Before dealing with the topic of regional security, I would like first to dwell on the concept of national security which I think is in need of a little clarification. As is well known the security parameters of region a could be regarded as a composite index of its constituent nations, state of national security. The concept of national security has always been understood in both broad and narrow senses. Broadly, it is so defined as to involve almost all aspects of national life, including security in military, political, economic and social fields: narrowly, the concept relates only to political and military security of a country or more specifically, to its defence capabilities and conditions. Traditionally, the concept of national security in the narrow sense of the word is more prevalent; in other words, among the various factors effecting national security, people tend to attach more importance to political and military ones.

However, even the traditional concept never fails to ignore the economic factor, because national economy constantly carries vital implications for national security, the former functioning both as the basis to build up and the means to safeguard the latter. It must be noted here that, along this way of thinking, the economic factor is still regarded as subject or servient to national security, whereas no intrinsic connection is established between the two.

Yet, changes in international relations after the World War II, especially since beginning of the 1980s, have fundamentally transformed people’s thinking. With the prevalence of detente in international life, people put more and more importance on economic security rather than
military security. As argued by the US Defence Advisory Council in its report published at the end of 1989, "We should no longer consider the problem of national security simply from military viewpoint and must view the economic interests as its important component". It can be said that the problem of economy has now grown into the problem of national security. Not only that with the lapse of time, economic security will most possibly become ever more glaring and will have increasingly greater influence on the changing patterns of international relations.

II

Since the end of the World War II, the Asian-Pacific region has undergone a long process of turbulence, disintegration and realignment. Here various contradictions have interwoven into a dazzling mosaic and major powers interests have been so inextricably overlapped that, although generally speaking a roughly bipolar pattern of confrontation gradually emerged on the scene, the demarcation line between the East West spheres of military and political influence is less clear-cut than in Europe. The 1980s, with its latter half in particular, has seen radical changes taking place throughout the region in the direction of multi-polarization. The bipolar pattern in the region has headed for an irretrievable collapse.

Besides, a cooling breeze is blowing across the hot-spots of the Asia-Pacific, as could be seen from the Soviet's withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, the political solution to the Cambodia issue, the multi-channelled/levelled dialogue across the Korean Peninsula, (two sides of Korea signed a reconciliation and non-aggression agreement in Mid-December 1991 in Seoul), the normalization of Sino-Soviet relationship, the improvement of Sino-Indian relations and the resumption of Sino-Indonesian diplomatic ties. At the same time, some countries and areas of this region have risen rapidly as economic top-notchers. To list just a few: Japan has ascended to be a towering econo-giant to world's surpriser; the "Four Little Dragons" are sharpening their economic claws; the ASEAN countries are rousing themselves to catch up; India has made remarkable headway in solidifying its economic might; China has achieved great success in its drive
for restructuring and opening to the outside world, etc. Throughout the 1980s the average rate of economic growth of the Asian-Pacific region continued to head the list of the world, with its output value accounting for more than half of the world's total and its trade volume accounting for 1/3 of that of the world. In the whole region, economic co-operation and exchanges are thriving in various forms, with regional or bilateral cooperative groupings being either formed or maturized or deliberated upon. These favorable developments furnish this region with a solid basis to launch a march for a more pacific, more stable and more prosperous future.

Of course, these fortunate tides will not belie the fact that elements of confrontation have not vanished completely, some even occasionally intensifying into daggers-drawn conflicts. Yet there is no gainsaying the Asian-Pacific region has entered into a new era marked by a universal cry for denouncing rivalry in favor of dialogue, and for promoting détente against tension.

As for South Asia, after the Gulf War and especially the rapid changes in the Soviet Union, the rivalry between the US and USSR in South Asia has basically come to an end. Afghan issue is an example in point. The US and the Soviet Union agreed in mid-September last year to stop all military shipments to the warring sides by January 1992. In November 1991, an Afghan Mujahideen delegation went to Moscow to talk with the government officials of Soviet Union and the two sides reached some accords. We can't say the civil war in Afghanistan will stop soon, but it is certain that one of the big obstacles on the way to the peaceful solution of the Afghan problem has been removed. It is interesting to point out that the close relationship between US and Pakistan and between the Soviet Union and India have changed a great deal. Such changes may be helpful to the relaxation of tension in this region.

Therefore, the external security environment in South Asia is gradually improving.

III

As a region, South Asia is characterized by the great disparity in the size, population, economy, as well as military capability of its constituent states. For a long time, the region
has been divided by many unresolved issues. There are a lot of disputes between India and its neighbouring countries. Kashmir was the theater of operation in all the three major Indo-Pak wars (1947, 1965 and 1971). Besides, New Delhi has been accusing Islamabad of aiding the violent Sikhs in their campaign for a separate state in India's state in India's East Punjab, while Pakistan feels that it is being made a scapegoat for India's internal turmoil. Pakistan also strongly believes that the dissidents in Sind and Northwest Frontier Province have India's support and sympathy. The more dangerous aspect of Indo-Pak rivalry is their continued arms race, especially regarding to their nuclear programmes and potentials. As for the relations between India and Bangladesh, the most outstanding problem is about the sharing of Ganga waters. Nepal's relations with India also remained under considerable strain last year, and what not. All these are unstable factors in this region.

But generally speaking, the relations between India and its neighbours have much improved since the beginning of the 1990s. The talk between the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan in November 1991 got some progress. At the same time, an unofficial seminar called "Indo-Pak dialogue" was held last year and will be held again within two months. The Indo-Bangladesh relations is getting better. On December 6, 1991, India and Nepal signed a series of agreements on bilateral cooperation. Thus the relations between the two countries have normalized completely. It seems the new leaders of South Asian countries have fully realized that it is impossible to solve problems between them by pressure of force and the reasonable solution can finally be found through amicable consultations conducted in a spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation.

The most important factor in recent years is that all the countries in South Asia are now concentrating their efforts on economic development. Since its formation the Narasimha Rao government has taken measures to carry out long-term economic reforms and has made great progress in introducing foreign fund and high technology. In Bangladesh, its new economic policies have been appreciated by international community. As Prime Minister Khaleda Zia pointed out,
Bangladesh's main point in its economic strategy are: human resource development beginning with the removal of illiteracy and appropriate population-control measures; increased employment opportunities, particularly for the poorer 50% of the population mostly residing in the rural areas; priority to the development of agriculture; promotion of private enterprise based on competitive efficiency and emphasis on export-oriented industries. The same changes are happening in Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. We needn't mention those one by one. In sum, economic development ensures political stability and vice versa. No doubt, the new trend in South Asia will be beneficial to the emergence of a favourable security environment in the region.

Seven South Asian nations, in their desire for promoting cooperation among themselves on a regional basis, formed an association called SAARC in December 1985. It has made some progress in political, social and cultural fields, but it is at a standstill in the economic and commercial sphere. As the relations among the seven nations are getting much better, it is believed that mistrust and misperceptions will disappear gradually and cooperation will gain momentum in all fields.

Conclusion

The prospect of the security situation in South Asia in 1990s will be brighter than in the 1980s while some stabilizing factors still exist, which need to be overcome through common effort and further cooperation among the South Asian countries.