CHAPTER V

REGIONAL COOPERATION AT TRACK II LEVEL
Introduction

Speaking to the Parliament upon return from his goodwill visit to India on 9th August 2000, the Prime Minister of Nepal, Girija Prasad Koirala gave hints that bilateral treaties and agreements in the water resources sector of the past would be reviewed to examine whether Nepal has received the gains that the past agreements indicated for her. This remark comes in the context of Koirala-Vajpayee joint statement recognizing the need for reviewing fifty years of bilateral relations between Nepal and India in the changed global context in order to give the relationship new impetus for the coming fifty years.

A few years back, Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikary had told a visiting group of Bangladeshi students that Bangladesh should invest in hydro-electricity and flood control projects in any river of eastern Nepal where Nepal and Bangladesh are separated by only a few kilometers. He said that he was worried about the problems related to water resources and added that Nepal was of the view that the whole of the South Asian region should benefit from this region’s water resources.

What is worthy of note in the latter statement, is that it came from Nepal’s first communist Prime Minister, a Marxist-Leninist weaned on Lenin’s GOELRO Plan of Electrification and its dictum; "Communism is equal to Soviet Power plus the electrification of all Russia!" While still holding on to the
'hydro-bonanza' school of thought, something that may not be entirely justified as will be argued below, the Marxist-Leninist Prime Minister's advocating an investment approach to infrastructure development rather than a state interventionist one is a significant indicator of tectonic shifts in thinking that are underway in the region.

That there is water and energy to be developed more efficiently in the region with the application of new technologies, especially in the Himalaya-Ganga, is a truism. What is becoming less and less obvious is, how such a development is to occur, for whom, at what cost, under how many different external conditionalites, with what level, of democratic participation, and so on. There are a whole set of nested questions, each of which, when uncovered, opens up a Pandora's box of newer sets of uncertainties. What the above statements of Nepali prime ministers highlight is that some serious rethinking of institutional arrangements is on the menu that would perforce have to challenge the conventional ways of doing business. Another truism hidden within these statements is that the past decades is nothing to be very proud of. These are openings provided by pluralist democracy. This paper examines why a new cooperative arrangement that allows space for various social solidarities would be a prerequisite for better results in regional cooperation.

**Water Example**

The complex system, which is the Himalaya-Ganga waters, has embedded within it the contradictions between the physical nature of the resource and the differing perceptions among the plurality of social units about the meaning of the resource. Furthermore, the social units, driven by their internal compulsions, or what are called "contradictory certainties"\(^3\), make choices of technology and
intervention measures that reinforce the cosmology inherent in their institutions. This paper argues that the complexity of the Himalaya-Ganga problem is not amenable to pure technical solutions, certainly not solutions that start from the euphoria of technological wizardry ignoring the societal base that ultimately has to sustain the imposed technology. Indeed, it is argued that very often the technical solutions proposed are reflections of the inherent interests of the institutions making those proposals, in the South Asian case that of omnipotent bureaucracies that provide no space to other solidarities. Often, these interests are not even adequately sensitive to the manifold physical nature of the resource, as the history of the last fifty years of water mismanagement in the region shows.

Traditional approaches used by dominant institutions in our midst in resolving the impasse in the overall development of the Himalaya-Ganga by means of the conventional social software have led to neither any breakthrough nor any dazzling new insight. It has been a techno-centric rather than a society-centric approach, and many of the elements of the impasse can be traced to this stratagem. The need today is, therefore, to analyze the problems of the Himalaya-Ganga from the perspectives of society, its needs and capabilities rather than from the mesmerizing possibilities and capabilities of imported technology. It is to bring society onto the center stage of the discourse, while defining our future and to see how society can adopt technology and adapt it to societal needs. Unfortunately, the current unthinking push for privatization and liberalization seems to be doing just the opposite - having technology developed for different civilizational purposes adopt poor societies and adapt them to the needs of the artifacts.

Part of the problem is the nature of the physical bounty. While the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Barak basins -- the Himalaya-
Ganga -- have a significant volume of water both in absolute quantum as well as in the average, its spatial and temporal distribution is so variable as to remind one of the old joke that a statistician is one who, with one foot on a hot stove and the other in a freezer, would say that on the average he is comfortable. Monsoon rainfall is the basic source of moisture in the Himalaya-Ganga, but about 80 percent of this fall in the three summer months of June, July and August. According to one estimate, it has been estimated that "in India, at most of the stations with rainfall of 100-150 cms per monsoon, half of the total monsoon rainfall occurs in 15 to 20 hours distributed throughout the rainy season. And on these occasions, the intensity is 5-10 cms per hour, each spell lasting an hour or less." In 1993, the Kulekhan catchment, south of Katmandu received 540mm of rainfall in less than 24 hours and over 50 percent of the reservoir was filled in just nine hours. Bharatpur, hardly 45 minutes drive away to the west, at this time was suffering from drought and had not experienced any rainfall.

This pattern is 'normal' all over South Asia. Flood and drought are the normal regimes within which the average is almost an exception. An acute drought in temperate Europe is defined as a period of three months without any precipitation. A period of six or more months between October and June without any precipitation, however, is normal in South Asia, which is really a semi-desert with the climatic anomaly called the monsoon sustaining life therein under precarious conditions. Thus, South Asia can be considered a region with perennial drought separated by a month or so of monsoon floods.

What this implies is that the technology to collect water must match the hydro-meteorological realities. In South Asia, including the Himalaya-Ganga, where recharge is crucial for groundwater replenishment, precipitation needs to be collected
wherever it occurs in the catchment rather than only where it concentrates as stream flow, such as at a gorge where a reservoir could be built. There is a strong economic case that can be built for storing water where it falls and near where one needs it (small ponds) rather than far from where it falls and far from where it is needed (high dams). This, in turn, means empowering through genuine decentralization those in the villages to do the water harvesting rather than far away bureaucracies. This logic has further lessons in the modality of South Asian regional cooperation, as will be seen below.

The nature of monsoon rainfall is only one among many scientific uncertainties that exist around water resource issues of the Himalaya-Ganga. The monsoon regime itself is poorly understood for all of South Asia. The geology of the Himalaya, where most of the high dams are proposed, is almost a black box. The sediment transport process is another subject where much research needs to be done. The Kulekhani reservoir was designed for an economic life of 100 years, when the dead storage volume was expected to fill up with sediment. The actual sedimentation rate in the 13 years of its operation was ten times higher and the 1993 floods mentioned above brought down sediment, for that year, which was 100 times the design estimate.\(^5\)

In relation to water resources, what are the societal imperatives within the basin? This is a question that needs to be kept in the forefront of any discourse. The first is that the human population within the Himalaya-Ganga has increased very rapidly in the last half a century whether it is in the highlands or in the lowlands, averaging almost two-and-a-half to three percent per annum with urban centers recording almost double this rate. Most of the cultivable land in the basin had already been cultivated a few centuries ago. The
1991 figures of population in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin was estimated to be about 535 million within an area of about 175 million hectares. The contributions (population/area in percentages of total) of the various countries being India - 75.7/62.7, Bangladesh - 19.8/7.4, Nepal - 3.6/8.0, Tibet - 0.6/19.0 and Bhutan - 0.3/2.6. While the man-land ratio looks favorable in the upper catchment countries in gross terms, when one examines this figure in terms of cultivable land, the implications are quite different. In Nepal, only a quarter of the gross area is cultivable of which less than half can be considered irrigable. With this consideration in mind, it can be seen that in Nepal, 3.6 percent of the total basin population resides on only about 2 percent of the cultivable land or 1 percent potentially irrigable land -- a ratio almost as bad as Bangladesh. Most of this cultivable, irrigated or potentially irrigable land also happens to be at the valley bottoms behind potential high dams.8

Second, the needs of this population are changing rapidly, away from what it was fifty or sixty years ago. It is not enough to talk of a larger population living with stagnant or declining agricultural productivity. The most important characteristic of current times is the fact that developing countries are being brought under an ambit of not just trade in luxuries but, more importantly, a trade in necessities.7 The difference between a regime of trade in luxuries (as the ancient South Asians and the Chinese had always done long before the birth of capitalism in the 16th Century) and one of trade in necessities is the very essence of the debilitating process of Third Worldization. While subsistence economy was possible before, it is becoming more and more impossible now with the threat of mass scale pauperization, a distinct and grim reality. Many elements of everyday use today would have been a luxury many decades ago; and this trend of increasing dependency on events and
production processes far away from possible societal control accelerates with the current path of development in vogue.

The result is that everyday items of food, clothing, housing, medicine, transport, entertainment, education, services etc. are no longer produced within the vicinity but are essential items that need to be traded, goods that larger and larger segments of society cannot do without. While previously 'land' was the productive resource base that could provide all the basic necessities, now it cannot; and a greater reliance must be placed on 'trade' as the productive resource base. Those nations and societies that may have the 'land' (including what can be mined such as petroleum), but have feeble or no control over the terms of trade are clearly under risk of severe marginalization.

In the past, the tradition of feudalism had understood the resource-giving capabilities of the land, and thus had been able to maintain control. Today, unfortunately, let alone the peasants, even the elite in society have feeble understanding of the resource-generating potential of trade. The Third World societies of South Asia are thus moving into a state of fatalism with a poor grip over their future. The increase in population mentioned above must be seen in juxtaposition with this change in the structure of needs of the population and means available for meeting them. The mixture is more serious than when both are seen separately because of the synergy of risk that is allocated quite unevenly among societal elements under trading regimes not understood or controllable.

Third, the conventional almost knee-jerk reaction to answering the dilemma of increasing population and the changing character of their needs which is becoming more trade-dependent has been the linear one of increasing agricultural productivity for which year-round dependable irrigation is seen as a *sine qua non*. The obsessive preoccupation of societies with
surface water flows is understandable. In a region of the world that would otherwise have been a semi-arid savanna, a thin strip of dry-season surface flow can be perceived to be the very life-blood of the land; and a scramble to secure rights over it becomes the order of the day. Achieving a larger commonwealth, however, lies in recognizing that much of the Himalaya-Ganga is an arid zone where precipitation must be conserved wherever and whenever it falls and not just where it concentrates. Developing surface water schemes to increase cropping intensity to take care of increasing population is knee-jerk thinking which ignores the costs, not only both financial and ecological, but also institutional. The latter stems from the fact that increasing agricultural productivity is not just about providing additional water in the dry season but one among a myriad of input, including easily accessible credit, crop insurance schemes, hybrid technologies, as well as new forms of social obligations and organizations etc.

The implication of these three imperatives, coupled with the ‘drought-flood’ nature of the region’s hydrology, has often been poorly appreciated and much of the water resources planning is based on annual averages divided on a per capita basis that are highly misleading. Such high intensity rainfall cannot be fully utilized. Their runoff into the ocean as floods is inevitable and the ability of this rainfall to recharge the groundwater is as small as 7 percent to 14 percent. Also, the view that deforestation in the hills is contributing to rapid run-off and detracting from soil percolation is seen today to be a myth. With such high intensity rainfall, even if all of the Himalaya were a canopy of trees, floods would still occur just as it has occurred before. Recharge is higher in the thick alluvial Ganga-Brahmaputra plains than in what are called the hard-rock areas; but even here, the fact that rainfall duration may be less than 3 percent of the time of the year severely limits what can percolate into the ground. Even
storing them in large reservoirs does not allow for more than 10 percent to 15 percent of the rainwater in a catchment to be captured as the water balance of Narmada has shown.\textsuperscript{10}

These three imperatives are also the main reason why, in Third World societies, the Western environmentalists' slogan of 'NO DAMS' finds poor response as the proponent of such a view would find himself quickly marginalized in civic discourse as being anti-developmental. He would be far safer, and more effective, saying NO BAD DAMS and talking of bad economics instead. Technically, any high dam or any length of flood protection embankment can be built -- at a cost. Provided society is willing to pay that cost, these engineering measures, which are often only 'textbook engineering' and not cutting edge rocket science, can be undertaken.

The real problem is whether these costs can or should be borne -- a question that is not technical but moral and ethical that brings our discourse back to society. If you were a reasonably powerful South Asian leader capable of imposing your will on society and somebody gave you six billion US dollars (the approximate cost of a high dam in Nepal's fabulous gorges), would you use it to build a dam, or to do two hundred other things needed to alleviate poverty and provide security? If you did decide to build the dam (and the money would certainly not be free but would bristle with high financial and institutional costs) how would you divide those costs between your fellow citizens and the future generation that is not your voter today, but who would ultimately be left with the debt burden?

Thus, in developing water resources using the tools of modern engineering technology, one has to contend not only with the scientific uncertainties, but also those of a social nature that perhaps may present themselves as more intractable. First and foremost, the question of clientele and markets for the
products has to be addressed. A high dam in the Himalaya-Ganga that stores the monsoon runoff would produce several types of goods: electricity, regulated flow and pondage. The clientele for these goods are varied. The consumers of electricity are the industries, pump irrigators and domestic consumers in mostly urban areas. The consumers of regulated water stream -- which would provide increased dry season flow increasing irrigation command coverage and reduced monsoon discharge providing flood control -- are the surface irrigators, highway and railway departments, dense settlements and river navigation operators. Those benefiting from pondage would be mostly the fisheries and tourism people.

These benefits must be paid for by the beneficiaries who have very conflicting interests and political clout. For example, it is the interest of pump irrigators to receive cheap electricity and therefore, would like to see most of the cost loaded onto the surface irrigation component. Farmers, of course, would like to have free water and would like to see electricity pay for the cost of the dams. Urban area benefiting from flood protection would also like to get such a benefit free, one might say, as a humanitarian gesture with the costs being borne by someone else. Often, these high dams can only be built in specific locations in the hills before the Himalayan rivers debouche onto the plains. These dams would inundate hill valleys with most of the fertile and arable land and towns (such as Tehri in the Indian Himalaya). So, in building many high dams in the Himalaya-Ganga, one can say that a seasonal flood in the plains would be exported to the hills as a permanent inundation. While it certainly can be done technologically, the question remains at whose cost, and why?
Pluralized Cooperation

These conflicts occur within any one country as Tehri, Arun 3, Kaptai, Mahawelli or Narmada have already shown. How much does one complicate the equations when one tries to extrapolate this exercise across national boundaries? As long as one is unable to address the issues of equity within one country, the benefits of an overflowing hydro-led cornucopia will remain unrealized. This is simply because the socio-political opposition – which can be expected to be more articulate with improvements in mass communication – will make such plans wholly unfeasible, if not extraordinarily expensive.

What is the way out of such a technology-led impasse? South Asians have been talking of regional cooperation in water resources development for the better part of this last half-century without having any major success to show. The Mahakali and Farakka treaties of 1996 are purely bilateral treaties and have nothing to do with regional cooperation. Of these, the Mahakali is in serious trouble. Even the much-vaunted Chukha hydroelectric project between Bhutan and India is not without simmering conflict that expresses itself in the 'nagging' method of price increase rather than a more scientific one. Undoubtedly, the first thing necessary to do is to admit the problems as quickly and sincerely as possible, something our water-related institutions in South Asia have not shown themselves to be very capable of doing. And the reason has to do with inflexibility of both the technology as well as the institutions upholding them. Thompson has identified four indicators of technological inflexibility: large scale, long lead time, capital intensity and major infrastructure needs. In addition to these, he proposes four indicators of organizational inflexibility: 'single mission' outfits, closure to criticism, hype (as in "If we do not cover the
Himalaya with trees, Bangladesh will sink forever beneath the waves”), and hubris (categorical certainty that "there is no alternative").

What these indicators of inflexibility in the choice of technology point to is an alarming institutional picture. Most South Asian water organizations are self-mandated to do one thing: build dams or canals or embankments. Anything that would hinder them from doing so -- e.g. if they are told that there may be environmental or social considerations, or that there may just be better economic alternative -- is seen as a threat. Our water organizations, therefore, have developed inbuilt institutional filters that prevent such 'threats' from penetrating their central nervous system. They also nurture themselves ideologically with hype and hubris ranging from the 'hydro-dollar' mindset in Nepal to technological arrogance as in the Kosi in north Bihar. The sad outcome of all this is that new information filters through only at very high decibel levels of conflict and confrontation where only Eco-fundamentalists as well as the revolutionary brotherhood can survive. There is sadly little space, in the current framework of intra-national discourse in much of South Asia, for the moderate.

In meeting the challenges of the future in South Asia, especially as regards its shared resources such as water, it is worth considering some positive successes of an alternative nature with creative space for the moderates. One such is the 'Patna Initiative', which was started by some academics of Bihar and Nepal as a complementary alternative to the impasse-ridden state and government-level intercourse, both between Nepal and India and between India and Bangladesh. The belief of those beginning this initiative was that, while the secretaries of governments and bureaucrats have been
jousting for the better half of this century without much results, the academic community of South Asia has not been as forthcoming with positive contributions as it should. It was, therefore, felt that direct academic interaction among basin riparians should be initiated to seek ways out of the impasse because academics could be more forthcoming both in criticisms of the past and new suggestions for the future.

