The issue of security assumes (conceals?) the pursuit of two parallel but not necessarily complementary considerations. The first involves territorial security of a nation-state and the second, political security of the class or group in power. The first consideration is paramount because it is only by projecting its own interests as those of the entire nation that a ruling class can protect and promote its own security. This is neither "immoral" nor exceptional. Everywhere, in every country, the ruling elite takes up the burden of promoting national interests along with its own interests. What causes problem is when the two interests come into conflict or draw too far apart. It is then that the survival of the ruling elite comes under threat.

In regard to inter-state relations, however, promotion of class interests in the name of national security can create other problems as well. First, relations become unstable. Second, an element of friction, if not confrontation, is introduced in inter-state relations in order that a particular group or class can gain political legitimacy by acting beyond its narrow interests on behalf of the nation as a whole. This again is normal practice in politics, except that preoccupation with national security can lead to the use of repressive methods in domestic policies and run-away pursuit of power game in external relations.

In the case of South Asia, this overlapping of class and national interests prevents "dominant fractions of the bourgeoisie of these countries" from developing a collective consciousness that indeed can provide a psychological spur for regional cooperation. The concept of small or big state would not have mattered much had we cared to note that
nations of the region share in common almost an identical set of socio-economic characteristics. There are imbalances. India with its large size, population and protected market dwarfs the individual identity of others. Both India and Pakistan possess disproportionately large military forces and different countries have different political systems according to the manner in which the ruling elites have sought to consolidate themselves in power in different ways, "depending on the internal relations of economic and political power".¹

But there is the other, perhaps more concrete, side as well: in global terms, South Asia constitutes one of the poorest, backward and over-populated "agrarian slums". No country in the region has a per capita income above $250; more than 1/3 of the population lives below the poverty line and, except Sri Lanka, the number of illiterates constitute absolute majority in every country. Further, although the region accounts for just over one per cent of the total world trade, even in such marginal area, every country shows unrelied trade-deficit. This causes scarcity of capital and makes them dependent on larger flow of foreign capital.

Even within this scale of poverty, there perhaps can be a hierarchy: Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh have the lowest GDP per capita; none has attained an industrial capacity to induce growth in any sector of the economy and each remains overwhelmingly dependent on foreign aid for economic survival. What makes this hierarchy all the more poignant is the rate of growth that fails to match the growth rate in population. Thus, even in regional terms, these countries are becoming poorer with every passing year. In the case of Nepal and Bhutan, their land-locked position makes them dependent not only on outside aid but also on their neighbours, particularly (India) for access to and communication with the outside world. Smallness constitutes thus a kind of double dependency on their part which is not marked in the case of small island countries such as Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The critical factors faced by Nepal and Bhutan are rooted in their geographical location. Yet, as independent sovereign nations (and as poorer members of the region) they must catch up with their neighbours in the context of what has come to be called nation-building i.e. a modernized state apparatus, a transport-communication network covering the
whole territory, and a set of developmental measures. Whatever political regime these countries inherited, the need for modernizing the state machine to initiate urgent socio-economic reforms could not be ignored by them. At the same time, whatever path of development they chose (which cannot be faulted because of their sovereign status), the choice itself aimed at the political survival of the established elites in these countries.

In the case of Nepal after a period of experiment with party politics, the monarchical regime launched innovations covering the whole gamut of the country's political, social, psychological and economic institutions.

The introduction of partyless Panchayat system, backed by an ideology of Nepali nationalism in the early 1960s, provided the political climate for carrying out these innovations. The Panchayat system recruited a new generation of administrators, professionals and intellectuals who rallied to support the regime to promote their sectional interests. This helped to broaden the social base of monarchy, an achievement that also helped the regime to relax the irritating restrictions it had imposed on the Kingdom's political life.

The ideology of nationalism instilled a sense of pride and self-confidence among members of Nepal's educated elite. Inevitably, in order to gain prominence both at home and abroad, this elite sought to distance itself from traditional/religious and cultural linkages with India. In some ways this was a welcome development because relations among sovereign states can be sustained only by mutual recognition of their independent sovereign status rather than by platform rhetorics of their close cultural/religious bonds in the past. As Abeyesekara puts it, "It could be maintained that the countries of South Asia are, in effect, parts of a single cultural matrix. But recent facts illustrate that the role of the Indo-Gangetic valley as the originator of much of South Asian culture can in itself be a hindrance rather than a motivation to forms of current cooperation".

