern borders with China, which is yet to be finalized.

2.1. Issue of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal

The extent to which Nepalis dominate the neighboring regions of West Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong in India offer an explanation to the fact that all the immigrants in southern Bhutan are ethnic Nepalis. As a migratory race, they have already reduced the indigenous
people of these areas into minorities, and Bhutan perceives herself to be the next target of such phenomena\textsuperscript{6}. As a small country with a small population and attractive features such as free health and education services, employment opportunities and high land to population ratio, Bhutan is no doubt a prime focus for economic migrants.

It was in the early 1900s that the Nepalis came to Bhutan for the first time as contractual laborers recruited by Bhutanese authorities to clear timber in the southern foothills of the country. By the early 1950s their presence in the southern foothills had expanded as timber was extracted from the dense forests. They were allowed to stay on in these areas as tenant farmers. When the Nationality Law was enacted in 1958, the National Assembly of Bhutan granted Bhutanese citizenship to these groups of people. Since then they have been known as \textit{Lhotsampas}, meaning Southern Bhutanese.

The influx of illegal immigrants into Bhutan came at a time when the government was taking up the task of planned socioeconomic development in 1961. While labourers were being imported from Nepal for development activities, Bhutan's porous and open border in conjunction with a relatively weak administration in the south provided easy access into the country for the economic migrants. It was only three decades
later, when a detailed census was carried out, that the government became aware of their illegal presence. The census revealed that a large portion of the immigrant population was illegal. A number of these people, motivated by political ambition, accused the government of "ethnic cleansing" as the policy of strengthening national integration by promoting a national dress and language came in place. The removal of Nepalese as a third language in primary schools added to the insecurities of the southern people. What followed was a series of destructive activities as the dissidents spread negative propaganda against the Bhutanese government. Playing up on the fears of the southern population and stirring up sentiment, violent demonstrations took place. Acts of terrorism gained frequency between 1988 and 1993 in the form of raids, kidnapping, killing, extortion and destruction of infrastructure, such as schools and bridges in the south. An important point that may be noted is that the Bhutanese government deliberately resisted the use of military retaliation in spite of the many acts of terrorism.

The dissidents left Bhutan and initially set up camps across the border in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India, but soon moved to Nepal. Forming several organizations such as the Bhutan People's Party, Bhutan Student's Union, Bhutan National Democratic Party, they have tried to win
international sympathy by amassing ethnic Nepalis from southern Bhutan and elsewhere in the refugee camps established in eastern Nepal, declaring them to be Bhutanese refugees. They have tried to seek help from the Nepalese government and international organizations to put pressure on Bhutan to take back the "Bhutanese refugees" by holding demonstrations in Kathmandu and alleging torture and forceful eviction. By organizing "peace marches" several attempts at mass infiltration into the country have been made.

At present, there are about 100,000 people in the camps in Nepal claiming to be Bhutanese refugees. However, Bhutan is certain that not all people in the camps are true Bhutanese citizens. One of the declared objectives of the dissidents is to change the citizenship laws of Bhutan. In January 1991, the number of people in eastern Nepal claiming to be Bhutanese refugees was 234. Six months later, on the request of the Nepalese government, the UNHCR decided to provide humanitarian assistance to these people. Immediately, the number of people claiming to be Bhutanese refugees multiplied. By the end of the year, the number reached 6,000.

Bhutan-Nepal talks over the issue of the people claiming to be Bhutanese refugees began in December 1991 when the King of Bhutan met Prime Minister Koirala of Nepal in Colombo for the sixth SAARC summit. The king requested the
Prime Minister to stop the ethnic Nepalis claiming to be Bhutanese refugees from coming to Nepal as it would give an opportunity for the poor and destitute of Nepalese ethnicity to seek free food and facilities by claiming to be refugees from Bhutan. The Prime Minister said he could not do this as it would hurt the sentiments of the people in Nepal and would bring political criticism. Soon the UNHCR established camps in Jhapa, Nepal, and the number of people in the camps increased rapidly. By the time the UNHCR and the Nepalese government established a screening system at the Nepal border in July 1993, before allowing people to be registered as refugees, the number of people in the camps had crossed 80,000.

