The countries of the South Asian region today suffer, in varying degrees, from problems of national integration, lack of political cohesion, economic deprivation and a host of other problems. The below subsistence-level poverty embracing a significant segment of population in South Asia poses a formidable threat to the inner fabric of the region as a whole. All these problems either in isolation or in composite form tend to spill over beyond a country’s frontier which, even without extra-territorial input, vitiate the regional environment of peace and stability. The situation is compounded by the strains and stresses in bilateral relations manifested sometimes in armed conflicts between some countries of the region. These conflicts were mutually reinforcing cause and effect of deep-rooted historical forces characterised by mistrust and suspicion. Together, the lingering unresolved issues between nations certainly stood in the way of a harmonious environment in the region.

As a result, the level of positive interaction among countries of the region, both in the economic and politico-security field, was at a minimum compared with many other regions of the Third World. Some circles put forward the argument that absence of a shared perception over politico-strategic issues in the region and beyond stand in the way of greater co-operation. But such a view explaining the minimum level of regional interaction in South Asia does not appear to be wholly tenable. For example, before the formation of the ASEAN in Southeast Asia in 1967, similar views
were expressed about the grouping. But today the sagacity and long-range vision of the initiators of ASEAN are well recognised in view of the degree of success in economic cooperation and political cohesiveness among members of the group. Therefore, experiences in other regions bear ample testimony to the fact that initially socio-economic cooperation at a regional level, though growing slowly, can go a long way in fostering regionalism which is both a process and a terminal goal among the cooperating members.

In examining the state of regionalism in South Asia, the concept and indicators of regionalism may be outlined. In the 1960s the surge of regional group formations naturally gave rise to the necessity of evolving some theoretical constructs over this new phenomenon in world politics. Bruce Russett tried to identify a region using the criteria of social and cultural homogeneity, political attitudes on external issues as manifested in the voting of governments in the United Nations, political interdependence as indicated by participation in inter-governmental networks, economic interdependence as evidenced by intra-regional trade in relation to national income and geographic proximity. Similarly, others put forward certain requirements, although with some overlapping, to be central to a region’s delineation. Normally, there is a sense of geographical contiguity, which implies spatial proximity and common frontiers. Moreover, the region itself must have a spatial definition for peoples living within it. Secondly, there should be a historical pattern of political interaction, of conflict and conflict resolution within the borders of the region. This is important for two reasons: first, it defines the region perceptually for decision-makers both within and without the region and secondly, it provides a perspective in which policy planners of member states can set foreign policy goals. Following from the second, there must also be a set of social norms which pervades the region. This may entail common political ideas, religion, moral values, class structure, or any of a number of elements of social interaction. In a sense, then, there must be a
"common soil" within which cooperation and social integration may flourish

The above definitions clearly overlap each other as indicators of a region, or for that matter, a sub-system. A country being far away spatially may join as a member of a cooperative group based on the same socio-political and economic system. Cuba or Vietnam's membership in the COMECON are examples. As for the perception of a region as a distinctive area, both by the internal and external actors, a discussion of likely approaches would be of use. Some outside powers for their own strategic interests may view an area to be geopolitically important and hence try to foster a sense of regionalism among countries of the area. Or one bigger power in the region may like to take along the smaller neighbours under some grouping for its own interests. The last but ideal approach is when all states of an area with shared perception of certain goals and values identify themselves with that area. Accordingly, there would arise an element of regularity in all types of interaction among them. Therefore, a sense of regionalism encompasses static (physical proximity and "common soil"), dynamic (interactions) as well as psychological (sense of belonging) elements.

