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Confidence Building and Security Cooperation in South Asia: The Role of Civil Society

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1. Introduction
It is indeed an irony that the discipline and discourse of International Relations has remained trapped within the languages and discourse of insecurity and war. The periodization that accompanied the formal onset of the discipline since the end of the Second World War has been in terms of hot wars, cold war or post-cold war, war remaining an important signifier. Even the discipline’s emergence as a formal field of study was marked by the end of a major war. Subsequent attempts at peace building, security studies, confidence building not only had their genesis within a paradigm of insecurity, but were built on the premises of insecurity, mistrust and crisis or lack of confidence.

In other words, they were immersed in the languages of the ‘enemy’, ‘opponent’ or ‘otherness’, somehow the language of the politics of peace and accommodation were either lost or silenced. It is further interesting that states, which are often regarded as the creators or sources of insecurity, are being looked upon as sources of security and confidence building.
The Lahore Declaration, following a meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, in February 1999, i.e., nine months after the acquisition of nuclear status by the two countries, agreed to a series of security and confidence building measures. What is further notable was the agreement between the two leaders that their newly explicit nuclear status had imposed additional responsibilities upon them so there was an urgent need to intensify their bilateral security dialogue and elevate the talks to the foreign minister level. Yet within a span of one year Kargil was fought as one of the most intensely fought wars between India and Pakistan!

It is submitted here that there exist very strong vested groups and interests within the state, in whose interest it is to perpetuate conflict. Besides, South Asia, despite more than fifty years of decolonization, has failed to decolonize itself from the hangovers of Partition and decolonization. Structurally and conceptually, the post-colonial states of the region have failed to infuse confidence and security not only within but also without. South Asia thus, despite its claim of being a civilization on its own, remains fragmented and appropriated by the nation. To explicate and make this point, I would digress a little and raise certain issues and questions that I consider integral to the issues of security, confidence building and civil society, which the paper will discuss later.
Did the common people, who ultimately constitute the core and base of civil society, ever lose confidence and trust in each other as human beings, or was it politics of markers and identity construction that made them do so? The findings of a project on Partition memories and violence jointly carried out by the Center for Alternatives (CA), Dhaka, the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, and Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, are quite revealing in this context. Psychologist Ashis Nandy of CSDS points out that Partition had frozen public consciousness for decades. It bothered the consciousness of people so they chose silence, which has a language of its own. Though Partition was violent, yet through the narratives of over 150 people in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan it has been found that there were self-imposed restraints to violence. Partition is not seen by the victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence as simply a conflict between the Hindus and Muslims but between landlord and tenant, between business rivals in the same community who had old scores to settle and took advantage of the chaos. There is a refusal on the part of the Hindu respondents to blame the carnage as a making of the Muslims, and vice-versa. Those are referred to as a time of aberration when humanity and sanity lost and absolute evil took over. But it was also found that neighbours protected and gave shelter to each other.
In Noakhali, where one of the worst partition violence took place, the Hindu victims pointed out they were saved by the Moulvi Saheb (Muslim religious preacher) of the village, though the riots were instigated in the name of religion. The respondents, both Hindus and Muslims, blamed the politics of Jinnah and Nehru for the bloodshed and persistently asked why Gandhi's path of non-violence could not be adopted. Memories indeed play a very important role in the construction of a nation's history, yet historians and social science research have done little justice to memories. Too much emphasis is given on negative memories. In South Asia we have never attempted to explore the memories that speak of trust and confidence. Instead the history given down to us for generations is one of Hindu-Muslim divide, violence, mistrust and antagonisms.

South Asia began its journey towards modern statehood through the politics of divides and identity formations, which were constructed by the colonial powers and later on consolidated by the nationalist leaders. The nationalist leaders later on became part of the state or government, the divide thus continued as this was considered by them to be the most effective way of nation and state construction. This was bound to have its resonance in inter-state relations in the region. Though no precise estimates are available but according to
one source the partition of 1947, resulted in a flow of no less
than 20 million people in both directions.⁶