Another beginning of a ‘Patna Initiative’ type outside-the-government interaction is *Duryog Nivaran*, a South Asian initiative at promoting the alternative approach to disaster mitigation. At a meeting in March in Dhaka organized by the *Duryog Nivaran* network members, it was agreed that, in addressing flood victims and flood hazards, the network must concentrate on what are called ‘marginalized rivers’ -- rivers and streams that have escaped national bureaucratic attention because they are small but which cumulatively cause more damage than the larger rivers combined. This initiative leaves the unresolved conflicts between India and Nepal on the Kosi as well as between India and Bangladesh on the Farakka to the governments concerned with best wishes for a speedy settlement, but concentrates on small rivers between Meghalaya in India and Sylhet in Bangladesh as well as tributaries of the Mechi/Mahanada between Jhapa and Bihar/West Bengal as pilot cases for transboundary collaboration between the basin riparians.

This initiative has seen some interesting outcomes. While such collaboration between countries with strict visa requirements is difficult, there is currently collaboration between Nepali and Indian academics and NGOs to study the flood problems of these ‘marginalized rivers’. These groups have engaged in doing ‘alternative science’ and chose to generate their own data. An example of such ‘alternative data generating’ was in the small Rohini river basin that flows from
Nepal’s Churia hills to the West Rapti near Gorakhpur, where seven rain gauges in Nepal and three in India were installed through collaboration between NGOs and grassroots academics in Nepal and India. The only scientific data on the 1998 cloudbursts and floods in this basin (460 mm of rain in 24 hours on August 3) is with this group and not with the bureaucracies of Nepal and India.18

Another related activity successfully undertaken recently was an exchange of riparian journalists, who were able to assess public perception on the Kosi project at the grassroots farmer level as well as at the state political level. As an indicator of changing perceptions, not one of the Nepali journalists who visited the north Kosi delta used the staple Nepali slogan of ‘India cheated Nepal’. Rather, the tone of their writing was that it is the Bihari and Nepali farmers who have been shortchanged, and that new initiatives are needed to educate the politicians and the bureaucrats on both sides of the border.

What these alternative initiatives hope to accomplish is both active research on alternatives as well as action at the grassroots that promote the security of everyday life of the poor. These initiatives have lessons for cooperation in South Asia. In building a shared future regarding shared resources, it has become imperative to address alternative ways of doing business that would maintain as much flexibility as possible in light of the scientific and social uncertainties. Enhanced academic collaboration transcending national boundaries is one such way to break out of what Max Weber called ‘a bureaucratized intelligentsia’.

Re-inventing the Future

The current water resource dispute in the Himalaya-Ganga, whether between nations or advocacy groups centers
on perceptions, the institutions these perceptions foster and the actions such institutions undertake.

"Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perceptions into forms compatible with the relations they authorize. They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and they arouse our emotions to a standardized pitch on standardized issues. Added to all these is that they endow themselves with rightness and send their mutual corroboration cascading through all the levels of our information system. No wonder they easily recruit us into joining their narcissistic self-contemplation. Any problems we try to think about are automatically transformed into their own organizational problems. The solutions they proffer only come from the limited range of their experience. If the institution is one that depends upon participation, it will reply to our frantic question: 'More participation!' If it is one that depends on authority, it will only reply: 'More authority!' Institutions have the pathetic megalomania of the computer whose whole vision of the world is its own program."

Furthermore,

"The Instituted community blocks personal curiosity, organizes public memory, and heroically imposes certainty on uncertainty. In marking its own boundaries, it affects all lower level thinking, so that persons realize their own identities and classify each other through community affiliation."17

The author of the above lines argues that there are effectively only four mutually exclusive social environments classified according to how they accept a preordained group structure and how they affiliate with group loyalty. Self-determined structure with group affinity leads to the world of the hierarchist. On the other hand, isolates the broad fatalistic masses, live within structures imposed by others but have no group support to fall back upon. Individualists who uphold the
ideology of freedom of negotiation consequently neither accept a predefined structure nor coalesce with any group interest. Finally, dissenting groups of communards have strong group loyalty, but accept no structure ("We are all equal, comrades!"), leading to a perpetual tension with hierarchists as well as individualists and the constant need to justify the group's own existence with a holier-than-thou agenda.

The water resources debate and the impasse within the Himalaya-Ganga can be seen within the dynamics of these four mutually exclusive social environments. The system as a whole moves from one state of temporary equilibrium to another depending upon the stress and strain it is put under. This perturbation is generated by the dissenting groups (environmentalists, interest groups etc.) and which temporarily draws in the isolates (voters, consumers, demonstrators at large) as allies. It is threatening to the hierarchy (state agencies such as water resources departments and boards) due to the loss of legitimacy which ensues and which it tries to prevent. It, then, either begins to change its way of doing business or strives to co-opt the dissenters.

As regards water resources, much of the action and debates have been framed within the world of the hierarchs such as the various state agencies. Their structure is defined by the paradigm of heavy and large-scale engineering. In Nepal, for example, there was no state-level agency to handle irrigation very many decades ago. It was created over a period of decades from the 1920's in response to British India's water bureaucracy which was initiating activities (such as the Sarda Barrage on the western border river between Nepal and India) that made the Nepali elites sit up and take notice. An agency so created could only pursue what Toynbee would call 'mimesis' or emulation of whatever activities were undertaken by the superior party. In India itself, the strongest element of
the water bureaucracy are the irrigation agencies which carved out their powerful niche in the savanna-like ecology as a famine relief measure for what is termed 'protective irrigation' as opposed to productive irrigation. Behavior of such organizations is confined to what is acceptable within this paradigm and the hierarchic institution systematically filters out any information or thought process that can be threatening to this cosmology.

It is at this point that the dissenting communard enters. The hydro-ecological reality of the Himalaya-Ganga is complex and hardly amenable to monistic solutions such as those advocated by high dam, large canal and long embankment building agencies. In Nepal, for example, for the country as a whole, over two-thirds of the total irrigable area are managed by farmers and only a third by government agencies. Of all the irrigated area in the hills, 94 percent have been developed over the centuries by the village communities themselves whereas only 6 percent are what are called agency developed, including farmer-managed schemes improved upon by the agencies. It is estimated that there are almost 15,000 such schemes in the different ecological zones of Nepal, from the sub-tropical Tarai to the alpine High Himal; and these schemes range in size from 10 ha to 15000 ha. Whenever agencies attempt large schemes as befits their paradigm of development, the interests of these small systems are downgraded, whether it is in the making of national budgets or in providing support to them at the level of the state. In Bihar in India, for instance, the Gandak Canal's performance has been less than satisfactory and, had it not been for the small tubewells done by small farmer groups, the situation would have been disastrous. This allows dissenting communard groups such as environmentalists and social activists to put the hierarchic system under severe stress.
The insensitivity of the hierarchy allows communards to recruit the isolates to their cause, temporarily albeit. The resulting pressure on the system as a whole from this powerful 'vote bank' coalition forces agencies to re-examine their path and attempt compromises. The quotes of the two Prime Ministers at the start of this article are an indicator of the nascent re-examination.

The current impasse in the water resources development of the Himalaya-Ganga is within the hierarchic social environment defined by state-level institutions. The water resource agencies of Nepal, India and Bangladesh are locked within a framework where interest definition is still problematic. In Nepal, which owns the site where most of the storage sites for multipurpose water projects can be built, water means mostly hydroelectricity, which can be a source of wealth if the large Indian market for it were favorably open. In India, the primary concern of the water agencies is increased dry season flow for irrigation with hydroelectricity for industries and urban centers rapidly climbing up in salience. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, flood moderation is the prime concern with dry season irrigation coming second due to water diversion at Farakka by India. Hydro-electricity is brought into discourse only as a gesture to Nepal.

Hierarchic institutions in all three countries do not have any quarrel with the technological paradigm: they all advocate large dams, long canals and even longer flood protection embankments. For them, that would be the essence of regional cooperation. What they cannot agree among themselves is the relative value of these intervention measures, the resource benefits that would ensue, and the costs that need to be shared.

Nepali agencies believe that it is not just the value of the water which flows down to the lower riparians that is of
concern; it is also the value of the site where the dam can be built. After all, there is no other place in the world where the Kosi or the Karnali can be tamed than in Nepal's gorges. And this value is the value of the flood damages controlled downstream, the fossil fuel displaced and the second and third crops grown. Not assessing all these benefits and getting the actual beneficiaries pay for the cost of the high dam leaves them wary that a future generation will attack them for having sold their interests too cheap.

Indian agencies, on the other hand, believe that sites do not have intrinsic value in themselves other than the cost of the structure put up when they are actually put up, and that the dry season flow is a birthright as per the natural flow doctrine as well as the doctrine of prior capture. Massive canals have been built that will not be used anywhere near full capacity until there is augmentation of supplies from storages in Nepal in the uncertain future. That the increase in capacity utilization of these canals and irrigation schemes is a benefit that should be attributed to Nepali storage sites is not readily accepted. Indeed, Indian agencies dispute the contention that storages in Nepal-Himalaya would provide any significant flood benefits in India, even though during every monsoon Indian political pronouncements decree that a permanent solution to the floods will come about only after high dams are built in Nepal. In all these, the other solidarities such as the egalitarian activists and the profit-oriented individualists come to the discourse with very different perceptions of technology choices and, indeed, even the very definition of the problem, that hierarchs have given very little space to in the discourse on intra-national and regional cooperation.\textsuperscript{23}

That there is a substantial value in having dams in Nepal in order to derive irrigation and flood protection benefits in
the downstream plains in India is highlighted in secret memos of the British Raj such as the following:

"I found the short note prepared in the External Affairs Department on Nepal and Post-War Development very interesting. The destinies of Nepal and India are very closely linked and we should do everything possible to foster good relations between the two countries, especially as we owe her a big debt on account of the Gurkha battalions. Existing differences in opinion on Customs and Excise matters should not be allowed to hold up help to Nepal to advance herself."

"The suggestion that this help should take the form of a storage dam and hydro electric power station is, I think, an admirable one. This would not only give Nepal a basis on which she could build local industries but would also materially benefit the Eastern districts of the United Provinces and Bihar, which could draw on Nepal for power. It would also focus attention in Nepal to water development and storage and this might lead eventually to the possibility of flood control in the lower Ganges valley. Without some check on such Nepalese rivers as the Gogra, Rapti and Gandak, flooding in the East UP and Bihar cannot be kept under control. Ibbotson, one of my Advisers, who has an intimate knowledge of the Himalayas and its rivers, was so struck by the suggestion, that he considered Nepal should be given a free gift of a storage dam and power house. He was of the opinion that though ostensibly this might be given as a reward for war work, in effect it would ultimately prove to be of material benefit to the Provinces in the center of North India."  

It could be plausibly argued that, if there is significant 'material benefit' to Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar in terms of flood control from dams in Nepal, there would be flood control benefits to Bangladesh too, attenuated albeit. However, Bangladesh's concern for flood protection can hardly find a place in the current state of technical discourse on the relative benefits of high dams in the Nepal Himalayas. Nepal's
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Concern is to make money from selling electricity to the Indian market. The idea that it should import seasonal floods from Bihar and Bangladesh as permanent features in the Nepali landscape in the context of land hunger in Nepal is difficult to accommodate within the euphoric agenda of Nepali agencies high on a hydro-dollar dream.

India, on the other hand, denies that there is any significant flood protection benefit even in adjacent Bihar or UP from these dams, let alone in far away Bangladesh. To Indian agencies, the question of including Bangladesh as a potential stakeholder who should pay for this benefit is a logic that does not filter through, primarily because the cosmology that constitutes hierarchic agencies designs in-built filters which screens out information not conducive to upholding the ideology of the institution in question. This is in addition, of course, to the vexing question of sharing dry season flow or any possible augmentation from intervention measures. The upholding by Indian water agencies of the natural flow doctrine vis-a-vis Nepal and the absolute sovereignty doctrine vis-a-vis Bangladesh precludes any rational discourse on this matter at the agency level.

Expecting a way out of this impasse from the social environment of hierarchic thinking is difficult, to say the least; and it might be a trifle naive to expect agencies to conduct logical exercises that would undercut their own cosmology and raison d'etre. One possibility of inducing change is by increasing the intellectual stress in the system as a whole by means of dissenting communards such as environmental and activist groups who can examine the problem afresh from the perspectives of the small farmers, urban dwellers and the other voiceless ones. They could ask questions that hierarchic agencies cannot because it would undermine their cosmology -- do the poor of this region really
need these high dams and embankments and, if they feel they do, then are they willing to pay for them? These questioning communards can be helped in this task by individualist academics with no stake in the structure (i.e., their promotions and pensions are not going to be dependent on what they say or write). What is needed therefore, is a contested policy terrain (unlike the present, uncontested bureaucracy-dominated one), where the practice of water science is open to all the solidarities including those of the risk-taking market and the caution-raising egalitarians. A true South Asian scientific community of academics committed to regional 'universal' scientific truth, not necessarily 'national science', and not afraid to ask unpopular questions may help all the actors in these conflict situations to arrive at a consensus.

After all, progress (in the conventional western sense of the word) was possible, as Max Weber was wont to say, only because Western intelligentsia, at the start of the scientific revolution, had not been bureaucratized into a straitjacket thinking that dictated the necessity of upholding a preordained structure, howsoever irrational it may be. In the field of water resources, much of South Asian expertise has been locked into agencies whose structure prevents a vibrant intellectual debate, and the region so much poorer because of it. Even the alternative, pursued as Track-II, has been an extension of the hierarch's world and has not provided more than token presence for thinking of civil society and businesses. Hence, the need for Track-III in regional cooperation, especially in water in South Asia, that looks for inspiration not towards the hierarchic solidarity's world of Track-I, but towards those of the marginalized peasantry's shut off structurally from the existing corridors of power.
Endnotes

8. Feudalism is used here in the political economic sense of rent seeking and control. South Asian feudalism has been different from its European namesake in that, while the latter depended on militarization, the latter grew out of religious control – the gifting of land to Brahmins between 3rd and 10th Centuries encouraging Sanskritization of the periphery. See Sharma, R. S., Early Medieval Indian Society – A Study of Feudalization, Orient Longmans, Hyderabad, India. 2001.
10. Pisharoty, op.cit. The total precipitation received in the Narmada watershed is 10 million hectare-meters (Mha-m) of which the mean run-off at the dam site is 4.1 Mha-m and the live storage capacity is 0.58 Mha-m.


24. Demi-official letter from H.E. Sir Maurice Hallett, GCIE, KGSI, Governor General United Provinces, to Sir Olaf Caroe, KCIE, CSI, Secretary to the Government of India, External Affairs Department dated 18 February 1945 (British Library Political Department Collections).


REGIONAL COOPERATION AT THE TRACK II LEVEL: CRACKING THE 'GENOME' OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES

Amera Saeed

Introduction – tracking the political 'DNA'

Today, through the Human Genome Project, scientific analysis has shown us that all living processes function under their own pre-formatted dynamics, determined by the embedded DNA coding within them. Following years of painstaking research, this landmark development, which has mapped the entire DNA coding of the human body, provides us with food for thought regarding the dynamics of inter-state behavior. Particularly, when we view the problems of the SAARC Member States, whose conflict-prone, poverty stricken, undernourished state of underdevelopment is such a source of worry to their own citizens and the rest of the world. By applying some of the scientific techniques of this huge collective, scientific, human endeavor, one could establish analytical procedures into cracking the 'political DNA coding of inter-governmental processes' of the states of the SAARC region. It is the poverty scenario of the South Asian region that depicts the actual state of its human condition, and one, which can no longer remain hostage to ineffective intra or intergovernmental processes. We should not remain focused on the probability of nuclear explosions when the possibilities of an implosion arising out of demographic pressures are palpably nearer, with a far more devastating fall-out.

Perhaps, such a line of inquiry may enable research to further clarify and define, with more accuracy, abstract aspirations such as 'regional cooperation', 'inter-governmental
processes’, ‘track II levels’ or ‘citizen’s diplomacy’, examine the organic inter-relationships among them, and then establish appropriate mechanisms of regional cooperation, which can translate into action-based strategies — both at country and regional levels — so as to bring about visible material well-being for the citizens of the SAARC region. The intended outcome would be to bring about political and diplomatic, trade and commercial configurations of inter-state relations that will have their differences but are tension-free, that will have differing time frames for the realization of set objectives but will be result-oriented and above all, the strategies to achieve these objectives will be action-based and people-focused. Whatever system it arrives at, it cannot bypass intergovernmental processes or the peoples’ right for participatory roles. So far these two processes have either run along parallel tracks, or seen each other in adversarial roles. SAARC also has reflected this reality. In its two decades existence, SAARC has been described as a ‘fragile’ organization and its viability has been held up to doubt, its future been marked with doomsday predictions of its near demise. Yet, once again we meet to determine its condition. As long as it is there to be discussed, there is every sign of hope for it to remain alive and become a dynamic institution.

