A new and rather unfelicitous acronym SARC has been added to the vocabulary of international regionalism. SARC is still in an embryonic stage, and its future evolution is quite uncertain; but it gives promise of developing into the first truly regional arrangement that has emerged in South Asia since most of its member states achieved independence nearly forty years ago. If it does so evolve, it will be, as the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, A.R. Shams-ud-Doha, said at the ceremony in New Delhi on August 2, 1983 marking the formal launching of SARC, a "new and dramatic development," not only in South Asia but in the entire international system.

The Past Record: Limited Cooperation

International regionalism as contrasted with regionalism within nation-states has been a conspicuous aspect of international relations for many years, and regional arrangements, which have proliferated in many of the world's regions, have become major international actors. But South Asia has provided few examples of these major world trends. It has remained, as Peter Lyon described it two decades ago, "a region without regionalism," probably the least affected by these trends of any of the world's major regions. It has, however, by no means been a regional desert as far as various forms of regional cooperation are concerned.
Leaders of practically every one of its member states have at various times endorsed the concept of regional cooperation in South Asia as well as in the international community, and have advocated various proposals for such cooperation, some of which have led to more or less successful cooperative programmes.

In an era of increasing interdependence, in which cooperative and collaborative transnational activities and ties have been multiplying, on bilateral, regional, and international levels, a major region such as South Asia, whose leaders and governments have participated in many forms of regional and international activity, could hardly be non-participants in such burgeoning world movements. But the fact that so much attention is being given to the recent efforts at regional cooperation, still very hesitant and limited, is a commentary on the relative scanty and often abortive efforts of the past. Apparently the conditions for extensive regional cooperation have not existed in the past, and it is a moot question whether they can be developed in time to assure the success, or even the continued existence, of SARC and other new programmes and experiments in South Asian regional cooperation. One can sympathise with the following rather gloomy observations by an Indian commentator, published in March, 1984:

To talk of regional cooperation among the seven countries of South Asia seems a far cry at a time when mutual distrust among them seems to be the rule of the day. As a matter of fact, tension is building up between India and Pakistan, fuelled by an arms race of a sort which their poor economies can hardly justify or sustain. And, what about the other five countries of the South Asia region—Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka? They also have their jealousies, suspicions and fears about their better-off neighbours, especially the larger ones whom they regard as some kind of regional bullies. This is one kind of pull to which these seven nations of the South Asian region have been subjected ever since they became independent a little over three decades ago. At times it would appear that the pull is inexorably and inevitably drawing them to nemesis as in a Greek tragedy.
The analogy of a Greek tragedy may seem all too apropos at the present time, when the shadow of a great tragedy—the sixth assassination of a South Asian national leader since 1947—hangs heavily over India, over all of India’s South Asian neighbours, and indeed over the entire world. But the South Asian story has been one of triumph as well as of tragedy, of progress as well as of retrogression. Moreover, as the Indian writer quoted above points out, “a counter pull also seems to be building up, though somewhat hesitantly. It is that these nations have begun an endavour to promote collective efforts for South Asian Regional Cooperation.” And he adds: "One must be thankful that the SARC endeavours have not been fouled up, not so far at any rate, by the prevailing tensions and misgivings between some of these nations.”

Most regional cooperation in South Asia to date, on both official and unofficial levels, has been bilateral rather than multilateral, and has been confined largely to various forms of economic, educational, and cultural cooperation, with economic interchanges predominating. Bilateral political contacts have also been extensive. They have often resulted in joint statements or communiques, less often in agreements to establish joint commissions or other cooperative arrangements, and even less often in important agreements of a political nature, such as the Sirimavo-Shastri agreement of 1964 between India and Ceylon, the Simla Agreement of 1972 between India and Pakistan, and the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 1972.