The nationalist government of Sri Lanka introduced the
18 of 1948, all Indian Tamils, even those born or domiciled in
Sri Lanka, were denied Sri Lankan citizenship. By the Ceylon
(Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act, No. 48 of 1949, the
issue of franchise was tied to citizenship. The Indian Tamils
had voted in 1931, 1936 and 1947, but by 1949 i.e., after the
independence of Sri Lanka, they became stateless and
voteless people.⁷ The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 saw the
creation of about 10 million refugees who took refuge in India
from the then East Pakistan. The state and nation building
process, as pointed out earlier, only strengthened the politics
of divide and refugee formation. The political elite of South
Asia thus failed to evolve a state system of rooting its own
population within a secured system. The ideas of nation and
citizenship, two basic components of state, remained highly
hegemonic and gendered.⁸

The divides were not confined within state boundaries.
The unresolved problems of colonialism, i.e., division or
acquisition of territories, resources, human population, vitiated
the security environment of the region. Besides, the
international environment too was non-conducive to peace. The cold war divide and polarization affected South Asia with all its negativity and the states found themselves in opposition to each other. The nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan in May 1998 were only an extension of the above. It is important to note that the divides and oppositions have been created and sustained in the name of national security, which in other words implies state security. But paradoxically enough the more military security arsenal the states have built up, the more insecure their populations have become in terms of human security. In terms of Human Development Indicators (HDI) of the year 2000, the two nuclear states of South Asia, India and Pakistan, rank 115th and 127th respectively out of a total of 162 states. The tragic events of September 11 revealed to the world the fallacy and myth behind the capacity of military or more specifically nuclear power to provide security to the society or state.

There is indeed an urgent need to rethink the concept of security in terms of its nature as well as threats to it. States no longer constitute the major or sole actors in politics and security. The world needs a more democratic and sustainable system of peace and security, which indeed can be built upon the enduring bases of trust and confidence. It is submitted here that civil society initiatives provide us with a stable anchor
to build confidence and trust within and among communities in South Asia, which may constitute the building blocs of peace and security in the region. South Asia provides its people with tremendous opportunities for cooperation and adoption of confidence building measures at the civil society level, because of the common deprivations that are often accentuated due to state policies. The deprivations may be summed up under the rubric of human security. The concepts of security, civil society and confidence building, however, have their own dynamics and problematics that need to be accounted for. It is to an examination of these that the paper now turns.

2. **Confidence Building Measures, Security and Civil Society**

Confidence building measures (CBMs) are steps, policies, processes designed to defuse possible tensions between different communities in order to break down the barriers that divide them. The objective is to enable those concerned to engage in dialogue, to learn and to work together so as to share experiences and promote mutual knowledge and understanding and to avoid war arising out of miscalculations or accidents. CBMs have to be realistic and pragmatic in its approach and ideals. It needs to be recognized that it is not possible to strive for uniformity in security
perceptions due to differences and the uniqueness of the states concerned. States should strive for mutual understanding and respect for different perceptions and perspectives and avoid mutual suspicion. This can be attained through sustained cooperation, consultation and communications. Theorists and scholars of international security have long emphasized the deadly consequences of non-communication between adversaries through the various models of game theory.

CBMs are generally associated with the cold war period when, following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the need was felt to develop institutionalized channels of communications between the two super powers so that accidental or miscalculated warfare did not take place. The term, however, entered the literature of International Relations following the Helsinki Final Act, 1975. Three basic objectives were ascribed to it: (a) eliminate the causes of tension (b) promote confidence, stability and security, and (c) reduce the danger of accidental armed conflict. The institutionalization and practice of CBMs, though not a panacea to all the woes and problems, indeed are a positive development in international politics. On the one hand, CBMs help to build up a security regime as it calls upon the states concerned to undertake sustained communications, employ constraints,
verifications, transparency and also some form of monitoring and evaluation of their successes and failures. In any security discourse failures serve as learning experiences and lessons for the future, upon which future bases of cooperative behaviour can be built. On the other and which I consider to be the more enduring contribution of CBMs, these emphasize upon the psychological dimension of politics, security and war.

As pointed out earlier, in the South Asian context the memories of the state formation process were too traumatic, and the subsequent state policies both within and without only reified the traumas. For the South Asian elite, the ‘imagined' nation also required an ‘enemy’ or ‘other’ to build itself upon. The ‘otherness’ of the ‘other’, however, remained unquestioned. The CBMs in a way demonstrated the limitations inherent in this construction, as increased communications revealed not only the differences but also, and more importantly, the similarities and urge for peace among communities. In the process the ‘otherness’ is bound to be interrogated at one point or another.

