Fourth BIISS-German International Conference
On
POLITICS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: SALIENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE
08-10 October 2002

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and the German Embassy in Dhaka jointly organised a three-day Seminar on Politics and Security in South Asia: Salience of Religion and Culture during 08-10 October 2002. It was the fourth in a series of Conferences jointly organised by BIISS and the German Embassy in Dhaka. The purpose of the Conference was to provide a forum for deliberation on religious and cultural dimensions of South Asian politics and security.

The twin forces of religion and culture, despite their paramount influence on the social fabric of the region, have not succeeded in bringing a common regional social outlook and vision due to multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic nature of South Asian polity. As a result, social fissures due to religious cleavages, cultural conflicts and ethnic animosity, continue to remain a living reality in contemporary South Asia with direct and adverse impact on the region’s politics and security. Most of the regional countries have
been, in varying degrees, the victims of parochial ethnic, linguistic, religious and sectoral politics with cross-border implications. The phenomenon received little academic attention and remains a neglected field of study by the ‘security community’ obsessed primarily with hard-core geo-political security issues in the region like nuclearisation, Indo-Pakistan conflict, global war on terrorism and so on. It is here that the rational behind holding the Conference finds its justification.

Apart from the Inaugural and Concluding Sessions, the Conference was split into six Working Sessions. The broad themes of the Sessions are: i. Domestic Political Dynamics in South Asia: Inter-State Relations and Security; ii. Inter-Cultural Dialogue; iii. Politicisation of Religion in South Asia: The Security and Political Dimensions; iv. The Media and Security in South Asia; v. Role of Civil Society in Security and Confidence Building in South Asia, and vi. Governance and Accountability: Security Challenges and Vulnerabilities. The participants in the Conference included resource persons from all the SAARC countries barring Bhutan as well as from Germany and the US. Throughout the Conference, policy makers, various government officials, representatives from academia, media, civil society, NGOs as well as diplomatic corps and international agencies in Dhaka have contributed significantly to its academic content.

H. E. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, MP, Honourable Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs of Bangladesh inaugurated the Conference on Tuesday, October 08, 2002 as the Chief Guest. H. E. Ambassador Dr. Gunter Mulack, Commissioner for the Dialogue of Civilisations, German Foreign Office, Berlin has been the Special
Guest. Justice Mustafa Kamal, Former Chief Justice of Bangladesh and Member, Board of Governors, BIrss, chaired the Inaugural Session. The Address of Welcome was delivered by Major General S. M. Shahab Uddin, Director General, BIrss.

In his Address of Welcome, Major General S. M. Shahab Uddin, while explaining the context of the Conference, stated that most of the countries in South Asia have been suffering from intra-state conflicts along parochial ethnic, linguistic, religious and sectoral lines with cross-border repercussions. In his deliberation, he depicted the current dismaying scenario in South Asia with respect to the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development. Terming the process as a painful one, he brought to light the factors responsible for it like intolerance and social violence, governance marked by corruption and lack of accountability, instrumentalisation of religious and cultural identities etc. Against this background, he hoped that the Conference would be an effective forum for deliberation on politics and security in South Asia with a focus on the religious and cultural dimensions.

H. E. Mr. Dietrich Andreas, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Bangladesh, started his remarks by making allusion to the cordial relations existing between the BIiss and the German Embassy in Dhaka. He said that cultural and religious differences would continue to exist in each and every country. Although not an easy task, it is the responsibility of the politicians, social scientists, civil society, intellectuals and others to bridge the gap caused by such differences. Towards this end, he suggested 'continuing dialogue' among the relevant parties.
In his speech as the Special Guest, H. E. Ambassador Dr. Gunter Mulack, Commissioner for the Dialogue of Civilisations, German Foreign Office, noted with concern how violence manifests itself in South Asia due to differences in religion and culture. He said that in no way attempts should be made to legitimise such violence or instigate the conflicts either in the name of 'crusade' or 'jihad'. He expressed the need to understand the underlying causes of violence with particular focus on the differences in religion and culture. In this context, he emphasised that 'cultural diversity' should be respected and 'religious difference' should be tolerated. Underscoring the need to de-emotionalise conflicts he suggested that violence should not be a means of dealing with them. Finally, emphasised that development that aims at poverty alleviation and mass education can contribute significantly to fostering such an outlook.