The ‘DNA’ as understood by this study of intergovernmental and people-to-people processes has a dual definition and role. For scrutiny purposes, it stands for ‘development negating approaches’. If we can crack what is it that makes negative approaches, at all levels, thrive in the South Asian region and nullify any positive collaboration and interaction, we may come closer to finding the ways of reversing this trend and altering its adverse components into a positive political DNA, namely one which is a ‘development nurturing approach’. The line of scientific inquiry adopted is whether Track II levels carry within them the wherewithal of
configuring more effective and implementable mechanisms, in order to alter adversarial inter-government processes and activate them into viable, durable, ongoing cooperative ventures.


SAARC was initiated through the intergovernmental process and over the next few years was built up through the same mechanism. The very inception was centred on the concept of promoting people-to-people contact and on the perceptions of shared commonalities. Let us diagnose those aspects on which there is no difference of opinion even within the governments of the member states of SAARC.

Regardless of the varying perceptions over various issues, all South Asian governments recognize the prevailing underdevelopment and backwardness as the main cause, of an immense multi-faceted poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity and unemployment. They accept that traditions that acquire the force of law to perpetuate human miseries in multiple ways as social discriminations based on gender, ethnicity, religion, caste, language and lead to the existence of huge numbers of vulnerable and marginalized groups; exploitation of children and women, lopsided development that has served to create more displaced people within the countries; rampant corruption in government at all levels; the fact that peoples' rights are daily trampled in the absence of sense of responsibility and commitment of those entrusted with authority whether it be in the government, or at the level of peoples' representatives. As a result of corruption and malgovernance, the people of the region have had to subscribe to a parallel rule of mafias that have brought the gun and drug culture, and added the dimension of terrorism and a host of insecurities. Added to this are the range of unresolved
bilateral tensions among the member states, which have resulted in wars and armed conflicts particularly between India and Pakistan. And finally, the challenges posed to each of them and the region as a whole by the fast pace of globalization and the expanding role of the World Trade Organization. All the governments of South Asia are acutely aware of this reality in which they co-exist. The media of South Asia has played the valuable role of keeping track of where these disputes stand.

Yet, cooperation is not an alien word within South Asia as has been demonstrated when the governments of the countries of South Asia have taken common positions in international fora on issues affecting them regionally, or in the larger debate of the rights of developing countries. It has been episodic but it has been there. Whenever it has occurred, there has been some ground reality that has compelled it and brought it about.

All this suffices to underscore the point the study takes up as the premise of its brief. Namely that cooperation, shared perspectives and common approaches on issues of common concern, that is rooted in the acceptance of a shared regional identity has been a sub-surface consciousness even at difficult times. It is this consciousness which responded to the endeavor initiated by President General Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh, when in 1980, he wrote to the heads of government of member states to examine the prospects of institutionalizing regional cooperation among them, in order to jointly realize their potentialities. To gauge how big a step forward this was, one merely has to look at the prevailing political differences of the time. The limitations of space do not permit a detailed presentation, but this study certainly recommends that SAARC's development be understood in the light of the context in which it has to function. Even at the
outset it can be stated that while the progress has been slow in showing tangible results, it has nevertheless been in positive directions. It has remained on the level of intergovernmental policy dialogue, but even at this level some significant gains have been made which need only to be translated into result-oriented action plans. The successful implementations of even a few of these serve to change the situation around.

The intergovernmental processes at the official level have been of the following categories: the annual meetings of the heads of governments/state; the bi-annual foreign secretaries levels as the Council of Ministers; meetings of the Technical Committees; the various other Sub-organizational levels of SAARC, and by the mid-nineties at the level of SAARC-international organizational collaboration as well. These latter levels have provided further venues for contacts, even at times when domestic political developments hindered official contacts.

Postponements of SAARC Summits

The SAARC meetings and summits have been held with a fair regularity, though there have been some postponements at the level of summits and in Council of Ministers meetings. These postponements also merit attention as they reflected certain overpowering political developments. Summit meetings were held at Bangalore (1986), Katmandu (1987) and Islamabad (1988). In 1989, Sri Lanka declined to convene the summit because of the continued presence on its soil of foreign troops, namely the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), despite the agreement for their withdrawal in accordance with the terms of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. India did not meet the demand on time for the summit to be convened by the newly elected Lankan government. Pakistan continued to hold
the office of the Chairperson of SAARC for two years till the convening of the fifth summit in Male in the autumn of 1990. Following that, there were some muted rumblings on the choice of the next venue. However, these were amicably settled with Maldives playing host to the 1990 summit and Sri Lanka agreeing to organize the event in 1991.

The Sixth Summit was scheduled to be held in Colombo on 7-9 November 1991, but the events of the preceding months cast their long shadow. Following the brutal assassination of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu, the not so friendly Indo-Lankan relations of the time took a further nose-dive, as the act was widely believed to have been the handiwork of Tamils in the opposing camp. Mr. Gandhi's association with having sent the IPKF to Sri Lanka had not been well received by the Sri Lankan citizenry, even though an accord had been hastily signed to make it official. The Colombo venue, therefore, was widely debated in the Indian press, which argued whether it was safe for the Indian Prime Minister to go to Colombo, given the level of tensions between the two countries. Nevertheless, preparations went ahead, when two days prior to the programmed arrival of the leaders, the Bhutanese King expressed his inability to come because of political unrest in his country. He offered to send his sister as his representative, but India refused to accept that arrangement of an accredited representative. It may be mentioned here that in the Second SAARC Summit (Bangalore, 1986), Prime Minister Junejo of Pakistan represented instead of President Ziaul Haq and in the Male 1990 Summit, Sri Lankan President Premadasa was represented by his Prime Minister Dingiri Banda Wijetunga. Prime Minister Koirala of Nepal also fell ill and thus, with three members absent, President Gayoom of Maldives had to cancel the summit a few hours before its scheduled inauguration.
What was significant in this cancellation was the opinion of the media. The observers, including most of the Indian press saw this cancellation as transparently engineered by the Government of India itself and termed it 'a petty Indian maneuver, unworthy of a country of India's position'. An Indian correspondent, K.P. Nayar of the *Economic Times* in an article dated 9 November 1991, categorically stated that India maneuvered the SAARC Summit collapse. He also gave his assessment of why it was done. He blamed the Indian foreign office of a deliberate plan to downgrade and eventually scuttle the meeting. He went as far as to state that if the Bhutanese King himself had been made suddenly aware of a security threat in his kingdom, the alert itself could have come only from the very agencies based in New Delhi. The President of Maldives and the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Bangladesh went ahead with planned trips to Colombo giving them the status of 'bilateral visits' and giving it thus the status of a 'mini summit.'

The international media of the time was engrossed with the disintegrating USSR, but nevertheless, took note of the Indian role in what pessimist observers were terming as the near demise of SAARC. In response to the growing criticism at home and abroad, the Indian government of the time then reiterated its commitments to SAARC ideals and expressed its willingness to attend a re-scheduled meeting in Colombo. After a hectic diplomatic activity, President Gayoom of Maldives was able to convene a one-day business only summit session in Colombo before the end of the year in 1991.

The Eleventh Summit at Katmandu in November 1999 was postponed at India's behest. As Sushil Sharma, BBC's correspondent in Katmandu reported that the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, K V Rajan, conveyed his country's desire for the postponement of the summit to the Nepalese
Foreign Minister. India had indicated that it wanted the forthcoming summit meeting of the SAARC postponed, in view of the October 1999 military coup in Pakistan. A spokesperson for the Indian embassy in Katmandu told the BBC that India endorsed what he described as the feeling of other member countries that the timing of the summit is not appropriate. This sort of a projection was given through other Indian forums as well. An academic assessment echoed the official line when it described the postponement of the Eleventh Summit was 'following concern expressed by some of the member states over the developments in Pakistan where the democratically elected government was thrown.' The interesting details are that when towards the end of November, a CASAC meeting was held in Katmandu itself, at its inaugural session in which messages were read out on behalf of the heads of state and government, there was no message from the Head of State or Government of India, while messages from the heads of state and government of the six other member states of SAARC were read out. This motivated lapse on the part of the Indian Government was also pointed out by the participants during the course of the inaugural session. It proved yet again that the smaller member states of South Asia have the commitment to keep SAARC related activities going and can manage to do so again in the future in other ways as well, should India decide to keep away.

It is necessary to put the record straight in the sense that whatever views were expressed on the military take over in Pakistan on 12 October 1999, the Eleventh SAARC Summit scheduled for November 26-28, 1999 in Katmandu did not warrant a postponement. The internal matters of Pakistan are primarily the concern of the people of Pakistan. Votes of no confidence and military take-overs have one thing in common in the short-term – they bring about abrupt ends to governments in office, but not the end of governance systems,
which comprise of other institutional pillars and mechanisms. While not denying the need for good governance through democratic practices and systems, the point being made is that peoples' aspirations are shelved in many ways. Also, there was an element of a wrong impression conveyed that all other member states unanimously wanted to postpone the Summit for the same reason as India. The Sri Lankan government issued a statement to the effect that the Summit should be held on schedule giving the reasons that: firstly, SAARC has no role to interfere in the internal political affairs of other countries; secondly, the SAARC charter does not allow such things; thirdly, the postponement of the Summit will inflict a big blow to the process of cooperation and economic development in the region. The Bangladesh government also stated that it would be violative of the SAARC charter, which did not endorse any such postponement in any of its clauses. Other member nations pointed out that it is the country that is represented not the government. As a news commentator pointed out that it was pertinent to recall that SAARC itself was conceived and born by the military ruler of Bangladesh.

The Indian media itself took a strong exception to what some describes as their government's 'petulant' behavior demonstrated in the postponement of the Eleventh Summit. The Asian Age in an editorial (4/11/1999) said that India, as the region's big democracy did not do herself proud. Its efforts to get the Summit postponed revealed its lack of confidence. It noted that it was also contradictory to the Indian position that it was willing to take up all pending issues with Pakistan. Furthermore, having acquired a nuclear status it was binding on both countries to keep lines of communication open and what more appropriate forum than SAARC. The Hindu in its editorial (9/11/99) decried the short-sighted stand and drew a distinction between internal affairs
of a country and those that while being internal affairs cast a shadow on the region as a whole. It recalled that ASEAN allows its forum to air bilateral disputes. Other viewpoints from the media of other member states also were objective enough to comment that military rulers like General Ershad of Bangladesh and Ziaul Haq of Pakistan played crucial roles in the SAARC process. A Nepali political observer commented that the current military ruler of Pakistan also be invited as only through constructive engagement military rulers can be persuaded or influenced to set timetable for return to democracy.

It is interesting that since the postponement of the Eleventh Summit a section of the academic debate in India has been looking at the 'relevance of SAARC'. Given earlier numerous instances of Indian commitment to the SAARC process and many occasions of India's positive contributions within SAARC, why has this strain of thought made this sudden appearance, just as SAARC is ready to enter adulthood and seek its regional rights on the arena of globalization? Does this reflect a new line of justification for some other Indian action under consideration vis-à-vis SAARC? Some Indian media comments are recalled here in that context before we look at the other aspects.

An article in The Pioneer by Siddharth Bhatia earlier this year, looked at the cultural and historical reasons why South Asian co-operation has been such a non-starter. The article attempts to make a distinction between India with its "many thriving institutions of democracy: a robust independent media, and independent judiciary and a free and fair election process and where the military, unlike in neighboring Pakistan tends to stay in the barracks." He ended his thesis on the note that left to themselves, the people of the region would find more ways to cooperate and suggests "why not give
SAARC a decent burial and end everyone's anxiety about putting up a smiling face in front of the enemy?" What enemy is meant here? It is a revealing thought process. It may not be entirely representative, but it does belong to a section of the Indian public opinion. The focus on intergovernmental processes should not forget that positive processes like water find their own levels. The advancements in the SAARC-based policy dialogue should not be set aside as non-starters. It is these efforts, which make the ground level for action plans. SAARC without India would have a gaping diplomatic hole, but there would not be a vacuum. The SAARC process could continue with the other six states of the region through other organizations that exist, or can be forged. Not even the Indian landmass could obstruct such a commitment as the neighborship of ideas has its own potency.

Fortunately, we can take our cues from other more wholesome views present on the Indian observer scene. Political observers like K.K. Katyal have noted that in the recent past, SAARC has been instrumental in casting a positive, beneficial influence in India-Pakistan relations. He went so far as to state that the 'coup leader of Pakistan' was not to be blamed for the postponement of the Eleventh Summit but the Indian government's shortsightedness. In the immediate context, he noted the setback in concrete steps on the SAPTA efforts, which had become operational for some time, after tortuous, protracted negotiations and a slowdown for the move for a free trade area in South Asia.³

The Widening Agenda of SAARC Summits

To determine the progress of the intergovernmental processes within SAARC, the scrutiny focuses on the Ninth and the Tenth Summits, which are not only closer in time but also reflect the crystallization process within SAARC's deliberations. While the focus remains on the policy dialogue
content, SAARC's viability is reflected in the kind of expanded agenda of activities that the organization has set out for itself in the new Millennium, within the region and with other international organizations. The Report of the SAARC Secretariat for activities in the year 1999 provides a wholesome picture of intergovernmental efforts and reason not to bury SAARC but to develop it further through coordinated implementation of programs. It is only against the backdrop of the earlier efforts that this progress can be determined. Therefore, some landmark developments are recalled for their insights into the intergovernmental processes.

It is pertinent to recall the conceptual basis of the 1980 so as to see the ground covered since then. President General Ziaur Rahman's very first proposal in his letter to the Heads of State said:

"The countries of South Asia share many common values that are rooted in their social, ethnic, cultural and historical traditions. Perception about certain specific events or political situation of the world may differ but such differences do not seem to create a gulf between them that cannot be bridged."

Subsequently, the Bangladeshi Working Paper in advocating the basis for regional cooperation, argued that previous cooperation at the bilateral level, or within such forums as the NAM and Commonwealth had "not fully exploited the vast potential of regional co-operation that exists and the consequential benefits that this will bring, collectively and individually, to the countries of the region." The Working Paper identified regional cooperation in economic, technical, scientific, educational, social and cultural field. It recommended meetings at Foreign Secretaries level to examine the prospects of institutionalization. This was followed by meetings of the foreign secretaries of the seven states between
1981-1982, who continuously discussed the idea of regional cooperation, at a number of venues and then established working groups, to go into details of further collaboration. The participants were invited to recall the political problems on ground despite which the result was the convening of the First Summit and the setting up of the Charter for SAARC by 1985.

The next landmark was the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991) which accorded the highest priority to the alleviation of poverty in South Asia and decided to establish an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA), consisting of eminent persons from member states, to conduct an in-depth study of the diverse experiences of member states and report their recommendations on the alleviation of poverty to the Seventh Summit. To be noted is the fact that this joint regional focus was well before the current poverty alleviation agendas of donor countries.

A consensus on poverty eradication was adopted at the Seventh SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1993), based on the ISACPA report. The member states expressed their commitment to eradicate poverty from South Asia by the Year 2002, through an agenda of action which would, inter-alia, include a strategy of social mobilization, policy of decentralized agricultural development and small-scale, labor-intensive industrialization and human development. The Summit also stressed that within the conceptual approach of Daal-Bhaat or Food Security, the right to work and primary education should receive priority. It also underscored the critical links between the success of national efforts at poverty alleviation and relevant external factors. The Seventh SAARC Summit also urged major actors in the world economic scene to create an enabling atmosphere, supportive of poverty alleviation programs and expressed the need for a new dialogue with donors for this purpose.
The call for a new dialogue with donors has led to important initiatives in this respect. Such as the SAARC/World Bank Informal Workshop on Poverty Reduction in South Asia (Annapolis, USA, October 1993). UNDP and ESCAP followed suit in formulating proposals for cooperation with SAARC on Poverty Reduction Programs.

The Eighth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 1995) endorsed the recommendations of the Finance/Planning Ministers (Dhaka, July 1994) to establish a three-tier mechanism for exchanging information on poverty eradication. India hosted the meetings of the first and the second-tier in New Delhi (September 1995).

The meeting of the first-tier, which constituted the Group of Secretaries to the Governments in the Ministries/Departments concerned with poverty eradication and social development in SAARC countries, underscored the need to give a distinct status and top priority to pro-poor plans in member countries ensuring specific commitment of adequate resource and organizational support. It stressed the necessity to involve the poor in the formulation and implementation of plans meant for them through participatory institutions and process at grass root levels. The member states were also urged to evolve mechanisms to evaluate the efficacy of pro-poor plans and develop appropriate socio-economic indicators relevant for the purpose. On specific issues germane to poverty eradication, the meeting emphasized the need to pursue an integrated approach taking into account the critical linkages among various sectors.

