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Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union

Editor

Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

CONSORTIUM OF SOUTH ASIAN THINK TANKS

COSATT

BRIDGING POLICY RESEARCH IN SOUTH ASIA

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Published by

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)

Consortium of South Asian Think Tank (COSATT)

www.kas.org

www.cosatt.org

First Published, November, 2014

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Printed at:

Modern Printing Press

Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tel: 4253195, 4246452

Email: modprint@mail.com.np

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Preface

This is a pioneering work on a topic in which very little has been written. A regional conference on the theme of “Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union” was organized on July 15-16, 2014 in Kathmandu by the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS) in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) under the auspices of the Consortium of South Asian Think-tanks (COSATT) which is a network of some of the leading think-tanks in South Asia. The COSATT was set-up in 2008 with the objective of bringing together some of the prominent think tanks in the region and as part of that effort, annual conferences are held to address topical issues facing the region. The COSATT has been fulfilling a long-felt need for the think-tanks and research institutions to come together to forge close partnerships and better ties for the objectives of promoting regional cooperation and building peace in our region. The need for prominent South Asian thinkers, academics, former SAARC Secretary Generals and think-tank representatives to come together in a single platform to suggest ways to make SAARC an important engine for promoting mutual understanding and boosting regional economic growth hardly needs to be underscored. Taking cue from the successful cooperative endeavors in EU and the ASEAN, people of South Asia too have been increasingly vocal about the need to rise above narrow nationalistic sentiments and focus on the larger interests of this vast, vibrant and dynamic region. This publication with speeches and papers of some of the most experienced personalities will be useful to policy makers as we prepare for a historic 18th Summit in Kathmandu which is taking place after a hiatus of three years.

We would like to thank Hon’ble Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal Mr. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey for accepting our invitation to be the chief guest at the conference and for delivering a speech. A special thanks also to the Secretary General of SAARC Arjun Bahadur Thapa to have encouraged the track-II of South Asia in the works that we are doing. All of us collectively believe that our future has to be a region

connected by physical linkages as well as through ideas, individuals and initiatives within and beyond South Asia because there is a perceivable shift of traditional patterns of state to state relations as civil society organizations, think-tanks, universities, women networks, chambers of commerce and industries and especially the media of SAARC region feel no longer constrained to exchange views and ideas about the imperative to come together for the sake of our region. This conference made an attempt to develop a workable framework focusing on a broad collection of common challenges needed to be resolved - from non-tariff barriers to psychological barriers that have held up the enormous prospects of the future. An extempore speech by Amb. Ong Keng Yong, former ASEAN Secretary General was a hallmark of the event which has been incorporated in this volume.

All of us are aware that South Asia has the potential and all the necessary ingredients in terms of human and natural resources to work for the development of this region. Our Association has come to epitomize the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of our region for peace, progress and prosperity. It has touched all areas of human activity and now the time has come to start delivering. 2015 will be the dawn of a third decade of SAARC. It is high time that it starts delivering on the pledges and promises that it has made to the people of the region.

There are surely a lot of hurdles to overcome. We have to be candid among ourselves that South Asia is one of the least connected regions in the world. Political and security issues have long impacted on regional cooperation endeavors even as trade, issues of connectivity and easing of travels have become victims in the face of bilateral problems. But the South Asian track-II is a robust and enthusiastic group of people from every profession that have time and again demanded that SAARC must become a flexible alliance that is effective and efficient. It is a heartening fact to be noted that an increasing number of track-II representatives in our region are actually track one and half who have just retired from diplomatic service, military or other branches of government and through their experiences and knowledge, we hope to bring in workable ways to move forward on the path of larger, deeper

and faster integration. Here we must not feel shy to seek assistance from SAARC Observer nations. I am extremely happy that two former Secretary Generals of SAARC Nihal Rodrigo and Ahmed Saleem presented papers at the conference based on their experiences and shed light on a range of critical issues.

Today, all of our member states are functioning democracies with periodic elections and also most of our governments enjoy strong mandate of the people, which can be a positive factor in fast-tracking delayed regional endeavors. With the formation of a new government in India and the attendance of SAARC heads of states and governments at the inaugural ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there is an atmosphere of positivism in the region. His first bilateral visit was to Bhutan and the next to Nepal. The region is hopeful of the same spirit of shared interests that he has pursued at the bilateral level to be translated with a top most priority for the SAARC.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not thank from the bottom of my heart the support I received from the out-going head of the KAS regional program-SAARC Mr. Tomislav Delinic. I am grateful for the encouragement to hold this event and to bring out this timely publication from Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister, Director of the Political Dialogue-Asia Program of the KAS.

I would also like to thank all the other paper presenters, member institutions of the COSATT network and local participants of the conference as well as my team members at the CSAS-COSATT Mahesh Bhatta and Dipika Dhakal for their hard work. I hope this modest endeavor will be appreciated by the readers.

Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey

Kathmandu, Nov. 2014

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**Inaugural Address by Chief Guest
Hon. Mr. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey,
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal**

It is my pleasure to attend this inaugural session of the conference of the Consortium of South Asian Think-Tanks (COSATT). I thank the organizers for organizing this important event and providing me with the opportunity to be present here and share my view with you all. As SAARC has upheld the participatory approach, involving private sector in its development efforts, such kind of interactions become more meaningful. It is in this context that the role of the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks can be vital. I think the theme of the conference, "Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union," is timely and relevant, particularly in the context of the 18th SAARC Summit being held in Nepal in November this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While establishing SAARC, our leaders had envisioned, way back in 1985, a peaceful, stable and prosperous South Asia through cooperative and collaborative engagements among the countries of this region. The welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improvement in the quality of their lives through economic growth, social progress and cultural development was made the cardinal objective of the Association. Again, it was in Kathmandu, during the eleventh SAARC Summit held in 2002, that our leaders had taken another step declaring their resolve to develop SAARC into an economic union.