The concept however has its critics. It has been viewed as too rhetorical rather than substantive. The argument has an element of truth in it, as one examines the objectives of the Helsinki Declaration. It is indeed not possible to eliminate the causes of tension. One can only work towards their reduction
and management. Besides, politics like life is an ongoing process, unpredictability is one of its basic characteristics. The causes and sources of tension, as the recent US crusade against ‘terrorism’ reveals, remain unpredictable. So the causes or sources of tension simply cannot be eliminated. CBMs also tend to work in favour of the status quo. This at times might be unacceptable or even unjust to a state that had been wronged or the prevailing status quo itself might be an unjust one.

It is argued here that under such circumstances CBMs cannot work, for confidence cannot be infused through the politics of hegemony. It requires the language of accommodation and respect, not control and domination. Critics also question the applicability of the concept in the South Asian context pointing to its western and cold war origins. This however is a faulty notion, it needs to be emphasized that the terminology might be a western one but the practice of CBMs between and within communities' predates the dawn of modern state. Humans and communities have always been dialoguing and communicating with one other, and through various gestures of self-imposed constraints have worked out the rules of the game. The above argument also cannot be carried too far for dismissing the applicability of CBMs, as the state system within South Asia
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itself is a western construct; the ground realities may be different but the state apparatuses remain the same. More importantly, the nuclearization of South Asia has made CBMs more pertinent than ever before for the region.

It is submitted here that while a critical examination of the notion indeed is a healthy development and is required for the development of the concept itself, from the South Asian standpoint it is more important to ask, CBMs for what and for whom. The questions have their relevance for the West as well, but given the socio-economic conditions of the people of South Asia, these merit a greater consideration. The notion of confidence building, as it evolved in the realm of politics, was much too tied to the state and state security. In other words the cooperative measures envisaged are primarily military in nature. The West perhaps having attained a certain standard of living for its people could perceive major threats to security emanating from military sources alone. These however cannot be the parameters of security for the developing countries. Needless to say, the above is not only a myopic view of security but is also a major cause of insecurity around the world. It divided the world into 'us' versus 'them' and then attempted to infuse trust and confidence between the 'us' and 'them' through instituting CBMs. The historical, political, societal and economic contexts of South Asia are much too
different to follow and adopt a state-centric military security oriented CBM approach for the region. In order to build a security system for South Asia there is a need to redefine and rethink security as well as the CBM approach to be adopted.

The idea of security came under critical examination following the demise of the cold war. While military security remained an essential component of security, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its report of 1994 stated: The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly, as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people ... Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives. For many of them security symbolised protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards.¹⁴

The concept of human security focused on four essential components: (a) Human security is viewed as a universal concern with relevance for the rich and poor. Unemployment, drugs, crime, pollution are common problems, though their intensity may differ from one region to another. (b) The
components of human security are interdependent. Famine, disease, pollution, drug trafficking, terrorism, ethnic disputes and social disintegration are no longer isolated events, their rupture in one part affects another. (c) It is easier to ensure human security through early prevention than later intervention. It is less costly to meet these threats upstream than downstream. (d) Human security is people-centric. It is concerned with the autonomy, freedom and accesses of people to opportunities to make their choices. It is an integrative concept based on the interdependence and solidarity of people, rather than divisions. Human security is different from human development. The latter is a process of widening the range of people’s choices, while human security envisions creating an environment where these choices can be made freely and safely.\textsuperscript{15}

The states of South Asia have come to ‘accept’ the above conception of security at the policy level. But it needs to be emphasized that this acceptance is more a consequence of donor pressure than an actual appreciation and realization of the above by the South Asian leadership. The nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan, the latter’s reversion to military dictatorship, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism under the garb of Hindu nationalism in India, the militarization and violence-prone politics in Bangladesh with shrinking spaces for
the ethnic and religious minorities point to the militarization instead of democratization of the region. Human security is bound to be a major casualty under such a scenario. Undeniably, the US attacks on Afghanistan have given vent to the forces of militarization in the region. Yet a dispassionate analysis of the situation would suggest that CBMs between the West and the Muslim communities would have been a better and enduring option. The US attacks and bombings in Afghanistan leading to the deaths of thousands of innocent civilian population might turn out to be counter-productive. In this context the Pakistan President, despite being supportive of the US efforts, has quite rightly warned that the war in Afghanistan could become a “quagmire” for the US and its allies.