The first ministerial level talks between Bhutan and Nepal on this issue took place in Thimphu in July 1993 between the home ministers of Bhutan and Nepal. A Ministerial Joint Committee was established to resolve the problem of the people in the refugee camps in Jhapa, Nepal. After extended negotiations, joint verification is underway in the first camp selected by the two sides. Once the field verification in the camp is completed, the two sides are expected to harmonize their positions on the four agreed categories of people in the camps so that the process of verification of the people into the four categories can continue.
and the problem can be resolved. The four agreed categories of people in the refugee camps are:

i. Bonafide Bhutanese if they have been evicted forcefully;

ii. Bhutanese who have emigrated;

iii. Non-Bhutanese people; and

iv. Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.

Bhutan has agreed to take full responsibility for any Bhutanese nationality evicted forcefully, while those responsible for this act would be punished according to the country’s law. Bhutan’s position on the people who have emigrated is that this would be dealt with in accordance with the citizenship and immigration laws of Bhutan and Nepal. Non-Bhutanese people would have to return to their respective countries while Bhutanese who have committed crimes would be dealt with in accordance with the laws of Nepal and Bhutan.7

As a small country with a very small population, Bhutan considers the root of the problem to be economic migration of a single ethnic group in large numbers over the years from neighboring areas into its territory which has open, porous borders and holds out alternate incentives to a large number of people feeling the pressure of economic hardship and population explosion.
2.2. The ULFA-Bodo Problem

Bhutan's security is greatly affected by the presence of armed militants who have illegally established camps in the dense jungles of southeastern Bhutan. Not only is this creating problem for commercial activities of the business sector and affecting the implementation of development programmes, but the friendly relations between the government of India and Bhutan are also facing potential threat. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) militants are fighting for the independence of Assam while the National Democratic Front of Bodos (NDFB) want an independent state of Bodoland carved out of Assam. After the Indian army launched operations against the ULFA militants in 1990-91, they took advantage of the 266-kilometer porous, open Assam-Bhutan border and infiltrated into the dense jungles in Bhutan.

It was only in the mid-1990s that the government became aware of the extent to which the militants had infiltrated into the country. For them, neighbouring Bhutan with its thick forests and rugged terrain is an ideal place to use as a hideout while carrying out military training. As soon as the government learnt about the illicit occupation of these militants, the gravity of the situation was made known to the public. The issue has been deliberated on extensively in Bhutan's National Assembly. A three-point resolution was
passed by the 77th session of the National Assembly in 1999 to make the militants leave Bhutan peacefully. Steps would be taken to stop rations and supplies from reaching the militants’ camps; any Bhutanese or Indian national helping these militants inside Bhutanese territory would be prosecuted under the National Security Act; and the government would hold talks with the leaders of the militants to find a peaceful solution. It is important to stress on a peaceful resolution because, although the militants are fighting against the Indian government, they are still citizens of India, and to inflict any harm upon them would not be a wise move. India is Bhutan’s closest neighbor and also the biggest development partner. As far as possible, it is crucial that Indo-Bhutan relations are not affected.

Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly evident that Bhutan may have to resort to military action to make the militants leave its territory. In the event of an armed conflict with the militants, there is every possibility that relatives and supporters of the militants in Assam would retaliate against the Bhutanese. There have already been some incidences of attack on Bhutanese civilians on Indian soil. Assam has a population of about 25 million people; for Bhutan, even if a section of their population were genuine supporters of the ULFA and NDFB, it would amount to a large number of people. Trade routes to at least twelve of the twenty districts of Bhutan pass through Indian territory in Assam. Beside
affecting the socioeconomic development of the whole country, the people in these twelve districts would be directly affected and face severe consequences. And the problem does not end here. Cooperation between the militants and the dissidents of southern Bhutan is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. If this be the case, then the threat to Bhutan's security and sovereignty is immediately heightened.

Talks with the militants have revealed their intention of a prolonged and continued intrusion on Bhutanese soil. They are not ready to move out until their goals of an independent Assam and Bodoland are fulfilled. The latest dialogue between the Bhutanese delegation led by the Home Minister and the leaders of the militants produced some results but there are doubts whether it would actually lead to a peaceful solution. The ULFA agreed to remove four out of their nine camps in Bhutan by December 2001 and reduce the number of their cadres in the remaining camps. This was to be followed with further talks with the Bhutan government to find a solution to the problem of the remaining camps. This was a positive development towards finding a peaceful solution. However, the unreliable manner in which the ULFA dealt with the past proposals during talks with the Bhutanese government is an indication that nothing should be taken for granted. This sentiment among the Bhutanese people was reflected in the 79th session of the National Assembly in July 2001. The
Assembly decided that the government should continue to enforce the embargo on rations and supplies to the camps of the militants and to prosecute any person found assisting them. The Royal government should honor the agreement reached with the ULFA during the recent talks with them. However, if they refuse to reduce the number of camps and cadres, as agreed by them, then appropriate military action would have to be taken to remove the militants from Bhutanese territory as soon as possible.