Now, SAARC has come of age, with almost three decades of its existence. When we look back, at the past activities of SAARC, we see that there are achievements to its credit. It has established important institutions and mechanisms, and has developed necessary legal frameworks. Continuous efforts are being made for expanding

cooperation covering a number of areas. The Sensitive Lists of products for the purpose of SAFTA are gradually being reduced. Close to a dozen projects on poverty alleviation have been carried out which have helped alleviate poverty in the region where one third population still live below poverty line. There are other efforts in different areas.

We are aware of the views aired from different quarters that SAARC has not been able to live up to the expectations of the peoples. We also know that the region is lagging behind other regions in many respects. This is due to a host of challenges it has been facing. Acute poverty, low economic growth, lack of basic developmental infrastructure and proper connectivity, crises of food and energy, and adverse effects of climate change have come on the way of regional cooperation as daunting obstacles. The free trade area is yet to materialize. The volume of intra-regional trade and investment is negligible. Similarly, the South Asian countries are confronted with the problems of terrorism and trans-national crimes, trafficking of drugs and women and children, and natural disasters of various types. Due to lack of sufficient financial resources, the regional cooperation mechanism has not been able to implement projects that directly benefit the peoples.

Trade is an important area under SAARC framework, but we have to continuously pursue liberalization of tariff rates and elimination of para-tariff and non-tariff barriers. Concrete measures are also required for enhancing trade facilitation with strong transport infrastructure and transit facilities, especially for the landlocked members of this grouping. Similarly, the South Asian region, which is homogeneous in many respects, is still not properly connected, especially in terms of air links, roads and railways. Physical connectivity is a pre-requisite for greater volume of trade, investment and mobility of peoples. Therefore, connectivity should be a focused area of cooperation. High priority is to be accorded to the development of the region's enormous potential of energy, including hydropower. Besides, cementing the people-to-people relations is an important vehicle for strengthening regional solidarity, which fosters South Asian identity. Enhanced activities with regard to

the promotion of tourism, exhibitions on art and culture, exchange of visits from different walks of life, sharing of experiences and ideas, etc. are important steps in this regard.

The challenges that the South Asian region faces should not mean that the region's prospect is limited. We in fact live in a region with huge potentials. We share homogeneous culture, tradition, values and beliefs. With the availability of resources of various types, the prospect of economic growth and development is enormous. Given such binding factors and common strength, there is every room for creating a vibrant and highly integrated South Asia. However, the realization of the region's potentials will depend on how we move forward in the days to come. Therefore, we need to accelerate our efforts with greater synergy and dynamism, in a spirit of mutual trust, cooperation and interdependence. It is the feeling of regionness, the *spirit de corps*, that truly helps consolidate the bond among the member countries and make the regional cooperation dynamic and fruitful.

As a member committed to regional cooperation, Nepal has been sincerely adhering to the principles and objectives of SAARC since its very inception. It is Nepal's firm belief that the regional cooperation is the prerequisite for facing common challenges, tapping available resources and shaping the destiny of our peoples. What a single nation cannot do alone, can be done collectively. Nepal stands ready to join hands with other fellow SAARC members in the common drive for the region's peace, progress, and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our peoples want tangible benefits from our Association, which they can enjoy in their daily lives. Launching concrete regional and sub-regional projects in economic, infrastructural, social, cultural, educational and scientific fields could bring our peoples further closer. For this to make happen, mobilization of financial resources for the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), especially for its Economic and Infrastructure Windows, has become a great and an urgent necessity.

As I mentioned above, regional cooperation under SAARC is marked by proliferation of activities, virtually covering every area. Expansion of the areas of cooperation is important; but given the limited resources and capability, it becomes difficult to achieve desired outcome in such a wide range of areas. We, therefore, have felt a need for a focused approach. I think we should move towards deepening, rather than expanding, our cooperation, which would concentrate our activities in the major areas of interest to the Member States. I believe that our common endeavour will make the regional arrangement successful in addressing the challenges we are facing. It is ultimately the countries of this region which have to make the regional cooperation effective, efficient, and result-oriented through collective resolve in order to fulfill the expectations of the peoples of this region as outlined in the Charter. It is my firm belief that the upcoming SAARC Summit will be able to add further momentum to this process.

It is said, "All that glitters is not gold," but I believe this Consortium with deepening thoughts and broadening minds will glitter in the days to come and guide the region in the 21st century to lead the world.

I hope that the outcome of this two-day conference would be useful, especially for those who are involved in the task of strengthening South Asia's better future through regional cooperation. I would, once again, like to extend thanks to the organizers, and wish the seminar a great success.

Thank you.

Address by
Mr. Shanker Das Bairagi,
Officiating Foreign Secretary,
Government of Nepal

It is my great pleasure to be with you here this evening. This occasion marks the commencement of the conference in Kathmandu tomorrow on the theme of "Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union" organized by the Centre for South Asian Studies and Konrad Adenaur Stiftung. I thank Dr. Pandey and Dr. Hofmeister for inviting me to this programme and providing me with this opportunity to speak a few words. I am glad to note that South Asian think tanks have developed rich tradition of sharing ideas on important issues facing the region.

Talking about the theme of the Conference, given South Asia's current realities and the level of integration, the theme of the Conference may sound highly ambitious but, in my view, it is a desirable discourse in an interconnected and interdependent world we live. Realizing a South Asian Union would require enormous amount of political will, and a right mix of policies, institutions and resources at national and regional levels. We all are aware that it took almost half a century for Western Europe to reach this level. Yet, it is not perfect. Recent crisis in euro zone and its impact on the evolution of the Union is a glaring example.