While terrorism, a major threat to human security, needs to be condemned and eliminated in all its forms, one needs to probe into the causes of terrorism as well. It is argued here, trust and cooperation attained through participatory CBM methods, involving the state as well as society, can be the best defense against terrorism. It cannot be rooted out through creating military defenses and divides between and among communities. The need for CBMs with an emphasis on human security and through the active participation of the civil society is more than an ideal today. The salvation of humanity from
conflicts, divides and terrorism requires the above to be turned into a reality.

South Asia has a long history of civil society movements. It began with the nationalist struggles for freedom and independence. Civil Society is often regarded as the nonprofit sectors or voluntary associations that act as checks to the excesses of the government. It has emerged as a primary locus for the expansion and strengthening of participatory democracy. With the widening of the concept of security and greater awareness among people about their rights, partly due to the forces of globalization and also the ongoing activities and demands of civil society, the state is often found unable to deliver the services to the people.

The non-governmental organizations (NGO) and agencies have stepped in to fill up this gap in quite a forceful way. The NGOs and non-governmental agencies today are regarded as important and crucial harbingers of change. Social movements, like environmental groups, human rights groups, etc are reflections of the normative values of the people and are important components of civil society, which is generally regarded as, "a collective noun, the sum of all the organizations we feel are responsible for bringing civility closer to home." 

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Civil Society has often been regarded as a counter hegemonic force to the state. It is the arena that provides the space for dissent, for interrogation and above all for reformulation of the state apparatus of governance. Arguably this arena should be independent of the state and in principle be accessible to all citizens for free engagement, dialogue and dissent. In other words, civil society ought to be democratic and participatory in nature. In majoritarian democracy civil society organizations and movements have helped to give voice to the minorities, by rallying behind their concerns and woes, which might be quite different from the majority community and often remain silenced due to the tyranny of the majority.

The existence of strong democratic values and system are often regarded as pre-requisites for civil society as Michael Walzer argues, "only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society." Critics have argued that due to the absence of stable democracies in South Asia there is no civil society in the region. It has been suggested that lack of political culture, and religious extremism and militancy, state terrorism, the negative role of the media, gap between the rulers and the ruled, and economic fragility constitute the main hurdles to a viable civil society in South Asia. A democratic system indeed provides the space for a healthy and creative
dissenting civil society to emerge and function effectively, but the lack of democracy does not rule out the existence of civil society. In fact, the Bangladesh experience during the Ershad regime demonstrates the resilience of civil society movements in the face of threats to the democratic ideals and system so cherished by the people. Ershad had to relinquish power in the face of a united civil society movement against him. In other words, civil society movements can lead to the establishment of democratic values and systems. The example may be cited in case of Nepal as well where, despite the monarchy, substantial powers have been devolved and a democratic apparatus functions due to civil society pressures and movements.

The same is true for other regions as well. In the East European context civil society played the most crucial role for the transition from authoritarianism to democracy following the demise of the cold war. Just to make the point, in case of Hungary civil society has been referred to as "a bold, radical but non-revolutionary political concept ... helping citizens make the psychological transformation from an authoritarian or developmental state to a democratic, market-based society."

Democracy therefore may be regarded as an enabling or facilitating factor, not a pre-requisite for civil society to emerge and function. The civil society in South Asia is, however, not
without problems. Questions may be raised about the nonprofit and voluntarism of this section. Rajni Kothari provides a very succinct and pointed criticism of the NGO culture in India and argues that it has been co-opted by the donors. In Bangladesh as well, many of the NGOs have come under scathing criticism of being co-opted by donors as well as the government, thereby losing their autonomy and independence. The elitist nature of many of the civil society movements is also a matter of concern. Many of the movements do not have any connection with the grass roots. Besides, not all civil society organizations and initiatives are democratic, emancipatory or inclusive in nature.