While dealing with the concept of regionalism, a distinction in situations between the developed and the developing countries has to be made. In the context of Europe, nationally developed political and socio-economic bases warranted the evolution of regionalism there, but lack of growth of adequate social and political institutions, economic backwardness and resource constraints in the Third World dictate a collective and regional approach as the better alternative for national as well as regional problem resolution. Unlike nation-states in the developed world, developing nations are yet to achieve their full statehood within their respective borders. Naturally, political considerations often become dominant factors in regional cooperation in the perception of the ruling elites. The growth of a healthy regionalism is impeded in the process.
Regionalism in South Asia suffers from a number of paradoxes. The countries of South Asia form an almost contiguous region, share significantly common cultural heritage and historical experiences. Secondly, the socio-political and economic imperatives at national level dictate the necessity of close and constructive interaction and cooperation. Yet, the countries are far apart at least perceptually. Where to start from to break the dilemma of nationalism vs regionalism? The greatest barrier in fostering a healthy regionalism in South Asia is the lack of a favourable environment and appropriate institutional mechanism for increased interaction, an essential prerequisite of regionalism. It is in this context that the role of SARC, a very recent initiative of cooperation in the socio-economic fields, in promoting regionalism in South Asia may be explored. While the very initiative and launching of SARC programmes reflect the willingness of the regional countries to forge, in effect, greater regionalism, much would depend on how SARC fares in future. With this end, the present paper reviews the state of regionalism in South Asia and then an attempt is made to explore as to how SARC can influence the various indicators of regionalism in the region.

Geographically, South Asia is well demarcated by physical features as any other region in the world. In the north, the land frontiers are demarcated by the Himalayan mountain ranges making South Asia, an expansive but contiguous landmass without any natural frontiers between them except for narrow water corridors between the Subcontinent on the one hand and Sri Lanka and Maldives on the other. The rationale for limiting the scope of the region to seven countries is historical and geopolitical. There are disagreements among scholars whether South Asia forms an independent geopolitical unit or it has just a derivative importance lying between West Asia and Southeast Asia (two regions, widely recognised for their geopolitical importance). Nevertheless, South Asia forms the littoral to the Indian Ocean and the region’s position astride its major chokepoints and trade routes.
Competition for control of these vital routes for trade and other geostrategic purposes has turned the Ocean into a theatre of superpower rivalry.

There are shared historical heritage and many commonalities in ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious spheres and value systems among the countries of the region. The living together for centuries in a geographically proximate landmass moulded for the people of the area many shared values as reflected in their way of life, philosophy and culture. Most of the countries of the region experienced the same legacy under British colonialism which also left a significant influence on the way of life and thinking in the region. The distribution of major religious groups all over the subcontinent is usually looked at as a negative factor because of the past conflicts between religious communities. But multi-religious nations also promote regular interaction among them. To this are added the dispersal over the region of sacred places and shrines of different religions which greatly fosters interaction among peoples of South Asia.

Similar is the case with linguistic ethnic communities. Although there are several hundred languages and dialects in the region, this diversity is significantly and operationally narrowed down by the fact that English is the language of communication between the ruling elites and educated sections of the population in the region. This has been reinforced by common political and administrative experience engendering liberal and democratic values. On the whole, the religious, linguistic, and above all, value systems' affinities promote social and cultural interaction among the peoples of different countries in South Asia.

Economically too, there are many commonalities among countries of South Asia and they are more on the need side than on the resource side. The region is still underdeveloped and forms one of the poorest belts in the world. The standard of living of the masses regionwide at a low level does not vary that much. All the economies are mainly agriculture-based, despite a reasonable degree of industrialisation in some of them. All the nations of
South Asia pursue, in varying degrees, a mixed-economy policy as their development strategy. All of them, although with varying intensity, are dependent on foreign assistance.

Further, the degree of complementarity in the economies of the region as viewed by some circles is not insignificant. Although the present level of intra-regional trade does not exceed 6-7% of the total, findings of a number of studies show clearly that there is enough scope for increasing the level of complementarity. Besides, the countries of the region have a comparative cost advantage in trading amongst themselves in view of the lower transport costs due to their geographic proximity. Further, the pattern of distribution of some natural resources, particularly the river waters make at least five countries mutually dependent, for the Himalayan river systems southward of Tibet encompasses these countries. As Pran Chopra writes, "there is no economic linkage or leveller between the Asean countries which has comparable potency. There is nothing that any Asean country can get or withhold from other Asean countries, or develop for the benefit of all Asean countries, which would affect their lives as can the granting or withholding of river rights by one South Asian country to another". It may also be argued that more people live in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Barak basin than in all of Africa or Latin America or western Europe and among these 400 million people constitute about 50 percent of the world's most poor.