The meeting of the second-tier, i.e., Finance and Planning Secretaries endorsed the recommendation of the first-tier and emphasized that poverty eradication should be viewed in the overall context of accelerating economic growth resulting in employment generation in an environment of macro-economic
stability with emphasis on human resource development. The meeting also put special emphasis on the need to improving the implementation of poverty eradication programs through devolution of power and decentralization. A special mention was also made in the meeting on the need to ensure the sustainability of poverty eradication programs, especially through ensuring education funds for such programs on a continuous basis.

During the discussions on poverty eradication under the SAARC three-tier mechanism, Member Countries also discussed specific measures that they may take either individually or collectively, to create the enabling condition for eradication of poverty within the time frame agreed for the purpose. In this context, a serious analytical exercise was initiated to identify the critical elements of pro-poor strategies in terms of their implications for fiscal and monetary policies of the Member Countries, the need for appropriate support infrastructure for the poor and their active involvement in the planning and implementation of the pro-poor programs. The second meeting of the Finance and Planning Ministers was held in New Delhi on 3-4 January 1996, and subsequently the second round of meetings of the first two tiers of the three-tier mechanism also took place in April 1997 in Islamabad.

Following the Ninth and Tenth Summits, much is still wanting in terms of some solid achievements, which could be held up as irreversible and desired outcomes. At the same time, there has been a widening of scope which permits many more entry points and do-able programs. There is a greater international awareness of SAARC’s potential as a regional organization, even though it is accompanied with pessimistic forecasts from within and outside the region.

Today, looking at the achievements against the objectives of the initial charter what stands out is as follows. As per
1(a), the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and their quality of life is not what it should be in its entirety. Not only are millions still without basic amenities, South Asia collectively houses the world’s largest number of those who live below the poverty line. These constitute 50% of India’s total population (which would mean between 500-600 million persons) and one-third of Pakistan’s population, which officially is stated to be between 40-44 million persons. As per 1(b), the hosts of marginalized groups and the figures of unemployment prove that millions of individuals in South Asia are far from realizing their full potential. There is still no sign of collective self-reliance, mutual trust and understanding of one another’s problems. Yet, in so far as objectives enshrined in (e), (d), (g) and (h) there is some measure of progress. A great amount of attention has been given to the subject of poverty. The ground realities in South Asian countries show that poverty and population has grown - both in the world’s greatest democracy and in its most military-run country - thus bringing both at the same level of mal-governance of governments. What is significant is how the SAARC focus has generated a great amount of investigative work done on the subject of poverty. Action-plans based on the substantial and substantive work necessarily yield positive results. If it is done through a regional approach, it can help in a simultaneous uplifting of the downtrodden. The only intergovernmental process it requires for the years ahead is the courage and commitment to continue holding our summits and meetings in a purposeful way.

Some of the significant scope-widening areas need to be recalled as these reflect that intergovernmental processes are not entirely in a comatose condition, but working on doggedly on their agendas. They also provide linkages and whole variety of start-up actions.
SAARC Cooperation with International and Regional Organizations

SAARC cooperation has grown with international organizations. A SAARC-UNCTAD Memorandum of Understanding on the Trade Analysis and Information System (TRAINDS) was signed in February 1993. This was the first Agreement of cooperation to be signed by SAARC with an international organization. The global aim of TRAINDS is to increase transparency in international trading conditions and thus facilitate trade. The target of UNCTAD is to include latest trade control measures of 100 countries of the world in this PC-based information system. This information is available to SAARC member states on request. A Framework Agreement for co-operation between SAARC and ESCAP was signed in February 1994. The Agreement provides for co-operation on development issues through joint studies, workshops and seminars and exchange of information and documentation in poverty alleviation, human resource development, trade promotion, foreign direct investment, environmental protection, prevention of drug trafficking and infrastructure development etc.

A Cooperation Agreement between SAARC and UNICEF was signed on 10 December 1993. The Agreement envisages cooperation in implementing the relevant SAARC decisions relating to Children through an annual agenda which include joint studies, exchange of documentation and monitoring of implementation. In pursuance of the Cooperation Agreement, the SAARC Secretariat and the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia have been holding regular consultations, which have covered progress in the implementation of Summit directives on Children and the recommendations of the Council of Ministers, Standing Committee and the relevant Technical Committees. The consultations focus on all child related issues including the Annual Review of the Situation of
Children in the SAARC Countries; implementation of the Colombo Resolution on Children; Plan of Action to mark 1991-2000 A. D as the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child; the serious threat faced by Girl Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (GCEDC); mid-decade goals on Children emanating from the World Summit for Children (1990) and certain aspects of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The regular interaction between SAARC and UNICEF has facilitated better understanding of problems faced by Children in South Asia and regional policies and strategies to meet these challenges.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by SAARC Secretary-General and Executive Director of Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) on February 4 1994. The MOU envisages cooperation between the two organizations to promote the growth of telecommunications in order to accelerate economic and social development in the region. SAARC and APT will exchange information, publications and documents on their respective activities in this field. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SAARC and UNDP was signed by the SAARC Secretary-General and Administrator of UNDP in July 1995. The MOU embodies a general agreement for broad-based collaboration with the aims and purposes of promoting sustainable human development for attaining poverty elimination, preservation and protection of environment, regeneration of natural resources, employment creation, and the goals of women in development; undertake periodic consultation for joint activities; publish studies on priority concerns and exchanging relevant reports.

The SAARC Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) signed an MOU on 18 August 1995 to coordinate their efforts
in combating drug trafficking and drug abuse in the region. The Memorandum envisages mutual consultation and exchange of information between the two organizations. In addition, the two organizations have agreed to seek each other's technical cooperation in pursuing their respective drug control activities in areas of drug supply and demand reduction, to assist in the development and implementation of such activities as human resource development; improving regional cooperation on drug intelligence through the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk; legislation; financial investigation; money laundering; precursor control; the establishment of a networking arrangement among existing institutions in drug abuse prevention and so forth.

SAARC has also entered into cooperation arrangement with the Colombo Plan Bureau for promoting the role of SAARC NGOs in anti-narcotic activities. In this context, representative of NGOs from the seven countries attended a meeting of the SAARC Forum on the role of NGOs in Drug Demand Reduction, in Dhaka on 10-13 April 1995. Efforts are also underway to establish a working relationship between the SAARC Secretariat and the Colombo Plan Bureau on training facilities in the region. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SAARC and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has been finalized and is to be signed, if it has not already been done so.

Regional Conventions/Agreements

1. Food Security Reserve

An Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve (SFSR) was arrived at during the Third SAARC Summit (Katmandu, 1987). The Agreement, which came into force on 12 August 1988, provided for a reserve of foodgrains for meeting emergencies in member countries. The SAARC
Food Security Reserve Board comprises representatives from each member country and meets once a year. The main functions of the Board are to undertake a periodic review and assessment of the food situation and prospects in the region including factors such as production, consumption, trade, prices, quality and stocks of foodgrains. (According to one report the size of the food reserve at present stands at 241,580 tones).

2. **SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism**

The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed in Katmandu in November 1987 during the Third SAARC Summit and came into force on 22 August 1988, following ratification by all member states. The Convention embodies and gives a regional focus to many of the well-established principles of International law in this respect. Under its provisions, member states are committed to extradite or prosecute alleged terrorists thus preventing them from enjoying safe havens. Regional Co-operation is also envisaged in preventive action to combat terrorism. Exchange of information, intelligence and expertise are among the areas identified for mutual co-operation under the Convention. Co-operation among Liaison Officers (Anti Terrorist Law Enforcement Officers) is being developed, through holding international meetings continually at regular intervals to monitor, update, evaluate and improve counter-terrorism strategies.

The SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) has been established in Colombo to collate, analyze and disseminate information about the terrorist incidence, tactics, strategies and methods. Efforts are being undertaken for further strengthening STOMD. The Eighth SAARC Summit, (New Delhi May 1995) expressed serious concern on the
spread of terrorism in and outside the region and reiterated the unequivocal condemnation of the member states to acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal. It deplored all such acts for their ruinous impact on life, property, socio-economic development and political stability as well as on regional and international peace and cooperation. The Summit Leaders reiterated the need for a constant dialogue and interaction among the concerned agencies of member states.

3. SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

The SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances which was signed in Malé during the Fifth SAARC Summit in November 1990, came into force on 15 September 1993, following ratification by all member states. The Convention seeks to reinforce and supplement at the regional level, the relevant international conventions and promote regional co-operation among member states in both law enforcement and demand reduction. Incorporating the generally accepted principle of extradition or prosecution consistent with the respective national legislative regimes, the Convention envisages the widest measures for mutual legal assistance among member states in investigation, prosecution and judicial proceedings in respect of drug offences. The implementation of the Convention is monitored by the Technical Committee on Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse, during its annual meetings.

4. Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA)

The Agreement on SAPTA was signed by the Ministers of Member States on 11 April 1993, during the Seventh SAARC Summit. The initiative towards establishing SAPTA was taken during the Sixth SAARC Summit in Colombo in December
This Agreement is an umbrella framework of rules providing for step-by-step liberalization of intra-regional trade. It envisages periodic rounds of trade negotiations for exchange of trade concessions on tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff measures. SAPTA contains provisions giving Special and Favorable Treatment to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in SAARC region. Additional measures in favor of LDCs are incorporated in Annex-I of the Agreement. Provisions for safeguard action and balance of payments measures are also incorporated in the Agreement to protect the interest of member states during critical economic circumstances.

An Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) on Trade Liberalization completed the first round of trade negotiations at its Sixth Meeting held at the SAARC Secretariat, Katmandu on 20-21 April 1995. It finalized the Consolidated National Schedules of Concessions, which were approved by the Fifteenth Session of the Council of Ministers held in New Delhi on 30 April-1 May 1995. The SAPTA Agreement has since been ratified by Member States and entered into force on 7th December 1995. The Committee of Participants has since been established and met in the third quarter of 1996 to review the progress in the implementation of the SAPTA Agreement. The Agreement on Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) signed in Dhaka on 11 April 1993 has accelerated the process of trade and economic cooperation in the region.

The Tenth Summit has an agenda which reflects positively on intergovernmental processes in the sense that for the first time since its inception it has taken stock of such aspects as can be qualified as politically problematic.

The Tenth SAARC Summit was held in Colombo from 29-31 July 1998, in the year of the Golden Jubilee of the Independence of Sri Lanka. The Declaration issued on 31 July reflected the concern of the member states for making
SAARC responsive to developments on the world scene. The agenda was wide-ranging and encompassed references to some of the recent happenings on the world scene, as well as the problems faced by the states of South Asia vis-à-vis globalization, the WTO agenda, and events on the international economic scene. This needs to be recalled for the concerns it reflected regarding SAARC and the changing international economic environment. The Declaration noted the initiation of links between SAARC and economic unions and trading groups that were emerging in the wake of globalization and liberalization and considered how best relationships of mutual benefit could be established.

The Tenth Summit assessed the implications of current global economic developments on the economies of South Asia and other developing countries and noted the profundity of the wide-spread changes being effected in the economic, technological, social and information fields and their apparent unpredictability. The Heads "expressed serious concern over the severe distortions produced by the process of unrestrained globalization as has been evidenced in the downturn of economies of several Asian States. The challenges and opportunities inherent in these fast evolving developments could best be met and the full potential of South Asia realized through effective practical regional and bilateral co-operation among member states."

Further that "the benefits of the so described 'liberalization' have been disappointingly asymmetrical with the process proceeding at a much slower pace in areas of special interest to developing countries. Increased opportunities in trade and investment have bypassed many developing countries. The Least Developed Countries have in particular been marginalized through a series of developments including the shrinking of ODA, concessional and other financial flows to these countries."
A specific mention was made of the role of the WTO and other multi-lateral trade issues that SAARC would consider since "these issues and the decisions arising from this process will have far-reaching consequences" for development strategies and prospects of South Asian countries. The Summit resolved that SAARC countries would endeavor to coordinate their decisions on these issues in areas of common concern so as to protect and promote the interests of the developing countries. They expressed concern about the erection of protectionist barriers and the tendency to impose arbitrary 'norms' relating to labor conditions, environmental regulations, governance and other extraneous issues to regulate trade exchanges, which would amount to additional non-tariff barriers that would have the effect of restricting market access for developing countries, including preferential access by Least Developed Countries (LDCs) into markets of developed countries. They agreed on the need for collective strategies to promote a rule-based, non-discriminatory and equitable international trading system in which the interests and concerns of developing countries would be fully safeguarded and served.

Pertinent emerging issues related to copyright, patents and marketing franchises including on foodgrains, plants and herbs indigenous to South Asia. The Summit recognized that it requires "firm collective responses to preserve these indigenous bio-resources from unregulated commercial exploitation by extra-regional interests." They emphasized in this regard, the principle of sustainable development of bio-resources and the provisions of the UN Convention on Biodiversity which provided for regulated access to such resources on terms and conditions to be agreed upon with the State in which such resources are located.

Recent worldwide financial crises were also taken due note of. The Summit envisaged a series of ‘to-do’ action plans for
concerted action to protect South Asian interests through similar worldwide interests. The SAARC Summit cautioned that potential efforts to formulate a new Multilateral Investment Agreement should not overlook the need to ensure the continued independence of developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to formulate specific investment policies appropriate to their stage of development. While reviewing the beneficial effects of globalization, the Summit stressed the fact that systemic crises are becoming unpredictable with increased globalization. They expressed their concern about the shortcomings of the international monetary and financial system, and its tardiness in anticipating impending financial market crises sufficiently in advance, so that pre-emptive remedial action be adopted. They noted that the problem is systemic, and not unique to Asia, nor confined to emerging economies, and that it can have global ramifications, unless more fundamental reforms are put in place. The Summit warned of the risks involved in "ad-hoc approaches, however prompt, once crises supervene", and which may lead to 'excessive social costs' in the attempt to restore financial discipline. It recognized the need for "more effective social safety nets ... to be devised for protecting vulnerable groups and a more appropriate balance between financing and adjustment found in a reformed international system or architecture, if both the economic and social aspirations of SAARC countries are to be realized." They acknowledged the need to strengthen the individual financial systems of SAARC countries through enhancing institutional capacity, surveillance mechanisms as well as through closer consultations on, and coordination of macro-economic policies where appropriate.

The Agenda of the Tenth Summit

A look at the agenda items of the Tenth Summit suffices to show the long road traveled through the intergovernmental
processes, from the concept of 1980 to the current concerns, at the threshold of the new millennium. The list is produced below, with the observation that at one level appears to be like a political agenda. Many of these concerns have figured as bilateral disputes within the countries of the region:

- Regional Co-operation
- Cultural Unity
- Enhancing Political Co-operation
- Appraisal of SAARC Activities
- SAARC in the Changing International Economic Environment
- Acceleration of Economic Co-operation
- People to People Contact
- Links with Other International and Regional Organizations
- Projection of Common Positions
- Sub-Regional Co-operation
- Security of Small States
- Special Measures for Least Developed and Land-Locked Countries
- Education and Literacy- Eradication of Poverty in South Asia
- Social Charter
- Communications
- Science and Technology
- Environment
- Youth
- Children
- Situation of Women and the Girl Child
- Health
- Disabled Persons
- Information
- Terrorism and Drug Trafficking
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Political Developments.
The next section dealing with Track II initiatives from within the civil society is taken up for a scrutiny to see whether in the light of such agendas it is in consonance or in a stark contrast to the official agenda, or at cross purposes with the intergovernmental processes.

**Track II Unofficial Dialogues and Interactions**

The people-to-people contacts have played a crucial role as the life-support system of SAARC and any effort to bury SAARC would tantamount to smothering these aspirations. At a number of crucial junctures, these Track II initiatives have kept SAARC afloat. They get reflected in intergovernmental processes and official agendas simply because they are ever present and exert their pressures in an on-going manner on their respective governments. It is to be noted that despite the gravest of tensions within the governments and some sections of the civil society of South Asia, what dominates at the end of the day is the comprehensive desire for peace and development, good governance, greater security, opportunities for employment, education and good health, of greater trade and other contacts – shortly the right to a life of dignity.

Track II initiatives in South Asia have taken a variety of forms. These initiatives have figured as organizational efforts led by well-known citizens in both India and Pakistan, by individuals, who have spoken at press conferences and public fora, in seminars and workshops of academic and research institutions and so forth. These are not signs of a dead process but vital signs of a live and aware civil society, who defies odds to bring the issues of the moment to the surface and demanding of official attention. If one looks at the issues, which have been presented at all these fora and compare them with the official agendas, they are not at cross-purposes. On the contrary, there is a remarkable similarity. The civil
society agenda re-inforces the official agenda. What
dominates in the media are the official-level, inter-state and
intergovernmental tensions between India and Pakistan since
the substantive directions can only come from the inter-
governmental processes. The initiatives taken by the peoples
of India and Pakistan have drawn the greater attention as
compared to those of the rest of the civil society in South Asia.
The focus in the present study on the Indo-Pak Track II
initiatives is unavoidable as they dominate the region with
their adversarial relations and nuclear programs and
governance debates, which eventually impact upon other
relations in the region. Some of the people-to-people efforts
speak for themselves and are highlighted below. The Track II
initiatives that have figured from the mid-nineties onwards
are taken up for their role, though there have been other
similar efforts in the past.