Apart from the above, the extent of polarization existing within the civil society in Bangladesh is also alarming. While differences and dissent are part of a democratic culture, the existing polarizations have the capacity of bringing the system to a halt. This indeed is a sad reflection on the sorry state of our political parties and intellectual community, who constitute important components of civil society. While the polarization has its roots in the nationalist struggle and liberation war of the country, its sustained and conscious reconstruction only hampers the growth of healthy democratic culture and values.

Civil Society and state have often been counterpoised into a position of tension and opposition to each other. It is true
that NGO activities as well as social movements have often come under close scrutiny of the government. The state often takes special cognizance of the civil society actions oriented towards the minorities or organized by the minorities themselves. In instances like these the government often institutes a rigorous governmental bureaucratic process that narrows the space for civil society initiatives to emerge from within the minorities themselves. The creation of the CHT Affairs Ministry and the requirement for the local NGOs to take clearance from it (apart from other intelligence clearances) before applying for registration with the NGO Affairs Bureau have stifled many of the local initiatives.

CBMs, it appears, ought to be instituted between state and society and, more importantly, between and within communities at the state level, before one moves at the regional level. Despite the existence of tension between the state and society their relationship is one of mutual dependence. Within democracies the state provides the enabling environment and framework for the society to operate, and the latter ideally being the watchdog helps create as well as sustain a healthy system. Under authoritarian systems, though the space is limited, the civil society can help transform the system.
In the South Asian context the civil society can provide a stable basis for building security and cooperation at the regional level. Civil Society initiatives enjoy a comparative advantage over the government in this respect, for the former is not bound by political expediencies, and the absence of the media pressure and mass expectations also provide them with relative freedom to work out their agendas. The psychological dimension of CBMs indeed can create a favourable environment for the states to consolidate and institutionalize the groundwork done by the civil society initiatives.

3. Civil Society and CBMs

In making the case for civil society initiatives for CBMs the paper considers two factors to be critical, (a) memories and perceptions, and (b) the day-to-day security concerns of people. It has been suggested earlier that the memories and perceptions handed down to us are largely constructions aimed to serve the nation-state. In this construction many voices and memories have been silenced that perhaps could have given us a different South Asia. The 1994 UNDP report explicitly and boldly states that people’s security perceptions center on their daily lives and struggles within it, national or state security are not their reference point. It is argued here the latter again is a construction of the nation-state; the people, their struggles and concerns somehow remain absent
within this construct. Political realism being the paradigm for the nation-state kept politics and security state-centric not people-centric. As a result, CBMs remained largely cosmetic and symptomatic. The civil society has the potential to bring about a paradigm shift. This however is a long drawn out process that requires interventions at various levels and issues ranging from trafficking in humans, arms and drugs, environment, abuses and memories.

The paper however concentrates on three issues. The choice has been a conscious one, in keeping with the perspective of perspectives, memories, knowledge and day to day security, for transformations in these, I believe, are critical for the transformation of the security system in South Asia.

*Knowledge System:* Knowledge is a mode of power. It has the capacity to divide as well as integrate people. The knowledge handed down to us and being taught in our academic institutions, starting from the school to the University levels is more often than not a nationalistic one. Nationalism, as has been argued earlier, is both hegemonic and gendered; consequently a discourse of hegemony and divides is constantly being produced. To make the point, I cite from the works of Rubina Saigol, who has made an in-depth examination of the school curriculum in Pakistan. She argues that in the school curriculum:
The two-nation theory asserts that the Muslims and Hindus were “always” two nations, they had “never” lived in harmony, and they will be different “forever”. Words such as “always”, “never” and “forever” constitute the empty time of nationalism – a time which is not situated in real people, events and actions but in the emptiness of “never”, “forever” and “always”. Anything can be filled into this empty time by those constructing nationalism ... yet they are accepted and legitimised as “The Truth” by the state curriculum and disseminated widely as legitimate, objective knowledge. The “scientific objectivity”, assumed for these projections and the emotional appeal inherent in the language style, makes this curriculum of rupture and boundary-production beyond the power of questioning and challenge.... The language of “is”, “was”, “happened”, “occurred” corrodes historical contingency further enhancing mythical time in which events appear to have no antecedents or consequences; things just happen or happened. The cause, if any, is attributed to an individual or group’s personality attributes rather than to social, historical, political, economic and ideological reasons (emphasis in original).24