In his inaugural address, H. E. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, MP, Honourable Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, briefed on the history of South Asia profoundly influenced by the factor of religion. He referred to the partition of the sub-continent on exclusively religious ground and the existence, since then, of a 'majority-minority' syndrome in the region on religious ground. He, however, said that the emergence of Bangladesh is not for the reason of religion. The country's birth is for reasons like the cultural differences, the exploitation of economic resources of the then East Pakistan by West Pakistan, the deprivation of the democratic rights of the people of the then East Pakistan as well as the distance between the two wings of Pakistan. He made an evaluation of the use
of religion in South Asian politics. While reflecting on the minorities in Bangladesh, he underscored the fact that the country’s Constitution guarantees the right to religion and worship for all. He refuted the allegation that ‘Bangladesh has become a Taliban country’ and substantiated his remark by stating that eighty seven percent of the women cast their votes in elections and the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the country are women. He praised the existing communal harmony in the country by stating that Bangladesh is a secular country with maximum religious tolerance. He stated that the Gujrat riot in India did not cause any retaliatory action with respect to the minorities in Bangladesh. While stating that problems due to differences in religion and culture would always exist, he suggested fruitful academic discussion on the subject with realistic suggestions to overcome the problems. While unequivocally condemning ‘fundamentalism and terrorism’, he also cautioned that Islam should not be identified with terrorism and war against terrorism should not be meant to be war against Islam.

In his speech as Chairman of the Session, Justice Mustafa Kamal, Former Chief Justice of Bangladesh and Member, Board of Governors, BIIS, appreciated the move by Germany to come out with the proposal for a dialogue among civilizations at a time when other developed countries talk about a clash among them. He also suggested that all countries should follow the German line of thinking. He referred to the politicisation of religion in almost all countries of South Asia in varying degrees. In this context, he stressed the need for new ‘policy directives’ to deal with the problem. He said that because of Bangladesh’s peculiar location vis-à-vis India, there exist a number of problems that need to be
redressed through bilateral means as international community would be unable to solve such problems. He viewed the Conference as a gathering place of experts on ‘conflict resolution’, and thus expected that new and positive ideas would come out of the Conference on the subject.

The First Working Session of the Conference on the theme Domestic Political Dynamics in South Asia: Inter-State relations and Security was chaired by Prof. Abdul Momin Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor, National University, Gazipur. Four papers were presented in the Session. In his paper entitled, Political Processes, Political Culture and Institutionalisation of Democracy, Emeritus Professor Bertram Bastiampillai dealt with the challenges that Sri Lanka faces in nation-building, maintaining national integrity and guaranteeing undisturbed civil governance. The principal focus of his paper is the constitutional uncertainty in Sri Lanka exemplified by three successive constitutions in the country, none of which defines clearly the power and authority of the executive, the judiciary and the legislative bodies. The author, therefore, questioned the proper functioning of democracy in Sri Lanka. Prof. Bastiampillai mentioned that the persecution of the minorities, the rise of ethnic insurgency and the violence associated with it, elections marked by intolerance and massive violence, rigid bureaucracy etc. are the direct negative outfalls of improper functioning of democracy in the Island State.

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (Mumbai), in his paper entitled, Rights to Minorities in India – With Special Reference to Muslims, dealt with the deprived position of the Muslims in India in political, economic,
social and cultural sense. He remarked that most of the communal riots in India where the Muslims have been the worst sufferers are politically rather than religiously motivated. As a result, the Muslims possess a sense of insecurity, and remain vulnerable as a ‘vote bank’ likely to be used by all political parties according to their respective convenience. He said that the concept of minority rights is very important and fundamental to democracy and that the Indian constitution guarantees such rights in Articles 25-30. He also talked about some contradictions that arise in India with respect to interpretation of minority rights as embodied in the constitution. He mentioned that it is not only the question of constitutional laws and guarantee for minorities and their religious beliefs and practices, but also that of social change, reform and gender justice. Depicting the deplorable social, economic and political conditions of the Muslims in India, he urged for a Muslim leadership that should put priority on reforms. In a complex and diverse Indian society, the best approach to guarantee minority rights, as he mentioned, is through three ‘Ds’ i.e., democracy, diversity and dialogue.

Mr. A. K. M. Abdus Sabur, Research Director, BIISS, in his paper entitled Challenges of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Ethnic Conflicts: Issues and Outlook argued that peace agreements do not necessarily resolve conflicts while offering opportunities for attaining peace through resolution of contentious issues that precipitate conflicts. He dealt with post-conflict peacebuilding characterising it as the foremost challenge in any conflict resolution scheme. In this context, he emphasised on achieving sustainable peace. Keeping in mind the reality in South Asia, Mr. Sabur identified the list of tasks facing the policy makers in building
sustainable peace such as reconstructing the institutions and processes, ensuring harmonious development and healing the scars of war. Terming a host of measures proposed by him as being the ideal ones, he suggested that academic and practical challenge is to devise ways and means of ensuring sustainable peace, security and development to the extent that would bring the achieved level of success as close to the ideal as possible. In this regard, the bottom line remains the sustenance of the process of peacebuilding itself through avoiding any irreversible setback and the progressive implementation of the peace building efforts.