SAARC was established three decades ago with the prime objective of enhancing the welfare of the peoples in this region. Though a late comer in the arena of regional cooperation, the lifetime of this association is the witness of progress made in a number of areas such as trade, poverty alleviation, regional connectivity, cultural development, and people-to-people contacts.

Here are some of the achievements that go to SAARC's credit:

- Necessary institutions, legal frameworks, and mechanisms have been established
- Slowly but steadily trade liberalization process, which is one of the core areas, is moving forward for the realization of free trade in the region
- Close to a dozen projects on poverty alleviation are being implemented in Member States through the financial resources of the SAARC Development Fund
- Agreements on motor vehicles and railways are in the pipelines, which could significantly contribute to enhance regional connectivity
- Culture, sports, art, literature, etc. of South Asia are being promoted through various programmes
- People-to-people contacts have increased through visits and sharing of ideas and information
- The private sector has been involved in the regional cooperation process with the establishment of the South Asia Forum, a public private partnership initiative, especially for the inputs of the private sector to make SAARC outcome-oriented.
- Civil society organizations have also been engaged in promoting regional spirit and togetherness

However, we cannot remain satiated with what we have achieved so far. Despite some achievements, the process of regional cooperation has remained rather slow. Moreover, substance, scale and speed (3s) of regional cooperation under SAARC do not match South Asian potentials. There are compelling reasons for meaningful regional cooperation. But, business as usual will not be sufficient if SAARC is to fully exploit vast South Asian potentials. Peoples of this region expect tangible results from SAARC activities. It is only through cooperative and collaborative approach that we can make SAARC realize its objectives for the benefit of the peoples of our region. In this context, I wish to state the following:

- South Asia is one of the vibrant regions of the world. Its richness in terms of human resources with young and dynamic population, diverse and beautiful geography with resources of water, gas, marine products, etc., and common tradition, culture and values provide a sound basis for regional integration. These constitute enabling factors. Against this backdrop, the future activities of SAARC should be directed towards creating a strong and developed South Asian region.
- SAARC has come of age, as it is about to complete the existence of three decades. The regional grouping has established its foundation. Now, it is time to focus on delivery. Delivery of results on the grounds helps enhance legitimacy and build confidence to move forward. Therefore, SAARC needs to launch activities that generate outcome for the welfare of the peoples of this region.
- Financial resource is the key to any development activity. As of now, SAARC has launched activities on various areas of cooperation with limited financial resources. Only the Social Window of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) has been operational with a limited fund of 300 million US\$ for poverty alleviation projects. The rest two windows-Infrastructure Window and Economic Window-require to be made operational as early as possible. Likewise, sufficient fund should be mobilized for the existing Social Window. Only then SAARC can carry out tangible projects in these important areas of cooperation.
- About one dozen and half areas of cooperation have been identified under SAARC, ranging from poverty alleviation to trade to people-to-people contacts. While widening has to respond to the trends of the time for enlarging the scope, deepening would be required to achieve desired outcomes. Hence, there is a need of SAARC focusing on prioritized areas for some period and carry out concrete programmes

and projects in those areas. So, we have to move from declaratory to implementation phase and from proliferation to consolidation.

- The role of the private sector can be vital for making the SAARC process productive. In this context, the South Asia Forum has an important responsibility for providing useful inputs to the official process. The Forum needs to meet at regular intervals for that purpose.
- Last but not least, the think tanks of South Asia, represented by the prominent personalities, do have important roles in making SAARC a meaningful regional grouping by their invaluable suggestions, inputs and recommendations. I recognize many of such personalities in this gathering.

I am happy to say that Nepal is going to host the eighteenth SAARC Summit meeting later this year. Necessary preparations are being made on both substantive and logistics fronts. It is an interesting coincidence that SAARC Secretariat is here in Kathmandu, and the current Secretary General is also from Nepal; and Nepal is hosting the Summit. Therefore, it is an important opportunity for Nepal to contribute to further enhance the regional cooperation process. I find the conference of the South Asian think tanks timely and relevant in this context.

Having said this, let me conclude my statement by expressing the confidence that the next two days' conference would be able to produce an outcome with a value addition to the efforts of the official process for making SAARC an organization effectively delivering to the peoples of South Asian region.

I wish the seminar a great success !

Address by
H.E. Mr. Arjun B. Thapa,
Secretary-General of SAARC

I am very delighted to address the Inaugural Session of the Regional Conference “*Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union*” this morning.

The presence of so many luminaries drawn from within the region makes this event truly special. It is more so, as they come together to Kathmandu to chart out a course for realizing a South Asian Union, an objective with which SAARC was founded nearly three decades ago. Moreover, this Regional Conference assumes special significance as it convenes at a time as Nepal prepares to host the Eighteenth SAARC Summit in November this year. I am confident that the outcome of this Conference will provide enough food for thought for the Member States of SAARC.

On this note, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the august presence in our midst of our Chief Guest, the Hon. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal. His presence not only signifies the importance of this occasion but also demonstrates his support to a Track II initiative as this. We keenly look forward to listening to his statement and to be inspired by the Hon. Minister’s Inaugural Address, which, I am certain, will set the tone for deliberations of this Conference.

I would also like to recognize the benign presence at this Session of my distinguished predecessors, Ambassador Nihal Rodrigo and Ambassador Ahmed Saleem. Their presence at this Conference is indeed a testimony to their continued commitment to the promotion of the cause of regional cooperation in South Asia. I am confident that with their rich knowledge about and vast experience in the South Asian affairs, this Conference will yield a fruitful outcome. Availing myself of

this opportunity, I would like to extend to them a very warm welcome to Kathmandu, the seat of the SAARC Secretariat, where they spent their eventful years trying to bring about positive changes in the lives of our people. I wish both of them a pleasant and comfortable stay in Kathmandu.