Under Nepal's new political dispensation, a great deal of improvements took place in the socio-economic infrastructure. On an average 186 km. of road has been built per year since 1960, which is an impressive achievement considering the difficult terrain to be negotiated and reached. This, together with improvements in other forms of communication, has facilitated administrative integration. Literacy rate has
increased; introduction of higher education with the Tribhuvan University acting as a nucleus, has helped to turn out in increasing numbers the much needed cadre of professionals and technicians; while a series of political/administrative decisions has opened the Terai for settlement by the hill people in large numbers thus bringing a sub-region into closer contact with the capital.

Crucial in all these policy choices was Kathmandu's attempt to extend its diplomatic and economic links with the outside world. Rather than being dependent on a single source (however friendly) for trade and assistance, every independent country wants to diversify its external linkages so as to underwrite its own independence! In the case of land-locked countries, this search for diversification becomes over-powering.

But more than the psychological factor, Nepal's economic development rests almost entirely on the flow of external capital. Historically, foreign aid has financed every year at least 60 per cent of Nepal's development expenditure, of which only 40 percent goes to capital formation. Consequently, it is foreign assistance which has directly or indirectly facilitated the expansion of bureaucracy to which a majority of the educated is recruited. The remaining beneficiary groups comprise real estate owners, agents, brokers, contractors, researchers and consultants. All in all, foreign aid around which a complete sub-economy has grown up has been a good business for Kathmandu.3

"Indeed", as Devendra Raj Pandey describes, "one can say that a supra-economy has been created on account of foreign aid....The government's plans, economic policies and even budgets bear little relevance to the nation's economic reality or the needs of the people. They are pursued with an eye on the aid donors on the one hand and the self-seeking attitudes of the ruling class on the other".4

That this is a soft choice for a developing nation cannot be denied. Neither could one accept that by avoiding drastic steps for mobilizing internal resources and by depending purely on revenues received from import duty and sales tax Nepal could achieve economic self-sufficiency in the long or short-run. But the compulsion to attract foreign aid in ever increasing volume has become absolutely essential for the political survival of the ruling elite in Kathmandu. In what way can such external flow be ensured? The question requires not only economic but political strategy. The only asset Nepal has to hunt for capital abroad is its geo-
graphical location. Because of this location, its external postures have a bearing on the security of the neighbouring countries as well as on strategic considerations of other extra-regional powers. Would such postures create suspicion in India about Kathmandu's intentions? They well might; otherwise India would not be too willing to release a part of its limited resources for projects chosen by Kathmandu for development. An assertion of self-independence can also cause apprehension or appreciation among the country's major donors: USA, China and UK.

Admittedly, management of foreign affairs on such lines can prove hazardous; but if political survival is the creed that governs the conduct of ruling elites in South Asia, then it must also be admitted that Kathmandu has managed its affairs rather well to consolidate its position at home as well as win friends and donors abroad. Above all, it has turned the liability of its land-locked geographical position into an abiding asset.

Notes
2. Italic, p. 54
ETHNICITY AND SECURITY OF SMALL STATES:
SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

Syed Anwar Husain

South Asia appears to be a mosaic of majority communities and ethnic groups. Such a scenario is, however, not unique in the case of South Asia only, but a general feature of small states all over the Third World. Historical forces, colonial impact and the consequences of social differences arising out of religions, caste or some other sources of division explain this variegated demographic pattern. Very often identity assertiveness of the ethnic groups because of what E. Shills aptly calls "serious disaffection based on primordial attachments" as against the majority communities is considered one of the potent threats to national identity, territorial integrity and state security. Yakubu Gown, the soldier-president of Nigeria during the Biafran crisis had this perspective in his mind when he once warned that most African states had one or more Biafras within their territories. A cursory glance at the political map of contemporary South Asia shows that the region is stuck up in the quagmire of problems created by ethnic turbulence and also that, unless properly coped, circumstances would precipitate into what might justify the Gown type of prognosis in the case of this region.