Due to the absence of Dr. Citha D. Maass, her paper entitled Nation-building in Multi-cultural Setting: Conceptual Considerations, Externalized Security Threats, Scope for Domestic Actors could not be presented at the Conference. However, her paper was circulated among the participants. In the paper, Dr. Maass argues that it is not the ethnic distinction per se but the political instrumentalisation of ethnic differences which leads to conflicts. She evaluated the concept of nation-state and argued that South Asia's task to build homogenous nations is impeded by several domestic factors. She, therefore, suggested that the process of nation-building be initiated by domestic actors with external support and mediation as useful backing. Among the domestic actors, however, the initiative should not come from above, but 'from below', namely from civilian movements and non-governmental organizations.

After the presentation of the papers, the floor was open to discussions, comments and questions by the participants. Some of the relevant questions were: How can equity and justice be guaranteed in a multicultural society? Is Indian constitution free from
contradictions with respect to minority rights? Is there any fall-out of Kashmir problem on the Muslims in India? What is the actual communal situation in Bangladesh? Is the CHT agreement functioning well under the new regime in Bangladesh? Is peace attainable in Sri Lanka? Is there a linkage between Kashmir and the recent communal riot in the Indian State of Gujrat? How can militancy be avoided in case of religious conflicts? On all these and other questions, there have been lively but constructive debate touching on the points relevant to each of the issues. Open discussion could be summarized as follows:

- In view of the complex social, cultural, religious and political composition in South Asia, all agreed that an atmosphere of trust and confidence be created in the region in order to avoid conflicts that may arise in such domains. The leaders, the public citizens, the youths etc. should avoid emotion-laden rhetorics.

- It is the duty of political leadership, more than any other body, to act with maturity and patience on contentious religious and cultural issues.

- There is the need for introspection on everybody’s part. Religion that so long has been used as an instrument of politics should now be used for the well-being of commoners.

- Paramount importance should be attached to the element of dialogue in diffusing tension and mistrust in the region.

- Development should, in its proper perspective, address the economic, social and cultural malaises of the people.
• ‘Cultural diversity’ needs to be accepted and ‘religious difference’ tolerated.

• Religion should not be politicised.

The Session Chair, Prof. Abdul Momin Chowdhury, concluded the Session by saying that contents of the paper and the discussions on them have been very thought-provoking. He emphasised that religion should not be used for political ascendancy and the majority should not remain indifferent to the minorities in any society. While discussing the Muslim issue in India, he underscored that mere the pronouncement of secularism does not guarantee the safety of the minority. In the context, he emphasised the role of politicians and suggested that it is the duty of the politicians more than that of the academicians to address the problems associated with religion and ethnicity.

The Second Working Session of the Conference, dedicated to the theme **Inter-Cultural Dialogue**, was chaired by Professor Muzaffer Ahmed, Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka, and Member, Board of Governors, BIiSS. Three papers were presented in the Session.

In his paper, Ambassador Dr. Gunter Mulack, Commissioner for the Dialogue of Civilisations, German Foreign Office, Berlin informed the audience that the growing realisation following 9/11 led to the establishment of a task force "Islam and Dialogue with Islam" within the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a Commissioner for Dialogue with the Islamic world, Dialogue of civilisations. While explaining the difference between the American and the European perceptions with regard to dealing with conflicts, he emphasised that
Europe is turning away from power and moving to a world of perpetual peace in which the rule of law and justice are the highest values. The United States is less patient with diplomacy and see the world divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies while we in Europe see a more complex picture and believe in transnational negotiations and peaceful resolution of conflicts. He also added that, in many societies of the Islamic world, which unfortunately do not have democratically legitimised governments or positive human rights records, there are groups of people who are longing for an improvement of their situation. We can only succeed in this dialogue with partners who have adopted the principle of dialogue in their own society. While concluding his deliberation, he again emphasised that the globalised world of the 21st century is facing many challenges and problems, which we can only master together in a non-violent way through dialogue.