I would also like to take this opportunity to compliment the distinguished speakers before me, namely, Maj. Gen. (ret'd.) Dipankar Banerjee, Mentor, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi; and H. E. Ong Keng Yong, former Secretary-General of ASEAN and Singapore's Ambassador to Malaysia for their insightful addresses at this Session. I am glad to mention that in their presentations, they have covered a wide spectrum of issues having a direct bearing on the theme of this Conference.

Likewise, I must thank Dr. Nishchal Nath Pandey, Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies and Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister, Regional Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for joining hands to organize this Regional Conference under the auspices of the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT). As the incumbent Secretary-General of SAARC, I do value the immense contribution being made by think tanks as COSATT and others in the region in supporting regular discourses on issues of interest to SAARC as an organization.

As we are all aware, SAARC commenced collaboration in a few areas at its formative stage. However, the years and decades that followed saw the emergence of several other areas for collaboration among the Member States of SAARC, with the process of regional economic cooperation initiated in early 1990s with the constitution of the Committee on Economic Cooperation. SAARC today encompasses almost all the spheres of human activity for collaboration that are aimed at promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life, which is the fundamental objective of SAARC.

It is widely recognized that the world economy has experienced an unprecedented intensification of economic and financial integration since the latter part of the twentieth century. Developments such as

trade and capital account liberalization as well as technological innovation in transport and telecommunications, have transformed the world. The process of 'globalization' has been accompanied by the strengthened economic and financial linkages within geographic regions. The trend towards regional integration has been supported in many areas by regional policy initiatives, particularly in the field of trade. The result is a proliferation of regional agreements that vary widely in breadth and depth. Formation of SAARC and its growth and progress over the years has been the result of these global and regional trends worldwide.

The concept of regional economic integration implies that nations of a geographic region come together in some type of partnership to foster trade, investment and development. As I understand, there are two distinguishing characteristics of a free trade area. The first characteristic is the liberalization of trade regulation for members. Second, the removal of trade barriers placed against members. This includes the removal of tariffs, quotas, and various non-tariff barriers, or a pledge to remove such trade barriers by a date certain in the future. The SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and now the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) are landmark framework agreements adopted by SAARC to promote the economic integration processes.

SAFTA has steadily progressed since its signing in 2006. With the available data, it is evident that trade under SAFTA has now touched USD 3 billion cumulatively since it came into effect. All the Member States have implemented the commitments under Phase II of Reduction of the Sensitive Lists. SAARC has begun discussions on Phase III which aims to further reduce the Sensitive Lists. The Eighth Meeting of the SAFTA Ministerial Council is scheduled later this month in Thimphu, which is expected to critically evaluate the process of trade liberalization under SAFTA and to give necessary directions to make the process faster and more efficient.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ADB and a number of Think-Tanks engaged in research on regional economic integration in South Asia are increasingly recommending that SAARC should now look at regimes beyond tariffs. A number of non-tariff and para-tariff measures have been identified and we hope the ADB study, currently underway, would give us some concrete recommendations in addressing them.

We have recently set up the SAARC Standards Organization or SARSO in Dhaka which is actively engaged in developing standards for various products identified on the basis of trade volumes and export potential. The standards would help in addressing technical barriers to trade. An Arbitration Council or SARCO is also functional in Islamabad which aims to settle trade and investment disputes in the region. We have recently launched our statistical website www.saarcstat.org

There are a number of SAARC Mechanisms relating to Finance which have been functioning well. These include the regular meetings of SAARC Finance Ministers, Inter Governmental Expert Group (IGEG), Competent Authorities on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, SAARCFINANCE (a grouping of Governors of Central Banks), Public Debt Managers' Forum, Expert Group on Capital Markets and Sub-group on Investments and Arbitration.

In the South Asian context, where bulk of trade between the SAARC countries is through land border stations, the need for stronger intra-regional physical connectivity is clearly established. Lack of transport connectivity and poor infrastructure, which act as structural constraints, are the main reasons for high cost of trade transaction and low volumes of intra-regional trade in SAARC. They also limit the positive impact of trade gains that we seek to achieve through tariff liberalization and implementation of trade facilitation measures in the region. Overall, they constrain regional economic cooperation and promotion of people to people contacts.

At the Twelfth SAARC Summit (Islamabad, 4-6 January 2004), the Heads of State or Government emphasized that for accelerated and

balanced economic growth it is essential to strengthen transportation, transit and communication links across the region. Subsequently, the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS) concluded in 2006 with the financial and technical assistance of ADB recommends several measures to enhance transport connectivity among the Member States of SAARC. At the same time, two important regional Agreements, namely, Railway and Motor Vehicles Agreements are under active consideration of the Member States. Likewise, the preparatory work on the operationalization of Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service, including the Feasibility Study, is underway.

It is no denying the fact that promotion of people-to-people contacts in the region is a prerequisite in the realization of the overall objective of a South Asian Union. In due recognition of this fact, SAARC has initiated several measures to promote people-to-people contacts in the region. Of them all, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme deserves particular mention here. Launched in 1992, the Scheme now covers 24 categories of people who are entitled to visa free travel within the region. SAARC is currently engaged in expanding the list of the entitled categories with the ultimate objective of putting in place a visa free regime in the region.

The Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians is another such initiative aimed at enhancing people-to-people contacts in the region, thereby promoting mutual understanding, trust and friendship among one another. Yet another measure initiated by SAARC to promote people-to-people contacts in the region is the granting of recognition as SAARC Apex Bodies and SAARC Recognized Bodies to various professional bodies from within the region. The creation of the South Asian Forum is yet another such initiative taken by SAARC in the context of promoting people-to-people contacts in the region. The Forum held its first meeting in New Delhi in September 2010 and its second meeting is expected to be held in the Maldives.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the organizers of this Conference for inviting me to chair and address this Inaugural Session. I would also like to wish the distinguished participants very fruitful

discussions today and tomorrow. Last but not the least; as we begin this two day Conference today, let us make a solemn pledge to unite ourselves. I say so because, “united we prosper; divided we disappear.”

I thank you.

Address by
H.E. Ong Keng Yong,
Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia
and former Secretary General of ASEAN¹

Let me update you on our ASEAN experience. ASEAN is a diverse group of countries which is very different from South Asia. ASEAN is very much governed by the sea. ASEAN started in 1967 based on a very simple document called the Bangkok Declaration. We did not have a charter in the beginning like SAARC. Its charter came more than 40 years after its formation. The main reason of the five founding member countries of ASEAN coming together in the beginning was to maintain peace and stability in South East Asia and to manage and protect the region from all the interested external powers. This was the very defining objective of ASEAN as it started. ASEAN has developed various instruments and treaties which are always highlighted what ASEAN over the years has done regards to the processes in which ASEAN engages in South East Asia as well as with other countries outside of the region.

The most important treaty is "Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)". This particular treaty has never really been activated. In the charter, there is a provision for the resolution of any disputes between member countries; however most of the countries in ASEAN that have disputes prefer to use bilateral means to navigate through overlapping disputes. In the past 40 years we have seen many countries outside of ASEAN adopting those treaties basically to support the notion of peace and stability in South East Asia and to use peaceful means to resolve the differences. There are 10 ASEAN countries that subscribe to the treaty of amity and cooperation as well as 22 other countries outside ASEAN have

1 Note: Based on an extempore address.

signed this treaty among which India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are from South Asian region. Another important treaty first signed in 1995 for ASEAN is called Treaty on the South East Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. This is a major legal instrument which the nuclear weapon states have not signed, but the region is working to make this treaty recognised by all other nuclear weapon owning nations too.

We started our regional integration process with the Bangkok Declaration. Only in 2008 we made the ASEAN charter. The basic point of this charter is that we wanted peace and stability in South East Asia and follow international laws and norms.

The basic point of ASEAN is we should always consult and work through consensus. In ASEAN as long as nobody objects to any idea or policy then we believe that we have a consensus. We approach everything we do in ASEAN in an evolutionary way, what we call 'step by step' in a gradual at the same time comfortable pace of progress for all member states.

We also have a commonly accepted principle of non interference in our Charter. ASEAN used to have lots of problems with Myanmar; and over the years we have had a hard time pursuing our relationship with countries outside ASEAN basically because of political issues with Myanmar. However over the past five years, Myanmar has systematically opened up and joined the free market economy of South East Asia and the global economic system. In the last decade we have not hesitated to discuss about the issue of Myanmar in the ASEAN ministerial level meetings or the Summits. To some extent, we have through a low key way engaged in domestic politics of member states of ASEAN. The latest is issue is regards to the overlapping claims by 5-6 countries in the South China Sea and very often ASEAN as a group has been asked to avoid talking about South China Sea. We are engaged in a very sensitive diplomacy with China for the ASEAN countries namely, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam. Yet we have managed to do so in various subtle ways and we believe in the coming days, we will be able to bring peace and stability in South East Asia.

If we cannot solve problems and disputes then at least we can manage it to maintain peace and prosperity in the region. This has been the policy of the regional organization. We also engage with external powers and ASEAN has ten countries as a dialogue partners. However in the dialogue with these ten external countries, we maintain that ASEAN should be at the Centre. We also connect ASEAN with regional groupings like SAARC, ASEM, APEC, EAS, etc. and the whole idea is to develop and maintain peace and stability in South East Asia.

ASEAN vision - 2015 is to form an ASEAN community with three major pillars; Political Security, Socio Cultural with Economic Integration at the centre. The idea is to bring ten South East Asian economy into one single market. We have the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Socio Cultural Community (ASCC) in order to have a holistic socio-cultural and economic development of South East Asia. Therefore, we believe that these two Pillars of economic and socio-cultural aspects will compliments for what we have been doing with regards to political security cooperation, TAC treaty, and South East Asian Nuclear weapon free zone. The real strength of the organization is our success in managing the diversity between different countries of the region and always adopting an open process and inculcating the habit of consultation and consensus. The only way in which the member countries would continue to support ASEAN is based on the support of the individual citizens in the countries of ASEAN. If there is no support to the notion of ASEAN from the member states then there will not be an effective regional body.

The role of Indonesia is very crucial in ASEAN since it is the biggest country in the region. Over the years Indonesia has always maintained a positive approach towards the ASEAN project. We work with everyone's agreement and consensus in the region, for example when we were approached by China for Free Trade Area between ASEAN and China we realised that it was an excellent opportunity. Using this opportunity to develop free trade zone between the ASEAN countries and China we were able to enhance our way systematically towards other Free Trade Agreements with Japan, Korea, India, Australia

and New Zealand. ASEAN is also influenced by external factors driven by development outside of ASEAN.

We have not yet done what we have to do fully for the ASEAN community building but we believe that a smooth and functioning regional process has been established. We hope that in the coming two years we will have an ASEAN community. We believe in sharing the dividends. We hope that through the work done so far we can bring about a certain assurance of the continuation of the peace and prosperity in the region in the coming decades.