The central argument of the paper is that, such ethnic turbulence provides one of the domestic contexts of security covers of states in South Asia. The analysis presented progresses through three broad thematic sections. The first section suggests certain relevant hypotheses. The second one reviews the South Asian ethnic scenario and draws attention to the security aspect with both internal and external ramifications in the context of the hypotheses; and the final section suggests certain policy options that may be considered for addressing these ethnic problems.
Framework

In this section some hypotheses are suggested in the context of a general conflict scenario of small states. This has been done mainly because most of these internal conflicts have roots in ethnic turbulence. Udo Steinbach identifies four specific sources of conflict in small states; and these are, national fragmentation, inequitable development, cultural clashes and liberation movements. The last one is the culmination of the circumstances created by the first three.

The concept of ‘nation’ introduced by the colonial powers materialized in a way which, in many cases, went against territorial, ethnic, religious, geographical or culturo-historical traditions. The externally imposed divisions of national states—products of decolonisation—have ignored the traditional ethnic and religious groupings. This has resulted in the government of the various national entities starting to lodge claims which are almost bound to lead to conflict with other countries.

The problems of development are not only to be found at an economic level. Many of the tensions and conflicts arise from the inability of the ruling elites to pay due regard to the demands of religious or ethnic groups for greater participation in political life, demands which arise as a result of the process of economic and social transformation.

The survival of cultural traditions in a western type of modernization creates the background for cultural clashes. These have found their expression in extreme form in Iran and may be detected distantly in other small states.

To a considerable extent, internal conflicts in the small states arise through failures in economic and political development. Actual examples of conflict illustrate that the above elements can be seen singly or in combination.

Keeping this general background in view we perceive ethnic problems in a security perspective when a non-ruling group challenges the ruling elite for the purpose of asserting its identity. And, in doing so the ethnic groups are found to be employing political resources and instruments of violence. Thus we are dealing with the type of ethnicity that seeks to reject the existing political community of which it is formally a part. It is suggested that such ethnic violence poses security problems for politically unstable and economically weak small nations in three ways:
first, by posing threat to internal cohesion and territorial integrity; second, by creating transborder manifestations thereby straining inter-state relations and often creating radial conflagrations on both sides of border; third, by occasionally inducing exogenous involvement.

**Ethnic Scenario in South Asia**

The ethnic problems facing the countries of South Asia have deep and complex roots. During the colonial rule administrative structure and economy of the region were so built up as to subserve the interests of the metropolitan power. While doing so the first seeds of ethnic problem were sown. Perhaps one striking example of such a process was the transfer of Tamil labour from South India to tea and rubber plantations of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the growing nationalism for challenging colonial power witnessed the linking together of various ethnic groups against the common adversary. The process of modernization that ensued from colonial administration also created new political organizations and structures in which individuals came together by rising above their ethnic identities. But the political process, although attended with increasing share of power by the indigenous elites created sources of new tensions. Under the system of an equal franchise power was monopolised by a small elite. As against them there emerged an aspirant middle class which had been gathering wealth and pretensions for power by participating in the capitalist system of economic activities. The members of the middle class sought to fight electoral battles by using those issues that were most effective for the purpose—ethnic and revivalist. The colonial rule abetted and perpetuated such undesirable cleavages. The ‘Great Divide’ of the Sub-continent in 1947 was the culmination of such a socio-political process.

The divide was, however, not the solution of the problems. The ethnic cleavages have been strengthened since independence as the dominant majorities have tried to impose their own identities and cultures over minority ethnic groups. The economic policies followed by these nations have also led to the deterioration of majority-minority relations. As one analyst of ethnic problems observes, “The roots of conflicts in a multiracial society almost invariably lie in the competition for scarce resources and scarce economic opportunities.” It may be
argued that in the long run such a nature of state policies might create social divisions along class lines but, in the short run, divisions along ethnicity is reinforced. But it would he wrong to attach too much importance to economic factors only, because assertiveness of ethnic communities arises also from their linguistic and cultural identity, which, under system of political and economic discrimination is at times thwarted. The present day ethnic problems thus has much to do with the dominant state structures and policies pursued. Ethnic consciousness, however, draws sustenance from the past, as well.

Urmila Phadnis has suggested three categories of ethnic problems as they exist in South Asia today:

1. A politically dominant majority versus a subordinate minority or minorities: Sri Lanka (Sinhalese Vs. Tamils, Moors, Burghers); Pakistan (Punjabis Vs. Sindhis, Pathans, Baluchis); Bangladesh (Bengalis Vs. Chakmas, Marmas, Tripuris).