A notable civil society forum that commands attention is
the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy
established on September 2, 1994, popularly known as the
IPF. Following some years of meetings unofficially of concerned
individuals and organizations of both countries, in various
regional and international fora, there was a strongly felt need
amongst them to initiate a dialogue between their two
countries. The year 1994 had experienced an all time low in
official relations. Against that background following the first
discussion in Lahore on September 2, 1994, second
discussion in Delhi on November 25-26, 1994, with an
exchange of contingents of hundred citizens visiting the other
side, comprising those "well-known for their commitment to
peace and communal amity", twenty five founding members
established the Forum.

The founding convention stressed the need for a freer flow
of information, travel exchanges between the country and
exchange of artistes, scientists, technologists and other professionals through a joint statement issued at Lahore. It gave out the purpose of the convention as: “to persuade the two mutually belligerent governments to listen to the saner voices of their people and negotiate and adopt policies to ease tensions and pave the way for lasting peace and friendship.”

It outlined an agenda that would raise the following issues and fight against their perpetuation.

- Increasing militarization in the region;

- Threat of nuclear empowerment. (The Resolution adopted at the Lahore Convention of the PFPD on November 12, urged the governments of the two countries to start direct talks on eliminating the danger of nuclear conflict in the region, ‘by intent or accident.’ “The governments of India and Pakistan should immediately initiate direct dialogue aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the chances of a nuclear war by intent or accident, irrespective of any international negotiations or agreements.” The Forum exhorted the two countries to conclude their own nuclear test ban agreement without waiting for a global treaty.)

- The political crisis in Kashmir. (The Kashmir dispute was accepted as one of the main causes of the dangerous confrontation, which has remained unresolved to date. In the agenda, both countries are equally blamed – India as primarily responsible for the continuing political crisis in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), while Pakistan as equally guilty of covert and overt military intervention in the strife-stricken zone. The Forum resolved to appoint a committee on the explosive dispute over Kashmir between the two countries in order to hold talks with all the parties, including Kashmiris, to help bring about a peaceful settlement.)
- Communal violence and violation of minority rights;
- Women’s rights;
- The fight against religious fundamentalism (blamed the powers-that-be for failure to combat ‘malicious propaganda by fundamentalist forces);
- The onslaught of new economic policies;
- Protection of the environment.

On the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations of Independence of both India and Pakistan, the IPF unanimously adopted the Calcutta Declaration, following a four-day convention in that historic city. It merits to be quoted:

"The most fundamental interest of the peoples of Pakistan and India, as also of the South Asian region as a whole, demands that both countries celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Independence by taking a solemn pledge to devote the second half century of freedom to realizing the shared aspirations of the peoples for peace, democracy, justice, tolerance, and equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of belief, ethnicity, gender and social status”.

“That in order to realize this objective, the two states must sign a comprehensive treaty by 14-15 August 1997, providing for the employment of internationally recognized mechanisms of mutual negotiation, mediation and arbitration for conflict resolution that could guarantee durable peace”.

“That the two states must enter into bilateral agreements to ensure the following:

- free travel across the borders
- free exchange of information and publications and reduction of communication and travel costs
- removal of trade barriers and grant of MFN Status to each other
while celebrating the Fiftieth anniversary of Freedom, the people rejoice in one another's freedom and integrity

that the members of the Forum have a historic responsibility to carry out the action plan adopted at the convention in particular”.

Other points made were in the context of the pre-nuclear blasts and pre-Kargil events. However, the demands remain valid in that the Declaration stressed that the people put all pressures possible on their governments to demilitarize, stop intermittent firings across the border, end proxy wars and demilitarize Siachin (Kargil could now be added to the list) and ensure transparency in their defense budgets. The forum members were asked to redouble their efforts to secure an agreement to make the two countries desist from nuclear preparations and instead prepare for regional disarmament and a nuclear free world.

The convention called upon the national committees of the forum to mobilize all groups and associations concerned with basic freedoms and rights in their respective countries to secure the objective of participatory democracy, to sponsor and undertake comparative studies in decentralization of authority to facilitate meaningful contacts between professionals and to help evolve common strategies “to deal with effects in global shifts in areas of governance and economy. They should combat intolerance and prejudice in the areas of education, teaching of history, media and the performing arts, state, law and politics, literature and culture. It called for a dialogue among religious scholars. The forum took up Kashmir specifically to work for creating a favorable public opinion to make it possible for the two governments and the people of Kashmir to find a solution to the long-standing problem. The Forums joint committee on Kashmir further decided to hold regular meetings with Kashmiri
leaders on both sides of the Line of Control (LOC): 'the
understandings obtained from these meetings can be used for
recommending future course of action". It would attempt to
organize a meeting in which representatives from both sides of
the LOC could come together. The Forum decided to
formulate a Joint Charter of Egalitarian Principles.

The Association of the People's of Asia organized a 3-day
'Indo-Pak Amity Meet' on May 15-17, 1996, in New Delhi, as a
'continuation of a number of earlier non-official initiatives for
people-to-people Indo-Pak dialogue'. The purpose was to
supplement and consolidate the work already done and to
concretize measures through more intensive and in depth
studies and discussions, for further promoting the
atmosphere of goodwill and improved cultural relations, and
to reflect the 'innermost urges' of the peoples of both sides.

In a preamble to its main resolution it observed that:

- Mutual fears and suspicions have led to a vicious circle of
  competitive militarization between India and Pakistan, and
  an endless arms race diverting, 'creating a militarization of
  the mind', and threatening both peace and civil society in
  South Asia, diverting their scarce resources to combat
  poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and resourcelessness of
  their teeming millions and their due role in global
  affairs

- Amity imperative requires de-militarization of Indo-Pak
  borders, reduction in arms purchases and need to
  promote on both sides the right to dissent and a spirit of
tolerance through democracy, genuine federalism,
decentralization, pluralism, human rights including the
rights of women, ethnic groups and nationalities and all
kinds of minorities.

- Need for closer linkages between groups working on these
  issues and objectives. Closer co-operation between women's
movements, youth organizations, environment groups, business organizations, trade unions, professional groups, academicians, writers, cultural and social activists.

- Recognizes that sovereignty and integrity of each country is sacrosanct, there are a number of trans-national identities which can strengthen emotional and cultural bonds between the two countries. A number of common languages are spoken in both countries. Development of common literary and cultural fora can promote people-to-people unity.

- As far as contentious and sensitive issues of mutual disputes are concerned, the first requirement is to promote and encourage growth of informed public opinion and active participation of people on both sides. Only such an informed public opinion will lead to a peaceful and a mutually satisfactory solution of disputes.

- Urged upon the two governments to facilitate exchanges of people by gradually relaxing visa restrictions and for abolishing them altogether. They should also remove restrictions for a free flow of information, ideas, books, newspapers, literature and films.

It formed a Steering Committee to prepare a draft and announced its Program of Action. It stressed the need for presenting a positive vision of future South Asia with regional harmony, to incorporate:

- Acceptance of the principle of unilateral practice of moral values;
- Acceptance of linguistic, cultural and ethnic pluralism and diversity as the keystone of civil society and political system;
- Decentralization of power and genuine federalism;
- Transparent and genuine democracy;
• General and complete disarmament.

• Two committees to be formed. One to study the economies of both countries which can develop faster and with mutual cooperation; and the Second a Committee of Historians and Educationists — to initiate the process of correcting distortions in the sub-continental history which are the source of tensions among the people. The committee will involve scholars to facilitate the presentation of objectives and balanced view of the past before the people, particularly of the younger people.

• A committee of social scientists from (both countries) may be constituted to highlight the biases in textbooks by looking at their respective school material and how the anti-each other attitudes are promoted through such materials. Their findings should be publicized as a joint publication where both sides own joint authorship and it may be disseminated through NGOs.

It undertook to establish a Task Team for participatory involvement of NGOs and voluntary organizations to join hand in promoting mutual understanding and cooperative efforts in addressing the issues of human survival, basic needs, health, information, literacy and peace.

There has also been the Indo-Pak Women’s Peace initiative. Prominent women activists, drawn from various social endeavors crossed borders to impress upon their governments the need to sit and talk. Indian women visited Pakistan in March 2000, and a similar contingent of Pakistani women went to India in April. There have been student visits, those of the Rotarians, and trade meets and those of SAARC organizations. And of course exchanges of retired officials - former foreign secretary of Pakistan, Ambassador (Retd.) Niaz Naik and his counterpart in India, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, who keep meeting on and off, judging by the newspaper accounts.
The IPF keeps on working on its mission even though its Pakistani activists were stopped in April 2000 from crossing over the Wagah border. Retired Generals, too, have been crossing the border. First Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Chhibber, of Siachen fame, and the former Indian naval chief Admiral Ramdas came and spoke at a variety of Pakistani fora. *The News* organized a South Asian media seminar in which editors and columnists from India alone numbered more than forty. What do these contacts prove even to the newcomer on the South Asia’s complex scene?

**Challenges to ‘Citizen’s Diplomacy’ and Regionalism in South Asia**

In the ten summits held so far, have there been no intergovernmental processes with successful outcomes so far? Does not the agenda outlined at the Tenth Summit provide a forward-looking basis on which to further the role of SAARC, organizationally and in terms of its programs?

Is there anything in the brief review of the Track II and unofficial dialogues and peoples interactions that all peace-seeking persons could pick up and state that it was unrealistic or was not needed in the South Asian region?

If SAARC can evolve a collaborative agenda with international organization and its member states adopt common positions in international conferences, can it not activate a healthy, comprehensive *regionalism* in its own region? More crucially, in the absence of SAARC can there still be a regional process of regional interaction?

Can there not be a participatory relationship between the citizen’s diplomacy and intergovernmental processes, since they talk the same issues? The government is an unavoidable political factor in our lives (thus qualifying as a political ‘gene’ that we inherit), whether we talk of the system within us, or
the external systems that figures in our lives. After all, we are meeting in this conference because our respective governments allow us to do so. Without that facilitation, would that have been possible? At the same time, why do the governments of South Asia, whatever their shapes, behave as if no citizens exist in the countries they appear to govern?

How can you devise the future steps when the past ones have not yet been realized? How can you operate globally without taking stock of the regional underpinnings that give any country its unique identity?

While SAARC to date appears to be more of an official policy dialogue forum, the detailed discussions at the official levels have been able to establish a detailed approach to possible programs, almost ready for implementation. The consensus on these also suggests that the theoretical underpinnings are sound ones. This has been the result of two parallel tracks taking place simultaneously and impacting upon each, under the pressure of the ground realities exerting their own compelling force.

The lack of trust, on further analysis, shows that it has something to do with India as the one country that has borders with all other member states, while those in turn either have no borders or are separated by vast sea expanses. There are no Pakistan-Bhutan differences for instance. As it is, Pakistan's land routes to Nepal are limited. India and Pakistan at cross-purposes with each other create an impact for other member states of SAARC. Political differences impinge so much on the positive dialogues that have taken place in other SAARC bodies that it compels attention. There is a need for evolving a mechanism for dispute resolution even if it is to be a long-term venture.

A Pakistani academic of great repute, the well-known archaeologist Professor Ahmed Hasan Dani has suggested a
noteworthy method of bringing Kashmir onto the SAARC agenda. For SAARC to play a proactive role to stop the suffering of the unarmed Kashmiris and eventually to help in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, he suggests that initially India and Pakistan both sponsor that Kashmir be made a SAARC agenda item. Secondly, those countries, which are directly or indirectly involved in the dispute, should not shoulder the responsibility. With reference to the Kashmir dispute, he suggests that India and Pakistan get eliminated, also Nepal and Bhutan because of the involvement of Gurkha troops because of their current deployment on the Indian side of the LOC. Those that are left are Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives and ask: 'can one expect these three countries to play a definitive role in building the transitory steps for solving the Kashmir problem?' He felt that on account of their neutrality, even the Kashmiris would not have any objection to their shouldering such a responsibility.9

On the Group of Eminent Persons Report: 'SAARC Vision beyond the year 2000'. Syed Shahabuddin from India looks at ways and means to put flesh and blood into SAARC. Noting that South Asia remains a house divided, while the rest of the world is moving towards regionalism and inter-regional cooperation, he looks to the envisioned Social Charter for SAARC - which was and is to form the agenda of the Eleventh Summit whenever it takes place. He sees a greater role responsibility for India as the biggest and the most advanced of the member states. As he notes: 'bigness in not a sin ... but bigness also means that India is in a position to give more and take less.' He advocates a study for a Regional Development Plan in which India leaves economic space for other SAARC states to encourage the 'development of inter-dependence', without insisting on reciprocity.10

'Re-inventing' government, so that it becomes a wholesome factor in our individual lives and collective endeavors, has
become a crucial undertaking for South Asian societies in order to ensure ongoing responsiveness within their governance systems. Since the focus is on the inter-governmental processes within the SAARC organization, the study posits the thesis that 'citizen's diplomacy' needs to be injected in a big way into the communication channels of the existent governmental processes. If citizens can network for better results within their countries and beyond their national boundaries, so should their governments do the same networking for better results. Twenty years later, there is a need to recall that 'inter-governmental process' came about because the governments of the time responded to a perceived need amongst their respective citizenry. That need not only remains but also has become more potent than ever before. So the time is ripe for taking the next regional initiative. The Eleventh Summit should be held soon and this time with the agenda of the Track II initiatives taken so far, and with some of the peoples organizations taking a full part in the inter-governmental process.

**Endnotes**


2. The author was present as participant in the CASAC conference.


5. Under this Agreement, UNCTAD provides the SAARC Secretariat, on a regular basis, an updated copy of TRAINS CD-ROM containing latest data on trade control measures prevailing in developed and developing countries. The SAARC Secretariat in turn updates trade control measures prevailing in the SAARC member states on a regular basis and forwards the same to UNCTAD Secretariat, on computer floppies for incorporation in the updated versions of TRAINS CD-ROM. SAARC Secretariat has now data on trade control measures prevailing in 50 countries including most of the SAARC member countries.
6. SAARC Secretary-General has attended two Consultative Meetings of the Executive Heads of Subregional Organisations in Asia and the Pacific and ESCAP (Bangkok 1994 and Jakarta 1995). The Secretary-General also participated in the Meeting of Eminent Persons on Human Resources Development organized by ESCAP Secretariat in Bangkok (November 1994).

7. They will also exchange technical and operational details of plans for improvement of national, regional and international telecommunications network. Collaboration is also envisaged in planning and development of networks, transfer of technology, promoting international standards, development of human resources and application of telecommunications in sectors such as health, education, environment, transport, and tourism.

8. The Heads of Governments were: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; Mr. Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, Chairman, Council of Ministers and Head of Government of the Royal Government of Bhutan; Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India; Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the President of the Republic of Maldives; Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal; Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; and Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.


SOUTH ASIA WITHOUT SAARC: BETWEEN THE POTENCY AND THE EXISTENCE

Imtiaz Ahmed

Introduction

The inculcation of T. S. Eliot in the subtitle is somewhat deliberate. I have been drawn to Eliot's poetic philosophizing for two reasons. First is the development of a chaotic, if not stagnated, South Asia. Regionally, we have managed to excel all others in poverty, illiteracy and violence. Few will deny that both South Asia and SAARC remain far less explored and active than the potential each of them singularly or in combination hold to rid the region of chaos. But then, it is the collapse of modernist goals so shockingly, yet, sanely depicted in 'The Hollow Men' that really caught my attention of Eliot and his poem. And this brings me to the second reason, and I intend to put this in the form of a question. Like 'The Hollow Men' stalking the streets of the modern West, have we not succeeded in constructing in our own fashion and fancy a 'hollow South Asia,' a 'hollow SAARC' and indeed even a 'hollow South Asian' having only (to use Eliot again) "Shape without form, shade without colour, Paralysed force, gesture without motion"? My task lies in making the interested few as well as the disinterested lot pause and ponder on this issue.

Most will take from the title of the paper that my concern probably lies with the post-Kargil, post-coup feud between the fundamentalist Vajpayee and the military Musharraf and the stalling of the SAARC summit. Will I be then, if I understand the expectation of many, focusing on the dreadful scenario of a region without a common platform to talk, dress up and dine? While agreeing that the current state does not help an
ioita in fomenting regional cooperation now or in the future, and the earlier the Indo-Pakistan deadlock comes to an end the better, there is no reason to believe that once the SAARC summit takes place the region will be showered with golden trinkets. And poverty, illiteracy and violence will vanish from South Asia forever.