Address by Maj. Gen. (retd.) Dipankar Banerjee¹

My Thanks to Dr. Nishchal Nath Pandey for his outstanding initiative in hosting this conference in Kathmandu. He exemplifies the vibrant, dynamic thought leaders of a young South Asia. This generation will not passively wait for change but are determined to push ahead and show the way. I wish Dr. Pandey and his team in COSATT every success.

As the COSATT (The Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks) commemorates its location in Nepal with this conference, the topic selected, “Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union” is very well conceived and timely. We hope that at the coming 18th SAARC Summit in November this year at Kathmandu, we can take the necessary steps to make this goal a reality at the earliest.

The COSATT has an interesting though brief history. In 2008 while hosting a SAARC Track one and a half dialogue on connectivity after the 14th SAARC Summit in Delhi, there emerged a consensus that think tanks of the region should play a more active role. Indeed, we agreed that they must show the way and light the path. Immediately, we held a one-day conference and decided on a format of annual dialogue amongst South Asian Think Tanks and the COSATT was formed.

I am personally delighted to see COSATT continue to thrive and grow. I would like to remember with great fondness the support we received then from my friend Jörg Wolff of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in New Delhi. Since then, COSATT has grown and so has the KAF support to it. I am sure that under Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister this support will be even stronger in the future.

¹ Mentor, IPCS, New Delhi.

South Asia is a region by far the most ideally suited for regional integration. Not only do we share a common civilization, culture, architecture, art, literature and language, but also physical and institutional infrastructure. We have a common administrative and legal system. When a citizen in Bangladesh, India or Pakistan commits fraud, he is prosecuted under the same section of the penal code - Section 420.

Yet, today we are the least integrated of all regions in the world. With the partitioning of the sub-continent, what was once a single geo-economic entity was splintered into divided and fractured nation states. By closing our borders we shut ourselves off from each other. This transformed what was once historically one of the most prosperous regions in the world, to one of its most deprived. In almost all measurements of human development, all SAARC nations today perform well below their potential.

The vision of a South Asian Union by 2020 was spelt out by a Group of Eminent Persons set up after the 9th Summit at Male' in 1997, under the leadership of I.H. Zaki, the former Secretary General of SAARC. At the next Summit in Colombo in 1998 the GEP Report was presented. But, its implementation still remains a dream. Even a meaningful single market for all of South Asia is proving difficult to achieve.

The South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) became effective in 2006. But, we are still very far from our goal of creating a single market for goods in South Asia. Till recently, the sensitive lists laid down by each country, which were excluded from tariff reduction, were far too long. Some progress has been made in recent years. India took an unilateral step of removing all but 25 tariff lines for Least Developed Countries and Pakistan has committed to eliminate 233 tariff lines from its sensitive list effective February 2011. It has also moved from a positive list of a few tradable items to a smaller negative list, which allows all other goods not listed to be traded.

The main obstacle to trade in South Asia remains non-tariff barriers and not much effort has been made to eliminate these. There are no good reasons why Indian goods to Pakistan and vice versa must

be routed through Dubai. Why, Afghanistan our newest member and perhaps most in need today is deprived goods from the rest of the SAARC nations? Why the entire eastern part of our sub-continent remains disconnected from a prosperous ASEAN ?

The principal weakness is not on drafting and signing treaties, but to achieve the nuts and bolts of deeper regional integration. This means, adequate transport and transit facilities across borders, joint development of infrastructure and harmonization of standards. This should lead to liberalization of investment flows and trade in services, cooperation in the fields of money and finance, coordination of macro-economic policies and a host of similar measures. Removing tariff barriers in goods is meaningless if physical movement from one country to another is not possible.

There is no reason why Nepal and Bhutan cannot have access to the sea through better and more competitive connectivity through Bangladesh as well, if they so choose. Why Bangladesh cannot access surplus power from Northeast India and Bhutan to drive its thriving textile manufacturing industries for its teeming millions. Or, why Bangladesh cannot benefit enormously from the revenue coming out of the transit of Indian goods through Bangladesh. Why Pakistan too cannot access power from India for its own manufacturing industries. Why is it that we cannot develop a single power grid for the entire South Asia?

River waters sharing is another major issue. Greater cooperation between Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India can lead to equitable sharing of a scarce commodity that can benefit all. Bhutan provides an excellent example. Through harnessing its enormous hydro-power resources and selling it to India at a profit, it is today the richest per capita country in South Asia. An Indus Water Treaty exist in the west and has stood the test of time. But, it too can be revisited in the future should there be a consensus. There is need for another comprehensive treaty for all the rivers that flow from the Himalayas through Nepal, Bhutan and India to Bangladesh. The Pancheshwar-Mahakali project is a ready treaty awaiting execution and must be expedited. We need also to

take up a collective position with China to ensure that its massive diversion of the Brahmaputra does not affect the collective interests of the lower riparian states in South Asia.

Road, rail and water connectivity is another issue. Unlike waters from a river, roads allow flow in both directions and benefit all countries along routes they pass. Trying to limit use of transit corridors or limit the move of goods in one direction is a defeatist policy and benefits no one. Just as roads need space, so does transmission towers bearing electricity. Only when we can seamlessly connect the entire SAARC region will trade flow and the region prosper.

There is need to develop new ideas, bury old shibboleths, look for fresh opportunities and break down our old mental barriers.

There is a new government in India. Let me assure you that the Modi government will focus like a laser to improve relations with the region. This is its top external policy priority. It is his firm belief that only through collective efforts and genuine cooperation can the whole region prosper. We cannot go it alone or leave others behind.

