Chapter 5

Common Risks and Common Solutions for the Smaller States of South Asia: A Comparative Perspective
Abul Kalam Azad

5.1 INTRODUCTION
The asymmetrical power structure in South Asia, where India enjoys virtual preponderance by all the indicators constituting power, inevitably leads one to take cognisance of two irrefutable facts. First, the 'small State status' of the countries lying in India's vicinity, and second, certain risks and dilemmas that these States face in their national and international lives due to sheer smallness and weakness. While the asymmetry coupled with few policies, strategies and acts of the region's central power, i.e., India, explain in most cases such perception of risks by the smaller States, there are certain internal factors peculiar to the latter like chronic political instability, economic underdevelopment, social unrest, environmental degradation etc. that further add to their vulnerability and weakness. The internal scene of these States, in effect, place them in a 'weak State syndrome' where challenges are multi-dimensional in nature, and the efforts for dealing with them appear to be daunting as well. The chronic instability in the region due to few hardcore conventional geo-security issues and the various non-conventional threats like economic backwardness, ethnic and communal violence, social unrest, insurgency movements, terrorism, trafficking in small arms and drugs, environmental degradation etc. also aggravate, in varying degree, the risk perception of the smaller South Asian nations. Furthermore, the inability and in-adaptive
capability of such States to cope up with various politico-economic developments at the international scene is a factor to further compound their perception of risks whatever.

The assessment of risk and challenges confronting the smaller South Asian States is, therefore, made by duly taking into account the three-pronged sources from where they originate, i.e., national, regional and international. While many such risks faced by the smaller States may be common in nature, their degree and intensity may still vary among them. Also, it is worth mentioning that while few risks faced may be common in nature, demanding at the same time few common solutions, the approaches towards the goal may appear to be different. This is explained by certain facts that are as follows. First, the difference among the smaller States in power composition, determined by such factors as geo-strategic location, resource base, political and economic performances, military capability, social stability, skill and technical capacity to adopt environmental standards etc. has its influence on individual State’s risk perception. Second, the issues at stake for the smaller States may vary. For example, at the regional level, where all countries, in one way or other, feel it risky to deal with India on their contentious bilateral issues with the latter, the degree of risk or uncertainty would depend much on the nature, specificity and peculiarity of the problems that the issues pose. Thus, the problematic dimension of issues like illegal trafficking in arms and illegal migration would not be same between Bhutan and India as it is between Bangladesh and the latter on the stated issues. Third, even on risks felt to be common by all the smaller States, their prioritisation of concern may not be same, and hence the difference in national strategies and plans of action for overcoming them. This holds true particularly in case of certain environmental problems. For example, land degradation is of high concern in Bangladesh, whereas in Nepal and Sri Lanka, it is of medium and low concern respectively.

Marine pollution is not expected to figure in the environmental concern of land locked countries like Nepal and Bhutan. In a similar vein, global warming is of more concern to the Maldives than to Sri Lanka despite both being insular in nature. Fourth, the Indo-Pak conflict and other low-intensity conflicts and their possible ramifications may not affect all the smaller States of the region equally. Finally, the capacity to adjust to the changed international political and economic
systems would depend on each of the State’s political and economic prowess. Thus, if globalisation means rapid growth of international trade, capital flows and global integration of production process, then the economic capability of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan cannot be viewed to be at par to deal with the process. Their capability varies in the order as placed. Given all such considerations, a comparative analysis of the perception of risks by the smaller States and their approaches towards solving/overcoming them would be an interesting endeavour in the project work.

5.1.1. Structure of the Paper

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section, entitled ‘Small States in South Asia: A General Assessment of their Vulnerability’, deals with the empirical situation of the Small States in South Asia. The discussion reflects the ‘smallness of the States’ in exclusive South Asian environment. The second section, entitled ‘South Asian Small States: An Assessment of their Common Risks’, critically deals with the types, causes and sources of risks commonly felt by the smaller States of South Asia at the three distinct levels - national, regional and international. In the discussion, the focus would prevail over the degree of commonality in the perception of risks by such states. The third section, entitled ‘Common Risks and Common Solutions’, attempts to suggest few measures or options that the smaller South Asian States may adopt to manage the myriad risks confronting them at the moment. The last section, entitled ‘Bangladesh: Charting Out Its Possible Role in Risk Management’, is an attempt to explore the country’s potentialities in playing a proactive role in managing common risks as felt by it and its counterparts in the region. The paper ends with a general conclusion.

Methodology

The methodology of the paper is based on an empirical and analytical approach towards understanding the common risks that the smaller States of South Asia encounter at the levels mentioned above. Many of their approaches towards eliminating these risks in the interest of regional peace and stability are suggestive in nature. Works from books, journals, newspapers, on-line documents etc. constitute the research documents of the author. The work is not based on interviews.
5.2 SOUTH ASIAN SMALL STATES: A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THEIR VULNERABILITY

Small States have been a subject of political discourse since the time of Plato. However, in contemporary international relations, the discourse on them started with the emergence of a number of small States in the wake of decolonisation movement in the post-War period. In the initial stage, most of these states, belonging to the Third World and lying in the lower rung of the West-dominated international system, failed to draw the research interests of the Western analysts and scholars. Many such scholars were even hesitant in accepting the 'universal principle of equality' that the small States were set to enjoy as members of the UN, and advocated for their domination by the West either through a new strategy of neo-colonialism or a Cold War strategy of keeping them under the US-led Western sphere of influence. Certain developments, however, soon led the Western scholars to change their attitude towards the Third World small States so long marked by prejudice, power complex, ethnocentrism, individualistic interests etc. In this respect, three developments in particular draw one's attention. First, the use of the Third World as a battle ground for the Cold War; second, the increasing importance of world regions as a focus of international studies; and third, the growing political, economic and social assertion of the Third World States in different international bodies.3

The result being that studies on international relations and geopolitics of the small States began to proliferate soon with increasing richness and variety to baffle even the most committed researcher on the subject. Various themes, in effect, have interested the scholars and analysts with respect to the small States like their political and economic viability, the small States as a bloc in the UN, the role of the small States at the sub-systemic level in international relations, the security dilemma of the small States, the small States and the disorder in the periphery, etc. Even, scholarly attention is now being paid to the adaptive capacity of the small States to the changes unleashed by the end of Cold War, the current process of globalisation, the revolution in information technology, etc. While several dimensions and facets of the existence of such States have constituted the research interest of many scholars and analysts, the fact remains that till now no satisfactory answer has been provided to the question: what constitutes smallness or how small is small?
It is important to bear in mind that smallness or bigness is the outcome of the power ratio between the nations, and this inequality in power between the nations has been an inescapable geopolitical and geo-strategic fact since long. As Yves Lacoste remarks, "The inequality in power between the States has, since long, been one of the great themes of geopolitical calculation and strategic reflection. It is not to envisage this inequality only in abstract sense or in terms of economic development, but also in terms of concrete rivalry for the control of a territory". He then remarks, "The inequality between the States is a function of different factors with contradictory effects. On the one hand, there are the factors easily measurable like the size, the number of population, the volume of GDP. There are, on the other hand, the factors difficult to be measured like efficiency of political supervision, national cohesion, the capacity of a portion of the population to more or less bear deprivation or constraints, and accept the risk to life for them and for the others for the dense of a cause deemed fundamental like the national honour, or the protection of motherland". While it is true that certain qualitative criteria like land-locked nature, insularity, isolation, vulnerability, etc. or quantitative criteria like land size, demographic composition, resource base, industrial and military capability, Gross National Product (GNP), etc. are normally employed to determine the smallness or bigness of a State, there arises the question if application of such criteria is appropriate enough to judge precisely the smallness of a State.

Thus, if State A in a particular geographical area is considered to be small owing to its size and territorial configuration, the same State in another area might attain a big State status by the same criterion. In a similar vein, while the military capability or the potential war power of a particular State in a given area may appear to be meager in nature, the same may appear to be gigantic in another context. In effect, the problem in applying the various quantitative and qualitative criteria lies in the fact that no particular standard has yet been set to judge the smallness or bigness of a State. Whatever standards existing now are mostly set from a Western perspective, and are stereotyped in nature with little consideration to the realities existing within the milieu of the small States. It is like the standard calorie intake criterion set by the World Bank and other West dominated institutions to judge the general health condition in the
world. Thus, to judge the smallness or bigness of a state in the light of the criteria set by the West would lead to many anomalies and fallacies, and more erroneous would be to call such perspective 'global in nature'.

5.2.1 Bigness and Smallness in a Regional Context

One, thus, needs to understand the bigness or smallness of a state in a relationship, and that too in a proper context. Understanding the vast majority of the Third World small States' complex political, economic, social and cultural mosaics with Western yardsticks and as well gauging their smallness or bigness with West-biased criteria would bring about distortion and disproportionateness in any analysis on such States. In this respect, the most effective approach towards understanding the nature, composition and policy behaviour of the small States is to be made at the regional level; in other words, at the sub-systemic level where these groups of countries not only constitute geographic but as well various distinct geo-strategic units in different parts of the globe.

Coming to South Asia, one finds the region as a distinct and widely recognised geo-strategic unit consisting of seven countries, i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The region has a comparatively greater asymmetrical distribution of power than the other regions, which makes the task of identifying its small States an easy one. Needless to say, India, by virtue of its geographic size and location, demographic composition, strong economic, industrial and military base, occupies a pivotal position in the region. This, in the first place, enables one to determine the smallness of other States in the region through a comparison of power capability between India and the other States surrounding it. In a very conventional manner, this would require the usage of various quantitative criteria like geographical size, population size, the GNP, the level of energy consumption, the military budget, etc. for accomplishing the task. Such a comparison seems to be rational, as South Asia as a strategic unit is dominated by India in power terms. Another way of determining the smallness of the South Asian States is through an assessment of their actual position vis-à-vis India as a regional power in the region. The approach seems to be more rational, as regional stability in South Asia remains vulnerable to few hegemonic and domineering tendencies of India.
Because India has the tendency to turn its natural preeminence in the region into predominance,\(^6\) and that no other significant power in South Asia other than Pakistan has the potential to check Indian dominance or hegemonic aspirations, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan may be considered as the smaller powers from the point of their respective vulnerability vis-à-vis India. One should, however, be cautious enough not to fit these countries into David Vital's description of a small, minor or tertiary power.\(^7\) Vital identifies such a power as a State which in the long term (by itself, or as a satellite, client or ally) constitutes no more than a dispensable and non-decisive increment to a primary State's total array of political and military resources.\(^8\) This relationship would exist regardless of whatever short-term contingent role the minor State may play as an auxiliary or obstacle to the primary power. It is, perhaps, Sikkim that would best fit Vital's description of a minor State as it was never an independent State, and was eventually incorporated into the Indian Union in 1975.\(^9\)