In his paper entitled, *Dialogue Among Cultures: The Role of Leadership*, Prof. Ataur Rahman, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka explored the role of leadership in the dialogue among cultures and civilizations highlighting the context of South Asia. He addressed four issues. First, the current debates and discourse on the ‘clash of civilization’ and ‘cultural reconfigurations’ of world politics are examined. Second, the history of interaction among cultures, particularly in Asian and European context, is reviewed. Third, the roots of conflict and cooperation based particularly on cultural identities of ethnicity, religion and language are examined. In this regard, the crucial importance of political leadership is evaluated especially in the context of South Asia.
Finally, a host of initiatives undertaken on the part of the leadership at the global, regional and local levels is analysed.

Prof. M Shamsher Ali, Vice-Chancellor, Southeast University, Dhaka, in his paper entitled, The Role of Inter-Cultural Dialogue for Global Peace remarked that dialogue is now being universally accepted as an instrument of peace as it promotes understanding and understanding promotes peace. He mentioned that for the purpose of conflict resolution, dialogue must be based on a number of factors like faith, avoidance of double standard, highlighting commonalities rather than differences, taking stock of the situation and finally the use of media in strengthening dialogue. The list, he remarked is only indicative and by no means exhaustive. He also remarked that peace in the world should be made not merely for the generations of today but for the future generation as well.

After the presentation of papers, the floor was open to discussions, comments and recommendations. Among the relevant questions raised were: How can dialogue be initiated between asymmetrical parties, in particular, when the international structure is uneven? What is the utility of a dialogue if it is between the bad political leaders? Does dialogue influence the USA like it does the EU? What are the real causes of terrorism? Is it the lack of education or deprivation and injustice? What are the implications of the fact the leaders of India and Pakistan are not in talking terms? What is the legal basis of pre-emptive attack? There has also been lively and constructive debate on the questions raised. Open discussion could be summarized as follows:
• Dialogue once launched should be sincere in its content and motive.

• Good leadership should conduct dialogue and such leadership should be free from all preconceived notions and prejudices.

• There is the need for political education of 'civic nature'.

• The West should abandon 'double standard' in its policy towards the less developed countries.

• There is no legal basis for 'pre-emptive attack', therefore, the US should engage itself in 'dialogue'.

• Justice is needed in the world with respect to the treatment of minority groups.

• The Middle East problem should end in justice for all the parties if violence and terrorism are to be eradicated from the region.

• There is need for 'soul searching' by all parties involved in conflicts and in their resolution.

• Continuous and meaningful dialogue among divergent cultures is a precondition for peaceful co-existance.

In his concluding remarks, Chairperson of the Session, Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, also underscored the need for dialogue in resolving conflicts and establishing peaceful relations. In this regard, he emphasised that the success of dialogue depends upon certain factors like, good leadership, proper political education, sincerity, concern for justice, respect for divergent cultures etc. Professor
Ahmad mentioned that in South Asia, dialogue can bring peace, stability and harmony between the countries of the region despite the asymmetry in their political, social and economic composition. Professor Ahmad remains critical about the way Europe is becoming stringent about immigration. This, in his words, contradicts the spirit of dialogue by barring people's access to knowledge and other civilizations. He concluded by stating that the fear of being marginalized in the age of globalisation can also be lessened to a greater extent through the instrument of dialogue.

The Third Working Session on the theme Politicisation of Religion in South Asia: The Security and Political Dimensions was chaired by Major General Jamshed Ayaz Khan (Retd.). Three papers were presented in the Session.

Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed, Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, in his paper entitled Politicisation of Religion: Underlying Reasons, Nature and Dynamics discussed the difference in the meaning of religion from Western and South Asian perspectives. He remarked that occidental word religion derived from the Latin religio means to 'link back or bind' whereas in South Asia, the Sanskrit word dharma means to 'hold, support, carry, sustain or maintain, almost like that of a mother. He said that religion in South Asia today is increasingly being understood more in the sense of the Western notion than dharma, bringing with its appeal for the otherwise ill-fated religio-communal unity (or conversely alienation) than mutual tolerance. With a view to overcoming the situation, he suggested a host of measures that includes: i. De-politicisation of religion by reinventing the power of
the civil society; ii. Democratisation of the society through education and educational religion; and (iii) Creation of space for dharma.