Shared views on international issues are reflected in the fact that all of them are members of the UN, the Non-aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and some are members of the Commonwealth. They all are equally affected by the North-South divide and by the adverse consequences of the periodic crises in the global economy. The representatives of these countries have been observed to consult and interact to evolve a semblance of common stance on major global economic and political issues.

What follows from the preceding discussion is that a significant number of indicators of regionalism does exist in South Asia, thus making the region a reasonably "common soil" for greater coope-
ration among the neighbouring countries. Yet, the actual level of regionalism is quite low in South Asia as we have indicated earlier. What, then, stands in the way? An objective analysis of the obstructing factors would help us to assess the potential of SARC in the growth of regionalism in South Asia.

Unequal economic power base, to a great extent a fact of geography, seems to be a factor standing in the way of greater economic cooperation in the region. In terms of area, population, resource endowments and industrial and technological development, India is far ahead of the neighbouring countries. Mention may be made of two opposite viewpoints regarding economic cooperation among unequal partners in the region. The smaller and weaker countries are believed to have a feeling that in any regional cooperation venture, India with its relatively developed and vast manufacturing base will swamp the regional markets, thus strengthening her economic position further. On the other hand, some quarters view that, because economically India is much ahead of others in the region, there is little scope for mutually beneficial cooperation between India and her neighbours and that India has much to lose in any such move. As a result, the economic relations of the regional countries are directed towards the West and other regions.

The most critical factors in South Asian regionalism are the politico-security aspects of interstate relations in the region. Since the British withdrawal from the region, the countries witnessed great diversity in their internal political developments, although the peoples in general have a regard for the democratic system of government. India and Sri Lanka developed a political system through democratic means along western lines. Political developments in Pakistan, on the other hand, were marked by repeated constitutional crises, growing regional disparity and unsound development strategies which eventually led to the division of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign state. After independence, Maldives established a representative government. Nepal and Bhutan are, with var-
ying degrees, stable monarchies. This divergence in political systems and developments in a region should not necessarily entail disharmony. What matters most is the internal political instability and frequent leadership changes, the waves of which often spill over beyond a country’s border, thus vitiating the peaceful environment of the region.

Another factor related to internal political developments in the region is the problem of national integration and national harmony, for they still loom large in some countries of the region. As most of the countries in South Asia are multi-racial and multi-religious societies, any internal political instability engendered by the demand for greater autonomy and other rights is often charged with extra-territorial input. Expressions of concern over each other’s internal problems are viewed with great suspicion. Recent charges by Sri Lanka against India’s alleged help to Tamil separatists or India’s allegations against Pakistan of helping the Sikhs in Punjab turmoil are examples. Public recriminations against this alleged extranational input in domestic upheavals only serve against the evolution of significant political regionalism in South Asia.

The centrality of India’s geographic position in the region and following from it her approach in dealings with smaller neighbours appear to be a key factor in the evolution of a harmonious and confidence-building environment in the region. All the smaller countries have land or maritime boundary with India. The apprehension about her predominance is all the more accentuated by the existence of unresolved bilateral issues with India. On the other hand, India’s policy of dealings with the neighbours only at a bilateral level fuels this apprehension. Optimum utilisation of water resources in the region is a case in point. Many scholars including some Indians suggest a multilateral approach to this issue, for they base their arguments on the fact that the river systems flowing from the Himalayas through the countries of the region cannot be divided, but are only to be shared. But India has so far not reacted favourably to multila-
teral cooperation in this regard and preferred to deal only individually with these countries. As a result, there is a deadlock in water talks between India and Bangladesh, with inevitable strains on their relations. Here it is worth quoting an Indian scholar: "In concentrating on a small, rather limited and unidimensional aspect of the whole, India has lost itself in little arguments and petty fears. The country's own long-term and larger interests have been jeopardised in consequence. India, Bangladesh and Nepal must be able to think big and boldly to break the deadlock and win a far greater prize". But lack of any significant change in India's posture continues to work as major impediment to confidence-building not only bilaterally.