5.2.2 Assessing the Small States' Vulnerability

The relevant question that arises is: what then is the nature and extent of vulnerability of the smaller South Asian States vis-à-vis India? The disparate gap between the smaller States and India in all components of national power is not the end of the story. In South Asian context, the vulnerability of the smaller States is explained by few irreversible geographical facts such as the centrally placed colossus position of India in the region, the geographical location of the smaller states in the periphery of the former, and their physical dispersion, one from the other. The physical dispersion compels each of the smaller South Asian States to embrace Indian territory directly, and hence meet India face à face. The peculiar geo-physical characteristics of the smaller South Asian States are also a factor to be taken note of. Thus, one finds Nepal and Bhutan in the category of land-locked States, Bangladesh a virtually India-locked State with an outlet to the Bay of Bengal portion of the Indian Ocean in the south, insular position of Sri Lanka in close proximity to the central power, and similar insular position of the Maldives but marked by isolation and remoteness from the core power of the region.
One important fact, which more often than not is forgotten, is that like in the terrestrial domain, India's preeminence also resonates in the ocean that bears its name. Its coastline that stretches for 7,000 km where it is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Arabian Sea in the west and the Indian Ocean in the south, significantly roofs the northern portion of the Indian Ocean, thereby endowing the country with a significant maritime status.\(^\text{10}\) From a geo-political perspective, the ocean cannot be viewed to be free from tension and conflict in as much as India's powerful navy in the region creates apprehension and speculation in the littoral countries about India's ultimate design in the region.\(^\text{11}\) While India has no maritime disputes with Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the one with Bangladesh with respect to the delimitation of boundaries is a factor in the ocean’s geopolitical tapestry.\(^\text{12}\)

The inherent weakness of the smaller States due to disadvantageous geographical and strategic position is further accentuated by few policies, strategies and acts of India vis-à-vis the former. Empiricism would probably testify that the relationship that developed between the two poles has not only been 'unequal' but that at the small States' end, there grew a kind of 'Indo-Phobia'; in other words, the perception of a perennial threat, direct or indirect, from India. Much has been written and talked on/about such policies, strategies and acts in various academic works of scholars both from the region and outside. However, reference may be made to India's role as a regional hegemonic power with specific emphasis on its India Doctrine\(^\text{13}\) that regards South Asia as a single strategic unit to be controlled and managed according to the Indian order of things. Also, the Indian-preferred policy of bilateralism\(^\text{14}\) is disliked by the smaller neighbours, as it appears in their eyes as a political means of keeping them under a short leash in order to gain their acquiescence to the greater Indian ambition in the region.

Another factor to unnerve the psychology of the smaller neighbours is the rapid Indian weaponisation programme with conventional, missile and nuclear components in it. The military might of India is seen as an attempt to dominate the region by force if necessary. While India might have its rationale and justification for framing out the contours of its regional policy commensurate with its own national interests, the fact remains that the constant
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5.2.3 Going Beyond the Hardcore Regional Problems

Apart from the above mentioned two hardcore realities of South Asian politics that have virtually turned the region into an area of 'chronic instability' and to which the smaller States have remained vulnerable with little maneuverability in regional peace and stability, few other conflictive issues of non-traditional nature like insurgency, trafficking in small arms and drugs, cross-border terrorism, illegal migration, large scale smuggling, etc. have further exacerbated the region's unstable scenario. Economic underdevelopment is another factor to add to the region’s instability. Despite rapid economic growth in the 1990s, South Asia has among the lowest per capital incomes in the world.16 Despite the assistance amounting to billions of dollars by the IMF/WB to support sustained economic growth, poverty continues to remain a problem in most South Asian countries. According to socio-economic criteria, the region is placed at the bottom of the scale in international statistics. According to the Human Development Index, all South Asian countries, except Sri Lanka and the Maldives, belong to the lowest category; in other words, the majority of their populations face extremely meager living conditions. Poverty is, therefore, viewed to be the common enemy of all.17

Then comes the issue of environment. In the continuing struggle against poverty, search for land and food, increasing rate of urbanisation,
pressure and stresses of myriads developmental activities both in inland and coastal zones etc. have resulted in a rapid degradation of the region’s environment. Among the regional environmental issues, air pollution, land degradation, deforestation, water scarcity, deterioration in water quality, loss of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, marine pollution etc. are, therefore, the concerns of all. The global phenomenon of climate change also finds its place in the list of environmental concerns.\textsuperscript{18}

The region also suffers at the cultural front, which is somewhat paradoxical in the sense that that it is marked by cultural commonality. The commonality becomes a threat when the smaller states face serious problems in developing their separate and distinct identities. Also, as Shahnaz Karim remarks, “The powerful elements of cultural commonality tend to create serious problems along borders through the migration of culturally homogeneous people across them. This often leads to turmoil and conflict and, in turn, contribute to tension”.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally, the region is also vulnerable to some of the current trends at the global level in so far as it needs adjustment to cope with such developments as the fluidity of current international system, the ongoing process of globalisation, the revolution in communication technology, the increasing power of various financial institutions, global campaign for establishing human rights and proper gender perspective, and undertaking development within a sustainable framework.

While the vulnerability of the smaller South Asian countries is explained by a complex web of structural, variable and situational factors, a combination of few fault-lines in their respective domestic polities further aggravate their feeling of vulnerability in the overall regional context. The succeeding section endeavours to decipher this weakness.

5.3 SOUTH ASIAN SMALL STATES: IDENTIFYING THEIR COMMON RISKS

The most common risks and dangers as experienced by the smaller South Asian States originate from their political, economic and social weaknesses at the domestic level. The problems, internal in nature, are the result of State’s malfunctioning in certain important spheres. As a territorially defined political unit, exercising ultimate internal
authority and recognising no legitimate external authority over it, a State is probably the most recognised and revered of the political institutions that the world community knows. The State understood to be an authoritative institution with sovereignty over a recognised territory is as well a utilitarian political organisation to meet economic, social, and security needs of its citizens. Also, a State acts as the symbol of social cohesion where differences between class, ethnic groups, elite and various interest groups are managed by its legitimate authority in the greater interest of the nation.

While in case of South Asia, colonialism, failure in state building, lack of democratic practice, absence of resource base, inappropriate models of development, lack of tolerance for diversity etc. are the reasons generally cited to explain the non-fulfillment of the above stated goals, the most rational explanation for it is the failure of power wielders in recognising two very important facts, first, ‘a State, irrespective of size and power, needs to be strong’, and second, a State’s overlapping politico-economic and social functions need to guarantee its subjects a political leadership with general acceptability and high degree of legitimacy, domestic stability, a sense of community, security against all threats of external and internal nature, general economic prosperity and well-being, etc. Much of such goals could have been achieved in the South Asian smaller polities provided efforts for creating permanent political stability were rendered by the political leaders representing such polities. Even democracy, seen as the most preferred system, both in ideological and operational sense, for the total well-being of a State has failed to deliver the mentioned benefits for most of the South Asian smaller States. The relevant question is: what then has gone wrong in these societies?

5.3.1 Risks at the Domestic Level

Political Weakness

At the outset, it should be mentioned that much of the weakness at the domestic level of the smaller States emanates from their wrong practice of democracy. Although democracy in most of these polities is not ‘unconsolidated in nature’, as is the case with most of the African countries, it, however, remains non-functional in the former case. The third wave of democratisation as described by Huntington and one that reached many African countries beginning from the
1990s has faced formidable challenges for reasons like party pluralism, denial of individual basic rights like freedom of belief, opinion and association, the independence of the judiciary, free and fair elections, good governance, etc.\textsuperscript{22}

In case of South Asia, a similar tendency seems to resonate in many smaller States that have adopted democratic systems in recent times. One should bear in mind that the power that the democratic system invests in a body of elected representatives needs to be exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources. ‘Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’, and therefore, with a view to preventing misuse of power, a democratic system equally envisages accountability and transparency in the political life of the State.\textsuperscript{23} All such mechanisms can only be possible if the level of integrity and honesty of the national leaders remain at a satisfactory level.\textsuperscript{24} In South Asian small States, it is, therefore, the crisis in leadership that probably has not enabled the democracies to flourish in a satisfactory manner. The system has been expediently distorted in such countries to suit the interests of political leaders and their stooges. In this respect, it is important to take note of few characteristics that mark each of the polities.

In Bangladesh, the practice of democracy is characterised by distortion. The distorted element in Bangladesh’s practice of democracy may be testified by certain facts like paralysis of the parliament, violence and disregard for the people’s mandate, lack of democratic institutions at the grass-roots level, unequal distribution of power, influence and opportunity, destructively parochial politics, narrow interests of the political parties, lack of political tolerance, political killings, inability to accommodate the rights of the citizens, inequality before the law and justice, etc. All such factors are responsible for causing a series of political turmoil in the country in recent times.

In case of Maldives, a handful of political elite with their political, economic, social bastion in the country’s capital in practice control the decision making structure of the island under the garb of ‘democracy’. The system can best be termed as democratic oligarchy\textsuperscript{25} where despite the existence of legislature (Citizen’s Majlis), a special body carved out of it under the name of ‘Citizen’s Special Majlis’ is entrusted with the ultimate authority to amend constitution, manage
the financial activities, lease any part of the territory to a foreign country, etc. The members of the body are the ministers, elites from the atolls, business tycoons etc. As a result, a sense of political deprivation is growing steadily in the island among the young Maldivians in recent times.

In case of Sri Lanka, the country with the longest practice of parliamentary democracy contemporaneously with that of India, political instability and violence remain to date the order of the day. While the Tamil crisis is responsible for keeping the Sri Lanka polity charged with violence and tension, at the root of the crisis is the flawed approach towards the practice of democracy in the country right from the beginning. Had the Tamils been brought under a greater national integration programme, and had their identity not been subsumed by the chauvinistic Sinhalese nationalism, the crisis could probably not have found its root in the island.

Nepal that adopted parliamentary democracy from 1991 has not succeeded in consolidating the system for reasons like ambiguity of the Constitution, King’s assertion for power against the spirit of constitutional monarchy, lack of effective leadership, power centric intra-party and inter-party factions and conflicts, political instability, lack of institutionalisation of party and parliament, etc. Many analysts are of the opinion that the current Maoist insurgency in Nepal finds its explanation in the overall political weakness and instability of the country. Finally, Bhutan continues to remain till date as undemocratic polity. However, it should be noted that the Himalayan Kingdom is set to emerge as a parliamentary democracy with constitutional monarchy on top. As one of the members of the drafting committee of the constitution remarked, “the process is now in full stream and the King wants a transition sooner or later”.