Ruptures and boundaries are created not only without but within state boundaries as well. The liberation war of Bangladesh is thereby projected in the history books of
Bangladesh as a war fought by the Bengalis alone. The struggles and wars fought by the ethnic minorities are totally absent from this nationalist discourse. The intellectual community indeed has a major responsibility in correcting the perspectives and building a knowledge system based on pluralism and harmony. Students tutored in the discourse of pluralism, harmony and trust can work towards the creation of a harmonious and plural South Asia. With this objective the idea of a South Asian University has been floated with the vision of creating a South Asian mind. Issue-based faculties from South Asia are expected to be taught in the various universities of the region.  

While such ideas indeed merit serious consideration, unfortunately they have not been disseminated and debated widely to make a dent into the mainstream thinking. State Universities being dependent on state finances perhaps would shy away from such ventures at the initial stage but private universities can make headway in this respect. The private schools and universities in Bangladesh have collaborations with overseas schools and universities, though the flow is only one way. Such collaborations can be turned into intra-regional ones starting from the school levels. Since private schools and universities are not accessible to the masses due to the financial costs involved, civil society movements and
organizations can build pressure upon the state to make it part of the state financed institutions. The donors can indeed play a major role in this respect.

The research institutes in South Asia have initiated the process of joint collaborations and training workshops on human security, human rights and peace building issues. Notable among these are the initiatives of the Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka, the SDPI, Islamabad, and the IPS, New Delhi. They have collaborated on research projects on governance, globalization and environmental issues and their impact on South Asia from a human security perspective. Such collaborative works not only help the researchers in taking a wider and comprehensive view of the issues and stakes involved but also provide the readers an overview of the problems collectively shared by the region and their solutions. Such knowledge system is a unifying factor. However, efforts should be made for the wider dissemination of this knowledge. One way of doing this is to translate the works into vernaculars. These also should be made available at the policy-making levels. The Colombo-based International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES) is also making a major contribution in carrying out research and advocacy works on democracy and minority rights. It has
collaborative networks with research institutes as well as legal aid bodies of South Asia, like the Centre for Alternatives (CA) and the Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), Dhaka, and undertakes major research ventures on minority rights and human rights issues. As dependence on donors may turn out to be a constraining factor affecting the autonomy of the research institutes, efforts ought to be made to make them self-sustaining.

*Information System:* This includes the print and electronic media, which produce as well as manufacture information. Anderson has detailed out the powerful role performed by the print technology in creating the 'imagined' community i.e., the nation. In South Asia, unfortunately the press has not had a very positive influence in building a community of trust and confidence. State censorship, fund constraints and at times the people's attitude too compel them to sell news that sells. That is why I refer to it, following Herman and Chomsky, as 'manufacture'. Many of the vernacular newspapers read by the masses often publish one-sided and sensational stories that beef up mutual antagonisms and divides. The English language newspapers appear to be more conscious in this respect; a few of them have pages with a regional focus and also write-ups by regional writers. These however are state-focused rather than regional. An intra-
regional debate or discussion on issue-based regional problems and processes would help create a healthy information, based upon which to draw one's inferences, conclusions and perceptions. The English language newspapers however have limited readership. The same could be published in the vernacular newspapers by translating those. The journalists have a significant role to play in the creation of perceptions and misperceptions.

It has been argued that the quest for reporting the truth can hurt the process of confidence building. This might happen in the short-term, but in a long-term and enduring perspective truth always helps.28 The total silence of the Bangladesh press on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) issue made many Bangladeshis believe that the insurgency in the CHT was the creation of Indian RAW – intelligence agency. This augured ill not only for relations between the Hill people and Bengalis, but also for Indo-Bangladesh relations. Likewise, for an initial period the Indian public was unaware that a genuine problem existed in Kashmir. Similarly, the public in West Pakistan was largely unaware of the abuses and violations committed by the military in 1971 in the then East Pakistan. Many people in Pakistan see Bangladesh as a consequence of Indian intervention.29 Objective reporting and analyses not only help clarify the positions, but also create a healthy public opinion
that can act as a pressure group upon the governments. Such initiatives do have a positive impact upon the security environment, both military and non-military. The dichotomy between the two however is a faulty one, for deterioration in the former invariably has a negative impact on the latter. South Asia has a vast reservoir of commonalities and shared memories among its people. The press indeed is guilty of not exploiting this to the advantage of the people.