2. A politically dominant minority Vs. a subordinate majority as in most colonial situations: Bhutan (Nepalis Vs. tribal groups); Nepal (Valley Hindus Vs. Terai people, Newaris, tribal group).

3. A multiplicity of ethnic groups of various sizes and power confounded by a multiplicity of loci of contacts among them make ethnic configuration in terms of politically dominant and subordinate groups at the state level impossible. India falls in this category.

In the context of the third category it may be added that impossibility of dominant—subordinate type ethnic configuration does not necessarily mean that ethnic turbulence will be absent. The present state of India is a clear testimony to such a generalisation. At the same time it needs to be stressed (as Urmila Phadnis has also done) that these categories are not static but may undergo changes depending on circumstances. For example, the pre-1971 ethnic configuration in Pakistan involved Pakistanis Vs. Bengalis and tribals. But in the past—1971 period the scenario has changed as Bengalis Vs. tribals.

Ethnicity and Security: Internal Dimension

Having discussed the roots and categories of ethnic problems specific country examples with internal security implications may now be analysed.
Ethnically most turbulent countries of the region are India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

**INDIA**

By any standard of measurement India is the fulcrum of power in South Asian security system. But in the recent past this state has been found to be grappling with sources of threat to its integrity and national cohesion. During the first two decades and a half the multi-ethnic state of India managed its business well with a state structure which provided for a strong centre but at the same time, the need for decentralised structures below the centre was not neglected. In the fifties and sixties, however, there were demands for greater autonomy and self-assertion in Nagaland and Tamil Nadu. The Dravida Kazagham even went to the extent of demanding the province’s secession from the Union. But these demands were never allowed to assume the stridency of the present problems in Punjab, Assam and Darjeeling. This was mainly because of the adroitness demonstrated by the Congress system in conflict management.

But a downturn in centre-periphery relationship became evident when Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s Congress system evolved certain traits different from the Nehru-Shastri period. The net result of the new system was both an increase in the authoritarian character of the state and an increase in the vulnerability of the state apparatus. It was in this backdrop, that the problems in Punjab, Assam and Darjeeling flared up.

The turmoil in Punjab has a religio-linguistic origin with economic overtones. Starting in 1981 the Sikh minority launched a campaign to win religious concessions and greater share of economic resources. In June 1984, the frustrating negotiations were broken off and the Golden Temple, at that time turned into stronghold of Sikh extremists was stormed by army, and over 1,000 Sikhs were reportedly killed. This act was viewed by most Sikhs as the Indian Government’s desecration of their holiest shrine. It may be argued that the demand for the Sikh mini-state of “Khalistan” is the result of the Sikh’s identity consciousness as well as of wrongly conceived and directed policy of the centre. Besides directly threatening territorial integrity the
Sikh problem may have other security manifestations. This is exemplified by the assassination of Mrs. Ghandhi, sabotaging of the Indian Airlines' Boeing and threat of assassination to Rajiv Gandhi.

The problem in Assam is more of linguistic and regional nature and characterized by efforts to assert identity *vis-a-vis* others in the same region. The Assamese movement started in 1980 on the issue of the inclusion of the foreign nationals in the electoral list. To all intents and purposes, the movement aimed at the advancement of the rising Assamese middle class, through a share for the state of its rich natural resources and accelerated economic development. The Centre's handling of the problem has already piqued the West Bengal Government. The accord signed between the central government and the All Assamese Students Union (AASU) and all Assam Ganasantram Parishad (AAGSP) representatives has been termed as "anti national, undemocratic and unreasonable" by the West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu. He further said, "We want the people of West Bengal and the rest of the country to raise their voice in protest against un-democratic and unreasonable concessions given by the central government to the chauvinistic demands of the Assam agitators.

In the recent days the northeast state of Tripura has been drawing public attention for the spate of violence let loose by the tribal separatists headed by the outlawed Tripura National Volunteers (TNV). The target of TNV guerrillas is the nontribal settlers. In 1986 the total death toll of the settlers reached 91. When TNV began its operation in 1980 about 450 people were killed.¹

The Gurkhaland concept first surfaced in 1984 when ethnic Nepalese who number about 90 per cent of the one million people in the hills around Darjeeling formed *Prantiya Morcha*. The sources of Gurkha disaffection seems to be linguistic and economic. Despite being a majority race the Gurkhas have not received official recognition for their language and can only get lowpaid jobs. The stridency of Gurkha agitation can be seen in the slogan of Gurkha youths, "We shall give our lives but will make Gurkhaland a reality".² And Subhas Geishing, leader of the Gurkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) is reported to have set the deadline year 1987 for the establishment of Gurkhaland.
To Rajiv goes the credit for easing, if not for solving the Mizo problem. Laldenga, President of the Mizo Nationalist Front (MNF) said in August 1986 that they would not give up the dream of greater Mizoram consisting of Mizo dominated areas of Tripura, Assam and Manipur. The centre may thus look forward to some more troubles.