Dr. Ross Masood Hussain, Member, Board of Governance, FRIENDS, Rawalpindi, in his paper entitled Religion Based Politics: Internal Security said that religion has always played a powerful and profound role in politics in South Asia. This is true both in the sense that religious groups have substantially influenced public policy and in the sense that religious belief has been a major source of the values, social attitudes and moral assumptions which South Asian politics is based on. He observed that with the rise of Hindu political power, India today is in the grip of a Hindutva neurosis, whereas in Pakistan there is the rise of Islamic radicalism and the consequential religious terrorism. Then he analysed how internal tensions generated by religion-based politics not only have a shattering impact on the social fabric in individual countries, but also have spill over effects on the neighbouring ones. He also analysed its underlying reasons including the presence of similar ethnic and religious groups across national frontiers, the transmigration of populations and the tendency of governments in South Asia to sue the ‘external threat’ for overcoming domestic political and economic crises. While asserting that the process of nation-building has reached an impasse, he suggested that it could be broken only by domestic efforts. External actors such as influential neighbouring states or extra-regional mediators can encourage and support, but not replace domestic initiatives. He further suggested that new attempts of building a homogenous nation should be encouraged not from above but from below in the conflict-ridden societies.
Ambassador Mohammad Hamid Ansari, Former Vice-Chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University, in his paper entitled *Religion as an Instrument of Politics and Policy: Inter-state Dimensions and Regional Stability* stated that religion in statecraft could be used for different purposes with different objectives. It could be an instrument of legitimacy for the regime, could be utilized for justifying the status quo in terms of policies and postures, or could play a politically mobilising role to articulate dissent. It, therefore, incorporates the role played by the religious establishments and political groups sponsored by religious organizations. Viewed in this perspective, he raised the following questions: Are religious precepts having a societal impact used in politics by state and sub-state actors for the formulation or advocacy of state policies? What is the nature of these policies? Do they impinge on or violate bilateral or multilateral commitments of the state? Does religion in any sense have an international role? He talked about the imperative to recognize pluralism and democracy as the normative principles of politics with due adherence to the principle of equality and of equal treatment.

Paper presentations by the authors were followed by lively discussions. Questions that came up during the course of discussions were: Can religion be used for the promotion of goodwill, understanding and peace? Up to what extent the interests of the Muslims are protected in a secular state? Given the negative economic growth of most of the South Asian countries, how insulated/secured Pakistan is against the religious extremism? Why has the UN General Assembly declaration on religious intolerance not been followed up by international conventions? Where do the
migrants, who belong to the upper strata of the society and make a conscious decision to migrate, stand when it comes to the question of supporting the insurgency? Following observations has also been made:

- We have to rethink and reorient when it comes to religious discourse.
- Homeland for the Muslims need not be a Muslim state. Muslims can have their political interests protected in a secular state.
- We have to aim at the de-politicisation of religion and the de-religionisation of the state and to use religious ethos to promote egalitarianism both at the state and international level.
- International laws are not the instruments for the powerful only; weaker states can also use such laws for their protection from the powerful ones.

In his concluding remarks, Session Chair Major General Jamshed Ayaz Khan also highlighted the fact that religion would continue to influence, in one way or the other, socio-political life in South Asia. He, therefore, stressed on the need to utilize religion in a constructive manner and emphasised that all the religions are basically for peace. He also underscored the fact that dialogue is the most effective instrument of overcoming the tension and mistrust that may arise between groups professing different faiths and beliefs.

The Fourth Working Session on the theme The Media and Security in South Asia was chaired by Prof. Bharat Karnard, Centre
for Policy Research, New Delhi. Three papers were presented in the Session. The paper entitled Security and Media by Mr. Enayetullah Khan, Editor-in-Chief, Holiday, Dhaka, reflects the author's critical views on the current international system being dominated and manipulated by a single global power and a few of its allies. In the circumstances, the international media has virtually become an instrument in their hands and serves their interests in a very distorted manner. The author, in fact, is very pessimistic about the current international system, in particular, about the elements of uncertainty and unpredictability of events going around the globe. As he envisages, the proper functioning of media, both international and national, is possible only if a new peaceful order based on good governance and harmonious international relations takes shape.

The second paper entitled Need for Media Cooperation in South Asia: Information Flow For Confidence Building was presented by Major General (Retd.) Jamshed Ayaz Khan, President, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. The central theme of the paper is the authors' examination about a possible correlation between media/information and confidence building measures in South Asia. The author, in fact, raises a number of insightful questions in establishing his argument in the context of South Asia. The purpose, relevance, and the target group of information flow in the region are put into question. More importantly, it is the veracity of information in South Asia that the author views with scepticism. To the author, the language barrier and the failure of the countries in the region to learn anything positive from international media are among the imponderables on the way of making media a vehicle of confidence building in the region. The author, therefore, presents a
typology of media interventions’ for peace building and, more importantly, the requisite skills to make them effective. The typology identifies five kinds of media intervention. Finally, the author recommends few measures for meeting the challenges that media faces in South Asia.