In international affairs the countries of South Asia have not functioned as a “regional bloc,” but they have often taken a similar position in international agencies and at international conferences, especially on issues relating to economic development, colonialism, and racism, in short on issues on which most Third World countries are generally united. All of the South Asian countries are members of the United Nations, and in the UN General Assembly and other major organs, agencies, and programmes of the UN system including the specialised agencies, UNDP, UNEP, UNCTAD, and ESCAP (formerly ECAFE) they usually
take similar positions. The same is true of the Group of 77, a unique grouping that emerged out of common membership in the U.N. General Assembly. All of the countries of South Asia are members of the nonaligned movement, of which India is now the chairman. They are all active supporters of this movement and of the major declarations and proposals that it has advanced. They are all Third World countries, and they support the demands that are espoused by these countries, including the demand for a “New International Economic Order” and other new international orders. They all participate in and benefit from the Colombo Plan, a major organisation for economic development that is heavily focused on South and Southeast Asia. Three South Asian countries Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka are members of the Commonwealth of Nations, and in this unique association their interests and positions usually coincide. In innumerable unofficial international professional associations relevant associations as well as individuals in various South Asian countries participate actively, often in leading roles. In short, as these examples—which could be multiplied ad infinitum—suggest, South Asian countries and country associations and nationals have developed an extensive network of inter-regional and international cooperation. But even though in activities outside of South Asia their positions often coincide, this is the result of mutual national and professional interests, not of formal cooperation and this kind of coincidental cooperation abroad is not the product of, and has not led to, much formal and official cooperation within the South Asian region.

The Recent Scene: New Momentum

Against this background of limited regional cooperation, well short of genuine regionalism, with almost all of the various proposals and efforts for regional cooperation soon withering in the arid sands of interregional tensions, ineffective communication, and misunderstanding and mistrust, the recent renewed interest and gathering momentum, however limited, in the direction of regional cooperation
take on added meaning. It remains to be seen, of course, whether this new interest and momentum will be able to continue and to flourish, for the environment in which they have to operate is still quite unfavourable.

The initiative of President Ziaur Rahman in 1980 is rightly hailed as a landmark in moving the South Asian countries toward a more cooperative relationship and in giving South Asia as a region a more visible and influential presence in world affairs. The work of the Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries of South Asia in 1981 and 1982 in developing this initiative into concrete proposals and programmes, with the expert assistance of members of study groups, working groups, and technical groups, also deserves special recognition. And the formal launching of SARC as a regional arrangement and the adoption of the Integrated Programme of Action by the South Asian Foreign Ministers in August, 1982, turned President Ziaur Rahman’s dream into an operating reality.

In the skeletal institutional framework of SARC the Foreign Ministers will of course have a major policy-making role. This will ensure continued high-level official direction and support for this promising and unique experiment in regional cooperation. And even these limited beginnings would not have been possible without the approval of the top leaders in all the member states.

This kind of top-level official support is absolutely essential for the success of SARC, but in view of the past record of official leaders in their dealings with each other a skeptic might add that this kind of support may also ensure SARC’s limited effectiveness and perhaps even its speedy demise!

The central role of top political and bureaucratic leaders may make it difficult, and perhaps impossible, for SARC to live up to the three basic principles which were formulated by the Foreign Secretaries of the seven South Asian countries at their first meeting in Colombo in August, 1981. These principles were that (1) regional cooperation was not to be a substitute for bilateral or multi-
lateral cooperation, and should not be inconsistent with such cooperation, (2) all decisions were to be taken unanimously, and (3) "bilateral and contentious issues" should be excluded from SARC's deliberations.\(^5\)

The first principle should create no major problems, although the distinction between multilateral cooperation among the South Asian nations and regional cooperation in SARC may not always be clear. The second is an essential feature (without it SARC would not have been formed), but as experience in various international bodies in which the rule of unanimity prevails indicates, this provision is almost a guarantee of ineffectiveness and frustration, and stands foursquare in the way of genuine international regionalism. The third principle is probably as impossible to abide by as it is essential, at least in the formative stages of SARC. So many "bilateral" issues have multilateral and regional dimensions, and even "non-political" issues are often fundamentally political and contentious. Moreover, the fact that SARC is a product of cooperative agreements among seven sovereign nation-states means that by its very nature it is an official political organisation; and an official political organisation can hardly be non-political. It can hardly avoid consideration of the political dimensions of almost every issue with which it is concerned. Indeed, it can hardly eschew consideration of the very issues which its founders have proclaimed to be out of bounds, including even military and security issues.