If not tackled by right policy measures such ethnic tensions may one day dot the political map of India with countless numbers of ‘front’ with their separatist slogans and activities. And the greatest threat to the Indian state structure emanates from such burgeoning of tension spots which show a clear sign of a loosening grip on national situation by the central authority. In the long run, such threats may not appear too much because of the fragmented nature of protest and plurality of conflict; but in the short run, they appear very much real.

**PAKISTAN**

The territory of Pakistan that came into being in 1947 was, according to its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a “truncated version” of the nation for which he aspired; and it was further truncated in 1971. Thus Pakistan’s security has been continually jeopardised by its internal weaknesses and divisions. The most obvious internal division with serious security implication is ethnic. The continuing unrest in the volatile frontier province of Baluchistan and in the Northwest Frontier Province, has been aggravated by the presence in these border areas of thousands of Afghan refugees on the one hand and military and other pressures from across the border in Afghanistan and Iran on the other. These strategically sensitive border provinces pose special problems of internal cohesion as well as of national security. The dominance of the Punjabis, the most numerous elements in the population, is resented by the Sindhis, the second most numerous element, as well as by the Baluchis, the Pathans and other minority ethnic groups.

Although the Baluchis, Pathans and Sindhis have their own individual and complex problems, they all share certain common grievances: denial of political participation, undue interference by the federal government, insufficient economic assistance; and a resentment against the Punjabis.
The demand of the Pathans seems to be for greater autonomy than for secession. In fact, the Pathans, compared to the Baluchis and Sindhis, are better integrated and consequently stand to benefit by remaining within Pakistan. They are well represented in the armed forces holding about 20 per cent of jobs while constituting only about 13 per cent of the country's population; and they virtually control long distance road transportation and haulage. But bitter internal rivalries preclude any concerted action by them.

The Baluchis constitute about 5 per cent of the population and occupy about 46 per cent of Pakistan's territory. They are divided into numerous tribes but share strong cultural and linguistic affinities and straddle across the frontiers both in Afghanistan and Iran. They are economically and educationally backward, are extremely poor represented in the federal services and the region has the appearance of being neglected far away from the metropolis. The Baluchi nationalism is thus a reaction to federal policies and demands Greater Baluchistan which would seem to include territories inhabited by the Baluchis in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

The Sindhis have somewhat different grievances. Although they are a separate linguistic group with their own distinctive culture, there is no suggestion of a secessionist or irredentist movement. It is much more a problem of neglected province and the fear of being supplanted in their home. The ethnic movement against de-Sindisation of Sind' exploded as late as 1984.

**BANGLADESH**

In view of the overall demographic picture of Bangladesh ethnic problems seem unlikely. Almost 98 per cent of the population is made up of the Bengalis. A tiny fraction of the entire population are ethnic-minorities inhabiting the hilly outlying areas of the country. Two-thirds of this tribal population of six hundred thousand are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the main spot of ethnic tension. The tribals here do not really demand a separated political entity but an autonomous status. Their grievances centre in threat to their cultural entity, detribalization and changing the demographic and ethnic balance through Bengali settlement and insufficient economic development,
Protests began to be voiced immediately after the independence of Bangladesh with the formation of the *Jana Sanghati Samiti*. In 1976, a military organ was added to this political body with the name, *Shanti Bahini*: and with it began violent guerilla operations. Although weakened by internal divisions and counter-insurgency operations, *Shanti Bahini* still remains a worrisome problem for the internal cohesion of Bangladesh.

**SRI LANKA**

The Sinhala-Tamil conflict has its origin in the deep rooted apprehensions of the Tamils that their overall community interest and separate identity are being swamped by the process of Sinhalization which began in 1956 with the introduction of Sinhala as the only national language. The problem became explosive in the seventies and early eighties due to escalation of violent activities of Tamil militants who are fighting an armed struggle with the aim of creating a separate Tamil state, Eelam. As the state security forces are engaged in countering the increasing guerilla operations, the entire country seems to be in a protracted civil war.