Moreover, the rationale of the current deadlock, dressed as it is in the democratic garb, makes little sense. After all, it was a military person in the name of Zia that brought the democratic and regimented regimes of this region together and called the initiative in the beginning just SARC; indeed, in terms of abbreviation with a potential much beyond the goals of the later formulated ‘Association.’ One must not take this to mean that the democratic agenda in South Asia is of little or zero significance. In fact, the logic of the current stand takes the issue beyond Pakistan and if we are to provide an example includes Bhutan as well. But then, I am less interested to take recourse to something that puts me in the midst of a binary and that again one between the irreconcilables, India and Pakistan. My reluctance to take seriously the current rationale of the deadlock (that is, the emphasis on having a democratic polity in Pakistan) has to do with the SAARC Charter. Do we have ‘democracy’ as a precondition to the holding of SAARC summit? The answer is, No! Should we then not think of a summit precisely for revising the SAARC Charter and codifying the precondition of democracy for all time to come? This definitely will do a far greater service to the cause of democracy in Pakistan than having the summit stalled by India in the name of democracy. But as I have tried to indicate before, my cause for concern of a South Asia without SAARC lies elsewhere.

There is, in fact, already a ‘South Asia’ live and kicking and operating in full force outside the domain of SAARC and
the manner in which it is being reproduced tends to make the region not only tense and dangerous but also fraught with life and potential. I will limit myself to only three areas to drive home my point.

**Shun Thy Neighbor: The Politics of Fencing**

In the backdrop of the construction of the Berlin Wall and the traumatic experience of the East Europeans, including the Soviets, it is often said that those who are engaged in the business of fencing suffer from a seized mentality. This would not have been a problem had I been reflecting on the Indo-Pakistan border, since there is a genuine fear that each by exporting explosives, arms and a host of eager but deranged volunteers is trying to destroy the other. There is, therefore, a genuine reason to feel threatened and panicky. One aspect of the panicky state, at least from India's side, has been well described by M. J. Akbar in *India: The Siege Within* (1985). My concern is the fencing of the Indo-Bangladesh border, countries, which are not only unmatched in size, population and resources but more importantly are friendly states with solid records of their friendship track. Apart from very localized border shootouts, and that again, without even having them properly sanctioned by their respective governments, there has never been a war-like conflict between the two countries. Why then fence Bangladesh and more interestingly, why the entire length of Indo-Bangladesh borders? Let me cite some facts here.

Table I below will provide some sense of the Indo-Bangladesh border, particularly the breakdown of the borders between Bangladesh and the various Indian states. This will also provide some sense of the logistics that is required to border and fence Bangladesh.
Table I. Indo-Bangladesh Border Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>International Border</th>
<th>Post or Pillar Number</th>
<th>Areas (km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>West-Bengal (India)-Bangladesh</td>
<td>0001 to 1001</td>
<td>2217.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assam (India)-Bangladesh</td>
<td>1001 to 1067</td>
<td>0262.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meghalaya (India)-Bangladesh</td>
<td>1067 to 1338</td>
<td>0443.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tripura (India)-Bangladesh</td>
<td>1338 to 1397 (North) &amp;</td>
<td>0856.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1397 to 2250 (South)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mizoram (India)-Bangladesh</td>
<td>2301 to 2358</td>
<td>0318.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4096.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The government of India under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to fence the entire Indo-Bangladesh border at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,134 crore and the project is stipulated to end by March 2007. In fact, the fencing of Bangladesh will include a combination of actual border fencing (2409 km) and border roads (797). The actual border fencing will be maximum in West Bengal (1021 km) and the least in Assam (71.5 km). Tripura, Mizoram and Meghalaya will have 736 km, 400 km and 198 km of fenced borders respectively. Several problems, however, have already surfaced in implementing the project, most if not all involving the people of India. I will very briefly touch on three.

The Enclaves

The case of Bhogdanga, now sarcastically referred to as Assam’s Tinbigha, is an interesting one. Bhogdanga is a small village (about 630 bighas) on the Indo-Bangladesh border near Satrasal in the Dhubri district of Assam, with about 800 inhabitants belonging to 85 families. In reflecting on the socio-economic conditions of Bhogdanga, one Indian critic commented: “Like most of our villages Bhogdanga lacks in
basic amenities. It has a dilapidated LP School but no health centre, no post office and not even a shop." There are good reasons for stating this, for Bhogdanga is an enclave of India in Bangladesh, surrounded by Bangladeshi land on three sides. The only link it has with Assam is through a narrow corridor and that again through a gate (!) at the border fence. Now, why the gate?

Unlike any other village along Indo-Bangladesh border, no border roads could be built surrounding Bhogdanga. This is because no permanent structure could be built within 138 metre (150 yards) of international border according to international rule, and Bhogdanga does not have that much space to spare. In the wake of the 'Assam Accord' a border road and fencing were constructed near Bhogdanga, but it was done in a way that kept Bhogdanga outside the fencing (see diagram in Appendix 1). For the movement of the people of Bhogdanga, a gate was constructed at the mouth of the corridor connecting Bhogdanga with the Indian mainland. This gate, however, was kept open only for three hours a day in the beginning, but after serious protest from the inhabitants, civil authorities instructed the Bangladesh Security Force (BSF) personnel to keep the gate open from 7.00 am to 8.00 pm. It may be mentioned that the people of Bhogdanga must cross a river and walk three hours before they can reach markets on the Indian mainland.

But what happens to these people during the night, that is between 8.01 pm and 6.59 am? What if they require medical attention at the dead hours of the night? What if someone feels like going to a movie or a nearby village jatra? What if someone is in love with a girl across the river and wants to see her when the moon comes down in full? Do they all come to the gate and press the bell? Some of the doctors working in Comilla (and this is just a bordering town, not even close to a
particular enclave) told me that often during the dead hours of the night they had patients coming from the Indian side of the border. I guess proximity and the sure availability of qualified doctors dictated them to come to Comilla than taking the trouble of going to Agartala, for instance. One can very well imagine where do the people of Bhogdanga end up at night for some fun, food or emergency! Do some of them then become Indian at dawn and Bangladeshi at dusk? But this is only one aspect of the problem and of the unintended potential.

**The Floods**

At one stage of the construction, conflict arose between India's Central PWD and the Assam PWD on the issue of the height of the fencing. The former, given their expertise on the Punjab and Rajasthan border, insisted that the height of the fencing be fixed at 2.6 metres throughout the Assam-Bangladesh border. The Assam PWD, however, pointed out that both Punjab and Rajasthan are predominantly non-flood areas and therefore 2.6 metres make sense, but the same cannot be replicated along the entire length of the Assam-Bangladesh border. The latter insisted that since the area is prone to having flood depth up to 3 to 4 metres, particularly in some places, like Binnechara in Satrasal sector of the border, the height of the fencing be raised much above the sanctioned 2.6 meters.

I am not really sure how this controversy ended. I would imagine possibly by raising the height of the fencing to some length, but that is beyond my interests. What interests me is the idea of tackling the floodwaters (and we are all aware of the volume and intensity, particularly the one that comes down rushing through Assam into Bangladesh) by simply raising the height of the fencing. It almost reminds me of a sentry or ten guarding a 58-megaton ICBM silo!
The last flood that has wrecked parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh is an interesting reminder that fencing could jeopardize the lives not of Bangladeshis against whom the fencing has been constructed but the lives of the Indians. The following news items will make this clear:

The flood in West Bengal forced several hundred Indian nationals to take refuge in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Rifles have been taking care of Indian nationals numbering 2,382 who are staying in relief camps.

Again,

The Indian nationals, who have taken shelter in flood centres of Meherpur and Chuadanga districts after being displaced by flood, have been asked to prepare to go back home.

The instruction was given when Assistant High Commissioner...and Visa Officer...of Indian High Commission in Dhaka visited Meherpur and Chuadanga.... The Indian flood victims told the diplomats that they have received all kinds of cooperation from local administration, political parties and villagers....

Meanwhile, an Indian woman, who has taken shelter in a flood centre, gave birth to a baby boy at Ballavpur Mission Hospital in Mujibnagar. Halima Begum, wife of Minarul Pal of Maliapota in Tehatta thana in West Bengal and her newborn were in good health.

Luckily, the fencing is yet to be constructed in the flood-affected areas of West Bengal and as such the Indian flood victims were easily able to cross over to Bangladesh. What would have happened if a raised, flood-prone fencing really blocked the West Bengalis from crossing the border during the flood? Would the victims have received ammunitions from the BSF personnel to dismantle the fencing? Or, would the BSF personnel have done it themselves and helped the victims cross over to Bangladesh? Or, would they have preferred drowning than break open the fences and commit treason?
Moreover, the story of Halima Begum (a Muslim by name) and Minarul Pal (a Hindu by name) and their baby suggests that the people in the border area are far less communalized than those who are sitting in some places faraway from the border and deciding the fate of the border and the state.

The Dissenters

There is no reason to believe that all will be deterred from crossing the border (that is, illegally) because of the fencing. There will always be some elements, incidentally on both sides of the border, who would venture piercing through the fences not for the love of crossing the border as for the circumstances of dire necessity. Militant dissenters are a good case in this context. As one Indian reporter, assigned to cover one such incident, noted:

Sensation prevails in the border villages of the Satrasal area of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Dhubri district over a rumor that some hardcore ULFA activists have pierced upon the newly constructed border barbed wire fencing.... Hearing the rumor this correspondent made a study and learnt that actually a portion of the front line barbed wire (the other two rows of fencing wire - the middle one and the one on the Bangladesh side remain intact) has been pierced (emphasis mine).³

What is interesting here is the recognition that the piercing of the fences was done not on the Bangladesh side of the barbed wire but on the Indian side. And as such, the act of piercing was done not by the Bangladeshis (as is commonly believed) but by the Indians, albeit the dissenting Indians. With the flow of small arms the piercing of the fences is not something that is difficult to carry out. One can only imagine the dissenters playing a protracted game of cat and mouse with the border security forces in the wake of keeping/piercing the fences, a game that is sure to increase the cost of building and maintaining the fences.
But such dissenters may not always be militant with a political agenda. Even those who are engaged in constructing the fences could end up quite inadvertently working for the non-materialization of the fences. This could, indeed, come up with a deliberate construction of sub-standard fences. As the following report noted:

It is alleged that quantity of cement in the fence post has been reduced thereby making the vital posts weak. There are usually two types of posts used in the border fencing – short posts and high posts. Formerly one bag of cement and sometimes one bag of and some more cement was used for erecting a high concrete posts and one bag of cement was utilized for erecting seven small posts. But now it is alleged that two high posts have been constructed with only one bag of cement and in place of seven small posts as many as fourteen small posts are made from just one bag of cement.

This practice makes the posts weak. The fence itself is ineffective otherwise due to the peculiar design of the fence. One can cross the fence and come back just in one minute which is demonstrated by some urchins on the border on payment of Rs. 1 or 2.9

Put differently, if there are already Indians who would have the fences pierced through or have them built in a way that would make the piercing easy to execute, it would be difficult to stop them from getting a friendly hand on the Bangladesh side of the border. Ingenuity of the people can never be fenced nor the desire to communicate in times of want and distress blocked.

The Denationalization of the Bodies: The Trafficking of Women

Several years back, I had an interesting encounter with my fellow Bangladeshis in Singapore. Just after reaching Singapore, I was placed before a verbally active and somewhat ultra-nationalist audience who wanted me to take up a
campaign in Bangladesh to stop the Bangladeshi women from coming to Singapore and work as home-workers or as we call them, maids. To be very honest, I was literally shocked at their proposition. Why stop the women from legally working and earning hard currencies abroad? I was absolutely dumbfounded by the answer: "They are our women. They cannot handle themselves. They will all end up as prostitutes!" But this is Singapore, which prides on its benevolent regimentation and the smacking of the whip! Who would dare perform an illegal activity, particularly of the magnitude that is being contemplated? More importantly, if they do not come and work in Singapore, where will they go? Stay home? But then, do what? I could make my zealous audience disappear, although somewhat disturbed and puzzled, only after pointing out that over a dozen Bangladeshi women are trafficked every day to different cities of South Asia, and followed it up with a nasty supplementary, are they willing to go back home and take up the issue and campaign in the whole of South Asia? Women's trafficking in South Asia is, indeed, another area that is live and kicking outside the domain of SAARC.

Critics have already identified the causes of trafficking at some length. To name a few: abject poverty; social stigma against single, unwed, widowed mother; lack of shelter for women in distress; illiteracy; lack of awareness; corrupt police; overpopulation; masculinized government; and the list goes on and on. There has also been an extensive description of the routes through which women trafficking take place and that again at each stage of the trafficking - from recruitment, transit to collection. Also detail has been the amount of money that is normally spent in this trade. Louise Brown provides an interesting account of this:
In Calcutta girls can be sold for anything from a few hundred rupees to around 10,000 rupees. This is the way the dealers arrive at a price: the girl might be bought from her parents for somewhere between 200 and 2000 rupees. Then further 'value' is added. A procurer will charge between 1,000 and 2,000 rupees for their services. Perhaps a couple of hundred rupees will be paid out as bribes to police and border security forces. The trafficker will then add his or her own fee of 1,000 to 3,000 rupees. When this is totaled it becomes the cost of the girl.\(^{13}\)

It may be pointed out at this stage that not all women end up in brothels or sold as sex slaves. Trafficked women may end up as illegal workers, bonded labor, illegal marriage, baby firms or even may be used for organ trade.\(^{14}\) But then I must quickly add, most end up as sex slaves.

In the deliberation on the subject, there has been an emphasis on the causes of women trafficking and how and where they end up as sex slaves, but interestingly not so much on the causes of men's eagerness to purchase sex. As Louise Brown so perceptively noted:

Some magical things happen in the sex industry. One of the most remarkable tricks is just how often the customers vanish from both analysis and censure. It is almost as if they were not really that important. Only a few of the many reports written on the trafficking of women and prostitution pay any attention to who is buying sex as opposed to who is selling it. From most of the available research on the subject you might begin to believe that the sex trade involves only poor women and an array of criminal elements. Yet, it is obvious that prostitution would not exist without demand from the customers. Commercial sex is an industry and, like any other successful industry, there has to be a sufficiently large number of people who are willing to become consumers (emphasis mine).\(^{15}\)
Louise then goes on to provide some statistics of the customers:

It has been estimated that between 60,000 and 80,000 men buy sex each day in Calcutta. This is astonishing when we remember that in 1993 – and in the midst of the global Aids epidemic – the Indian Minister of Health said that the country would be saved from the scourge of Aids by strong family values. Either the assessment of prostitute use in Calcutta was uncharacteristically sloppy or the Ministry of Health needed a more professional briefing. If we look at HIV infection rates in terms of the percentage of the adult population who are infected, India is not suffering the misery of many sub-Saharan African countries. Even so, the disease is beginning to spread very rapidly in India and four million people are now thought to be infected.\(^\text{16}\)

My interest in shifting the focus from the sellers to the customers of sex is somewhat more concrete. Let me take recourse to a pair of citations first. In highlighting the Nepali case, Human Right Watch noted:

In India’s red-light districts, the demand for Nepali girls, especially virgins with fair skin and Mongolian features, continues to increase. It is impossible to say how many girls and women are employed in the sex industry in India or what percentage of the total is from Nepal.... Nepali social workers estimate the number of Nepali girls and women now working in Indian brothels at about 200,000 and believe that between 5,000 and 7,000 new Nepalis end up in Indian brothels every year.\(^\text{17}\)

The second citation highlights the Bangladeshi case. According to Farida Akhter:

The estimates from Bangladesh show that 200,000 women have been trafficked over a period of last 10 years. According to the report published by UNICEF, an average of 4500
women and children from Bangladesh are being smuggled to Pakistan in one year. Every month 120 to 150 Bangladeshi women are trafficked to Pakistan and sold to brothels or individuals, most of them are turned into prostitution. A UBINIG study shows that women are trafficked out to India for marriage to Indian men who find it difficult to marry for reasons of dowry payment.

It is understandable that both Nepali and Bangladeshi women trafficked to India and Pakistan and also elsewhere must *denationalize* themselves to live and work in these countries. But my question is, how do the male customers, who are otherwise all political and social beings, relate to these women politically and socially? Do the Indian men take the Nepali girls as Nepali or Indian? Or, like Madhavi Dixit, do they take Nepal to be a part of India? Do the Pakistani men take the Bangladeshi women as Bangladeshi or Pakistani? Or, do these sex starved men still consider Bangladesh a part of Pakistan? Do the West Bengali men frequenting the brothel by minute take the Bangladeshi women as West Bengalis or Bangladeshis? Or, do they take them as members of Greater Bengal? Or, do they all become *apolitical* and *asocial* beings at the time of their carnal desire? But then that would be no less disturbing for they will cease to be Indian or Pakistani at least momentarily and in the process expose the artificiality in the construction of the nation and nationality. Or, do they all – victims and perpetrators – bind themselves in the uncommon thread of South Asianess? While condemning women trafficking in the fullest sense of the term, it does provide a clue to the existence of yet another ‘South Asia’ beyond the confines of statist and governmental structures. And there lies the fear as well as the hope.