2.3. *Bhutan-China Border Issue*

The international border Bhutan has with China in northwest, north and northeast is not demarcated. This is an issue of security concern to the Bhutanese. The concerns of the people whose livelihood depends on their yak herds grazing in their traditional pastures near the northern borders have been raised in the National Assembly. Reports of Tibetans and Chinese people crossing into Bhutan every year have been confirmed. Illegally, they collect medicinal plants and graze their yaks on Bhutanese pastureland. There is the need to increase patrolling along the borders. Roads and bridges in the area have to be improved to facilitate patrolling in the winter months. Grazing routes need proper maintenance so that Bhutanese herders may be encouraged to graze their yaks on pastures in border areas.
Bhutan and China have held fourteen rounds of border talks since 1984. In 1998, at the 12th round of border talks held in Beijing, an interim agreement on maintaining peace and tranquility along the Sino-Bhutanese border was signed. The interim agreement provides for "peaceful co-existence" between the two countries based on five principles. The principles are mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. An important provision of the agreement is that it ensures the maintenance of peace along the border until the issue is finally resolved. At present, there are still three disputed areas along the northern boundary and the demarcation of the northern border in the eastern region still needs to be finalised.

3. **Confidence Building Measures**

In many parts of the world, measures to reduce tensions or resolve disputes have been taking place for a long time. However, it was only with the advent of the Cold War that the implementation of such measures came to be termed as confidence building measures (CBMs). Whether they are unilateral, bilateral or multilateral in content, military or non-military in nature, CBMs are meant to enhance mutual understanding by reducing suspicion. In South Asia, military
CBMs may have dominated the scene as a consequence of Indo-Pak hostilities and nuclear tests. Nevertheless, non-military CBMs between India and smaller nations in the region do exist. The creation of SAARC can be seen as a CBM in a multilateral form. The extent to which such measures can be implemented successfully depends largely on the ability of the leaders and the political will of the states. An atmosphere of mutual trust needs to be created by any means possible.

Confidence building measures with regard to Bhutan brings to mind its relations with India, Nepal, China and Bangladesh. This can be attributed to several factors. One is its small size and strategic location between India and China. It must co-exist with these two large neighbors as a buffer state and uphold its own identity in the face of globalization. Second is the security threats posed by the ULFA-Bodo militants and the southern Bhutanese dissidents who have been using the problem of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal to generate international pressure against Bhutan to achieve their political goals. Although Bhutan enjoys a close and friendly relationship with India, it cannot ignore the threat posed to both countries by insurgents fighting against the Indian government from Bhutanese territory. The case of the southern dissidents has brought to light the fact that a deep-rooted problem of population movement and displacement
continues to take place in the South Asian region. It also highlights the absence of mutual trust and confidence between Bhutan and Nepal on the refugee issue. Relations with Bangladesh must also be considered given the fact that areas of cooperation between the two countries are growing.

It is these issues that have to be kept in mind when it comes to confidence building measures. The region will have to focus on removing the prejudices of past history and tapping the inherent desire of the people of South Asia to promote their close ties of culture and common heritage as the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations in the world.

3.1. Relations with India

India continues to be Bhutan’s closest friend and neighbor. Bhutan’s relations with post-independence India have been remarkable. Nehru’s visit to Bhutan in 1958 has been the foundation of Indo-Bhutan relationship as it stands today. During his visit to Bhutan, Nehru ruled out any pressure on Bhutan that might impair its independent status. Later in 1959, he stated in the Lok Sabha that Bhutan’s territorial integrity and frontiers were the responsibility of the Indian government. The rationale of this statement is ingrained in the natural formation of the Himalayas placing Bhutan as a buffer between India and China. An outcome of the India-China war
in 1962 was the modernization of the Royal Bhutanese Army with training provided by the Indian Military Training Team or IMTRAT\textsuperscript{11} in 1963.