It is not the purpose of the paper to take up a further discussion on the factors that stand on the way of proper functioning of democracy and the growth of institutions associated with it. While many such factors may vary in nature for explaining the ineffective functioning of democracy in the smaller South Asian States, it is important to take note of those that are common in all the societies. Some of the important points that one needs to take into account are: (i) Democracy is fast turning into an empty ritual with elections being the only bridge between the State and the people; (ii) Democracy has not been grassroots in
any of the countries. It remains mainly 'capital based' with a coterie of persons enjoying power at the center with reluctant efforts to diffuse it at the local levels. In the process, a decentralised system of governance is virtually absent in the South Asian smaller countries depriving the common masses of political participation and empowerment, and hence of tangible benefits from the national wealth; (iii) The political process is marked by personality cult, bureaucratic dominance, rent seeking character of social forces, division within the civil society, etc.;
(iv) Good governance remains an elusive goal with State repression and lack of accountability being the rule of the day; (v) Institutional decay is evident in parliaments that cannot protect people's interests, in civil services that are heavily politicised and unable to provide basic public services and in judiciaries that fail to deliver social justice; and finally (vi) The root of all evil lies in corruption and dishonesty of the leaders who represent the State.

Honesty is, in effect, the glue that binds together any effective and successful good governance, and "strong leaders in a country can overcome the governance problems created by weak systems, but the strongest systems can be completely undermined when the leaders are dishonest". It is, therefore, corruption that needs special attention in South Asian context, as it has generated risks for the millions of people struggling to survive, retarded democratic progress and economic well-being, resulted in social exclusion and inefficient public services, and finally in a breakdown of the rule of law. A report entitled 'Government Corruption in South Asia', published by the Mahbub-ul Huq Development Centre (Islamabad) says, "corruption in a poverty stricken region is political dynamite when the majority of the population cannot meet its basic needs while a few make fortunes".

Economic Weakness

On the economic front, South Asia, considered to be one of the most poorly governed regions in the world, also reflects a disappointing scenario. The region shares 22% or over one fifth of the world's population. The per capita GNP is $440, the lowest in the world. The region shares only 1.3 per cent of the global income and 40% of the global poverty. The economy which grew by 5.6% annually in the last decade, depends more heavily on agriculture here than in any other region. With increasingly open economies in the 1990s, non-
Table 5.1: Overlapping Factors for Economic Malaise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Inefficient and unjust systems of economic management.</td>
<td>i) Growth is anti-poor in nature due to pervasive human deprivation and corruption</td>
<td>i) Withering away of traditional livelihoods due to unsustainable environment practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii) Inappropriate policies and poor governance</td>
<td>ii) Inappropriate policies and poor governance</td>
<td>ii) Rapid urbanisation resulting in tremendous pressures on the limited environmental resources and city functions. As urban centers are considered the vertices of economic growth, rapid and unregulated urban development would have implications for the region's economic growth, apart from environmental sustainability and social cohesion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Concern for human development has not been enough of a priority for most policy makers in the region.</td>
<td>iii) Growth has been limited to the élites in the countries.</td>
<td>iii) The challenge of sustainable development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Growth has been limited to the élites in the countries</td>
<td>iv) Lack of people's participation in economic affairs.</td>
<td>iv) Natural disasters</td>
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<td>v) Public expenditure on the social sectors continues to be insufficient. The fact that basic human needs are not met is indicative of how the problem of under-development still persists, and that too, in great proportions.</td>
<td>v) Lack of political goodwill to eradicate poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>vi) The employment situation is precarious. Rising prices of essential commodities continue to reduce the purchasing power of consumers and rising unemployment only exacerbates the problem</td>
<td>vi) A nexus between the politicians and the dishonest businessmen etc.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>vii) Income inequality and imbalanced distribution of wealth.</td>
<td>vii) The challenge of sustainable development.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>viii) The challenge of sustainable development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ix) Economies are open to fluctuations in work market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x) Very relatively un-diversified production and exports.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>x) Currency crisis.</td>
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governmental organisations, particularly multinational corporations, have progressively larger impacts on the fragile social, economic and environmental systems in the region. Due to gradual opening up of economies, structural transformation is taking place with lesser important role of agriculture and expanding role of service sector. In the process, little importance is being paid to industrial and manufacturing sectors.

The smaller States of the region belong to a category of States called the 'LDCs', and are handicapped by resource crunch, shortage of energy supply, small domestic markets, absence of technology and industrialisation, poor infrastructure, dependence on external aid and assistance, poor export basket, trade deficit, inability to cope with the process of globalisation, etc. While these are some of the common characteristics that mark the economy of the smaller South Asian States, it is important to note that each of the countries has in recent years witnessed an increase in growth rate quite significantly. However, the growth has been lofty and does not speak about the overall economic stability in such polities as malaise caused by a complex web of overlapping economic, environmental and institutional problems continue to bedevil them at present (see Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1). Also see Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 for (i) size of economies of South Asian countries; (ii) Poverty in South Asian countries; and (iii) Some indicators of Human Deprivation in South Asia (%), respectively.

Table 5.2: Sizes of Economies of South Asian Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Surface Area (sq km)</th>
<th>GNP (billion dollars)</th>
<th>GNP per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Poverty in South Asian Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Survey Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Survey Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>National</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1991-2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>1995-6</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1995-6</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1985-6</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>1990-1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.4: Some indicators of human deprivation on South Asia (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Deprivation</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Bhutan</th>
<th>Maldives</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>Sri Lanka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate adults</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate female adults</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without access to health services</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without access to safe water</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without access to sanitation</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-5 mortality rate</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malnourished children (&lt;5)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Environmental Weakness

Despite the fact that environment is now a vital component of sustainable development programmes in all the smaller South Asian countries, certain factors like lack of environmental consciousness, abysmal poverty, overpopulation, pressure on limited resources, rampant corruption, lack of governmental efforts, absence of effective enforcement mechanisms and more have resulted in serious environmental degradation in each of such States with adverse impacts on their politics and economies. In this respect, it is important to note that while the reasons behind rapid environmental degradation
in the smaller South Asian States are similar in nature, and that in many cases similar problems overlap them, there is, however, the variation in nature and intensity of such problems among the States. Thus, deforestation, which is a common environmental problem in all the smaller South Asian States, is more intense in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal than in Bhutan. In Bhutan, deforestation takes place mainly due to recent high rates of urbanisation and development pressures, and the country’s traditional reverence for nature flowing from the Buddhist philosophy has a sobering effect on keeping the problem within a manageable level. In a similar vein, flood encountered equally by Nepal and Bangladesh has more adverse effects for the latter due to its peculiar geo-morphological and hydrological conditions.

While in case of marine pollution faced by Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bangladesh, the foremost problem relates to the degradation in marine environment in general due to myriads human activities on marine and coastal resources, some issues are, however, very specific in their cases like beach erosion in Sri Lanka, degradation of coral reefs in the Maldives, and destruction of mangrove forests in Bangladesh. Also, the extent of the vulnerability of the Maldives to sea level rise due to global warming is more serious than it is so in case of Sri Lanka. Lastly, it is to be noted that some smaller States encounter few environmental problems very specific in nature and peculiar to them, for example, arsenic contamination in Bangladesh, flooding and submergence due to melting of snow in Bhutan caused by global warming, landslide in Nepal, and depletion of fresh water aquifers in the Maldives. In the context of the paper, it is relevant to look at the overall picture of environmental problems being faced by each of the South Asian smaller States. This is represented in a tabular form as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Environmental Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Overpopulation and high population density, air pollution, solid waste, water pollution, arsenic contamination, deforestation and land degradation, flooding, soil erosion, water logging and drainage congestion, marine pollution and coastal degradation, various natural disasters of oceanic origin, climate change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.5 Contd.)
5.3 Common Risks and Common Solutions for the Smaller States

(Table 5.5 Contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Environmental Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Soil erosion and land degradation, solid waste, limited access to portable water, air pollution, water resource pollution, climate change and global warming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Climate change and global warming, marine pollution and coastal erosion, depletion of fresh water aquifers, degradation of marine habitats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Land degradation, deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, natural disasters like floods and landslide, solid waste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Deforestation, air pollution, solid waste, marine pollution and coastal degradation, limited access to potable water, water borne diseases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is relevant to mention that environmental degradation in each of the smaller States has implications for domestic and regional stability. The degradation has its adverse economic and social effects in terms of decreased agricultural productivity, poverty, and economic decline, health hazards, displacement of people from rural to urban and sometimes to neighbouring countries creating, thereby, in the process threats that may be more dangerous than the military ones.

5.3.2 Risk at the Regional Level

The risks at the regional level, to which the smaller South Asian States remain prone, reflect, in essence, the cumulative effects of their weakness in various fields on the domestic fronts. Because each of the smaller South Asian States is weak and fragile, various risks of politico-strategic, economic and environmental in nature pose few inescapable challenges for them at the regional level. At this level, one, therefore, notices a further accentuation of their domestic weakness only to be worsened by few other problems at the regional level. Few of such risks are discussed below.

Politico-Strategic

At the politico-strategic level three factors draw one’s attention. These are: (i) the unpredictable behaviour of the region’s central power; (ii) the recurring Indo-Pakistan hostility; and (iii) the presence of several forms of low-intensity conflicts in the region. The first factor,
'unpredictable behaviour of India', essentially refers to the way in which India would expect each of the smaller States in the region to manage their respective relations with her. While, as per Indian argument, a set of geopolitical, geo-strategic, economic, social, cultural and ecological factors should direct such management as per 'Indian order of things in the region', the problem arises when the smaller States view such approach as a means to compel them to come to a sort of compromise with India on the terms set by her. In other words, India would like the solution of a number of contentious bilateral issues between herself and the smaller States in a manner that guarantees its 'maximal gains'. As evidenced by empiricism, the nature and extent of such 'high handedness' in Indian attitude vis-à-vis its smaller neighbours depends on two very important factors, first, the tenor and texture of existing relations between India and the smaller States, and second, the nature of contention as reflected in the bilateral issues between the two.