As an example, only last month at Sriharikota, witnessing the launch of a PSLV satellite, Prime Minister Modi asked the Indian scientists to develop a SAARC satellite. Instead of five foreign satellites that were sent to orbit, from France, Germany, Canada and Singapore, why could these not have carried a South Asian satellite? This is a new and exciting possibility. Actually I would expect to see similar initiatives from Prime Minister Modi at the next SAARC Summit.

At the same time, let us not forget that a common minimum standard for any cooperation is that we eschew violence against each other in every form and manner. Unless we accept that each of our nation's security is intimately connected to our neighbor's security and for which we must eschew all forms of terrorism and support to such forces against another, no meaningful regional cooperation can ever be possible. Every SAARC Summit has come out with a strong Declaration to combat terrorism. It is a common scourge of the region. These must be implemented in both letter and spirit. As we know from examples

around the world, no meaningful regional cooperation is possible when one country threatens another.

Once again in Kathmandu as in 2002, we are poised for a new beginning. We know what needs to be achieved for greater South Asian integration. What we lack today is greater popular participation amongst civil society groups to research and find ways to implement these ideas. All eight states of SAARC today are democratic countries, with newly elected governments. They are committed to the betterment of the lives of their citizens and have promised them to strive for achieving these objectives. In turn, civil society in SAARC needs now to come forth and provide the direction and I have no doubt the governments will respond.

It should be noted that the SAARC now also visualizes sub-regional cooperation. Where some countries may not be able to cooperate on any issue, it may be possible to move ahead on a sub-regional basis.

SAARC certainly has the strength, resources and the sanction of all governments to move ahead. It is also fortunate to have the support of major nations of the world as Observer states. Many are willing to help and provide cooperation. We should not lose this opportunity and learn from other's experiences and from best practices from around the world. We should not hesitate to collectively seek their collaboration in regional development in a meaningful and practical way.

Finally, our work for fulfilling the vision of a South Asian Union has barely begun. Let us work through the COSATT to make this a reality in the shortest time.

Address by
Mr. Binod Kumar Chaudhary,
President and Managing Director,
Chaudhary Group, Kathmandu

The theme of the conference is very timely; in fact even revolutionary to discuss of a possible union at a time when basic fundamentals are yet to be set-up. My personal involvement with SAARC has been right from the beginning. I was involved during the initiation phase of the SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry. My own experience and impression regarding SAARC is, it is perhaps one of the poorest examples of any economic block in the world. The level of progress being made in terms of SAFTA nowhere compares with the bilateral arrangements we have with India. The transit arrangements with in the SAARC is even poorer, for instance to send goods to Pakistan we need to send via Dubai. Transporting goods and services to Pakistan through the Wagha border point remains a dream. Technically speaking, there is a border and transit arrangement with Dhaka, but given the poor infrastructure and limitations in terms of regulatory offices, efficient and smooth transportation has still not been a reality. Cost of business increases due to inefficient transportation and this is a major issue in our region. It is not the question of just finding the way to send goods but to do it in an efficient and inexpensive manner only then can one make some profit.

I have no qualms in stating that I too take my share of responsibility for the tardy progress of the SAARC Chambers of Commerce. SAARC Chambers is not really active and has maintained a low-key existence while it should have been in a leading position with respect to regional economic issues. In other regions, the private sector is encouraged by the governments for a bigger and a more visible role.

SAARC is a huge platform with impressive fanfare to see the political problems that go on among the member nations particularly between Pakistan and India. Most of the SAARC summits are dominated by the news of Pakistan and India's attendance and the bilateral issues between them which are not talked about in the SAARC meetings but obviously these events are influenced by bilateral tensions. I recall a famous handshake between Pakistani's President Mr. Musharraf with India's Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee in Kathmandu at the 11th Summit which made a global headline and other SAARC issues suddenly became peripheral.

SAARC has done an excellent job to create a powerful platform for people to people contacts. It is a stage for literature, journalism, arts, academia, exchange of focal groups of different countries and the civil society, which are certainly important. The level of engagement that has taken place in the last 28 years would have been nowhere close to where we are today if SAARC was not there. But I must say that SAARC was not designed for business or economic engagements. Because, the private sector's involvement in SAARC structure is only in its namesake. Our think-tanks' role also is only limited to the extent of submitting reports and publications.

However, we must not be pessimistic. There is still a hope for business within the SAARC and there are two reasons for this; one is China's interest in uplifting the South Asian business integration and second is the new leadership in India under Prime Minister Modi.

China - South Asia business forum held annually in Kunming on the sidelines of the Expo is a successful platform for discussions and debates about business and politics of SAARC countries with China. Apart from the business with the member nations of the SAARC, business should also be extended with partners from outside the region. For example we should use the opportunity to extend our business and get engaged with Thailand, Myanmar and China that are the emerging economies for business next door. Unless there is a forum of a true partnership, engagement and participation both qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of business there cannot be any progress on the

common economic agenda. To discuss economic agenda is not the job of the bureaucrats; time has changed, the industrialist has to be given the lead. The success of World Economic Forum is the best example to realise the importance of business institutions for a prosperous economy. The initiation by China which is an Observer of SAARC to push the South Asian business integration with the governments and beyond is going to play a very important role in the years ahead because all the eight countries of SAARC are well represented in this annual Kunming Expo.

Another reason that I am optimistic about the growth of the South Asian economy and the future of SAARC is the changed leadership in India under Prime Minister Modi. The new leadership in Delhi has clearly indicated that South Asia comes first in Mr. Modi's priority list. His oath taking ceremony which was attended by all SAARC heads of states and governments and his visits to Bhutan and Nepal is a clear indication that India's immediate priority will be the immediate neighbourhood. Delhi's engagements not only with South Asia but with China and Japan is also going to make huge positive changes particularly in the infrastructure sector.