**NEPAL**

The simmering conflicts between the majority hill people and those of the minority plains (or Terai) threaten Nepal's unity and integrity. The Terai people constituted about 37 per cent of the total population in 1971. Most of the plains people are of Indian origin and speak Indian languages. What the majority hills people resent is the control that this minority plains group exercise over Nepal's entire economy. Thus the tension is between the politically powerful majority and economically powerful minority. But because of the slow and tardy process of socio-political change Nepal's ethnic problem has not yet assumed the character of a crisis threatening viability of the state structure.

**BHUTAN**

The underdeveloped ethnic minority in Bhutan is made up of the Nepali community. The power structure is entirely monopolised by the hills people. Like Nepal the slow pace of change in Bhutan has
been mainly responsible for latency of ethnic troubles. But the scenario may change if the movement for ‘Gurkhaland’ or ‘Greater Nepal’ gathers momentum. In that case the situation may be likened to the one created by the Baluchis in Pakistan.

MALDIVES

In contrast to other South Asian states, Maldives is conspicuous by its cultural homogeneity. One religion (Islam) and one language (Divehi) have provided the state with a strong national identity and cultural cohesion not to be found elsewhere in South Asia. Maldives thus does not really face any ethnic problem that might threaten its security.

Ethnicity and Security: External Dimension

The actual South Asian scenario suggests that domestic ethnic turmoils not only threaten security of states internally, there may also be spillover effects across state boundaries and in the process a straining of inter-state relations with serious security implications may occur as well. This happens when contiguous ethnic groups draw support, material as well as moral, from each other. In such cases, domestic ethnic conflicts acquire a transborder character and may even get complicated through trans-regional linkages with expatriates and also with extra-regional powers having stakes in the region. That these are the genuine security concerns of the South Asian states is borne out by the importance attached by SAARC to effectively coping with terrorism in the region.

The most conspicuous example of such phenomena is the strained relationship between India and Sri Lanka on the Tamil issue. Any communal turmoil affecting the Sri Lankan Tamil is bound to have a reflex reaction among the 50 million Tamils in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu who press the Government of India to seek redress through diplomatic channels with Colombo. There have been reports that India provides training and sanctuary to the Tamil militants from Sri Lanka and the persistent denials by the Government of India of these allegations have led to a deterioration in the relationship between the two countries. At present, however, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) openly supports the Tamil irredentist cause; and the All India
Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which is in power in Tamil Nadu is sympathetic towards it. But it will not be an unreasonable speculation to say that, if the Sri Lankan Tamil problem remains unsolved for long the Tamils of Tamil Nadu may develop similar irredentist aspirations.

There are unconfirmed rumours that at the time of storming of the Golden Temple in 1984, some Sikh militants who eluded capture slipped across the border into Pakistan. India charges that Pakistan fanned the flames in the Punjab by providing arms, training and sanctuary to Sikh militants. In December 1986, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi categorically accused that "Pakistan has set up training centres for terrorists from where they are being trained in sabotage and subversion to create internal disturbances in the Punjab and other parts of the country" and hastened to warn that "we shall give them (Pakistanis) a crushing defeat and they will meet their waterloo".

It could be anybody's guess what such provocative exchanges would do in the backdrop of three wars since 1947 between these two traditionally hostile states.

It is reported that the Shanti Bahini guerillas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts find support in the adjacent territories of Mizoram and Tripura with which they have socio-cultural affinities. On more than one occasion high government officials of Bangladesh categorically stated that they had definite evidence of Indian involvement. Flag meetings were held between the officials of border security forces from both the sides wherein Bangladesh requested the Government of India not to be sympathetic to the members of the Shanti Bahini. In July 1986, while on a visit to India Bangladesh President raised the matter with Rajiv Gandhi and repeated the request at Banglaore. Finally, in December 1986, a military level accord was signed wherein both countries undertook to contain insurgency activities on both sides of the border.