The third paper in the Session was presented by Mr. Thomas J. Mathew, Associate Editor, *Himal South Asian*, Kathmandu. The paper entitled *Pattern of Regional Coverage: Mutual Awareness and Image Building* deals with the current trends in South Asia. The most perceptible among them is the fact that mutual coverage is extremely limited and that too is very negative in nature. The phenomenon is explained mainly by the media’s vulnerability to political and security related issues in the region. In this respect, the perennial animosity between India and Pakistan is responsible for initiating a kind of media warfare between the two. In the ultimate analysis, it results in the distortion of facts about the true nature of issues confronting the region and the creation of distorted public opinion about them. In the prevailing climate of suspicion and hostility, the author doubts if there is any scope for the media as an institution to rectify the current imbalances and distortions of mutual representation. Quite dismaying, but true, any change in the situation, as the author visualises, is simply a matter of conjecture at present, and does not look to be anywhere on the horizon.

After the presentation of papers, the floor was open to discussions, comments and recommendations. Among the relevant questions raised were: How can media be used in cultural dialogues? How can media be controlled when they give false, exaggerated news? How much should be made available to the media when talks
and negotiations go on? How should small countries react to big countries' media campaign? What should be the role of media during crisis situations? To what extent media should be asked to be constructive? There has also been lively and constructive debate on the questions raised. Open discussion could be summarized as follows:

- Media should have their own ombudsman to be more accountable to the public.
- As Indian media is vast and dominates South Asia, it should be more responsible in presenting news and views that have cross-border implications.
- Media should be used as an effective tool of CBMs in South Asia.
- Media should develop ethical code/code of conduct to be more polished and trustworthy.
- In South Asia vernacular newspapers have more influence in shaping public opinion.
- Media also have their own limitations in presenting the news.
- Western media have vested interest in presenting South Asia as nuclear flashpoint.

Session Chair Professor Bharat Karnard, in his concluding remarks, also stressed the need for an effective, propaganda-free, accountable and public-oriented media in South Asia that would promote the cause of peace. He expressed his disgruntlement over the fact that media blitz sometimes portrays South Asia as 'being on
the verge of a war' due to problems like nuclearisation, religious conflicts, border skirmishes etc. The depiction of such an image is the work of media and press working without ethics. He, therefore, stressed on ethical dimension of media reporting. Professor Karnard also feels that South Asian countries can derive benefits from the well-developed Indian satellite system in the fields like, meteorology, disaster management etc.

The Fifth Working Session entitled Role of Civil Society in Security and Confidence Building in South Asia was chaired by Professor Mohan P. Lohani, Director, China Study Group, Kathmandu, Nepal. It may be mentioned that Professor Lohani served in Bangladesh as the Ambassador of his country. Four papers were presented in the Session.

The first paper Politics and Security in South Asia: Salience of Religion and Culture - A Nepalese Perspective was presented by the Chairman of the Session himself. The author, in the paper, expressed his disgruntlement over the region's failure to realize the fruitful benefits of several positive changes following the end of the Cold War. He finds this region being deeply embroiled in the acts of violence and terror arising from social tension and unrest, injustice, deprivation and discrimination. The paper depicts a scenario where South Asia is desperately seeking to replace the cult of ever escalating violence and terror with a culture of peace. In this respect, the author is of the opinion that both religion and culture in their essence can serve as a device to foster unity, understanding, mutual trust and social harmony leading to lasting peace and stability in the region. A very cogent description of current socio-economic and political situation in Nepal is made in the paper. While, in author's
view, Nepal has made progress in many such fields in recent years, a major challenge for the policy makers and administrators still lie in curbing the forces of disintegration and terrorism and, integrate all communities with diverse religious, ideological and cultural backgrounds in the national mainstream.

The second paper in the Session was presented by Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka. While viewing South Asia as a region characterized by both conflict and cooperation, the author in his paper entitled Cooperation and Security Building in South Asia: The Role of Civil Society opines that in South Asia cooperation moves haltingly and conflicts are seen both at the perceptual level and in specific issue areas. He evaluated the attempts made at the official and non-official levels for confidence building and economic and security cooperation in South Asia. While only a few such attempts have been successful, most others ended in failure. The paper, therefore, seeks to explore the role of civil society in the area of cooperation and security building in the region. The author deals with various pathways to peace, stability, development, cooperation and security in South Asia. He also very cogently focuses on the role of civil society in improving the current situation in the region as well as the inter-state relations.