In time, no doubt, political, security, and other "contentious issues will come within the purview of SARC, inspite of the prohibition of its founders, as they have in a number of organisations for regional cooperation which began with a strict prohibition against consideration of such issues. (ASEAN is an outstanding contemporary example.) But SARC could not have come into being if it had not commenced in a very limited and tentative fashion, and if it had not taken special precautions to avoid too rapid institutionality and agenda-building escalation. The Foreign Se-
creta ries were wise to begin by prescribing limitations on the pro-
posed new organisation, and by selecting only a few relatively non-
controversial, non—political issues—agriculture, health, rural devel-
opment, and telecommunication—as areas of priority. Later they
identified related areas for study and possible cooperation, namely
science and technology, meteorology, transport and postal services,
arts and culture, and sports, and established technical groups in
these areas as well. Other related areas could easily be identifie
for example, to take a list proposed by an Indian journalist, “traded
currency, joint ventures, food security arrangements, manpower,
resource development, environment, long-term development of
land, water and forest resources, medium-to-long-term regional
development planning, a regional customs union and a regional
payments union.” But this kind of shopping list simply suggests
that there is no end to the kinds of issues, primarily of an economic,
technical, social, and cultural nature (although by no means free
from political and security aspects), with which SARC, even with
its present limited mandate, could properly be concerned.

All of these issues require regional as well as national con-
consideration and cooperation. Even with due recognition of the sorry
record of the past, it still seems amazing that so little cooperation
has been possible among states whose stability, development,
and perhaps even survival may depend on more effective program-
mes for dealing with such issues which, by their very nature
and seriousness, cannot be dealt with adequately on a purely
national basis.

In view of the many asymmetries, and the long history of ten-
sions and divisions within as well as among the states of South
Asia, these nations are still exploring ways of mutually beneficial
cooperation in a hesitant and often suspicious manner. In this
evolving scenario the position and influence of India will be quite
central and decisive: but India can also be a great stumbling
block to effective regional cooperation as well as a leader in pro-
moting it. India’s delicate position and special responsibilities
are widely recognised in India, although its leaders do not
always seem to be sufficiently concerned with the interests, or sufficiently aware of the suspicions and sensitivities, of the other states of the region. Recently an Indian journalist candidly faced this dilemma for India, and suggested a constructive approach:

India is unlikely to adopt bold initiatives and a high-voltage approach, for this could be perceived by its South Asian neighbours as an assertion of Indian "hegemonism." A high-profile policy by India would be a bad regional policy. At the same time, India, the leading and most developed nation in the region, cannot appear to be dragging its feet and lagging behind smaller countries in regional cooperation initiatives. A medium-level policy initiative supported by diplomatic efforts seems to be the best policy for India to adopt.  

As this Indian commentator recognises, in the developing scenario of regional cooperation the other countries of South Asia will be looking to India, as usual, with both suspicion and expectancy. Each South Asian country must develop its policies and programmes regarding regional cooperation in the light of the interests and the suspicions and sensitivities of its neighbours in the subcontinent as well as of its own national interests, as its leaders conceive them. Any effective moves toward regional cooperation must be based on the jointly-held assumption, and agreement, that there are many areas in which national and regional interests coincide.

Lessons From ASEAN

In the evolution of SARC the countries of South Asia can benefit from a careful study of the experience of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Like South Asia, Southeast Asia has been a region in which regional cooperation has been conspicuously limited. Previous experiments in regional cooperation, notably the Association of Asian Nations (ASA) and Maphilindo (a loose and temporary arrangement among Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia), were confined to a few nations and soon
broke down because of tensions among the member states. Like the historic action of the South Asian Foreign Ministers in August, 1983, in formally launching SARC, the Bangkok Declaration exactly fifteen years previously marked a new departure in regional cooperation.