In this respect, there is no gainsaying that it is Bangladesh that perhaps remains in a more precarious and volatile state vis-à-vis India. Unlike in case of Nepal, Bhutan and the two insular States whose relations with India are more or less institutionalised,\(^37\) and that the bilateral problems between the former and the latter are less quarrelsome, the relations between Bangladesh and India do not fall in the same category. Bangladesh is not tied to India by any treaty obligation concerning issues like geopolitics, security and defense and that many of its contentious issues with India having their roots in region’s geopolitics, social, religious, cultural and ecological factor impinge on its national interests directly and indirectly. In the catalogue, the issues would be the following: (i) the sharing of the water resources of the common rivers including that of the Ganges; (ii) implementation of the 1974 Land Border Agreement in general, and the undecided status of un-demarcated border, enclave and land in adverse possession; (iii) India’s policy towards ethnic insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; (iv) demarcation of maritime boundaries and the ownership of South Talpatty Islands; (v) trade imbalance in favour of India; and (vi) smuggling, illegal cross-border activities and a number of other issues.\(^38\) While most of such issues (excepting the Chittagong Hill Tract case) have not yet found their respective lasting resolutions, much to the chagrin of Bangladesh, certain new issues like export of gas to India from Bangladesh, push-in of Bangla-speaking
Indian Muslims into Bangladesh, pressure for transit across Bangladesh territory, Indian propaganda and media blitz about the presence of al-Qaeda elements in Bangladesh, and India’s plan to divert water from the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Jamuna through a $120 billion re-channel project seem to have aggravated the already existing bitterness in the Indo-Bangladesh relations. 39

A widespread sentiment now goes that India is playing with the linkage strategy with Bangladesh. This, in other words, implies that resolution of an issue would be linked up with the resolution of another, thus throwing Bangladesh in a vicious circle of uncertainty. That India is willing to reduce the trade imbalance with Bangladesh through the latter’s grant of transit facility to the former is a fact well known to all. It is also believed in certain Bangladesh circles that export of gas to India might bring a change in the current Indian proposal for diverting the waters of the rivers commonly shared by the two countries. In brief, the fact that in the overall Indian policy priority, Bangladesh remains in low profile, if not totally ignored, is a discomfiting factor for the latter. As Amena Mohsin states, “the Bangladesh-India relations is further complicated by the fact that while there exists an India factor for Bangladesh, there exists no such corresponding Bangladesh factor for India. India’s inertia, lack of political will and sympathy to settle the outstanding contentious issues is indicative of this. For New Delhi, these are mere irritants, but for Dhaka, these are vital issues. Delhi’s attitude only sharpens Bangladesh’s hostility towards India and militates against pulling the relationship too close”.40

Thanks to the special relations that the other smaller States of the region enjoy with India, irritants of such nature are absent in their mutual relations, excepting few that occasionally call for dialogue and accommodation. The case of Bangladesh amply demonstrates that perception of threat or risk from India would vary among the smaller States depending on the kind of relations and the issues in dispute between the former and the latter. In a comparative study of such threats and risks, Bangladesh appears, at the moment, to be the most vulnerable State to India’s unpredictable political and strategic behaviour in the region. While the answer to the question – what has gone wrong with Bangladesh then – would be a rather controversial one, the fact nonetheless remains that resolution of all contentious issues would be in the mutual interests of both India and Bangladesh.
**Small States and the Common South Asian Problems**

While the disputes between India and the smaller South Asian States are bilateral in nature, and that each, in the process, faces India face à face for dealing with them, there are the other problems in South Asian polity that such states face collectively. Among these, the most portentous one is the conflict around the India-Pakistan axis over a number of contentious geopolitical issues of hard nature. The continuing adversarial relations between the two principal South Asian actors has adversely affected the South Asian smaller States in so far as regional peace and stability remains a perennial hostage to Indo-Pakistan conflict. As Shaheen Afroze observes, "To a large extent the politics of South Asia is covered by Morgenthau paradigm: international politics like all politics is a struggle for power. Not only the three wars fought between India and Pakistan since independence, the violence and threat of violence by each against the other, but also the continuing hostilities and rapidly heightening conventional arms race now with its missile and nuclear dimension especially after they detonated their atomic devices in 1998 bear out Morgenthau’s law in the context of India-Pakistan security relations. Governed only by this paradigm, the India-Pakistan conflict has plagued the entire region". \(^{41}\)

The Indo-Pakistan rivalry poses a threat to the smaller States on two counts. *First*, the conflict between the two principal regional actors stands as a stumbling block on the way of all regional cooperative endeavours towards peace, stability and economic prosperity. This is vindicated by no other fact than the current moribund state of SAARC, whereas through the instrumentality of this organisation, the region could meet many current challenges arising from the rapid changes in international politics and economy. At the regional level too, SAARC could act as the forum for building confidence and mutual trust among and between the countries of the region. *Second*, the smaller States of the region are also apprehensive about the possible breakout of a nuclear war between the two antagonists by sheer accident, the effects of which would be felt equally by all the smaller States in the region. However, such effects on the island countries like Sri Lanka and the Maldives may be less disastrous due to their location away from the continent.

The presence of several forms of low-intensity conflicts and threats of non-traditional nature in South Asia with cross-border
implications bear risks and dangers for a number of smaller States. In the list of low intensity conflicts, insurgency by various ethnic minorities is the most critical one after which follows cross-border terrorism. While roots of such conflicts are deep and complex with socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological explanations, it poses a threat to the security of the smaller States on few counts. First, the country encountering the problem remains in the danger of being disintegrated territorially. The ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka and the Maoist insurrection in Nepal pose a threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the two States respectively.

While in case of Bangladesh, the CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) problem has been solved to a certain extent by the Peace Accord of 1997, there still remain certain residual problems, in particular with respect to the implementation of various provisions like rehabilitation, land dispute settlement and functioning of the political process in terms of the Regional Council. The result being that various dissident groups are trying to disrupt the peace process that ultimately may drag the country into fresh encounter with the insurgents. Second, in most of the cases of insurgency, there is the rampant violation of human rights with heavy toll on peoples' life, property and personal security. This ultimately creates a feeling of human insecurity in those countries witnessing destructive insurgency activities at the moment. Third, it is the element of allegation and counter allegation that draws one's attention. As Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury remarks, “Encouraging insurgency in the neighbour’s backyard is a common problem in South Asia that vitiated inter-state relations. Thus, while India complains of Pakistan’s involvement in Kashmir, Pakistan alleges Indian hands in Sind. While Bangladesh blamed India for harbouring Chakma insurgents, India accused Bangladesh of providing sanctuaries to guerrilla groups of the northeastern states. Considering the adversarial relationships in South Asia, there is and was probably some truth in the allegations and counter-allegations. However, further breakup of the state system is not in the interest of the region”.44

Bhutan also finds itself trapped in the cross-fire of insurgency in Northeast India. The country frequently experiences incursions from Indian security forces in hot pursuit of the guerrillas. Trafficking in small arms, illegal trafficking in drugs and contraband goods,
trafficking in women and children, illegal movement of population, ethnic unrest, communal violence, etc. constitute at present few dreadful threats of non-traditional nature to the overall peace and stability in the region. Among these, the ominous proliferation of small arms and weapons in the region to support violence of varying nature like political, ethnic and religious militancy, insurgency, terrorism, etc. is the most serious one. There is no gainsaying that almost all the countries in South Asia are infested with the problem, with Pakistan being at the top in the list.

Nepal due to its internal Maoist insurgency and Bangladesh for its criminalisation of politics have become the safe conduits of small arms movement. Sri Lanka is also flooded with small arms. Even India is not free from the problem as the country due to the separatist movement in Kashmir and the insurgency movement in Northeastern region is inundated with small arms from different sources. In effect, a heinous nexus exists between these countries in order to meet the demand and supply for/of all sorts of weapons. While the worrying factor behind the proliferation of small arms in South Asia is the inflow of this menace from external and trans-national sources, its end effects can be still more dreadful. These have been paraphrased by Tara Kartha as follows. First, light weapons and covert war practices leading to fears of escalation into full-fledged conventional war between States, conducted under a nuclear overhand. Second, light weapons and societal diffusion leading to political violence, crime and threat of fragmentation along ethnic, religious or tribal lines. It needs to be mentioned that along with light weapons, there is the trafficking in illegal drugs and all the South Asian countries are parties to it.

In a comparative study, it will be observed that the smaller States in the continent are more vulnerable to various non-traditional threats than their oceanic counter-parts like Sri Lanka and the Maldives. However, the two being maritime States are as well vulnerable to a number of low intensity conflicts in their respective oceanic domains like increasing piracy, poaching and illegal fishing, trafficking in women and children, clandestine movement of arms and weapons, etc. Bangladesh’s maritime zone as well confronts such problems in a routine manner.
Regional Economics – A Victim of Politics

On the economic front, it is quite dismaying to observe that while the domestic base of each of the smaller States is poor, underdeveloped and incapable of meeting the challenges of globalisation, efforts to fill up such economic deficiency through cooperative efforts at the regional level have so far been rendered only half-heartedly. Needless to say, South Asia till now has not been successful in establishing itself into a distinct economically integrated bloc despite the rapid progress in regionalism elsewhere in the globe. The acceleration of economic growth, social progress and cultural development and mutual collaboration in the mentioned fields that the SAARC charter envisages are some of the goals that remain far from being fulfilled till date. Disillusioned by the fact that lack of cooperation within SAARC has not brought any positive results in terms of poverty reduction, social sector development, tourism, energy, transport and communication, the smaller States remain sceptical about the effective functioning of the regional body in the future. Lacking any record of success to its credit, the organisation is now criticised by many as an institution embodying ‘inverse regionalism’.48 Politics of the subcontinent is, in fact, responsible for this phenomenon, as the member States of SAARC are unwilling to forego their mutual animosities for achieving the larger extra-territorial benefits of regional cooperation. As A.R. Khan observes, “The main reason behind slow progress in regional cooperation is that economic cooperation is hostage to political and security considerations”49.

What is most perceptible is that on the economic front too, there is the fear among the smaller States that India with its diversified industrial base might dominate them economically. The fear is generated by the fact that under the present tariff structure and the heavy protectionist policy of India, the country runs a large trade surplus with its neighbours. The trade deficit is more shocking for Bangladesh at the moment. Another factor to explain the economic malfunctioning in the region is the non-concessionary attitude of India. As in the political field, India’s reluctance and procrastination in giving concessions is a factor to generate disillusionment vis-à-vis India. The result is that the countries of the region prefer to remain ‘outward’ looking rather than remaining ‘inward’. As A.R. Khan remarks, “One interesting characteristic of South Asian globalisation is that the
economies display greater interest in integrating with the global economy rather with each other in the region. However, in the absence of a solid basis of regional cooperation, they are both individually (except India) and collectively likely to get marginalised. The question, therefore, arises with respect to effective functioning of SAFTA (1995); (ii) the implementation of SAARC Social Charter (1995); (iii) the operational capacity of the Growth Triangles, etc., all of which could yield immense benefits for the smaller States of the region.