The third paper entitled The Role of Civil Society in Linking and Promoting Track I and Track II Initiatives was presented by Dr. Moonis Ahmar, ASIA Fellow and Visiting Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. The paper speaks about the involvement of civil society in creating conditions for holding official Track I and non-official Track II
negotiations. The author emphasises that civil society groups like political parties, workers, students, journalists, artists, and other segments of the society can play an assertive role if the state structure is democratic in nature and is amenable to the voice of the people. Viewing the need to consider the civil society in South Asia from a broader perspective, the paper deals with a number of pertinent issues like the actual role that the civil society can play in promoting Track I and Track II initiatives in South Asia, the nature of linkage between the two, the challenges on the way, and the lessons from other regions in promoting non-official dialogues.

In his paper entitled Women's Rights in Islam Dr. Syed Asharaf Ali, former Director General, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, while dealing with women's rights in Islam, emphasised that Islam has been the first religion to confer legal status of honour and responsibility upon women making them Sui Juris, ensuring their economic independence and providing them opportunities in every sphere of human activity and in every domain of thought, guaranteeing their rights in the properties of the deceased parents, the husband and the children. In the case of marriage and divorce also a Muslim woman enjoys rights and privileges, which have never been granted to the women by any other religion.

A lively discussion followed the presentation of papers by the authors. The questions raised and also discussed during the Session were: Can the civil society organizations pay the desired role when they are polarized? Is there any relationship between good governance, civil society and democracy? Does the hegemonic-stability model work in the case of South Asia? How could state security be maintained when people do not have access to food,
shelter and a dignified living? Following observations have also been made:

- Civil society has to play its role in creating people-to-people relations and for the promotion of CBMs in South Asia.
- Pressure from civil society organizations forces the most powerful nations to change their policies.
- Diplomacy at Track II level requires legal entity, as it does not have any legal basis for operation.
- Access to food, shelter and dignified living is more important than that of ideology.
- The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty between India and Bangladesh has been made possible by a great deal of input from the Track II level.
- Islam has also promoted the concept of civil society.
- The Holy Quran has given equal rights for women in the case of marriage, divorce and other aspects of life. However, these rights are violated in the modern day lives.
- The discussions about the status of women in Islam in Syed Ashraf Ali’s paper took place some 1400 years ago. The picture today is very different than that.

Session Chair Professor Mohan P. Lohani said that the growth of civil society in South Asia is a recent phenomenon, and that the significance of such forces would continue to grow. Civil society that reflects the views of the common people as against that of vested interest groups can play a meaningful role in the domain of peace.
and confidence building measures. For this, however, it is essential that its constituent actors are educated, non-partisan, sincere and committed. On the question of women rights, while expressing his opinion, Professor Lohani emphasised that women do not want to be romanticized, rather they want to be treated as normal human beings at par with the men.

The Sixth Working Session of the two-day seminar on the theme Governance and Accountability: Security Challenges and Vulnerabilities was chaired by Mr. Mujibul Huq, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of Bangladesh. Three papers were presented in the Session. The first paper entitled, Problems of Governance: Corruption, Accountability and Transparency, Dushyantha Mendis, Associate Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Kandy, Sri Lanka, analysed the entire spectrum of governance in the light of three issues, corruption, accountability and transparency. The author, in particular, stresses on corruption that frustrates good governance in many countries at present. The concept gets an elaborate theoretical treatment in the paper with empiricism reflecting the complex nature of corruption in South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The author is of the opinion that corruption which is deeply entrenched in South Asian societies mostly as a result of political factors, can only be eradicated once the political factors giving rise to it are eliminated. However, he admits that this is a long and painful process, which could come only with the progressive development of civil society and a process of economic growth, which would strengthen civil society institutions.

The second paper entitled The Rule of Law and Human Security was presented by Dr. Hans-Joachim Heintze, Institute for
Peace Maintenance, Law and International Humanitarian Law, Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany. The paper begins with the view that the absence of a functioning legal system is a typical expression of state failure, general anarchy and a monopoly power firmly in the hands of government. States of this kind must be seen, as the author opines, on the road towards collapse. The author argues that modern international law increasingly obliges states to abide by democratic and constitutionally defined rules in their dealing with the population. Unless such rules are established, no guarantee for human rights can be ensured. There is, therefore, the stress in the paper on a causal relationship between rule of law and human security. In this connection, the author, while advocating independent judiciary, also refers to external agencies, particularly the UN ones, as the credible institutions in fostering rule of law.