Nehru's visit also sparked dialogue for planned socio-economic development that commenced a few years later with Bhutan emerging from centuries of its self-imposed isolation. The construction of the first motor roads was only the beginning of India's generous assistance to Bhutan's growth. Since the inception of its five-year plan in 1961, Bhutan's growing infrastructure of schools, hospitals and motor roads has been the outcome of India's assistance to Bhutan's development process as its largest donor. India supported Bhutan in its admission to the United Nations in 1971 by sponsoring its membership. Over the years Indo-Bhutan friendship has grown from strength to strength and provides a model of friendship and cooperation between a small, landlocked country and a large, strong neighbouring state.

India continues to be Bhutan's largest donor with aid facilitating in every area. Other donors, both bilateral and multilateral, have also been extending assistance to Bhutan in more recent years. Bhutan is largely dependent on India for the security of its economy since, as a landlocked country, its trade routes pass through India. While basic essential
commodities such as salt and oil are brought in, hydro energy is exported to some Indian states that are dependent on this source. It is in this area that Bhutan can offer some relief to India’s growing need for electricity while contributing to its own goal of economic self-reliance.

3.2. Relations with China

With China’s forceful occupation of Bhutanese enclaves in 1958, Bhutan withdrew its representative in Lhasa\(^2\) and its officer in western Tibet. It also closed its border with China in 1960 with the influx of Tibetan refugees and its potential to worsen Sino-Bhutan relations\(^3\). Other than some multilateral relations and expression of similar views on matters of mutual concern in the international fora, Bhutan has no formal diplomatic ties with China. It abstains from issuing any official opinion with regard to the Tibetan government in exile although India is host to it. Bilateral talks with China are still ongoing over the border demarcation in the north of Bhutan. An outcome of these talks was the interim agreement on maintaining peace and tranquility along the Sino-Bhutanese border. This agreement was signed in 1998 in Beijing. It may not be wrong to say that Bhutan’s relations with China are correct and cordial, given the fact that there are some interactions in the multilateral fora like the United Nations, and official contact takes place during the boundary negotiations.
even though they have no formal diplomatic ties and their international boundary is yet to be demarcated.

3.3. Relations with Nepal

Nepal and Bhutan have a shared history as two kingdoms in the Himalayas. They formed a buffer between India and China after the latter’s occupation of Tibet. Nepal is a pilgrimage destination for many Bhutanese as it has many sacred Buddhist sites, the most notable being the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Lumbini. The beginning of the 20th century saw the settlement of Nepalis as tenant farmers in southern Bhutan. They brought with them their culture and religion, and formed part of present-day Bhutan’s ethnic makeup. Unfortunately, the overwhelming presence of illegal immigrants, uncovered by a delayed census, contributed to the undesirable situation in southern Bhutan. Although the census pointed to a fault on the part of the illegal immigrants, it also had its effect on many genuine Bhutanese citizens of Nepali origin. Instigated as well as terrorized by parties with vested interests, many of these people left Bhutan for the camps in Nepal. The problem in this case has risen from the fact that an incredible number of people are now claiming to be Bhutanese refugees, even though many of them may not have stepped foot on Bhutanese soil.
It is this issue of the people in refugee camps in Nepal that overrides bilateral relations between Bhutan and Nepal. The many rounds of talks over this issue, and the verification process that has finally been agreed upon and is underway, has actually been the maximum area of official interaction between the two Himalayan kingdoms.

3.4. Relations with Bangladesh

Bhutan established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in 1973. This was significant for both countries in strengthening their status as sovereign, independent nations. After India, Bhutan was the first to have recognised Bangladesh, and the latter was the second country with which Bhutan established diplomatic relations. Resident relations were established in 1980 with Bangladesh being the only other country besides India to have a full-fledged resident Mission in Bhutan.

In the economic sphere, Bhutan has been able to diversify its trade relations after it signed a bilateral Trade Agreement with Bangladesh in September 1980. As the largest destination for Bhutan's third country exports, Bangladesh provides market for an average US$ 5 million worth of Bhutanese fruits and primary products annually. The trade agreement between the two countries allows
concessions on duties on a range of products that have been negotiated. All products from Bangladesh are granted duty free access in Bhutan, while Bhutanese exports are imposed 50% of normal duty in Bangladesh. As an alternative source to meet the growing demand for manufactured goods, Bhutan’s major imports from Bangladesh include food items, medicine, household utensils, ready-made garments, and automobile and machine parts. In return, major exports to Bangladesh include fruits such as apples and oranges. Over the years, the trade balance has been in Bhutan’s favour. This trade imbalance may have been a cause of some concern for Bangladesh. However, this favourable trade balance for Bhutan can be seen as a form of assistance from a bigger nation like Bangladesh to a small country like Bhutan.