As a matter of fact, the factors discussed above working against the evolution of political regionalism in South Asia find their cumulative expression in a divergent perception over security threats emanating from within the region. Some circles in the smaller nations feel that India with her vast size, superior military and economic power always aims at regional domination. This threat-perception relating to India is linked not only to the geostrategic location of these states but also to pronouncements of various kinds by Indian leadership stressing India's strategic link with some smaller neighbours. One scholar observed: "Perceived threat might be overt, directly related to the independence and integrity of a state regime (e.g., Sikkim in 1973-75, Nepal in 1960-62, Bangladesh in 1975), or it might be covert, related to indirect pressure on them. India's conception that the small states of the region lie within her security sphere has entailed the corollary that these states must subserve her security interests and move within the India orbit."

On the other hand, some quarters in India view that the smaller neighbours uniting among themselves and through external linkages want to bar India from playing her rightful role commensurate with her power and position in the regional as well as global context. As evidence of hostile attitude of the neighbours, the three wars India had to fight with Pakistan and one with China during a span of less than three decades are cited. That is why the
the leadership in India always tends to view with suspicion any arms acquisition, particularly by Pakistan. India's fear towards her neighbours' military capability seems to be somewhat exaggerated. Prof Huq, former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, is of the view that "So far as India's fear of the neighbours is concerned, according to all objective analyses, the combined military strength of the neighbours of India even with modern arms that might have been acquired by Pakistan, could pose no serious threat to India's security." Hence, the concern expressed by India from time to time about the neighbours' foreign and defence policies is only likely to fuel the suspicion of the smaller countries towards India.

The self-sustaining process of suspicion and misgivings as mentioned above is complicated by external input. The relationship of most of the countries of South Asia, particularly of Pakistan and India with external powers can be said to be, although in varying degrees, a function of their intra-regional relations for economic, political and security reasons. Since the mid-fifties Pakistan with a view to maintaining a parity with India cultivated close relations with the US and after the 1962 Indo-China war, also with China. After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, this trend received a further impetus. Besides, Pakistan forming the western flank of South Asia tends to consider herself as a part of West Asia. On the other hand, India as a founding member of Non-aligned Movement initially tried to establish a policy of equidistance from the two superpowers. But, developments at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s in the region and beyond accompanied by India's policy preference made her a Soviet ally. Since the mid-seventies Bangladesh in her policy of balancing the earlier Indo-Soviet tilt started cultivating close relations with the Middle East and improved her relations with the US and the West. Nepal now successfully plays a balancing game between her two giant neighbours—India and China and advocates Nepal to be a Zone of Peace. All along Sri Lanka, except short-term strains, maintained good relations with China, USSR and the USA. The present Sri Lanka government pursues a more
open policy towards the US and the West. Until recently she made overtures to become a member of Asean, projecting herself as a part of Southeast Asia. The kingdom of Bhutan is taking initiatives to diversify her foreign relations. The Maldives, a relatively new sovereign entity in the region is actively involved in determining her foreign policy directions. All indications suggest that the Maldives, a Muslim country will have a foreign policy oriented towards the Middle East and the West.

This alignment pattern conditions, to a great extent, the countries’ outlook towards issues directly affecting peace and stability of the region. Although India did not support Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, her ambivalent approach towards its withdrawal or for example, her recognition of the Heng Samrin Government of Kampuchea clearly put her in a position of isolation from the other countries in the region. In like manner, although there is a verbal consensus over the superpowers’ withdrawal from the Indian Ocean and making it a Zone of Peace, there are underlying differences in the regional countries’ national perspectives, linked to their misgivings about the intentions of the bigger neighbours in the event of an eventual vacuum.

Thus, the intra-regional relationship and their extension beyond serve as formidable barrier in the way of evolving a shared perception over issues and developments within and outside the region. To this are added the recent but continued unhappy events in some countries tending to have spill-over effects beyond the border. And this naturally invites mutual recriminations. As Dieter Braun has observed: “Over the course of the last 3 years there have been two trends in S. Asia, diametrically opposed to each other: on the one side there has been a spate of conflicts, partly of a new and partly of a latent character. On the other, one could observe an effort to push back or to set aside such separating issues and to try out selective cooperation, with a view, among other things, to stress the common South Asian identity vis-a-vis the outside world.”13 Let us turn to the second trend and its potential for creating an environment leading to regional harmony in its wide sense. For this we come to the context of SARC.
The formal launching of the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) by the Foreign Ministers of the seven countries last year opened up for the first time a new horizon of interstate cooperation among the regional countries and augured the emergence of South Asia as a regional entity within the international system. It is indeed, a testimony to the far-sighted vision and statesmanship of the leaders of the countries in the region that they did not let their objectivity of reason to be shrouded by the difficulties and problems which so far strained and may continue in the future to strain interstate relations in the region.