The last paper in the Session entitled, Human Security in India: Synthesising the Government and Non-Governmental Efforts was presented by Dr. Ashutosh Misra, Project Coordinator, Project on Human Security in India, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. An insightful theoretical discussion on the concept of human security precedes the author’s discussion on the subject in the context of India. The author admits that given the wide-ranging human security concerns originating from multiple sources, it will be futile on the part of the government in tackling them single-handedly. For this, a collaborative approach is suggested in which the NGOs and the private sector would share the burden in rational proportions. The author points out the fact that the building of a collaborative approach may generate a kind of relationship between the Government and NGOs, which may not necessarily be free from
constraints and challenges in many respects. While reflecting on the improvement of the role of NGOs and other Non-governmental bodies in promoting human security in unison with the governmental apparatus, the author suggested a host of ways and means for addressing the myriad of challenges and constraints faced by India in this regard.

After the presentation of the papers, the floor was open to discussions, comments and questions by the participants. Some of the relevant issues raised were: How could the NGOs be used more effectively for the promotion of human security? Whether and how far the intra-NGO clashes impede the process of development? What is the role of corruption in South Asian Politics? Whether and how far collective interference to the extent of impinging upon the sovereignty of a nation state is justified? Whether Bush doctrine of pre-emptive strike is going to be an essential component of international law?

The discussions could be summarized as follows:

- While institutional changes are an imperative, these alone are not sufficient for dealing with corruption, changes in individual are also a must.
- People are becoming even disillusioned with democracy due to the corruption at the state level and due to the fact that even the democratic governments in South Asian are increasingly failing to curtail corruption.
- Elected representatives of the people should appoint the official in the anti-corruption bureau.
• An ombudsman independent of the government should be institutionalised.

• Creative initiatives are required to deal with the current scale of corruption in South Asia.

• Partnership between NGOs and government is needed for the development of the country.

• Excessive use of force by the state is flagrant violation of human rights in Kashmir.

The Chairman of the Session, Mr. Mujibul Huq, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of Bangladesh, expressed that in contemporary parlance, governance which connotes managing the affairs of state is not limited to the narrow confines of public administration only, it extends into the area of political economy, state security, cultural and social development. Within this broader interpretation, governance needs to take account of the following facts: (i) appropriate political institutions within a democratic framework (ii) proper authority and working of the judiciary; (iii) efficient administrative system with due recognition to socio-political and cultural dynamics of the society and (iv) recognition of the role of civil society. Mr. Huq mentioned that governance, in order to meet the security challenges of the society, has to be good governance characterized by participation, rule of law, transparency, consensus, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability etc.

H. E. Mr. Reaz Rahman, Honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, was the Chief Guest at the Concluding Session chaired
by Barrister A K H Morshed, Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh. Mr. A. K. M. Abdus Sabur, Conference Co-coordinator, presented the Summary of the Proceedings.

In his speech as the Chief Guest H. E. Mr. Reaz Rahman said that unfortunately, in South Asia, religious and cultural differences are the key factors for political opportunism and exclusion. He said that it is now becoming more and more evident than before that the root causes of the high level of instability in the region are negative perceptions of various nationalities about one another. Unfortunately, such perceptions are historical with their roots in religion, ethnic origin and the likes. He expressed satisfaction that the Conference has set the context for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue to further South Asian security and political cooperation. He emphasised that, nowadays, security discourse is not confined to conventional military security as security threats also emanate from other sources like poverty, population explosion, human rights violation, environmental degradation etc.

In his deliberation, he highlighted the fact that the Conference has brought a host of new and non-traditional issues like, the role of civil society, information and media in security into a sharp focus. In this context he mentioned that the role of media, information and communication in national and international security has become an exciting area of research and it is really praiseworthy that the Conference has discussed this and related issues at length. He congratulated BIISS and the German Embassy in Dhaka for organizing this International Conference. He also thanked scholars and experts from both home and abroad who have made the International Conference a success.
While presenting the Summary of the Proceedings Conference, Mr. A. K. M. Abdus Sabur, Conference Co-coordinator, emphasised that the central motive behind organising the Conference has been to let the diverse ideas come into creative interactions so that the issues could be analysed from different perspectives.

The Session Chairman Barrister A K H Morshed, in his concluding remarks, praised BIiSS efforts in organising the Conference on a contemporary topic of significant importance.

The Conference ended with a vote of thanks delivered by Major General S. M. Shahab Uddin, Director General, BIiSS.

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