There have been some attempts of cooperation within the journalist community of the region. A South Asian Union of Journalists was established in 1992. It was a coalition of journalist’s unions of SAARC countries. The body held its first conference in Dhaka in 1992. But it has become inactive now. A South Asian Press Club Association was formed in 1994. The objectives were to have free flow of information among the member countries and withdrawal of visa for the journalists of the member countries. This body is also inactive now. Members allege political factors were largely responsible for this, as the subsequent regimes did not encourage the initiatives.

The electronic media more or less follows the path of the print media. It needs to be emphasized here that the relationship between the media and the audience is a two-way
traffic. The media not only sets the agenda for the audience, but in democracies the latter also plays a strong role in setting the media agenda. Various civil society forums in South Asia can play this role. In an age of information technology, termed as “The Death of Distance”, civil society initiatives across South Asia can set the agendas for promoting cooperation and confidence building for the media. This can be initiated through tele-debates and discussions, held simultaneously from the various countries on issues relevant and of concern to the state and society at large.

*Human Rights and Human Security:* The question of human rights and human security is inextricably linked. A violation of the former leads to a rupture in the latter and vice versa. It is equally important to note that the sources of violations can be both state and non-state actors. The human rights and security discourse ought to take into cognizance the presence of the various sources. Civil society initiatives should also focus on the state and non-state sources and factors of threats to human security and human rights violations. The issues of trafficking in humans, small arms and drugs are fast appearing as major sources of threats to security and violations of human rights. These are increasingly emerging as major lucrative businesses and possess the potential of destroying a people and are regarded as a form of terrorism.
Small arms have made their entry into state politics thereby militarizing the political processes of the state, despite their apparent democratic appearance. Regional as well as individual state efforts are required to combat these new forms of terrorism since these are transnational in nature. Besides, states also need to make their respective legal regimes more effective in these arenas.

In this context conventions and declarations have been signed among the SAARC countries. Mention may be made of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, 1987; SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance, 1990. However, anything substantive could not be achieved as the SAARC process itself is in a sorry state. Besides, the conventions do not address the roots of the problem, which in many instances are associated with the state process itself. The NGOs and civil society movements can build awareness within the general population and act as strong pressure groups upon the governments to combat this evil. They can forge networks among the regional NGOs to mount resistance against these threats to human security. The media, both print and electronic, has much to contribute in this respect. Cooperation on these vital issues can build an atmosphere of trust and confidence within the region, as these evils affect all the countries of the region and
are vital human security issues. A Civil Society Network on Small Arms in South Asia was formed in Colombo under the auspices of RCSS in June 2001. It identified the problem as a global crisis that negatively impacts upon peace, sustainable development, human rights and human security. There is an urgent need to form such networks for human and drug trafficking as well.

Through the human rights discourse the local and regional NGOs have also become involved with conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace building as a necessary condition for the protection of human rights. The NGOs have played a significant role in advocacy and awareness building about human rights abuses. Women rights, as human rights, and minority rights have been integral to the movements carried out by the NGOs and various civil society movements. It is worth mentioning here that that the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in July 1998 was the outcome of tremendous pressure and lobbying with the UN officials and policy makers by the NGOs and other civil society groups. The Court has widened the spectrum of activities defined as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Through Article 7 clause g, rape has been defined as a crime against humanity. The court also has a gender caucus, which again goes a long way in ensuring human rights for
women. It is interesting to note that, though women and children constitute the most vulnerable groups during conflict and war times and women have been violated as a war tactic, till today no woman has been appointed to the committee framing code of conduct for war.