**The Flow of Small Arms**

In the aftermath of the notorious ‘Bombay blast’ in March 1993, it was found that deadly logistics of an enormous scale
had earlier made their way through the Indian customs. Table II below provides a partial indication of the items and their numbers entering the country:

**Table II. List of Illegal Small Arms and Materials Confiscated by the Indian Police**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AK-47 Rifles</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines (AK-47)</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rounds (AK-47)</td>
<td>38,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand grenades</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 mm pistols</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines (9 mm)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rounds (9 mm)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Detonators</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Rods (9 mm)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDX (in kg)</td>
<td>2,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelatine (in kg)</td>
<td>1,132.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating Devices</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolvers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolver Rounds</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolver (local)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow grenades</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30 Carbine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30 Magazines</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30 Rounds</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timer Pencil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, on the above flow of small arms and violent materials, Shiv Visvanathan researched and found out that:

Mohammad Dosa (the brother of Dawood Ibrahim, the main 'hit man and smuggler') organized a meeting with custom officials at Hotel Persian Durbar, Panvel. This meeting took place on 6 January 1993. The Assistant Collector, RK Singh was present along with his staff. The 'price' for each landing was negotiated between Dosa and the custom officials. It was fixed at 7-8 lakh per landing. Such a price was high, for the normal customs rate for landing smuggled goods was in the Rs 3. lakh range. This indicated that the custom officials were aware that what was landing was something different, even lethal, and not just textiles, silver, watches or gold.

One can very well see that without the connivance of the government or custom officials the violent materials could not have entered Bombay. But while this finding provides an account of the 'helper' it does not give a clear picture as to
who has received the arms and more importantly who supplied them. The best we can do in this kind of circumstances is consult Jane's Infantry Weapons, a book of notable distinction, and find out the names of the countries manufacturing these weapons. According to Jane’s 1996 edition, the following countries, both developed and developing, were listed as the main producers or suppliers of small arms: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, USA, Venezuela and many more.

But this does not help much unless we have identified the sources of the small arms that are found and used in South Asia. Again, this identification is of limited help, as we shall soon see. In a survey conducted at Dhaka University in 1995-1996, small arms of various types, diverse sources and varied cost were found in the hands of student political cadres and in-campus mastaans. Table III provides an account of the findings, supplemented by various newspaper reports published during the same period.

Table III. Small Arms Located in Dhaka University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Source/Manufacturer</th>
<th>Price (Taka &amp; in Thousand)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saddam Pistol</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 mm bore pistol</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>50-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 bore pistol</td>
<td>Spain, Italy, Brazil</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.65 mm bore pistol</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese rifle</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>303 cut rifle</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.45 revolver</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German revolver</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.324 revolver</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>15-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipe gun</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shutter gun</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The type and source of the small arms do point out that the bulk of them were produced in the developed countries but then it does not tell us how they have made it to the University. It is very unlikely that these weapons were directly shipped or airlifted from the manufacturing countries to their destination in Dhaka. What is more likely is that these weapons entered Bangladesh from various border points via a vibrant South Asian network that possibly includes Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and I would guess even Nepalis and Burmese. On this issue, a national daily of Bangladesh recently reported:

Sixteen northern districts of the country, especially the frontier ones are flooded with illegal arms and ammunition, posing a threat to law and order situation. These arms are mostly possessed by political activists, outlawed extremists, terrorists, extortionists and miscreants. The illegal arms include both foreign and local sten gun, SMG, sawed-off rifle, SLR, revolver and pipe gun. Most of the firearms are in the hands of activists of 'three political parties' who have separate hideouts in different places in this region including frontiers of Natore, Pabna, Sirajganj and Bogra districts. 22

In fact, the flow has become so acute and extensive that even the former Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh, Deb Mukherjee, publicly noted that "it is possible that firearms are among the items smuggled from India into Bangladesh." 23 Put differently, without an extensive South Asian network, it is impossible to imagine the flow of small arms, whether into Bombay or Dhaka University. At times, however, not only the arms flow but also the network could prove deadly. Let me cite one example by quoting Jasgjit Singh:

A large number of terrorist groups are believed to be in possession of man-portable SAMs now.... The whereabouts of the unaccounted 560 Stinger missiles (out of the stock
supplied to Afghan Mujahideen) are unknown, and all efforts to recover them have failed so far. A few had appeared in Iran, having been sold by the Mujahideen. Another 312 were reportedly sold in the open market at Landi Kotal (Pakistan) in January 1993. Earlier this year (1995) the LTTE shot down two Sri Lanka Air Force aircraft carrying passengers.24

What we have here is a network consisting of Afghans, Iranians, Pakistanis, and in so far as the missiles making it to the hands of the Tigers, Indians and Sri Lankans. But then, an American-made weapon changing hands in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, India and finally reaching Sri Lanka can only make all culpable when the said weapon is finally used against the Sri Lankans. Similar is the case with the weapons that are used in Bombay, Karachi, Dhaka, Delhi, Colombo or any other place in South Asia. In this light, can any single South Asian state rid itself of small arms when the network of small arms itself is South Asian? The question merits serious attention for it is not only the arms traders and killers that are tied up in a network but also the victims for falling prey to these weapons. Can we fence ourselves from this reality and wait for SAARC to rise from its slumber and transform South Asia? People, I am afraid, are too busy to call upon the sleepers!

Concluding Remarks

As a marked departure from my previous papers, I have shied away from the issue of 'what is to be done?' purposely. I am somewhat betting on the flow of imagination, not one or two but thousands and millions. It is shameful that a region of 1.2 billion cannot creatively resolve its conflicts but must continue to stall, fight and languish. Let me end, however, by raising three or four questions pertaining to the three areas discussed earlier:

- Will India ever cease to have a seized mentality and take up the task of de-fencing itself and restore the dignity of
the people on both sides of the border? Added to this, will Bangladesh ever succeed in developing the creative potential of its people, indeed, to a point where they would be welcomed with open arms by the neighboring countries and beyond?

- Will South Asia ever be able to desexualize its customers and bring an end to the process of denationalizing the bodies of both the victims and the perpetrators?

- Will South Asia ever be able to disarm itself and contribute to the task of empowering its people?

Think and act creatively before the 'shadow' covers us all in perpetual darkness!

Endnotes

1. Let me cite the stanza from which the two lines were taken:
   
   Between the desire
   And the spasm
   Between the potency
   And the existence
   Between the essence
   And the descent
   Falls the Shadow


2. Ibid., p. 83


4. Ibid.


6. The Daily Star, 6 October 2000, p.11

7. Ibid., p.12.


10. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association in a study in 250 villages identified as 'recruiting, transit and collection' areas found that
over 7,000 women and children were trafficked to India and Pakistan every year. On the average per day, therefore, the number of women trafficked would be in the least more than a dozen. See, The Daily Star, 6 October 2000, p.12.

11. This is despite the recently formulated, although yet to fully ratified, SAARC Convention on 'Combating Trafficking in Women and Children'. The Convention, however, is limited by the fact that it does not directly focus on the 'male customers' of sex slaves. Moreover, given the nature of our legal system, such Convention can only, if at all, be partially effective.


16. Ibid., p.135.


20. Ibid., p.123.


22. The Daily Star, 19 October 2000, p.10

23. Ibid., 12 June 2000, p.12

Appendix-1

Map of the Enclave, Bhogdanga (India)
REGIONALISM FROM BELOW: THE DOMAIN OF CIVIL SOCIETY
Navnita Chadha Behera

Introduction

Regionalism in South Asia - at an intergovernmental level - has reached an impasse as symbolized by the continued postponement of the 11th summit meeting since November 1999. While the current deadlock may be attributed to an ideological clash between the democratic and military regimes or to matters of realpolitik, the real malady, I shall argue, lies elsewhere. Regionalism pursued within a functionalist paradigm and mainly through official channels remains hostage to protecting the 'national identity', defending the 'national interests', preserving the sanctity of 'national borders' and safeguarding the 'national security'. The nationalist discourse accords precedence to nation and nationalism over the region — South Asia — and without the philosophical ethos underpinning the South Asian regionalism, the political leadership of these countries has been unable to imagine and evolve a mindset, an outlook that could be truly characterized as 'South Asian'. That is why, the paper argues, the task of creating a South Asian mind and the necessary political and social milieu to forge a South Asian regional consciousness and develop a South Asian community must be rooted in the domain of civil society. Unfettered by the nation-state ideology, the players in the civil society are better placed to conceive, shape and nurture the idea of 'South Asia'.

We begin by briefly analyzing the structural limitations of pursuing regionalism within a nationalist discourse. The second section examines the processes and developments that
have facilitated the civil initiatives. The paper concludes by identifying some critical tasks for forging a South Asian regional consciousness with an ultimate goal of establishing a regional civil society.

**Regionalism within a Statist Paradigm: Structural Impediments**

South Asia is a well-defined geographical region with a shared social, cultural and civilizational past; but its post-colonial history, mired in inter-state conflicts, has deeply divided the region. Driven by the ideology of nationalism, the primary goal of its post-colonial leadership was to create nation-states. New national borders were demarcated along with new symbols of sovereignty like separate armed forces and visa controls, which looked at people across the newly created boundaries as 'alien nationals'. The havoc it would cause with peoples' lives soon became evident from the unprecedented communal carnage in wake of India's partition. The lines drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe on India's map had not only demarcated the frontiers of new states, but also divided permanently the centuries old collective social space shared by its populace. It left a lasting legacy of one and half million divided families who remain torn apart behind the frozen walls of hatred and hostility between India and Pakistan. The integrated infrastructure and markets of the subcontinent as well as the communication networks were also disrupted. The land links along the Grand Trunk Road connecting areas of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan with Central Asia were severed forever and the riverine links between West Bengal and Northeastern India with what was then East Pakistan, presently Bangladesh, snapped.

There were some exceptions such as the 1700 kms long 'open border' between India and Nepal but political sensitivities
on questions of sovereignty still cause discord, disrupting the free movement of people and goods. Let us explain this with an example. Under the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950), India and Nepal permit free movement of nationals of one country into the other, ensuring them 'national treatment' on a 'reciprocal basis'. For the last three decades, Nepalese policy makers and political analysts have castigated it as an unequal and imperialistic treaty for compromising Nepalese sovereignty. The open border is criticized for having worked to Nepal's disadvantage. Successive Nepalese governments especially the monarchy-sponsored Panchayat regimes have imposed several restrictions on Indian nationals in the matters of acquisition of land, movement in the various parts of the Kingdom and participation in industrial ventures and commercial enterprises. More recently, the Indian government has mooted several proposals to regulate this traffic apparently due to the growing activities of Pakistan's intelligence agency, ISI in the Terai border areas.

In the name of preserving the territorial sanctity of borders, these have become instruments in the hands of the ruling regimes to inhibit rather than facilitate the movement of ideas, peoples and goods across the frontiers. Against this backdrop, ideas such as the trans-Asian railway link and Asian highway could materialize. Paradoxically, cross-border trafficking in women and children, smuggling of arms and drugs and most important, spill over of ethnic conflicts causing huge outflow of refugees such as Tamils from Sri Lanka into India, Bhutanese refugees into Nepal, Chakmas from Bangladesh into India, Afghan refugees into Pakistan and so on have exposed the porosity of state boundaries that cut across communities, tribes and ethnic groups.

Also, the search for a 'national identity', especially if rooted in a religious ideology, has generated hatred and
hostility for the 'other' communities and nations. There are serious and divisive ramifications of externalizing the 'other' in construction of a national identity. Such a nation-building strategy inherently generates hatred for an alien community or foreign country and makes these biases and prejudices a part of our national psyche. Mutual enemy images of India and Pakistan are one such example. Similarly, the construction of a Sri Lankan national identity rooted in Sinhala nationalism alienates its Tamil minority and generates animosity towards the Tamil populace of neighboring India. The ideology and nationalism, in this sense, has been mainly used in a negative sense. In order to evolve a viable political framework of regionalism and to create a positive South Asian identity, there is a need to evolve mutually co-existent conceptions of nationalism among these countries. Finally, regionalism pursued through a state-driven agenda remains plagued by all the ills that lie at the root of the crisis of governance in most of the South Asian states which, over the years, have created highly bureaucratic and coercive state structures. There is a belated realization that the state formation processes, marked by growing centralization, bureaucratization and militarisation of state structures have marginalized the civil society and, paradoxically, weakened the state capacities. The top-down strategy of nation-state building has, clearly, not worked. Obsessed with the task of creating and safeguarding the 'entity' of nation-state, the political leadership has spared little attention to peoples' interests and peoples' choices. An alternative, bottom-up approach is called for empowering the people and strengthening the civil society institutions. Likewise, regionalism at the top — through the governmental processes — within the framework of SAARC has not been a pace-setter in changing the political or social dynamics of intra-regional relations. As the political leadership failed to
meet the challenge, the civil society actors have been taking initiative in promoting 'regionalism from below' by forging links and communication channels at people-to-people level. Several developments within the region and nation-states have facilitated this task.

'Regionalism From Below': The Supportive Processes and Mechanisms

First and foremost, the growing autonomy of the civil society is evident from the ascendance of market forces that are "overtaking the state as an arbiter of intra-South Asian economic relations". For instance, while Pakistan continues to regulate its bilateral trade with India through denial of the Most Favored Nation status, their informal trade far exceeds the formal trade routed through third countries such as Dubai and Singapore. Such barriers have also not inhibited high volumes of human traffic across the frontiers both through formal and informal channels. In late 1980s and early 1990s, the Indian Embassy in Pakistan was issuing about 650 to 700 visas per day and servicing about one-third that number of passports of Indian citizens who were visiting Pakistan. In 1996, more than 100,000 Pakistanis traveled to India through legally approved channels. The traders, students, those in need of medicare, pilgrims and tourist are now manifesting the ascendance of the civil society in setting the pace of India-Pakistan relations and are using the instruments of the market economy to accommodate these felt needs.

The private sector is a new catalyst for change. Conscious of the enormous potential of intra-regional trade and increasing importance of regional economic blocs in global trading, the private enterprise and business associations are setting the pace in transforming regional relationships and establishing the institutional framework for regional cooperation and
networks. Several delegations of Chambers of Commerce have been exchanged. FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and FPCCI (Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May 1997. Bypassing the state governments, Pakistani Chamber agreed to give preference to Indian businessmen for imports and the Indian Chamber agreed to evaluate Pakistani bids before importing goods from any other country. FICCI and its counterpart apex business federations in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have established Joint Business Councils (JBC) to investigate and suggest solutions to cross-border difficulties for business people. They actively seek new avenues of bilateral economic cooperation, organize trade fairs and promote joint ventures. At the regional level, such processes are institutionalized with the creation of a common SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) in 1989. SCCI organized the first South Asian Economic Cooperation Conference in November 1996, bringing many groups of academicians, policy makers, business community and journalists on a common platform.

Informal movements of people between India and Bangladesh also far exceed legalized travel figures because ordinary citizens, exposed to the delays and petty harassment of Indian visa officers and immigration authorities on either side, "prefer to pay an agreed fee to order security personnel on either side or private agents to get them across the border". Market forces largely determine the volume and composition of the Indo-Bangladeshi trade. Besides, informal trade nearly equals the official trade statistics. The story of Indo-Nepal trade is no different.

This is serviced by an increasingly efficient informal capital market, operating outside the purview of the monetary authorities, which not only finances $2 to 3 billion worth
intra-regional transactions in goods and services but also integrates capital markets spanning Middle East and South Asia. Likewise, the labor markets of South Asia are also being integrated "far beyond the understanding and indeed the political tolerance of their respective Home Ministers". The large-scale movements of people across borders, in search of better livelihood, have undercut the barriers of national boundaries.

The communications revolution in satellite technology has challenged the notion of state sovereignty including the power to control radio waves and television signals within a nation's borders and drastically undercut the governments' monopoly over controlling the information flows. The ability of the media to reach beyond national frontiers, across the globe, has far-reaching implications for transforming the national identities. The notion of an exclusive and unified national identity is being challenged from within and without. Diverse social and cultural groups within a nation are finding a powerful medium in satellite technology, for creating, popularizing and maintaining their sub-national identities. There is a mushrooming of satellite channels in India, catering to specific linguistic groups including Tamils, Telugus, Malayalam and still others. State governments are equally alarmed about the dangers to the country's hallowed cultural traditions from the imminent invasion by a globalized, syncretic western culture represented by glitzy soap operas and MTV. The point is not, whether the process of global cultural integration can be successfully opposed but that a national identity may no longer remain a 'preserve of the national governments'. It cannot be treated as a 'sacrosanct given' either as an abstracted, unified identity for the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversities within a nation or by fixing in a rigid fashion, relationships between national 'imagined communities'.
A second implication is that people in South Asia are learning about each other through satellite channels, independent of the government's control. Despite limitations of reach as compared to the terrestrial television, quality of broadcasts and nature of programming - mostly 'cultural' with a little time devoted to foreign policy and regional security issues - the satellite medium is playing a critical role in exposing the people to diverse viewpoints and breaking down several myths about the exclusivity of the national identities. The popularity of the Star or ZEE television, private satellite channels watched across South Asia, has been instrumental in alleviating enemy images of Pakistanis and Indians. Also, Internet is becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation of educated middle class in South Asia.