**Regional Environmental Problem**

On the environment front, South Asia currently depicts a frightening scenario in view of the rapid degradation of the region's closely-knit resource, eco- and bio-diversity systems. The reasons for the degradation are mainly widespread poverty, population pressure on resources, pressures of development, lack of environmental consciousness, etc. In this respect, the relevant point to take into consideration is the lack of South Asian consciousness in general about the region's richness in its ecology and bio-diversity. As Narottam Gain remarks, "The region is extremely rich in biodiversity and several areas show high levels of endemic species. India and Pakistan, for instance, encompass a unique spectrum of ecological regions ranging from snow-capped mountains to hot deserts and coastal mangroves. Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also have a high diversity of plants and animals and a high degree of endemism. Maldives, on the other hand, possesses unique coral land formations, and a large variety of reef fish. Very little of this biodiversity has yet been studied but it is already under heavy threat of extinction."

It is being apprehended that violence and conflict are likely to generate in the region due to few common environmental problems respecting no national boundaries like atmospheric pollution, land degradation, deforestation and bio-diversity loss, water scarcity and degradation, increasing marine pollution, etc. While the maritime countries like the Maldives and Sri Lanka would probably remain unaffected by many such land-based environmental problems, the fact remains that their marine eco-system and bio-diversity are at present facing danger due to acute degradation in marine environment. Bangladesh as a coastal State is also fraught with
danger of similar nature. Thus, while all the smaller States may not equally experience the environmental problems of various nature occurring in the terrestrial and oceanic domains, the risks out of such problems are menacing for all in terms of loss of resources and livelihood, deterioration in health conditions, uncertainty for the future generation and the potential for future conflicts. As Narottam Gain observes, “It is seen that environmental degradation in South Asian countries along with its social effects in terms of decreased agricultural productivity, poverty and economic decline, health hazards, displacement of people from rural to urban and sometimes to neighbouring territories, and the growing incapability of the states to meet the basic needs of the people, have come as a greater threat than military”.52 In particular, more conflicts are likely to occur in the future over the share of water resources from the common rivers of the region. The long enduring conflict between India and Bangladesh over sharing of the Ganges waters is well known to all. Even the ‘Thirty Year Treaty’ between the two countries seems to have failed to guarantee for Bangladesh an equitable share in the waters of the Ganges. There is also the conflict between India, Nepal and Bhutan over the use, management and harnessing of common water resources.53

Cultural Threat despite Commonality

On the cultural front too, the smaller South Asian States are exposed to certain risks. Paradoxically, the risk originates primordially from the cultural commonality that these States share among themselves. The commonality is largely explained by the common origin of South Asian history, culture and tradition in the rich variety of languages, religions, philosophies and the multitude of races produced by undivided India over the ages.54 Thus, each South Asian State, in essence, possesses Indian culture, albeit, with some regional variation in it caused largely by religion, local customs and practices. In the ultimate analysis, the commonality becomes a threat when the smaller States face serious problems in developing their separate and distinct identities vis-à-vis India. As one Indian author remarks, “All the countries in South Asia historically formed parts of one distinct civilisation. India had accepted this inheritance, but the other countries believed they had to seek alternative traditions in order to emphasise their differences from India and thus establish their separate identities”.55
Small States and Regional Stability in South Asia

While the fear of getting overshadowed by Indian culture as a result of commonality may appear to be psychological in nature, and one which further gets compounded by the presence of tension and mistrust in the relations between India and its smaller neighbouring States, the 'commonality factor' at the operational level, creates certain other problems. First, it is the large scale movement of culturally homogeneous people across free and open borders that has, in recent times, led to the phenomenon of illegal migration in the region. Second, due to globalisation and the concomitant revolution in information technology, the smaller States in the region now find themselves more exposed to Indian culture than before through the satellite media. While the citizens of the smaller States have no qualms in viewing Indian dramas, dances, cinemas etc, the problem lies in the distorted fashion in which they are projected. To many analysts and observers, the distortion in Indian culture and tradition is the result of India's benign indifference to Western influence on the society alongside the country's liberalisation policy. Also, various multinational companies operating in India now exert influence on the Indian satellite media through financial means. This ultimately results in a situation where the peculiar mélange between the Indian and Western cultures becomes totally unacceptable to most of the South Asians who at large love 'Indian culture and tradition in its puritan form'.

A Bomb in oblivion

The traditional risk perception of the smaller States should not overlook the HIV/AIDS bomb in the region. Although the epidemic is still relatively small compared to population size, if left unchecked it is likely to grow rapidly and ruthlessly thereby posing risks for all South Asian States, big or small. It may be mentioned that South Asia has about 4.2 million of the world's 36 million people living with HIV/AIDS. While overall prevalence rates remain relatively low, the region's large populations mean that a rise of a mere 0.1 per cent in the prevalence rate in India, for example, would increase the national total of adults living with HIV by about half a million persons. As the current scenario of HIV/AIDS in South Asia suggests, Nepal has a concentrated epidemic, characterised by a low prevalence rate among the general population, but significantly higher rates among high risk
behaviour groups, such as injecting drug users and sex workers. Although Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives have nascent epidemics, they remain highly vulnerable to the disease.

5.3.3 Risks at the International Level

Risk like threat is a matter of perception. Thus, the perception of risks by the smaller South Asian States likely to originate from the international level may be real or imaginary. Some of the risks at the mentioned level may be as follows:

(i) The current international system marked by unipolarity under the US hegemonic leadership, structural conflict between the North and the South, increasing pace of globalisation in favour of the richer nations, the West’s craving for resources located in the Third World, marginalisation of the poor and underdeveloped nations in international trade and commerce, etc. do not favour the weaker or those nations that are on the way to development. The sentiment is likely to prevail among the South Asian smaller States as well.

(ii) The US hegemony as the sole superpower in the world and its advocacy of the theories of pre-emptive attack, regime change, axis of evils etc. might have implications for the world as a whole, and the smaller States, in the process, might become the victims of many adverse situations arising out of such theories.

(iii) There is now the question mark against the UN capability to enforce world peace and stability. In this respect, the hopes and aspirations of the smaller States around the UN have been shaken to a great extent following the recent US-led invasion of Iraq without any UN mandate. The credibility that the world body attained in the aftermath of the Gulf crisis (the second Gulf War following Iraq’s annexation of Kuwait) seems to have eroded by now, and the Third World remains increasingly doubtful and skeptical about the prospects for conflict management or resolution either through any regional organisation or the UN. It is now the feeling of the majority of the Third World countries,
including those in South Asia, that the UN now exists to pander to the needs of the powerful nations.

(iii) Adjusting to the needs and requirements of globalisation like free economies, open market, liberal trading arrangements, acquiescence to the role of MNCs, external private groups etc. may not be an easy task for the small South Asian States. There is the apprehension that globalisation processes may be further increasing inequities in South Asia. The queries of the smaller South Asian States like their counterparts in other areas are many: will globalisation undermine their sovereignty and national economy? Will globalisation increase economic inequality within their domestic societies? Will globalisation promote peaceful cooperation or exacerbate conflict between States? Will globalisation provoke a protectionist and interventionist backlash? Will globalisation promote diktat of donors, NGOs, and the big Financial Institutions?

(iv) There is also the likely risk of media blitz for the smaller States of South Asia. In this respect, Bangladesh being a Muslim country remains most vulnerable to such phenomenon.

(v) The smaller States also remain vulnerable to environmental problems that originate from sources external to the region like global warming.

The three-level analysis of risks mentioned above inevitably raises the issue of addressing them at the appropriate levels. The succeeding section is an attempt to answer the problématique.

5.4 COMMON RISKS AND COMMON SOLUTIONS

The various risks that each of the South Asian smaller States is encountering today clearly demonstrate that their transition to democracy, sustainable economic development, long-term social stability are long and traumatic, and marked by uncertainties, predicaments and challenges. There is, therefore, the growing disillusionment with such state of affairs in all the South Asian smaller polities. The relevant question that now arises is: how to overcome the myriads risks that the smaller States are encountering at the three distinct levels?
5.4.1 Need for a National Strategy
At present, what the smaller South Asian States are facing is a weak State syndrome. Overcoming this weakness is, therefore, a formidable task and involves undertaking various political reforms and development programmes tuned to certain ethos like rational utilisation of resources, economic progress, social justice, intergenerational equity, environmental protection, etc. Thus, as far as the risks at national level are concerned, it should be mentioned that efforts towards dealing with them would ultimately remain confined within the territorial and sovereign boundaries of each of the states. It is the level where the national authority of a particular country remains well informed about the nature and extent of various risks. This, in other words, implies that each State has to rely on its own national strategy rather than expect any other third country or international organisation for addressing the risks at its home front. Nor is there any possibility that any of the smaller States serves itself as a model or provides ready-made prescriptions for remedying the maladies of the others, as none of such entities has yet been successful in creating a viable and positive image in this respect.

The smaller countries need to come to the realisation that the various risks in their respective polities leading to disintegration of democratic institutions, erosion of moral values, polarisation of society into rich, poor and ultra-poor, societal disorder and unrest due to poverty, unemployment and unequal income, collapse of approach to economic development and ecological safety, and a host of other related issues now constitute what is called the ‘human security agenda’ for each of the smaller South Asian States. Stress on human security is now imperative in South Asia as political, economic, social, environmental stresses in the South Asian smaller States are likely to endanger regional peace and stability.

5.4.2 Advocating the Human Security Agenda and Identifying the Areas, Actions and Actors
Given the fact that the contextual factors like level of democratic culture and practice, socio-economic access to basic needs, education, health, gender politics, economy (its base, growth and type), degree of integration with the global economy, human capacities and sustainability, natural resource base etc. in each of the smaller South
Asian countries represent a disappointing scenario at present, realisation of human security agenda would remain a problematic task for these countries. In such a scenario, the imperative would be to properly identify the areas, actions and actors to be involved in such problematic issues. *Areas* would definitely refer to those issues as being directly linked to basic human rights and their well-being and prosperity like democratic practices, poverty eradication, safe environment, employment opportunities, guarantee for health, etc. In this case, each of the small States would select the issues in order of priority in its exclusive national context. Thus, Bhutan, which is safer than Bangladesh from environment point of view, may place the issue in a lower order of preference than in case of Bangladesh. Also, no country can dictate the democratic modalities in Bhutan that at present is trying to embrace the system gradually.