A bilateral air services agreement enables Druk Air to operate flights to Dhaka and Bangkok. Bangladesh has granted the airline Fifth Freedom Rights and 50% concessions on handling charges. Bhutan’s human resource development has also benefited, especially in medicine, from the technical cooperation agreement. From 1980 to 1994, a number of scholarships were offered to Bhutanese students in areas of medicine, agriculture, and engineering in Bangladesh institutions.
4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering the immediate security threats to Bhutan, confidence-building measures must necessarily address concerns over the militants and the southern Bhutanese dissidents. This means that dialogue with India and Nepal is of paramount importance. The presence of the ULFA and NDFB militants inside Bhutan is a spillover of India's insurgency problem in its northeast region. The presence of these militants is posing a very serious problem to Bhutan and the Bhutanese government has been doing everything possible to make the militants leave its territory. The situation may even lead to armed conflict.

However, suspicions and misunderstanding among some Indians that Bhutan may not be doing enough to remove the militants is not totally absent. Although there is trust and confidence at the government level, the same cannot be said for all sections of people in India and Bhutan over this issue. Still, in light of the fact that Bhutan is spending a huge amount of resources to establish army camps and outposts in the militant affected areas, despite limited resources, and that it has deployed troops along the Bhutan-Assam border, such misconceptions are hopefully proved wrong. After all, Bhutan is being seriously affected by this problem, both in terms of its security, and its development activities that are so crucial for its survival.
Aside from the suspicions of some people on both sides about the nature of the militants' presence on Bhutanese soil, a sense of fear and insecurity is another element that needs to be addressed. For those people living close to areas where the militants have established their camps, daily life is not free of constant tension. The borders are not secure and there is fear of senseless attack on innocent lives\textsuperscript{16}. Regardless of whether such attacks are carried out by the militants, ultimately they are citizens of India\textsuperscript{17}. This means that mutual confidence is urgently required along the border amongst people who actually live within the areas that are directly affected, and amongst those who have to travel through Assam.

In this regard, His Majesty the King has taken the initiative of personally visiting the affected areas to be with the Bhutanese people in such times of difficulty. While the people have received the personal assurance of the King that the government is doing everything possible to resolve the problem, it has also been made clear that armed conflict is a possibility and that many hardships would follow. Such frank discussion is a step towards building confidence as it lets people know what to expect. In knowing what to expect, people are at least able to prepare themselves psychologically and have some confidence that they will not be taken off-guard by some destructive force.
Along the borders, security has to be tightened so that people do not feel too threatened by possibilities of militant attacks. Even if there can be no guarantee that harm is totally preventable, visible efforts to strengthen security would definitely make people feel safer. From the Bhutanese side, resistance from helping the militants in any way must be firmly upheld. Meanwhile, the cooperation between Bhutanese and Assamese officials and people must not only continue, but also strengthen.

With regard to the problem of the southern Bhutanese dissidents, a grave misconception that needs to be addressed within the country is the interpretation of the term *Lhotsampa* to be synonymous with the term *Ngolop*. The former is a Bhutanese term used for people in southern Bhutan who are mostly of Nepali origin; its literal meaning is “southerner.” The latter is another Bhutanese term, used for any individual acting against the state and people; its literal meaning is “traitor.” The misunderstanding amongst some sections of people probably arose because the trouble in the south involved just the *Lhotsampas*, and the term *Ngolop* has been used liberally since then. The significance of this is in its psychological implications. If the error is allowed to persist, very soon hostility towards all southern Bhutanese will occur. In the minds of the people, the fact that someone is from the south
will mean that he or she is a traitor. There is then the danger of the perceived threat to Nepali ethnicity manifesting into real threat. At another level, if the international media were to use these two terms interchangeably, then it would indeed harbour a negative image of Bhutan.