Regional cooperation within the framework of SARC is intended to grow step by step in economic and cultural fields and a modest beginning was considered pragmatic in the prevailing conditions of South Asia. However, in due course cooperation based on mutuality of interest in those fields is sure to yield tangible benefits for all countries of the region as pointed out in the foregoing discussions. Gradually the areas of cooperation in other fields such as trade, industrial joint ventures, joint harnessing of natural resources and other fields mutually agreed upon can be expanded. Bangladesh in its working paper circulated among countries of South Asia suggested 'Market Promotion' in some items such as tea, jute and cotton. Initially, if joint market promotion policies abroad for these vital products could have been pursued, then some tangible gains such as reducing promotional costs, taking full advantage of measures under GSP and additional guarantees for further market expansion at remunerative prices would have been achieved. But, due to some countries' opposition, the field of trade was not included in the areas of cooperation already envisaged. The apprehensions behind this have been discussed above. But, as the Bangladesh working paper states, "the uneven level of development should, if anything, inspire on the one hand the less developed to catch up with their more fortunate neighbours, while on the other hand encourage the more developed to help to narrow the gap existing between them. The process will be
one of gradual evolution that will assist the relatively less developed
to overcome their existing problems so that in the long run a sys-
tem of preference becomes unnecessary.”

It may be mentioned
that the economies of the EEC countries were developed and highly
competitive, but through a planned effort they gradually could
expand the level of complementarity.

Besides, together with trade expansion in the items each country
presently can offer the others, new areas can be created through
production planning in the countries of the region on the basis of
comparative advantage. For this, India needs abandoning its
policy of self-sufficiency in respect of manufactured consumer
goods and jointly plan with other countries of the region for
the supply of such consumer goods as the latter can produce to
serve the regional market. These other countries on their part
may meet some of their requirements by imports from India instead
of countries outside the region. In like manner, joint industrial
ventures to mutual benefit can be developed regionwide. This
can also be done through a well-planned policy of initiating a
part-production system in each country of the region, so that each
one can become a producer and consumer at the same time on a
regional basis. This regionwide production-planning approach
has a bright prospect in view of the fact that South Asia with
almost a billion people is potentially a vast production and
consumption area. Politically, this policy contains in itself
the seeds of growing understanding and amity through increasing
interdependence of the states thus acting as a force for continued
political stability in the region.

Another area gradually to be covered through the regional
cooperation is the joint harnessing of the natural resources in the
region—particularly river waters and energy resources. In view of
the fact that agriculture is still the mainstay of the economies
in the region, the abundant hydro-power and irrigation potential
as the biggest economic resource can play a vital role, if properly
harnessed and developed. An optimum utilisation of this vast
resource is possible only if cooperation in this field takes place at
a regional level because of the reasons discussed above.
But it would be naive to deny the influence of political relations on the economic and cultural cooperation to progress at a level and at a pace desired. As a matter of fact, one of the important objectives of the initiators of SARC was to create through regional cooperation in economic and cultural fields an environment conductive to confidence building and generation of friendly cooperation in the political field. This has been well recognised in the Declaration of the South Asian Regional Cooperation and the Joint Communiqué issued at the lunching meeting of SARC in August 1983 in New Delhi. One of the specific objectives of SARC is “to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another’s problems.”

In similar vein the late Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Gandhi while inaugurating the meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Delhi clearly stated, “At a political level, this is an important step in the development of mutual relations in our region . . . . The world can survive and progress only with strong sense of the unity of humankind and tolerance of the right to political diversity. Within this framework we seven must conduct our affairs so as to eliminate tension and promote greater peace and stability in our region.”