At the same time, it was also reported in 1980 that members of the insurgent Tripura Upajati Juba Sangha were being trained in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. And, to stop the alleged illegal immigration of Bangladeshis into Assam the Indian government has embarked upon a programme of fencing the border—a move resented by Bangladesh as inhuman, and at the same time, denying such allegation on the ground.
that economic condition in Assam is not such better as to lure Bangla-
deshis into there. The treatment of Indian community in Nepal and anti-Indian feel-
ing among the middle class Nepalese have unwelcome impact on India-
Nepalese relations. The Nepali elite had reasons to be concerned when
Sikkim with its large Nepali population was annexed by India in 1974.

South Asian expatriates living in the West are always deeply
influenced by their perceptions of ethnic divides in their respective
countries and of intraregional ethnic linkages. Militant Khalistanis
living abroad wooed Pakistan. Tamil expatriates have stood behind
Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka and have been reported to have exten-
ded monetary and propaganda help to the Tamils operating in Tamil
Nadu. The ethnic expatriates also try to inflame ethnic passions
and internationalize ethnic conflicts by accusing the ruling groups of
denying human rights to affected ethnic minorities.

It can also be argued that same extraregional powers have the
temptation of influencing political events through transnational con-
nections with the militant ethnic groups within a given country. One
such example could be the covert linkage of the Baluchis with Mos-
cow. The USSR could use the local left wing political parties to set
up a puppet Baluchi state. Possible designs of other big powers should
not also be ruled out. The global perspective of big power competi-
tive relationship vis-à-vis small states and interstate as well as intra-state
conflicts are inducements for such extra-regional linkage.

Policy Recommendations
It appears from the foregoing discussion that, if not tackled in the
right spirit and with a right strategy these ethnic problems very often burst
into open rebellions and assume the character of periphery challenging
the centre. It is also evident that the transborder nature of this problem
acts as a real threat to the growing SAARC spirit, a product of the
first ever regionalism in this part of the world. There could be two ways
to deal with the problem: politico-economic and regional-diplomatic.
The first concerns the individual countries, while the second, all the coun-
tries within a regional framework.
The first way includes such strategies as political accommodation with an objective understanding of ethnic problems, if possible, granting of autonomy to the deserving ethnic communities, and gearing up of economic development in such a way as to satisfy the aspirations of all the communities in a given country.

As most of the ethnic problems are transnational in character, effected countries of the region have to take a regional approach. "Since each nation-state is the unit of SAARC" as one observer of South Asian ethnic scenario rightly points out, "vulnerability to the forces of disintegration should be reduced with a cooperative foreign policy approach". Any state trying overtly or covertly for the destabilization dismemberment of another state should also be discouraged. It thus appears that any machinery developed under SAARC spirit could be put to an effective use for coping with ethnic problem on a regional basis. In fact, it may be argued that the South Asian countries have two common threats to their stability and security: poverty and ethnic turbulence. These common threats, therefore, are sufficiently strong 'push' factors for building the nations in unity, provided there develops the right perception. The recent military level accord between India and Bangladesh relating to ethnic turbulence in Tripura and the Chittagong Hill Tracts may be a good start in the right direction.

The regional approach may also be helpful in containing the designs of extra-regional powers for getting foothold in the areas of ethnic conflict.

Of the two suggested approaches, priority should be given to the first. Because, without any success in the individual countries, the regional approach would be superficial and an exercise in futility. Another reason for such a priority ordering is that, ethnic problems in South Asia are essentially country specific. Perhaps a mix of both approaches is what appears to be most essential under the present circumstances.

Conclusion

The ethnic plurality, racial and tribal tensions, religio-linguistic dissimilarities do not always lead to irredentism and secessionist aspirations. Whenever there is a case of identity assertion by an ethnic community there is always in the background the failure of the centre to suffi-
ciently integrate that community politically and economically. Again, whether such identity assertion will be translated into a separatist-movement will largely depend on the handling of the situation by the relevant government, and to some extent, on the regional and extraregional linkages. Prevalence of ethnic tensions in South Asia confirms that there has been a mishandling of the ethnic problems. The serious security ramifications of ethnic problems also suggests that the course needs to be reversed with a right spirit and in the right direction.

Notes


9. Cited in *India Today*. 


15. For an exhaustive analysis of the Tamil issue in India-Sri-Lanka relations, see Abdur Rob Khan, "Strategic Aspects of Indo-Sri Lankan Relations", BIILL Papers, 4 (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, 1986).

16. *Bangladesh Observer* 13 December 1986

22. See note 16.
ECONOMIC ASPECTS