ASEAN’s generally impressive progress since then suggests that with careful nursing and genuine political support it is possible to build regional arrangements even in regions where past experience and prevailing political conditions seem to be almost insurmountable barriers. But the problems that this organisation has faced suggest that the path to regional cooperation is a very rocky one indeed. The still unresolved questions regarding its future character and evolution are reminders that there is no assurance that ASEAN will continue to be a relatively impressive success story.

SARC begins with at least one major disadvantage in comparison with ASEAN, and at least one major advantage. The disadvantage is that, unlike the members of SARC, the countries of ASEAN, with the single exception of the Philippines, have achieved some of the most remarkable rates of economic growth of any nations in the world, and they are major centres of world trade and investment. The advantage is that only six of the eleven nations of Southeast Asia are members of ASEAN (and the sixth member, Brunei Darussalam, joined only in January, 1984, soon after it became an independent sovereign nation), whereas all of the seven nations of South Asia are charter members of SARC.

Like SARC, ASEAN evolved slowly and tentatively, with emphasis on economic, social, and technical cooperation, and with repeated assertions that it would eschew controversial bilateral issues and would not be concerned with regional, political or security matters. But its members soon came to realise that political and security matters would inevitably be discussed during high level ASEAN meetings, even though they would not appear on the formal agenda. In fact, at a conference on regionalism in Southeast Asia in Jakarta, nearly ten years ago, organised by the Centre
for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Singapore, A. Rahim Ishak, declared:

ASEAN's greatest influence in its formative years lay in the opportunities it provided for greater interaction between the political leaders and officials of the five member countries. It opened informal channels of communication between the member states which served to provide a better understanding of their respective foreign policy positions, assisted in the muting of conflicts between member states and increased the opportunities for private discussions between opinion-makers in the ASEAN member states.

Mr. Ishak also pointed out that "the annual Ministerial meetings have been particularly significant," and he added that "the decision to conduct annual meetings of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers on subjects pertaining to political affairs... marks the shift of ASEAN from an organisation with primarily economic goals to one which recognises that the nature of economic relationships in the modern world is often based on the premise of a mutually satisfactory political relationship." Since the first ASEAN summit conference, held in Bali in 1976, the ASEAN nations have developed closer associations in political as well as economic and social matters.

A major demarche of ASEAN that has attracted international attention and that has obvious political and foreign policy implications is the proposal to establish in Southeast Asia a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality" (ZOPFAN). This is of course quite different from Pakistan's proposal of a nuclear-weapons free zone in South Asia or Nepal's proposal of a "zone of peace" in the Himalayan region, since these proposals have not been endorsed by all the members of SARC. The SARC countries might, however, give some consideration to the idea of proposing a ZOPFAN in South Asia, which would have added weight because it would be endorsed by all of the states of the region, in contrast to the ZOPFAN proposal for Southeast Asia.
Inspite of the strong predilections against giving ASEAN any dimensions as a regional collective security organisation, security considerations have obviously been well up on the list of priority concerns of leaders of ASEAN countries. They are particularly concerned with internal threats to security and national integration, and with external threats emanating from the activities of great powers—the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and perhaps Japan in the region and from the explosive developments, with serious spillover effects, in the Indochina area. Concern over these threats, internal and external, was frequently voiced prior to the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, and some ASEAN members, notably Indonesia and Thailand, began to suggest that ASEAN should consider possible steps to ensure the security of each member and of the region. In late 1974, for example, the Indonesian Minister for Defense and Security said that ASEAN countries should begin to develop "regional defense policies," designed to strengthen what he termed "regional resilience." This term was also used by President Suharto in early 1975, in an address to an ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Jakarta, in which he said that "long-term" cooperation should be developed in ASEAN not only in economic, social and cultural fields but also in "still wider forms." As early as in 1976 Justus M. van der Kroef noted that "regional resilience" now increasingly serves Indonesian officials as a code for some form of non-threatening, low profile regional collective security defense.