Now the question is—how within the framework of SARC can the elimination of tension and promotion of greater peace and stability in South Asia be attained? This question is examined below:

Firstly, the goal of political cooperation, although implicit, can be materialised, as discussed above, through mutual benefits yielded by economic cooperation in the fields already envisaged in the Integrated Programme of Action and its gradual expansion into newer areas. What is required for attaining the full potential of regionalism through SARC is a shift in threat perception, allegedly emanating from extra-territorial sources to the individual country’s internal ones. “Ironically enough, there is still not an adequate perception of the threats to the security of the region.
which lie within each country." Combating these threats collectively is a challenge that can be met most effectively through regional cooperation.

Secondly, the institutional arrangements already envisaged for SARC are likely to yield tangible and intangible benefits for member countries both at the economic and political levels. The Male Foreign Ministers’ conference of July 1984 already decided to hold the summit meeting in Dhaka sometime in late 1985. Then, the communique issued at the end of the August 1983 Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Delhi stipulated a yearly get-together at their level. In the already institutionalised form, three types of Committees, Standing Committee, Technical Committee and Coordination Committee at the official, technical and implementational levels would be established. In carrying the programme forward, concomitant involvement of other bodies and centres of expertise and research would automatically be entailed. As a result, rational and functional distribution of issue areas both at the vertical and horizontal levels among the member countries would take place. All these human interactions regionwide at different levels on a regular basis would be likely to serve as a process for cross-polination of minds, resulting in increased appreciation and appraisal of each other’s problems, needs and aspirations.

Thirdly, although SARC did not envisage as yet the establishment of any permanent secretariat, an official secretariat even on a small scale appears to be an imperative for further progress. Such institutionalisation represented equally by all the member countries would be essential if regional cooperation is to be developed in a meaningful way. A secretariat under SARC with a neutral approach may initiate and implement programmes of cooperation among member countries, monitor the progress in implementation and act as a service and information centre for member countries. Similarly, it can constantly monitor world developments having impact on our region and provide professional support to the member states of SARC in their nego-
tations with other countries, both developed and developing, and also other regional bodies and international organisations.

Fourthly, the proliferation of regional bodies under SARC and participation in those by the member countries are expected to gradually inculcate among the leadership concerned a sense of belonging to the region, thus widening the psychological horizon from the national to the regional level. The interaction of SARC as a regional grouping with other countries, regional groupings and international organisations will reinforce the new reference make-up, such as "we from SARC" as is usually done by the EEC, Arab League, OAU, or ASEAN member counties. Thus the changed reference make-up would gradually strengthen the sense of regionalism among the countries of South Asia while also promoting their interests as nation-states.

Fifthly, the SARC Declaration accepted the provision that "decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity." This principle of unanimity would ensure an equal say for all member countries irrespective of size and strength. Such a decision-making mechanism is important in regional specifics of South Asia for positive reasons: (a) Any proposal or projects to be undertaken for acceptance or cooperation at the regional level would have to be preceded by its indepth study with objectivity of judgement and a clear recognition by all the members that the proposed venture is likely to be mutually beneficial. This would automatically call for increased level of diplomacy and interaction, both at the official and technical levels, among the countries of South Asia; (b) The principle would allay the suspicion, if any, that SARC as a grouping is a "ganging up" of the smaller neighbours against the biggest one or the latter's possible domination over the former. This will naturally help in confidence-building, thus increasing the level of understanding and amity at the political level.

Sixthly, despite the other general provision agreed upon in the Declaration stipulating that "bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations", the already decided yearly
political level meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Seven will provide regular opportunity to breathe fresh air in bilateral relations and generate new initiatives and constructive discussions among the member countries of SARC. This positive process would be reinforced by summit meetings in the region, if decided in future, to be held at regular intervals. An increased level of political understanding and amity in South Asia will facilitate the peaceful resolution of bilateral issues, still remaining un-resolved and straining the interstate relations in the region. The leadership in South Asia should not lose sight of the fact that countries with longer and darker period of discords and conflicts are now partners in fruitful regional cooperation. The EEC and the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China bear testimony to this. In like manner, as a result of greater interaction at the political level, the horizon of commonality of interests that already exists among the South Asian countries, as reflected in their shared views on major world political and economic issues, would be extended over the regional level.