Next, *actions* that entail huge mobilisation of resources both in terms of men and materials would essentially be a national undertaking as well. However, given the fact that a country’s national capacity may not be adequate to meet the totality of risks, some flexible support can be rendered through cooperative endeavours. This cooperation, perhaps, can be more feasible in case of economic and environmental cooperation. A radical move can be the right given to landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan to participate, on an equitable basis, in the exploitation of living resources of the EEZ of Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. As far as *actor* is concerned, in addition to government’s, the participation of a number of other agencies like private groups, NGOs, business community, epistemic community, experts in various disciplines is needed in combating the risks encountering the smaller South Asian States. In this connection, a convenient linkage can be established between these small States. The concept of Grameen Bank, which is being replicated in many African countries, can equally find its place in the smaller neighbours of Bangladesh. As one BIJSS researcher remarks, “population management, non-formal education areas and micro-finance and social empowerment of women are the areas in which Bangladesh’s performance are well known and appreciated among the multilateral donor circles, its development partners and among the developing countries in Asia and Africa. Bangladesh’s target should not only be to project these for image boosting purposes only but also to sell these
models and services, particularly among the neighbours and developing countries”.57

5.4.3 Integrated Regional Approach

At the regional level, where India becomes the focus of the small States’ respective foreign policies, each would deal with the former on its own merit. The risks, real or perceived, from India can be minimised provided the smaller South Asian States succeed in engaging the former in continual talks, dialogue and discussion at both governmental and non-governmental levels. The small States need to make India realise that resolution of conflicts is also in the interest of the latter. In Indo-Pak conflict, the smaller States should make efforts to keep the dialogue alive between the two countries without taking any partisan position. As far as the non-traditional sources of threat are concerned, the plans, actions and strategies of the smaller States would depend on the degree of their exposure to such threats. It is to be noted that regional level gives the smaller States an opportunity to go for cooperative initiatives in the fields like economic, environment, culture, health, etc. The philosophy in this respect should be ‘integrated approach’. At the economic level, the avenues of cooperation can be through (i) SAARC; (ii) SAPTA; (iii) SAFTA; (iv) South Asian Growth Quadrangle; (v) Sub-regional Multilateral Cooperation; and (vi) Successful bilateral cooperation.58

It should also be noted that most of the small States’ economy that function through foreign aid and assistance can open different avenues of cooperation, in particular at the regional level. While foreign aid and assistance could satisfy their short-term economic objectives, the long-term objectives demand emphasis on internal resources whose harnessing is more or less linked with the region. Despite a number of staggering economic problems existing in the region, an efficient exploration of its immense economic potentialities could bring an economic prosperity for all the regional countries, thereby creating in the process a climate favourable for knowing what they have in common and how to advance their economic interests. In this connection, cooperation between Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal for utilising and sharing the common river waters and resources of GMB finds its logical explanation.59 Similarly, cooperation among the
three for access to sea is vital as Bhutan and Nepal are the landlocked countries with no access to the sea.

It is in the field of environment that a great opportunity lies for the smaller countries to solve many common environmental problems through a regional approach. While in recent years, there have been a number of national and local responses to environmental problems in many countries of the region, it is at the regional level that many environmental problems can find their easy solution. The reasons for this are many like (i) national sovereignty and regulatory policy at the level of individual nations cannot guarantee success in matters related to environmental security; (ii) regional level allows for a more accurate assessment of trans-boundary problems, as well as for an appropriate identification of priorities of action; (iii) strengthens mechanisms for both regional and national capacity building; and (iv) harmonises and adjusts measures according to national environmental, institutional and socio-economic conditions. In effect, regional approach to management of environmental problems is now looked upon as an endeavour to bring all the actors – national, regional and global – in the same continuum. The need, therefore, is to initiate cooperative programmes to address various environmental problems in the region for achieving environmental security.

It should be mentioned that in case of protection of marine environment, regional level is considered to be the most preferred one in so far as it (i) allows for a more accurate assessment of trans-boundary problems, as well as for an appropriate identification of priorities for action; (ii) strengthens mechanisms for both regional and national capacity building; and (iii) harmonises and adjusts measures according to national environmental, institutional and socio-economic conditions.

Also, in tackling HIV/AIDS in South Asia, the national strategy of each of the South Asian countries can be integrated with the regional one. The HIV/AIDS infection is not to be looked at from a health based approach only. The disease, in fact, finds its causes in social and economic vulnerabilities, including poverty and illiteracy. In this respect, while the national approach would seek to address such problems, there is the scope for all the South Asian States to adopt a regional strategy for preventing the further spread of the disease in the region. As the World Bank Group suggests, a regional strategy can
seek to (i) promote political commitment at all levels and in multiple sectors in order to create a supportive environment and actions for effective HIV/AIDS responses; (ii) encourage the inclusion of HIV/AIDS issues and programmes in the broader development agenda; (iii) utilisation of development assistance through various channels including governmental agencies, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector; (iv) advance strategies that enhance community participation and community-based interventions and enable open discussions about HIV/AIDS, reduce stigma and help prevent discrimination; and finally (v) emphasise the need for strengthened institutional capacity and the prioritisation of control efforts in areas where HIV programmes are still nascent.61

The small States of the region can also render unified efforts for curbing the crimes like inflow of small arms and drugs, asylum to criminals, trafficking in women and children, etc. In this regard, few administrative and legal measures can be taken either on bilateral or multilateral basis. For example, during the ‘Operation Clean Heart in Bangladesh’, many criminals took shelter in neighbouring India. Due to the absence of extradition treaty between the two countries, Bangladesh could not take effective measures to bring back those escaped criminals from India for trial at home. Similarly, if the neighbouring countries are suspected of harbouring the insurgents, then joint efforts can be taken on issues like: (i) providing information; and (ii) a surveillance system. The rise in the numbers of women and children which are being trafficked from all the South Asian countries can also be checked through a regional approach.62 Given the fact that all the smaller countries now realise the gravity of the problem and that the crisis is not limited within one country only, a common strategy in order to control the ever-increasing rate of such crime can be undertaken.

5.4.4 Linkage between National and Regional Levels

As far as meeting the risks at the international level are concerned, the paper suggests that once a linkage is established between the national and regional levels, the task can be made a lot easier. For example, a successful economic bloc can meet many of the challenges of globalisation. Also, in case of environmental protection, coordination between national and regional efforts would ultimately meet the
global environmental challenges. At the end, it should be mentioned that to bring about an integration between the national and regional strategies, the smaller South Asian States need to attain a minimum level of political, military, diplomatic, economic and social stability and progress in their respective home fronts. The cumulative effect of their power and capability would engender peace activism at both regional and international levels.

5.5 BANGLADESH: CHARTING OUT ITS POSSIBLE ROLE IN RISK MANAGEMENT

In an integrated approach towards solving the common risks, the special role of Bangladesh needs to be highlighted. The task is dictated not by the origin bias of the researcher but by the fact that the country has to its credit the past records of a role that envisioned regional economic cooperation, and hence peace and stability in the region on the platform of SAARC. Also, the country's ceaseless efforts to diffuse tension in Indo-Pak relations following the denotation of nuclear bombs by both is a testimony to confidence building measures in a politically tense and volatile region like South Asia. What can then Bangladesh do in practice to minimise the risks that it, along with its counterparts, face in the region? This section of the paper is an attempt to answer the question.

5.5.1 Peace Culture in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's role in regional stability has to percolate through three levels. First, it has to make its domestic front a strong one in political and economic terms and thereby bringing a change in its image. Needless to state, one of the fundamental objectives of Bangladesh's foreign policy is the promotion and preservation of the country's vital interests including its sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and viable economic development. Despite innumerable problems on the way to economic development, the country through concrete initiatives is now engaged in a country-wide poverty alleviation programme with the aim of maintaining social stability and peace. Also, various initiatives, mixed with moderation and pragmatism, have been undertaken by Bangladesh in several international socio-economic forums to promote the cause of developing countries in particular. Such initiatives call for strategies to stop failing investment,
restructure and reduce debt, promote trade and encourage technology transfer.

On the political front, while transition to democracy is fraught with many problems mentioned earlier, growing public awareness about their democratic rights and privileges can no longer be ignored by those in power. As a result, democratic institution building continues to remain an on-going process in the country with the avowed goal of meeting the peoples’ hopes and aspirations. Growing awareness about protection of environment is as well visible in the ruling circles despite the fact that the country lacks a coherent environment diplomacy in order to look for a place in the global environmental arena. In brief, the country now well realises that the politico-economic and social stresses in its polity cannot meet appropriate resolution unless the entire gamut of security and peace affairs are understood in a comprehensive manner. Hence, relentless efforts are underway to address the security affairs of Bangladesh both through traditional and non-traditional approaches.

5.5.2 What Could Bring Regional Stability?
Bangladesh as a smaller and weak nation is well aware that peace and stability in the region is contingent upon certain factors like: (i) even if the power structure in a particular region is asymmetrical in nature, the powerful actors would desist themselves from such acts that create doubt, suspicion and fear in the minds of the weaker States; (ii) there should be a certain degree of regional cohesion and solidarity so as to enable all the actors in the region to co-exist peacefully and interact with each other in a positive manner; (iii) the regional States should render efforts to manage, if not totally eliminate, problems that create frictions and antagonisms of ethnic, communal, sub-national or socio-economic character within these states themselves, thereby eliminating intra-state tensions; (iv) inter-state tensions should be kept at a low level and there should be certain institutional mechanisms to eliminate them; and finally, (v) the regional actors should share a certain degree of commonality in their perception of external threat to their region.

Unfortunately, however, South Asia is far away from meeting all such criteria. Bangladesh, thus, believes that through a strong domestic base, it can initiate efforts to reinvigorate the process of cooperation in the region. In this respect, the country’s emphasis is on
soft political issues and promotion of dialogue and consultation on contentious issues in the region. It also seeks to act with the external powers, like the USA, in combating terrorism in all forms and manifestations. The country advocates a halt to arms race in South Asia, lends credence to Track II diplomacy, supports coexistence in the region and shows readiness to fight media blitz, etc. In order to bring credibility in all such efforts, the country actively participates in various inter-governmental organisations like the UN, the NAM, the Commonwealth of Nations, stands for international laws and norms, voices against the use of force in settling disputes, plays a role in international peacekeeping force under the aegis of UN, and demonstrates moral and normative positions on international issues.

5.5.3 South Asian Destiny in SAARC

Finally, to what extent Bangladesh can contribute to peace and stability in South Asia would depend much on its ability to play a meaningful rather than a symbolic role in bringing the two principal actors in the region, i.e., India and Pakistan closer to each other. While the two are already engaged in various talks and dialogues for a rapprochement between them, it would be in Bangladesh’s interest to see that the process of dialogue and consultation remains on the right track between the two antagonists in the region. Bangladesh, which is the architect of SAARC, should take rational and effective steps to revive the SAARC process. It would not, perhaps, be an exaggeration to state that the ultimate South Asian destiny lies in the future of SAARC since it is the ultimate body to (i) foster intergovernmental cooperation in multifarious fields; (ii) ensure participation of the non-governmental actors, civil society, academics in Track II diplomacy; and (iii) promote peaceful coexistence of the South Asians in the greater interest of regional peace and stability.