Concern with regional as well as national security has increasingly preoccupied leaders of ASEAN countries since the end of the Vietnam war, the genocidal policies of Cambodian leaders and the consequent influx of refugees from Cambodia into Thailand, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia (Kampuchea), with the strong backing of the Soviet Union and the strong opposition of China, the United States, and the ASEAN nations. But while ASEAN members are increasingly exchanging views on possible concerted measures for defense, even within the framework of ASEAN, Professor van der Kroef's observation that "giving real teeth to 'regional resilience',... is still some distance in the future."
The member nations of SARC, like those of ASEAN, are faced with security problems with which they are hard pressed to cope, problems arising from instabilities and tensions within each nation, among nations of the region, and in relations with “intrusive” external powers. The experience of ASEAN suggests that such problems will inevitably be discussed when high-level meetings of members of regional arrangements are held, but that it may be unwise to include these problems among the “still wider forms” that President Suharto recommended for ASEAN a decade ago. There is an obvious reluctance to seek to develop ASEAN as an instrument for collective security as well as for other forms of regional cooperation and certainly the reluctance of its members to move SARC in such a direction is even greater.

The member states of SARC may also derive some useful ideas from the relations that ASEAN has developed with major external powers and major international organisations. These relations have been quite extensive with major non-Communist states, but not with the major Communist powers. The ASEAN-EEC relationship is particularly extensive and impressive. In 1980 an ASEAN-EEC Cooperative Agreement was signed, and a Joint Cooperation Committee was established. ASEAN relations with EEC are channeled mainly through SCCAN (the Special Coordinating Committee of ASEAN). An ASEAN-EEC Business Council has been quite active. The EEC has agreed to extend its Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) to the ASEAN countries.

This pattern of extensive cooperation, featuring joint agreements, joint business councils, and usually cooperative arrangements for trade promotion, frequent exchanges of official and unofficial trade and other delegations, joint ventures, industrial and other projects, bilateral and multilateral financial cooperation, etc., is also prominent in ASEAN’s relations with its two largest trading partners, Japan and the United States, and with its other major trading partners of the Pacific region, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Canada. ASEAN has also developed special relations
with the World Bank, the International Development Association,
the Asian Development Bank, and other international financial
institutions.

SARC is beginning to develop external relationships of a similar,
although far more limited, nature, including relationships with
EEC and the International Telecommunications Union. Appa-
rently it is contemplating relationships with COMECON as well.
This is another area in which the more extensive experience of
ASEAN could provide useful lessons.

The countries of SARC, like those of ASEAN, are understan-
dably apprehensive of some of the possible consequences of ex-
tensive relations with major external powers. The ASEAN app-
roach, to this basic problem may provide useful guidelines for
the SARC nations. This approach, and its essential under-
pinning, were well stated by A. Rahim Ishak a decade ago:

If we are to achieve our hopes of a region free from external
interference, we must be capable of sustaining our own econo-
mic independence. This may only be attained through the
establishment of strong domestic regimes capable of economic
growth along lines which are in the interest of the state for
those states involved. Such an approach does not deny the
positive role which may be played by foreign aid, multinational
corporations or external investment, but it stresses that the goals
and targets of economic growth must be determined by the
countries concerned and that external sources must never be
placed in a position where they can manipulate the political
or economic decisions of Southeast Asian states . . . . .

A realistic appraisal of the role of the major powers must
recognise that they are likely to continue to play a role in the
region whether we desire it or not. Moreover, the present
diversity of states in Southeast Asia lends itself to the possibi-
ity that some states may act as the proxies for major powers
outside the region. The integration of the region is therefore
an urgent priority if we are to avoid being overcome by the com-
peting challenges facing us.13
An interesting type of dialogue that ASEAN Foreign Ministers have institutionalised with their counterparts in countries with which ASEAN nations have the most extensive relations is the so-called "Post-Ministerials" with their five "dialogue partners" of the Pacific area—Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States and with the EEC. These meetings have apparently been quite useful in many ways. SARC might consider the development of similar ties with its major "dialogue partners."