In fine, it can realistically be expected that with the necessary momentum provided through continuing support of the governments and peoples of the member countries of SARC, growing economic cooperation and the resultant increased interdependence will gradually attain a form and level so to act as a catalytic force for fostering a real sense of regionalism in South Asia and thereby create an environment of peace and stability in the region.
NOTES


2. Ibid., p. 510.


5. Ibid., p. 241.


17. Ibid., p. 191.


DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS:
ISSUES RAISED

1. The emergence of regional subsystems is very much linked with the bipolarity in international relations and hence the international system no doubt impinges upon the regional system. But the fact that the idea of SARC had originated and progress so far was made from within the region without participation and patronage of any outside power holds great potentials for SARC.

2. Mutual suspicion and mistrust stand out strikingly as an important bottleneck against regionalism in South Asia and the success of SARC depends greatly on minimisation of these. Tangible headway in giving a meaningful concrete shape to the concept of SARC clearly depends on a greater demonstration of goodwill and respect for mutuality of benefits in dealing with problems of bilateral discord including sharing of water resources. The process of SARC and for that matter regional peace and stability is directly related with the growth of multilateralism in handling inter-state problems in South Asia.

3. In order to be more effective and meaningful, regional co-operation organisation must enjoy the support of the respective peoples within the region. There is a great need of taking SARC beyond the corridors of Foreign Ministries for getting the mandate of public opinion. Greater interaction among different peoples of the region at different levels would contribute to the deepening of the SARC roots.

4. SARC has a great potential to contribute to the strengthening of the position of South Asia as a region in international forums and thus place South Asia in a better bargaining position in relation to issues included in North-South and South-South negotiations.
5. There may be divergences in respective national ideologies and objectives of the member-states; but, this should not act as a serious impediment to the process of joining hands for working to achieve shared goals and objectives. While these objectives can hardly be expected to be attained overnight, as indicated by the experience in regional cooperation elsewhere, the opinion-making elites of the region should cooperate in generating a political will to step up efforts to give a functional shape to regional cooperation in conformity with the objective conditions obtaining in the region. The SARC experimentation must reflect the specific circumstances prevailing in the region specially from the point of view of inter-state relations in the region and should not necessarily follow any particular model.

6. A favourable big power perception of SARC is not a necessary condition for regional co-operation in South Asia. Big power attitude is only a part of the overall external environment. Other international and regional organisations also play a part in satisfying the needs and aspirations of a country or group of countries and thus condition the functioning of regional cooperation. The presence of the critical minimum initiatives for the growth of SARC from within the region are what is of paramount importance specially in the context of prevailing inter-country differences in their perception of external environment.

7. It may not be surprising that there is hardly any regional view of the external world as opposed to the common position often taken by South Asian states on different issues in different international forums, which are more-frequently-than-not arrived at autonomously rather than through mutual consultations. The perceptual differences manifest themselves very strikingly in the case of external threats to the region or countries of the region. As a corollary, external forces affecting the region are not frequently comprehended on a regional plane, but are seen from national interest and concern as perceived by each country.

8. The danger of assigning primacy to the political factors currently influencing inter-state relation lies in that (a) it virtually
makes the member-states captives of the past, (b) overlooks the historic reality of the interacting and interlocking character of political and economic factors' bearing on external relations and (c) under-rates the potential of political cooperation through growing economic interdependence. A better way would be to rank a problem on the basis of its intrinsic merit, irrespective of whether it is political or not.

9. Regionalism is not an end in itself. It is only one of the means for greater cooperation among states. While it is hard to expect that SARC can really advance banking exclusively upon non-contentious issues and bypassing problems of mutual discord, 'cautious optimism' is a virtue which is very useful for the success of SARC. With such an approach the countries may be able to reduce the differences and work out a reasonably effective structure of cooperation for greater and enduring welfare of the peoples in the region.
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PANELS AND COMMITTEES

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3. **Panel of Rapporteurs**

4. **Panel of Moderators**

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