In other words, in Bangladesh’s calculation, SAARC would serve as a regional body where its members would build collaborative ties through cooperation in certain important functional areas. In the process, habits of cooperation learnt in such areas would have positive spill-over effects on the overall South Asian regional interaction that would: (i) ensure economic prosperity of the region; (ii) prove wrong the perceptual gaps – the creation of misinterpreted history and asymmetry – which has been in existence between the countries of South Asia since long; (iii) reduce the level of
asymmetry in the region; and (iv) bring qualitative changes in the attitudes and outlooks of the region's two principal actors - India and Pakistan. Also, once the structure of cooperation is ensured, a space for prevention of conflict in the region may logically flow from it. In brief, SAARC, as Bangladesh sees it, is an instrument for carrying forward the functionalists' peace plan, thereby assuming that unabated cooperation among the South Asian nations would multiply their bonds and be a step forward towards creating a collective consciousness for peace, stability and progress in the region. Indeed, by fostering mutual cooperation in the region, SAARC is expected to generate a number of confidence building measures and conflict prevention mechanisms for ensuring peaceful inter-existence in the region.

5.6 GENERAL CONCLUSION

While many analysts are of the opinion that the smaller States in contemporary world are in a disadvantageous position due to a number of new politico-strategic and economic forces, there are the others who view the 21st century as the century of the smaller States' prosperity, well-being and dignity. This, in other words, implies that by reaping the opportunities provided by the democratic systems, laissez-faire economy, good governance, effective human rights regime, international and regional cooperation, maintaining environmental standards etc. the smaller States can turn themselves into a formidable force in current world politics. This is achievable only when the stereotyped image of the smaller Third World States as the creator of disorder in the periphery is rectified by the commendable efforts of such entities in overcoming their all-round weakness in various spheres of their respective national lives. In this respect, the most important realisation among the smaller States, including the ones in South Asia, should be that 'state system exists to serve the needs of humanity and thus it should be made politically, economically, socially, culturally and morally strong for all time'. While challenges in reaching the goal may be many, in the ultimate analysis, it is the policies, strategies and actions of the political leaders that would be a deciding factor in making the State a strong entity.

In the contemporary world, state weakness cannot continue to remain a permanent phenomenon as it ultimately leads to state
disintegration with serious implications for peace and stability in the region in which it takes place. There is no gainsaying that by now many states are well aware about the causes that lead to a State collapse. While preventing such a phenomenon essentially remains a national task, the regional community and the international community too have an obligation to address the problems that emanate from the weakness and fragility of the smaller States in the world. The smaller States should not live in despair as 'they have risen from the subjugation to establish democratic governance in free societies and have responded to the challenges of the last 50 years. They should use the 'power of ideas, and raise voice collectively for actions'.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
1 (i) 'The total land area of South Asia is about 4,48,2298 sq km, of which India's share is 73.36%, and that of Pakistan 17.76%, Bangladesh 3.22%, Nepal 3.14%, and Sri Lanka at 1.5%. Bhutan and Maldives together have the remaining 0.5%. India is by far the largest country in terms of land, population, GDP and other resources'. Hafiz G.A. Siddiqi, "Regional and Sub-regional Cooperation in South Asia" in Asit K. Biswas, J.S.A. Brichieri-Colombi, Amirul Islam Chowdhury and K.B. Sajjadur Rasheed (ed.), Contemporary Issues in Development, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Third World Centre for Water Management and Academic Press and Publishers Limited, 2002, Dhaka, 2002, p. 373. More information on Indian power, see Iftekharuzzaman, "The India Doctrine: Relevance of Bangladesh" in M.G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan (ed.), Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy, Bangladesh Society of International Studies, Dhaka, 1989, pp. 19-20.
2 The phenomenon of regionalism beginning from the mid-sixties placed special focus on regional studies. Various chapters in R.A. Falk and S.H. Mendlovitz (ed), Regional Politics and World Order, W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1979, describe trends of regionalism in the post-World War II period. In particular, regionalism received its stimulus from the theoretical breakthrough in the concept provided by a number of political analysts. In all such studies, the political and economic behaviour of the smaller States constituted an important area of interest for the analysts.
3 While, from the beginning of the sixties, the policy of non-alignment adhered to by most of the Third World smaller States created a breakthrough in their political approach towards world politics dominated by the then Cold War, their most strident effort to alter their position in the world economy occurred
in the 1970s when they called for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). In effect, the historical roots of the developing nations’ demands for a new order can be traced to the 1964 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), when the developing nations of the Third World banded together to form the Group of 77 as a coalition of the world’s poor to press for concessions from the rich countries of the North. Known in diplomatic circles, as the G-77, the coalition effectively joined the non-aligned movement during the 1973 Algiers Summit of Non-Aligned Nations, when issues relating to economic as well as ‘political liberation’ came to the fore. Using their superior numbers, the G-77 succeeded in passing the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Order. See for details, ‘The Transformation of the World Political Economy: Perspectives from the Third World’ in Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trends and Transmission* (4th edition), St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1993, pp. 262-296.


5 Les inégalités de puissance entre les États sont fonction de différents types de facteurs dont les effets peuvent être plus ou moins contradictoires. D’une part, des facteurs aisément mesurables: la superficie, l’effectif population, le volume du PIB. D’autre part, des facteurs plus complexes, plus difficilement mesurables: l’efficacité d’une partie de la population à supporter privations et contraintes et à accepter de risquer sa vie ou celle des êtres chers pour la défense d’une cause qui lui paraît fondamentale, telle que l’honneur national ou la défense de la partie”, ibid, p. 5.

6 The enormously disparate pre-eminence rendered to India in the South Asian regional configuration by ‘facts of geography, demography, economics and technology’ is something about which neither India nor its neighbours can do much about but accept. The Indian preeminence is indeed hardly a problem for its neighbours; problem arises when preeminence is used as justification for predominance. This thrust for regional domination is expressed in the words of K. Subrahmanyam, a frontline Indian strategist as such, “This country with its population, size, resources and industrial output will be dominant country in the region just as the US, Soviet Union and China happen to be in their respective areas. This is just a fact of geography, economics and technology”. Cited in Iftekharuzzaman, op. cit., p. 21. India’s aspiration for a pioneering role in South Asia finds its expression in what is called ‘India Doctrine’. Bhabani Sen Gupta, a leading Indian scholar, has identified the parameters of this doctrine. According to him, “India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has implicit or explicit anti-Indian implications. No South Asian
government must, therefore, ask for military assistance with an anti-Indian bias from any country ... if a South Asian country genuinely needs external help to deal with a serious internal conflict or an intolerable threat to a government legitimately established, it should ask help from a number of neighbouring countries including India. The exclusion of India from such a contingency will be considered to be an anti-Indian move on the part of the government concerned ...”. Cited in Mohammad Humayun Kabir, “Regional Security in South Asia: A Bangladesh Perspective”, BIJSS Journal, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 2002, p. 126.


8 Shrikant Paranjpe and Raju G.C. Thomas, Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 165.

10 India is the only country in South Asia with a well defined ocean policy and its maritime interests are trade and commerce, exploitation and exploration of oceanic resources, and maritime security etc. India has pursued an active program of exploration for manganese nodules in the Indian Ocean and has been successful in being designated a pioneer investor with respect to this area by the Preparatory Commission for the International Sea-Bed Authority, and as such is the only Third World nation to achieve this status. A.K.H. Morshed, “Cooperation in the Maritime Zones Among and between the SAARC Countries”, BIJSS Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1, January, 1999, pp. 1-11.


12 A detailed discussion on the maritime delimitation problem between India and Bangladesh is made in the paper “Practice of SAARC Countries on the Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries: Some Pertinent Issues for Bangladesh”, presented by M.H. Rahman at the Training Workshop on the “Legal and Technical Requirements of Maritime Boundary Delimitation”, jointly organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIJSS) and the Ocean Institute of Canada, and held at BIJSS, Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 27-29, 1998.

13 During post 1971 period, Indian strategic thinking on South Asia underwent a radical transformation. Taking into account its historical heritage, geo-strategic position, economic and military potentials as well as international standing, Indian strategists developed a series of well-connected foreign policy and security perceptions with regard to its role in determining the destiny of South Asia which are widely known as India Doctrine. To a significant extent, it is the South Asian version of the Monroe Doctrine, wherein India views the entire region as a single strategic unit and herself as the sole custodian of security and stability in the region”. See for details A.K.M. Abdus Sabur,

14 ‘One of the facets of India’s policy towards neighbours was to deal with all matters on a bilateral basis. Again, this was a general policy equally applicable towards all neighbours. India felt that all matters with neighbours should be settled bilaterally on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, i.e., without, needlessly complicating them by internationalizing in multilateral form, or inviting third party intervention. But this was not reciprocated by Pakistan and sometimes by other neighbours too’. See for details, M.S. Rajan, “India and Its Neighbours: The Policy and Problems” in S.D. Muni (ed.), *Understanding South Asia: Essays in the Memory of Late Professor (Mrs) Urmila Phadnis*, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1994), pp. 10-35.

15 The SAARC Charter, *inter alia*, envisages: (a) the acceleration of economic growth, social progress and cultural development; (b) the promotion and strengthening of collective self-reliance; (c) the promotion and mutual collaboration and assistance in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields, and (d) cooperation with international and similar regional associations. P.R. Chari, “National Security and Regional Cooperation: The Case of South Asia”, in Iftekharuzzaman (ed), *Regional Economic Trends and South Asian Security*, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (Colombo), (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997), p. 192.

16 ‘The socio-economic indicators of South Asia reveal a very gloomy picture of the conditions of people of the region. The region shares 22 per cent, or over one-fifth of the world’s population. The per capita GNP is $440, the lowest in the world. The region shares only 1.3 of the global income and 40% of the global poverty. It is the region with a disproportionately high share of the world’s total illiterate population (46 per cent), more than twice the global average. Fifty per cent of the world’s malnourished children live in South Asia. In terms of human deprivation, South Asia represents one of the most difficult cases in the whole world. Economic globalisation is likely to have further negative effects on the economy of the poor South Asian countries’. A.M. Mansur Ahmed and Md. Abdul Mannan, “Regional Security Scenario in South Asia: A View from Bangladesh”, in Dipankar Banerjee (ed.), *South Asian Security: Futures – A Dialogue of Directors Regional Strategic Studies Institutes*, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, 2002, p. 48.