In Yugoslavia most of the investigations of war crimes were done by reading reports prepared by the NGOs and Human rights groups. The rules of evidence for rape were also redefined. No corroboration of testimony was required, and consent was not treated as defense. It was argued that the situational context of war does not allow consent to be a defense for the abuser. These are remarkable instances of improving the human rights thereby security situation by civil society initiatives. In South Asia as well, human rights groups, and legal aids and women organizations are playing a forceful role in building peace across the region. They have mobilized support for people-to-people initiatives like Pakistan India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy, and Pakistan Peace Coalition. In the intrastate conflicts of South Asia women have been in the forefront of peace movements, like the Mothers' Associations in Sri Lanka and Nagaland. In Bangladesh the Shammilita Nari Samaj (United Women's Front) came forward and joined hands with the Hill Women's Federation (HWF) of CHT in demanding probe into the
abduction case of Kalpana Chakma, who was abducted from the Hill Tracts on the eve of elections in June 1996. The HWF has openly joined hands with the women movements of Bangladesh on various issues. Such coalitions help build confidence within and between communities and strengthen the process of democracy, which contributes positively to the security environment within states.

Regional NGOs, like the Kathmandu-based South Asian Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR), have built upon these coalitions and initiated its peace programmes. In Pakistan a coalition of women NGOs, in an international conference organized by ASR (A women NGO) in Lahore on 26 March 2001, formally apologized to the Bangladesh women for the violations committed by the Pakistan military in 1971. Such gestures of understanding and empathy, though narrow-based, must not be peripheralised. These are strong demonstrations of people's solidarity with each other that cuts across national boundaries and identities and helps change negative perspectives and perceptions. Such initiatives on righting the human rights situation need to be broadened and taken to the grass roots levels in order to create an environment of understanding and tolerance among the general people who constitute the critical factor for building a people-based and people-centric security system in South Asia.
4. Conclusion

South Asia has been described variously - a conflict-prone region, a region without regionalism, a civilization and so on. The new millennium has set in new unpredictabilities in international politics that have their resonance in regional politics as well. The forces of fundamentalism, within nationalism and religion, seem to be on the rise. This, on the one hand, militarizes the states and, on the other, shrinks the space for democracy. Human security and human rights become the first casualty of these forces and processes. Perhaps, more than ever before, there is a need for the civil society to space itself in, in a most effective and profound manner through these times of chaos and uncertainties, and weave a discourse and culture of peace, tolerance and pluralism. Such interventions however need to be broad-based and inclusive of grass roots, cutting across the various levels and discourses of hegemony. Sustaining them through financial and human resources is also a major problem in a milieu beset with uncertainties and partisanship. Yet it is worth holding on to for civil society movements are strong pressure groups and they do possess the potential of bringing about transformations. A generation tutored in the language of dialogue and friendship can make a meaningful change in the security regime and lives of people. There is a need to recall and reconstruct the memories of trust, confidence, faith and
accommodation that this civilization possessed, as Dev Nathan so aptly points out, "the diversities have not changed but the means to accommodate them have.\textsuperscript{37}" The means of accommodation indeed need a change, a change infused in the discourse and language of confidence and security, not insecurity and mistrust. It is time that South Asia is described as a region of peace, amity and diversity.

\textbf{Endnotes}

1. files\Qualcomm\Eudora Mail\Attach\PAK IN,htm Register for Arms Control.

2. This however is a contested view. For an alternative perspective see, Sinderpal Singh, Framing "South Asia": Whose Imagined Region? IDSS, Singapore, May 2001.


4. Based on author’s personal interviews in Chatkhil, Noakhali. Gandhi had visited the place in the aftermath of riots.


10 files://C:\Program Files\Qualcomm\Eudora Mail\Attach\programs.htm, Campaigns Confidence Building Measures in Civil Society.


13 Moonis Ahmar, op. cit., p. 43.


17 The Independent, 28.10.2001

Informal linkages have all along existed in the region. With the beginning of 1980s as many as five tracks of dialogues were in existence, and by 1997 there were more than forty dialogue channels. For details see, Talat A. Wizarat, "Confidence-Building Measures: The Role of Track II Diplomacy and NGOs," in Moonis Ahmar (ed.) op.cit., pp. 254-265.

Rubina Saigol, "Boundaries of Consciousness: Interface Between the Curriculum, Gender and Nationalism", in Nighat Said Khan (et. als eds.) Locating the Self: Perspectives on Women and Multiple Identities, ASR, Lahore, 1994, pp. 43-44.


Benedict Anderson, op.cit.


Author's personal encounters with the general people in Lahore, in March 2001.


Lecture by Patricia Sellers in Colombo on 20.10.2000. She was one of the judges of the war crime tribunals. The author was present during the lecture.