SARC's limited institutional development has paralleled that of the early years of ASEAN. During its more than seventeen years of formal existence ASEAN has developed a rather labyrinthine structure, but it is still a relatively loose organisation, with limited budget and personnel. It has permanent headquarters in Jakarta. Its nine permanent committees are quite similar to the nine technical groups which the Foreign Secretaries of the South Asian countries created for SARC even before the organisation was formally launched.

SARC will undoubtedly develop a variety of links with ASEAN. It might consider the advisability of entering into a general agreement of cooperation with ASEAN, and of forming a joint SARC-ASEAN commission, or at least a joint SARC-ASEAN Business Council. Its representatives might have periodic meetings with their ASEAN counterparts at various levels, from the highly technical to the Foreign Ministers or even the summit level. It could undertake joint projects, of an operational or research nature. It could exchange information and perhaps even personnel. It could undertake joint programme in areas of mutual interest. It would probably not be desirable, at least at this stage, to press for overlapping membership. The application of Sri Lanka for membership in ASEAN was probably a premature move, which did not find favour in certain other South Asian countries, notably India. But SARC would probably benefit by forming a variety of links with ASEAN, and indeed with other regional arrangements in other parts of the world. Its vision and approach should be broad,
global in scope and farseeing in concept, even as it seeks to lay the bases for its successful functioning and development on a more limited and pragmatic scale.

**Lessons from Other Regional Arrangements**

Since ASEAN is the only major regional arrangement that exists in East and Southeast Asia, and since it has been surprisingly active and successful in a rather unfavourable regional environment, it is the organisation that probably will provide the most relevant lessons for SARC. Other lessons can no doubt be derived from a careful study of the experience of regional arrangements in other world regions. The EEC is probably the most successful of all such arrangements, and certainly merits special attention. SARC, as has been noted, has already established certain special ties with this organisation. But EEC developed in the region where the conditions for regionalism and regional integration were most favourable, whereas SARC is emerging in a region where these conditions have been largely absent. And EEC is an organisation of some of the world's most economically and politically powerful nations, whereas SARC is an organisation of some of the world's most economically underdeveloped nations, with varying degrees of political development well below the levels of the much older and more stable nations of western Europe.

One practice of EEC that has proved to have a useful and integrative effect is that of appointing a single EEC representative, instead of individual representatives of member states, to various international organisations and conferences. SARC may not be ready to follow this example, but by so doing it could take a great step forward in effective regional organisation. This would be an important symbolic as well as practical gesture. It would indicate to the outside world that South Asia was emerging as an important international actor, and that on some matters, at least, the nations of the area can speak with a single voice. This would enhance the region's visibility and influence in international affairs.
The Nordic Council may be cited as a regional organisation that might not be thought of by the SARC nations, but that might merit a special look. This interesting Council has been functioning successfully, on a deliberately limited basis, for more than twenty years. It has even been able to make some progress in the direction of "microintegration." "At this level of microintegration," observes a distinguished Norwegian scholar, "the Nordic Council has managed to establish a degree of Scandinavian integration where the more ambitious schemes for Scandinavian union failed." There seems to be almost no prospect that any scheme for real integration in South Asia will be seriously considered by SARC, but possibly some long-term goal of "microintegration" could be presented as a unifying theme for the future, to give meaning and relevance to the more specialised and pragmatic programmes and proposals, many of a limited and even ad hoc nature, with which SARC will be primarily concerned.

South Asian Regional Cooperation: The Larger Dimension

While the birth and early adolescence of SARC have been the most conspicuous evidence of the developing new regionalism in South Asia, there are many forms of regional cooperation, including many that have been in progress for a long time, that are not embraced by SARC, inspite of the all-encompassing nature of this awkward acronym. It is, after all, a regional governmental organisation, and hence cannot possibly subsume the many ongoing and developing forms of regional cooperation and contacts on unofficial levels. In fact, at the present time, at least, the most extensive and significant interactions among the South Asian nations at the official level are not being carried on under the aegis of SARC, but through an extensive pattern of bilateral contacts, exchanges, and agreements. Thus we should bear in mind that there are many forms of South Asian regional cooperation outside of the framework of SARC.