17 ‘The region is the home of more than 560 million poor, which is more than half of the world’s poor. Individual country picture varies somewhat. For example, in Bangladesh, available studies suggest that poverty has declined somewhat and the decline is more pronounced in the urban area than in the rural area. However, the decline has not been sustained and there are reasons to believe that poverty might have increased since mid-1980s. Although, Bhutan ranks rather low in HDI, it is understood that there is no serious shortage of food and the average calorie intake is not that low-either. Sustained poverty decline, however, has taken place in where poverty ratio was 48.3% in 1977-78 and it
came down to 18.3\% in 1992'. A.R. Khan, "Interfacing Traditional and Non-

18 'With 22\% of the world population living on only 3\% of the world's land, the
region is facing serious environmental crisis. Degradation of natural resources
(air, water, forests and land) and the depletion of species are increasing at an
alarming rate. A large proportion of the population does not have access to
safe drinking water, groundwater depletion is widespread, and the contamination
of groundwater with arsenic, fluoride, and other toxins has affected the health
of millions of people in the region'. Report by the International Development
Research Centre, available on-line http://www.idrc.ca/saro/office.html (date
accessed 07 July 2003).

19 Shahnaz Karim, "Security Implications and Economic Benefits of Transit
Facility : A Bangladesh Perspective", in Iftekharuzzaman (ed), Regional


21 The notion is some what analogous to what George Sorensen referred to as
'unconsolidated democracy'. In another sense, the nomenclature, incomplete
metamorphic democracy, may be an adequate concept or euphemism for
describing Africa's current democratic development. The rationale for this
approach is based on the assumption that at this juncture many lack a majority
of the "essential" ingredients of a complete metamorphic democracy such as
accountability, multi-partyism, legitimacy, orderly change of government, successful
elections at intervals, freedom of expression etc. See for details, E. Ike Udogu,
"Incomplete Metamorphic Democracy as a Conceptual Framework in the
Analysis of African Politics: An Exploratory Investigation", Journal of Asian

22 Ibid.

23 Lord Action's often quoted statement, cited in Misa Telefoni Retzlaff, "Good
Governance: Pathway to Small States Prosperity - A role for America and the
West?, paper delivered at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service,
Georgetown University.

24 Ibid.

25 See for details, P. Sahadevan, "Challenges to Political Order in Maldives',

26 Krishna Hachhethu, "The Maoist Uprising in Nepal: From Insurgency to
Negotiation", paper presented at the Workshop for Young Scholars on
'Strengthening Cooperation and Security in South Asia in post 9/11' at
Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, July 1-2, 2003, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

27 'An online (internet) conference on 'Conflict Prevention in Nepal', organised
by Harvard University for seven days in the last week of January 2001 and
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participated by 82 native and foreign scholars involving in Nepalese study/research found out several factors, i.e., social injustice, unemployment, underdevelopment, problems of exclusion, lack of good governance etc. contributing to the escalation of the Maoist armed activities'. Ibid.

29 Abdur Rob Khan, op. cit.
30 Ibid.
31 Cited in Misa Telefon Retzlaff, op. cit.
32 Govt. Corruption in South Asia, available online http://www.alltogether.org/wwwboard/messages/24.html, (date accessed 18 June 2003). UNDP in its recently released Human Development has castigated South Asia on corruption as one of the most damaging consequences of poor governance undermining investment and deepening poverty. Endemic corruption, social exclusion and inefficient civil services, it says, plague South Asia. South Asian corruption, it adds, has four key characteristics. These are (i) it occurs at the top, distorting decision making; (ii) corruption money has wings — it is smuggled abroad; (iii) it leads to promotion, not punishment, the big fish rarely fry; (4) it is flourishing where 500 million people are in abject poverty. Available on-line http://www.peoplefirstindia.org/undp_castigates.htm, (date accessed June 18, 2003)
35 Ibid.
36 Small and Micro-Sates of South Asia, available online http://www.staff.brad.ac.uk/akundu/csa/microStates.htm.
38 A.K.M. Abduls Sabur, op. cit.
39 It should be mentioned that India’s decision to divert waters from the common rivers to its drought prone states has caused increasing alarm in Bangladesh. There has been protest from Bangladesh at the governmental level. This scheme of interlinking rivers, without first reaching an accommodation with Bangladesh violates the articles and principles enshrined in the Ganges Treaty. As per few specific articles and principles of the Ganges Treaty, India is required to discuss with Bangladesh all major projects of interventions in the


42 "Ethnic cleavages have bedeviled nation building and national integration efforts of most South Asian nations in different degrees. The roots are deep and complex. However, the simple reason has been the attempt of the dominant majorities to impose their own identities and cultures over minority ethnic groups. Non-inclusive policies and resultant economic deprivation leads the minorities to express dissatisfaction, at times in violent ways, which have been exploited and encouraged by forces within and outside South Asia". A M Mansur A


45 Abdur Rob Khan, op. cit.

46 Tara Kartha, “Management and Control of Light Weapons in South Asia”, in Dipankar Banerjee (ed.), South Asia at Gun Point, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (Colombo), 2000, p. 213.

47 The current maritime situation in Bangladesh somehow represents a disappointing scenario due to a number of reasons like: (i) the vulnerability of the oceanic frontier to naval developments in and around the region; (ii) Bangladesh’s unresolved maritime boundary with two of its neighbours, India and Myanmar; (iii) frequent encroachments along the inshore, offshore and areas beyond it by outsiders in search of fish and other marine resources; (iv) the use of coastal areas as convenient conduits of small arms and drug trafficking; (v) the increasing rate of sea piracy; illegal migration, narco-terrorism and smuggling (vi) the vulnerability of the country’s coastal zone to various sources of pollution and coastal development pressures and finally (vii) the lack of initiatives to cope with the vulnerabilities in the coastal zone and explore the opportunities through proper management. Abul Kalam Azad, “Maritime Security of Bangladesh” in Mufleh R Osmany and Muzaffer Ahmad (ed), Security in the Twenty First Century: A Bangladesh Perspective, Academic Press and Publishers Limited in association with Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka, 2003, p. 162.

48 The term ‘inverse regionalism has been used by the Pakistani economist, S. Lahari, while explaining his dismay over the current intra-regional trade of the region,
which is in the range of 3 per cent of all foreign trade of the member countries. Thus, to him, economics that has been emphasised as a golden opportunity of regional cooperation is now wishful thinking in the region. Cited in P. Zingel, “On the Economics of Regional Cooperation in South Asia”, paper presented at the 15th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Prague, September 8-11, 1998. 'The share of South Asia in global trade is currently less than 1 per cent. Intra-regional trade is only 3 per cent of total trading by the SAARC nations. Conversely, 97 per cent of its trade occurs with countries outside South Asia. This compares unfavourably with the situation obtaining in other regions wherein intra-regional trade averages roughly 50 per cent. Intra-regional is around 70 per cent in the European Community'. P.R. Chari, "National Security and Regional Cooperation: The Case of South Asia", in Iftekharuzzaman, Regional Economic Trends and South Asian Security, (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo), (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997), p. 193.


50 Ibid.

51 See for details, Narottam Gain, “Comprehensive Security for South Asia: An Environment Approach”, BLISS Journal, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1999, pp. 105-114. It may be mentioned that the Hindukush Himalayan belt is home to some 25,000 major plant species, comprising 10 per cent of the world’s flora. Sri Lanka is one of the most biological diverse countries in the world and India contains extensive savannah forest habitats, including many endemic species of international importance. South Asia is also home to around 14 per cent of the world’s remaining mangrove habit, in additional to the highest percentage of threatened wetlands, 82 per cent of which are in Bangladesh.

52 Narottam Gain, op. cit.

53 Relations between India and Nepal are facing another stumbling stone over the rivers they share. The bone of contention is four reservoirs whose construction dates back to British rule. Nepalese media and NGOs say four of these – the Mahali Sagar, Marthi Sagar, Siswa Sagar and Bajha Sagar cause inundation on both sides of the border during monsoons, with Nepal bearing the brunt of over 60%. See for details, India, Nepal spar over shared waters’, in The Daily Star, Dhaka, 07 August, 2003.


Small States and Regional Stability in South Asia

Paper presented by Dr. A.R. Khan on "Challenges to Foreign Policy of Bangladesh" at the National Seminar on "Challenges to Security and Foreign Policy of Bangladesh", held at BISS on June 17, 2003 on the occasion of the Institute's Silver Jubilee Celebration.

See for details, Hafiz G.A. Siddiqi, op. cit.

Water sharing and water management has become a part of international and regional diplomacy, primarily because water flows give upstream regions a distinct advantage over downstream neighbours. Bangladesh is unfortunately in a disadvantaged situation, being located downstream of a number of mighty rivers which originate outside Bangladesh and flow into Bangladesh from India. In Bangladesh, there are 230 rivers. With their tributaries, these rivers flow through a total length of more than 24,000km within Bangladesh. Along with the three major rivers, viz., the Ganges, the Meghna and the Brahmaputra, a total of 54 rivers enter into Bangladesh from India. Therefore, Bangladesh needs water sharing cooperation more than the other three countries (India, Nepal and Bhutan). Equitable water sharing agreements are key to rapid economic development. Appropriate strategy to convert water into wealth cannot be formulated and implemented by a single country. For this we need a special type of cooperation between these four countries. Interests of the GBM regional countries are linked with water flows of the rivers. According to some experts, the flows of the Ganges during the winter can be increased by making reservoirs at some specific points of seven tributaries of the Ganges that flow through Nepal. An estimate indicates that the usual winter flows in Nepal and India are likely to increase by about 1 lac 4 thousand cusec'. Hafiz G.A. Siddiqi, op. cit., pp. 392-393. P.R. Chari argues that 'non-cooperation within the region carries immense financial/economic and political costs. "One significant example would be the enormous hydroelectric potential of the Ganga and Brahmaputra river system, estimated at 93,700 MW and 54,950 MW respectively, which remains largely unexploited. A run-of-the river project at the Brahmaputra's eastern bend could generate another 18,000 MW if the river was harnessed by structures in China and a powerhouse built in India", cited in P.R. Chari, op. cit., p. 205. He remarks, "this enormous hydropower potential has remained unexploited due to the inability of India, Bangladesh and Nepal to negotiate the bilateral/trilateral agreements needed to construct the necessary projects, because of purely domestic political compulsions. Further the virulence of intra-regional tensions has definitely inhibited foreign investments being attracted to South Asia". P.R. Chari, op. cit., p. 205.


South Asia Regional HIV/AIDS Overview and Strategy, op. cit.

The information disclosed at the three day long court sessions reveal that nearly three and half thousand children had gone missing from Bangladesh in
last ten years and only 69 of them have been found so far. *The Daily Star*, Saturday, August 16, 2003.

63 In accordance with Article 25 of the Bangladesh Constitution the fundamental policy goals include: (i) promotion of regional and world peace; (ii) security and disarmament; (iii) the cause of economic and social development; (iv) the central role of the UN in the cooperative management of the world’s problems. Bangladesh Sangbad Sanghta, available online http://www.bssnews.net/about_foreign_policy.php,