The emergence and robust growth of NGOs across South Asian region has opened a multitude of communication channels, at the grassroots level, on a broad spectrum of issues ranging from gender issues, child labor and human rights violations to ecology, agriculture and science and technology. Several NGOs like South Asia Women's Forum, South Asia People's Action Network and South Asia People's Ecology Network are playing an active role in civic mobilization and public advocacy and organizing activities across national boundaries in these areas. The last decade also witnessed a spurt in non-official dialogues among significant elements of the body politics in the South Asian countries. They refer to a host of activities including various kinds of meetings, training, research programs, exchanges and workshops that focus on issues ranging from economic cooperation and social issues through to political security matters. The criteria are not the kind of setting but the intention to discuss sensitive issues across the borders. The nature, scope and range of such dialogues have been
documented in detail elsewhere. Suffice to say that there are more than forty dialogue channels in South Asia and about a dozen more outside the region in which South Asian states participate on a regular basis.

Critics point that the non-official dialogues have not produced any dramatic breakthroughs on contentious regional issues nor have they brought any qualitative transformation in the calculus of bilateral and regional cooperation. They have not had the same kind of cumulative effect or achieved a systematic influence on governmental thinking and interactions as in the neighboring areas. Non-official dialogues are still at a comparatively nascent stage and it is premature to expect quick results, especially when formal diplomatic efforts are, for last five decades, still grappling with the same issues. The overall value of these dialogues has to be measured against a different set of standards. They have promoted exchanges and coalition building among like-minded individuals and groups and helped cement new sectoral networks among the private sector and citizens groups, operating across borders, who share the general goal of building a more peaceful and cooperative South Asia. Viewed from the people's perspective, the dialogues have been valuable in stimulating cross-national interactions, reshaping opinions and creating a sense of empowerment among the participants.

There is little doubt, however, of the long road ahead in building and strengthening the philosophical foundations of South Asian regionalism. The first critical task is to evolve a new, alternative discourse, which liberates our thinking from the limitations imposed by the structures of modern nation-states. What we need is, a "thorough and an innovative remaking of our education", especially re-writing of the history because presently, the South Asian children are "literally
brought up as 'nationalist' or 'communalist', tutored to fall in love only with the nation, they have come to share". A communal interpretation of history lies at the root of continuing ideological clash between Pakistan's Islamic nationalism and India's secular beliefs with BJP's espousal of Hindu nationalism introducing a new dimension to the conflict. This is because history in the subcontinent is closely tied to the question of identity and nationalism. As Romila Thapar points out,

"A communal segmentary nationalism draws on an identity which focuses on one group identified by religion and excludes the others.... the argument is that we have a right to be a nation-state or to dominate the nation-state because of our distinct identity. Whether it is the Muslim component of the subcontinent as it was in the pre-partition days or whether it is the Hindu majority or Sikhs in Punjab, this right or this perception of identity is based on how history is perceived. History, therefore, is modulated in order to conform to projecting an [national] identity."17

A communal approach to history - of a Muslim or Hindu variety - is basically the same. Both view history in terms of a religious struggle between Islam and Hinduism and try to establish the superiority of their community. Once Islam and Hinduism are established as anti-theoretical to each other, hostility towards an 'Islamic' Pakistan or 'Hindu' India is only the next logical step to take.18 By infusing an 'us versus them' feeling among the younger generations and imprinting an inimical picture of the 'other side', historical texts and textbooks have served as an important medium for reproducing hatred and conflict. This is only one aspect of the matter.

A history written by and from the standpoint of the dominant majority of a nation-state tends to alienate the minority communities. In the Sinhalese ideological
construction of the Sri Lankan state, there is a powerful idea of Sri Lanka being "our land" - *ape rata*. Uyangoda points out that this "territorial possessionist idiom in the Sinhalese political discourse implies a condition of social appropriation of the state which is mediated by ideology", and it also refers to a "collective self-understanding of a polity - a polity of 'ours' and not of an 'other'." Accordingly, the Sri Lankan history eulogizes the Sinhalese people and Sinhala nationalism, excluding the ethnic 'other' - the Tamil minority. Likewise, the history of Bangladesh glorifies the history of 'Bengalee or Bangladeshi nation'. The Hill people as such do not find a space for them in this history. This creates a sense of alienation among them for they cannot identify themselves with the history of the state of which they part. This necessarily leads them to search for their 'own history'.

Imtiaz Ahmed rightly argues:

"A re-evaluation of the etymology of history is therefore, required - it must narrate the history of people - it must create a space where peoples of all kinds will find their worth as human beings, and not be evaluated by the (Western) abstraction of nations and nationalities."

At the regional level, a South Asian University, with issue-oriented faculties like Water-Management, Peace Research, Human Rights and Duties, Gender Politics, Communications and others, spread throughout the region, has been proposed. The students and researchers here will be 'people of South Asia first and last', and would look into the issues from a "South Asian perspective, indeed, over and beyond the modern state to which they all belong". The idea is to 'create a South Asian mind', which would look into the business of organizing cooperation in diverse fields within South Asia, not from the standpoint of nations and states but from the standpoint of people.
In fact, people in South Asia need to know each other anew - independent of their nationalist labels. Let us explain this further. A typical interaction between an Indian and Pakistani is characterized by a dual-level dialogue. When they meet in a 'human encounter', and talk about business, films, family matters or any non-political subject, they talk to each other positively. In places like Europe and North America, there is an instant mutual recognition. Speaking the same language, sharing the same values and enjoying the same food and music, they easily befriend each other. It is only when they are engaged in a political dialogue about India-Pakistan relations, each feels obliged to subscribe to his/her government policies. Then some kind of conflict takes place. Despite the fact that they may not be well acquainted with the problem, they argue. It is, as if, they feel a 'duty' or responsibility as an Indian or Pakistani national to back their respective governments. They seem to be responding to the nation-building activities or 'indoctrination' that has taken place on both sides, for last fifty years. The moment they get off the 'official dialogue', they are friendly and, their points of view relate to each other. The task of the civil society in this situation is to enable the people to re-discover each other as human beings first. It needs to create alternative social spaces to allow more 'human encounters and interactions' among the people and at the same time, humanize and de-politicize their dialogue. Finally, the civil society actors and institutions need to forge links and develop sectoral networks, across the region, with an ultimate goal of creating a regional civil society.
Endnotes


2. Harinder Baweja, "The Kathmandu Nexus", *India Today*, 12 June 2000. She cited a secret report of the Indian government entitled *Pakistan’s Anti-India Activities in Nepal* that the National Security Advisor, Mr Brajesh Mishra proposed to discuss with the Nepalese authorities.


7. A delegation of PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry went to Pakistan in March 1996, followed by the Cil visit in May 1996. Recently, a FICCI delegation went to Pakistan in April-May 1997. From the other side, Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s first ever business delegation visited New Delhi in December 1995. FPCCI delegation came to India in December 1996.


9. These include trade, investment, energy, science and technology, travel and tourism, telecommunications, business information and data networking, human resources development, social dimensions of business development and women entrepreneurs. *The Nation*, 27 April 1997.


11. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
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12. Ibid.


14. Ibid., p. 3.


16. Ibid., p. 27.


19. Uyangoda outlines following meanings and conceptions of this category of ‘our land’ or ‘our country’: (a) ours is a Sinhalese country; (b) ours is a land of Buddhists; (c) this is the only place in the world where the Sinhalese race exists; (d) foreigners have come and exploited our country, and we the Sinhalese have become poorer and poorer; (e) we will not allow anybody to divide our country; (f) why can these Tamils not go back to where they originally came from? See, Jayadeva Uyangoda, "The State and the Process of Devolution in Sri Lanka", in Sunil Bastian, ed., Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka, New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1994, p. 90.


21. Ibid.


23. Ibid., p. 193.

24. Based on a conversation with a Pakistani journalist.
SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

International Conference on

Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Interfacing New Dimensions and Perspectives

22-24 October, 2000

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) in collaboration with the German Embassy in Dhaka organized a three-day international conference on ‘Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Interfacing New Dimensions and Perspectives’, during October 22-24, 2000 at the BIISS auditorium, Dhaka.

Mr. SAMS Kibria, former Minister for Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh inaugurated the conference. Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, former Deputy Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, was present at the inaugural session as the Special Guest. Dr. Towfiq Ali, the then Secretary to the Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also addressed the inaugural session. Maj. General Jamil D. Ahsan, Bir Protik, psc, former Director General of BIISS, and Mr. Uwe Schramm, former Ambassador of Germany to Bangladesh, made the opening statements at the inaugural session. Professor A. T. M Zahurul Huq, Chairman, University Grants Commission, Dhaka, presided over the inaugural session, while, Dr. Shaheen Afroze, Conference Coordinator, and a Senior Research Fellow of BIISS, proposed the vote of thanks. H. E. Mr. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, Hon’ble Minister for Planning and National Development, Republic of Maldives, and Former Secretary General, SAARC, was the Chief Guest at the Concluding Session and made the Valedictory Speech. Ms. Claudia Schutt of South Asia Department, German
Foreign Office, Berlin, made special remarks at the concluding session, which was presided over by Major General Mustafa Kamaluddin, ndu, psc, former Chairman, Board of Governors (BOG), BIISS.

About 100 distinguished scholars, members of the academia, representative of multi-disciplinary professional bodies and policy makers from Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Germany, Belgium, France, EU and Bangladesh participated in the Conference. The Conference, spread over three days, was divided into five working sessions over which altogether nineteen papers were presented. The first session highlighted the achievements of and constraints to regional cooperation at SAARC level and finding out possible reform measures. The second session dealt with examining the possibilities of developing linkages of cooperation between South Asia and some extra-regional forums as well as with extra-regional countries. The third session focused on devising possible mechanisms of conflict resolution and thereby ensuring peace in the South Asian region. The fourth session engaged itself in deliberating on the prospects of and challenges to sub-regional cooperation in South Asia. And finally, the last session attempted to examine the prospect of developing regional cooperation through track two level cooperation.

In his inaugural address, the former Minister Mr. Kibria, emphasized that for promoting regional cooperation priority should be given to promotion of trade, investment and technology transfer. He regretted that the activities of SAARC remain standstill because of the armed conflicts between India and Pakistan. Mr. Kibria underscored the need for finding an alternative way, which will help strengthen regional cooperation and encourage people to people contact in the region towards the path of economic progress.
Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury said that the time has come to reinvent, rediscover and give a new look to the regional body. He laid importance to people-to people contact in the member countries adding that sport, information technology and cultural aspect could be the sources for establishing people-to people contact in the region.

Dr. Toufiq Ali opined that the regional body must address hardcore economic issues. Regional cooperation is a mechanism to face challenges posed by globalization, particularly for protecting small economies like Bangladesh.

The former German Ambassador, Mr. Uwe Schramm, lauded the pro-active role of Bangladesh. He highlighted the purpose of German Foreign Policy in South Asia, which is to contribute towards peace, stability and development. He expressed Germany's firm commitment in favor of all efforts to initiate, strengthen and further develop cooperation among South Asian nations.

A number of substantive issues confronting the process of regional cooperation in South Asia were deliberated upon and experiences of successful regional groupings like the EU and ASEAN were often brought to bear in the deliberation. The participants discussed at length various issues confronting regional cooperation in South Asia. The conference held that the rapid pace of globalization and the concomitant changes in the political, economic, and strategic environments have added to the imperative for strengthening regional cooperation meaningfully.

The speakers of the conference were in accord that SAARC needs reinventing and reforming. They recommended for a new look to SAARC without confining SAARC activities within the summitry. Majority of the participants called for reforming SAARC with or without changing the SAARC Charter. To
make SAARC active and vibrant, the participants unanimously advocated for regional cooperation at Track II, meaning more and more people-to-people contact, strengthening the role of civil society, and the like. The participants opined that SAARC must address core economic issues such as trade, investment, and technology as they believed that poverty alleviation calls for boosting of trade and investment in various sectors of the economy. In this regard, they viewed regional cooperation as a mechanism to encounter daunting challenges thrown by globalization. The house agreed that environmental problems, natural disaster and problems of floods and water scarcity could be effectively addressed if meaningful regional cooperation takes place.

Although participants observed that intra-SAARC trade is insignificant, yet majority tended to believe that this dismal trade picture does not mean that things would remain same in the coming days. The participants, citing examples of the ASEAN and the EU experiences in regional cooperation, felt that there is no reason to despair. For a long time, no economic cooperation took place within ASEAN and the EU. Significantly, even, to date, intra-ASEAN trade is lesser as compared to the extra-regional trade.

Some speakers argued that South Asia is a region of immense potentialities, and SAARC can definitely attract development partners like the EU, ASEAN, and Japan opening windows of opportunity to make increased economic and political interactions. Identifying poverty as the common foe of SAARC, the house opined that unless the problem of poverty is tackled at the end of the day, SAARC is bound to face an explosive situation.

The participants discussed and debated the issue whether political integration should come first or economic integration in fostering regional integration. On this issue, although the
participants could not strike a consensus, they were in harmony that political willingness is a necessary precondition to foster regional cooperation, which, in turn, would lead to regional integration. They attributed the deadlock situation of SAARC to the lack of political willingness in the region. A frequent refrain in the conference was that “putting SAARC into practice is a matter of political will”.

The house recommended shunning of ‘official mindset’ that it viewed as the main roadblock. It observed that low-level of reciprocal response from some of the bigger neighbors constitutes the real problem in SAARC trade relationship. While the participants identified market access as a formidable challenge before SAARC, they noted that the traders and business community of SAARC countries have started coming closer in an attempt to boost up trade relations.

Arguing that India-Pakistan mistrust was the basic impediment to peace and cooperation in South Asia, the participants underlined the urgency of shifting away from the elite-centric security paradigm to that of the people-centric security paradigm. The house was evidently in agreement that the nuclearization of South Asia has heightened the insecurity among the non-nuclear states of the region. Some speakers even advocated for a ‘South Asian Peace and Security Doctrine’ based on a litany of principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the UN resolutions and the SAARC Convention as well. They echoed for a sort of loose security forum parallel to or within SAARC where political issues could be discussed. Some recommended that SAARC should tailor itself to the strategy of multilateralism keeping all options open including arbitration and mediation as tools of conflict management and prevention.

The participants noted with concern that defense expenditure is on the rise. They portrayed it as a very
deplorable situation as the majority of South Asian population have been living in abject poverty. They recommended that South Asian governments should spend more in the development sectors instead of the military sector.

The participants hotly debated the issue of interference by bigger neighbors in the internal affairs of the South Asian states. The house was divided as to whether such interventions in the affairs of South Asian states have complicated the management and prevention processes of conflicts in the region or not.

Another issue that generated hot debate was the question of sub-regional grouping. Questions were raised whether the growth of sub-regional grouping has marginalized SAARC. Will sub-regional grouping be pursued within the framework of SAARC? There was no consensus on these questions. It was however, felt that sub-regional cooperation need not necessarily be counter-productive for regional cooperation. It was also pointed out that although official SAARC remains deadlocked, the process itself has spawned a host of contacts and interactions at people’s level.

That brings the proceedings of the conference to people to people cooperation. The need for people to people cooperation was considered to be the *sine qua non* for sustaining regional cooperation. The participants also grappled with the question of transition between one to the other track.

In the light of the above, the conference made the following advocacy to the governments, policy making community, NGOs and the civil society:

- Whatever progress SAARC has made, should be consolidated. SAARC process and framework should not be abandoned. If necessary, the Charter may be modified to suit the changing needs and new challenges. Experiences of EU and ASEAN serve to reinforce the plea.
• Other levels and layers of cooperation should not be excluded. Rather they should serve to reinforce SAARC.

• A time may have come for non-contentious security issues to be addressed in a multilateral framework, although CBMs, conflict prevention and management should be pursued at bilateral level first.

• Civil societies and citizens group should put pressure on South Asian Governments to reduce defense spending. In this context, a beginning may be made by reducing defense spending by symbolic 1 percent and contribute the same amount to social development program within the framework of SAARC.

• Collaborative research in poverty alleviation, role of NGOs and civil society, environmental degradation, meteorology, regional water management and voluntary science parallel with hierarchic science and market science should be undertaken.

• Another sector of cooperation is the disaster management. And here, the Armed Forces of South Asian countries can cooperate.
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