At the bilateral level, much can be done to improve relations with Nepal. Although both countries have always been friendly towards each other, there is lack of close cooperation. The problem of the people in the refugee camps has not helped matters. In fact, it has developed a strain on both sides. This, however, does not mean that all hope is lost. There is still much room for establishing good relations. With the verification process underway, it is now time to take steps towards building mutual trust and confidence. Bhutan and Nepal must look towards commonalities that they share as two countries in the Himalayas. Tapping the potentials of cooperation after exploring common features could go a long way in mutual expression of solidarity and goodwill.

Seeing that a major factor contributing to the unrest stems from lack of economic opportunities, Bhutan and Nepal could look toward sharing ideas on development methodology. A joint effort on raising awareness on economic disparity amongst sections of people and efforts to bridge these gaps
may be applicable. Also, as both countries have the majority of their people living as farmers engaged in agriculture, strategies to improve agricultural production could be launched. They could also look towards developing trade relations. At present, Bhutan imports most major essentials from India, and its exports are primarily to Bangladesh and India. Both Nepal and Bhutan could take the opportunity to expand their market in the region by studying which products are feasible for trade between them, and then give it a trial run so that trade relations may be built upon. If official visits were to gain frequency, there would definitely be more interactions between the two governments. Projects that are mutually beneficial could be embarked upon. The exchange visit of parliamentarians is an option that could be considered while the exchange of cultural troupes is another.

Environmental protection has been the buzz for quite some time now. Bhutan’s status in this respect is highly commended by the international community. Similarly, Nepal’s environment is also an issue of great interest to the international community. However, Nepal might have more to offer in terms of related expertise and facilities. Perhaps it is possible to look further into this area for common elements that can be addressed through sharing experiences and lessons. In the same breath, the two could also join hands in
tourism. Situated in the Himalayas, the prospects of mountaineering and eco-tourism can be made more appealing through joint efforts. At present, Bhutan is very cautious about exploring new trekking routes and the like. Nepal may be able to extend cooperation in identifying such prospects.

As a predominantly Buddhist country, Bhutan sees many of its people going to India and Nepal on pilgrimage. The many holy sites for Buddhists include Bodhgaya in India and Lumbini in Nepal. Besides being hosts to such sacred places, these two countries also witness many Buddhist initiatives like mass sermons and pujas. Bhutanese pilgrims may be encouraged to visit these places so that appreciation for culture and history of another country is increased. This may contribute towards developing a sense of affinity as people realize that they share a common heritage even though they live in different countries. Sports is known to bring a wide range of people together, be it in the international context or otherwise. Promoting sports activities in each other’s countries by hosting tournaments and sending participants can be another way of increasing people-to-people contact. At the same time, there could develop an increased awareness of each other’s country through friendship programs and exchanges.
The close cooperation, understanding and trust between Bhutan and India could provide an example of CBMs to promote trust and confidence between neighboring countries that will transcend any potential problem issues like the presence of ULFA and NDFB insurgents in Bhutan. It is an example of conflict prevention at the governmental level owing to age-old ties of friendship and trust that can weather such disturbances. One can also look at the good relations that Bangladesh and Bhutan enjoy. There are no outstanding issues between the two nations. On the contrary, cooperation exists right from the governmental level to personal business interactions. Bhutan’s favourable outlook on Bangladesh is equally reciprocated.

We must not wait for a problem to manifest before we embark upon confidence building measures. It is better that we establish good relations ahead of time so that there is confidence among all people in each other’s good intentions. In the event that a conflict breaks out, there is at least a basic principle of goodwill that can be built upon in an effort to resolve disputes. The thrust of all CBMs should be to promote mutual trust and goodwill between governments and citizens of our South Asian countries by building on the shared desire for peace and prosperity to prevail in our region.
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### Endnotes


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6 Ibid.

7 The Home Minister’s briefing on the verification process at the 78th session of the National Assembly of Bhutan, June 2001.

8 Briefing by the Foreign Minister to the 77th session of the National Assembly, June 1999.

9 Chari, P.R. 1999. CBMs in Post Cold War South Asia, New Delhi: IPCS, India.

10 India’s Lower House of Parliament.


12 Capital of Tibet.

13 Ura, Karma, Walking with the Giants, P. 35


15 Ibid.

16 In attacks on December 20 & 21, 2000, the BLT (Bodo Liberation Tigers) left 15 Bhutanese dead and 19 injured in Assam.

17 As expressed by the people’s representatives in the 79th session of the National Assembly, 2001.