The developing interest in regional cooperation in South Asia on the part of both South Asian and foreign scholars, universities,
and research institutes is worthy of special note. This is evidenced by the increasing number of books, articles, and other studies of this subject, and by the number of local, national, regional, and international conferences (such as this one) on this theme. This growing academic interest has provided a more substantial intellectual foundation for SARC and other official efforts at regional cooperation and in turn has been greatly stimulated by the new momentum on the official front.\(^{16}\) It is encouraging to know that a Committee on Studies for Cooperation in Development in South Asia (CSCD), composed primarily of scholars from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, has been set up, with headquarters in New Delhi, and that it has already selected some ten areas of possible regional cooperation for special study and analysis. This kind of cooperative academic regional cooperation is significant in itself, and it takes on added significance because of its potential contribution to meaningful regional cooperation on many official and unofficial levels.

**The Road Ahead**

As the theme of this conference suggests, South Asian regional cooperation can provide “a socio-economic approach to peace and stability in South Asia.” But it also can provide other approaches to the same desirable goals, including even political and security approaches. It is noteworthy, and by no means inappropriate, that this conference on “a socio-economic approach” is being sponsored by an Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

There are many possible approaches to regional cooperation in South Asia, and there are many ways in which regional cooperation can contribute to peace and stability in the region, and indeed in Asia generally and in the entire world. We should not lose sight of the larger dimensions and possibilities even as we examine and discuss the still limited and hesitant, if promising, developments of recent years.
It does seem that at long last, in a regional environment that still presents many obstacles and difficulties, something really important is taking place in South Asia in the direction of more genuine and hopeful regional cooperation. The new momentum in this direction has been a very recent development. It has already led to the creation of the first genuine regional arrangement in South Asia and to a variety of other forms of regional cooperation on official levels, as well as to increasing interactions on unofficial levels and to more serious and extensive study of regional cooperation as a significant trend in South Asia and to more widespread interest and awareness, in South Asia and elsewhere, of this trend.

Writing at the beginning of the present decade, an Indian and an American scholar called attention to the general nature, limitations, and potential significance of this new trend:

... there have been significant changes in the attitudes of all the South Asian governments on their interrelationships in the late 1970s. To date, this trend has been primarily reflected in bilateral agreements that have substantially expanded relations between India and the other states in the region. But these bilateral agreements may well prove to be an important transitional stage, both substantively and psychologically, toward broader-based regional institutions since they are based upon novel perceptions of mutual interests and trust by the states of South Asia. This change in attitude is still very fragile and subject to a reversion to past hostilities and suspicions unless carefully nourished, particularly in India. But interstate relations in the South Asia of 1980 are qualitatively different from what they have been at any time since 1947, and there is now a foundation on which to build regional institutions.

Let us hope that this trend will continue, and that these institutions will flourish, even in a still rather uncongenial environment.
NOTES


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., [p. 69].


9. Ibid.

10. See report on a conference on "ASEAN—Today and Tomorrow," organised by the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and the Council on Foreign Relations, held in Medford, Massachusetts, 11-13 November 1981 (Medford, Mass.: The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, [n.d.]); especially the remarks by Zain Azraai, Ambassador of Malaysia to the United States, Richard Solomon, the RAND Corporation, John H. Holdridge, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State, and Jusuf Wanandi, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, ibid., pp. 7-11.


16. An outstanding example of a conference on this subject was the "Seminar on Regional Cooperation," organised by the Institute of Asian Studies: Hyderabad, India, held in Hyderabad in April, 1981. The seventeen papers presented at this Seminar have been published in K. Satya Murty, ed., *South Asian Cooperation* (Hyderabad: Institute of Asian Studies, 1984).