If trilateral relationship and collaboration between Japan, China and India working together to take advantage of infrastructure opportunities is a possibility why not trilateral cooperation between China, India and Nepal? I cannot see the traditional taboo about China anywhere in India especially amongst businessmen and the industrialists. China is a darling as far as India is concerned when it comes to infrastructure. Here countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka should play a bigger role as a bridge to bring these players together. Chinese companies should be able to come to Nepal to construct hydropower plants in Karnali, Chisapani and Pancheshwor and we should also be able to sell power to India. If there is resource and a market then the multilateral agencies and business companies from different regions should join in for economic growth. Someone who has the capacity to bring capital at cost which is affordable should bring the capital, someone who has the capacity to bring in the technology should

bring technology and who has the market should provide the market. Therefore, I visualise cooperation taking place in South Asia both within and also externally. And this is a positive signal for economic prosperity in the region.

The dream of an economic union which this conference is dwelling on, can only be successful if the current structure of SAARC is totally over-hauled. If one wants SAARC to become an engine of economic force in the region then the focus will have to shift from politics to business and from the bureaucracy to the private sector. But dream we must. Time has come to rise above our cold war mind-set and accept the importance of economy to strengthen the SAARC and thereby introduce profound positive changes in all the poor economies of our eight countries.

Address by
Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister
Director, Regional Programme
Political Dialogue-Asia, KAS

I have two messages to deliver to COSATT network. My first message is to encourage COSATT think tank network to work for promoting regional integration in South Asia. We, European Union as a regional organization have learned how beneficial regional cooperation and integration is for countries of certain regions. We know that it is not possible to copy the experience of European Union and I would like to warn the South Asians from both track I and II not to try to copy from the experience of EU, ASEAN and other regional groups because each region has its own political culture, traditional history, social structure and so forth. Nevertheless, we can draw some common experiences of regional integration processes from the EU. And one basic experience of regional integration process is it is beneficial for all the member states because individually one state can never be as strong and relevant in international affairs as the bigger group can be. Even for the bigger members of a regional integration grouping, it is profitable to be part of a broader group.

I would like to encourage COSATT and other track-II networks in SAARC to be inspired by the European experiences and also to study its experiences with regards to its limitations. One point of time, European experiences was very small not just in terms of limited member countries but also in terms of the projects. We did not start as an economic community rather started as a community of coal and steel in 1951 with an eminent task to come together to avoid or to control the industry with regard to future conflicts. Only when this community succeeded over the nuclear community, and enough trust was developed

among the six countries, a step forward was taken to develop an economic community. Building economic union was not the only initiative taken to create an union in the beginning in Europe. But we went step by step and tried to concentrate on very small projects in the beginning.

I heard one of the major objectives of SAARC is poverty alleviation. This is a very important task for SAARC because this region has the highest number of poor worldwide. However this is probably a big task for SAARC to face and resolve. Therefore maybe there are other areas and smaller sectors where it can concentrate and achieve success. I suggest you not to hand over the sovereignty rights to the international institutions and also not to copy from European Union experiences since the background in each region is different. But at the same time, it is good to build some common institutions with competences to execute agreements of policies.

Another message I would like to deliver purely as a suggestion is try to create a sense of belonging within the region. The idea of belongingness was very important for EU process from the beginning and even ASEAN is giving importance to it nowadays. My message to the COSATT members is to reach out not only to the think tanks but also to the social and political sectors. It is also a task for COSATT members to reach out to the socio-political sectors and teach them about the significance of regional integration. For example to integrate media; in many countries media does not have any idea about the benefits of regional cooperation or economic integration. COSATT members should concentrate on small projects and try to focus on concrete issues and to contribute knowledge and analytical reports and present tangible solutions and projects to the leaders so they can take timely decisions towards regional integration.

We from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) are honoured to have the opportunity to accompany and support this process and I guarantee we will continue to support COSATT in coming years as well. I would like to congratulate the entire member of the COSATT network and particularly to the CSAS and Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey for organizing

this conference. I am confident that we will have very interesting, encouraging and inspiring discussions and recommendations for future cooperation.

Human Security in South Asia: Vision 2025

ANM Muniruzzaman¹

Conceptual Framework

Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic shift in the development of the security studies.² The human security approach stresses that all people should have the right to their most essential needs such as access to food, shelter, education, health care as well as earning their own livelihood.

According to the final report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS), human security means “Protecting fundamental freedoms that are the essence of life”.³

The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report refers to human security as:

Human security means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life whether in homes, in jobs or in

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- 1 President and CEO, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), Dhaka.
 - 2 “Dominant Theories of Security”, at<<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/dnp/sub1.asp?ipage=sectheories>> (accessed November 25, 2012).
 - 3 “Human Security in Theory and Practices, Application of the Human Security Concept and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security”, 2009, at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HS_Handbook_2009.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2012).

communities.⁴

As human security suggests that all human beings have the right to freedom and right to basic human needs irrespective of race, color, religion and ethnicity; the notion is mostly applicable to ensure a country's food security, health security, water security and environmental security as well.

Water Security

Water security which falls under the concept of nontraditional security⁵ is defined as availability of required amount of water at the right time and right place for human and environmental use.⁶ It signifies the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution, and water-related disasters, as well as for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.⁷ Water scarcity induces competition for water between users, and even among countries and regions for sharing a common resource.⁸

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) defines water security:

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- 4 See "Edward Newman, "Critical Human Security Studies", *Review of International Studies* (36), 2010, at <[http://demo.sheruyasodha.com.np/uploads/Review_of_International_Studies_36_\[2010\]_77-94.pdf](http://demo.sheruyasodha.com.np/uploads/Review_of_International_Studies_36_[2010]_77-94.pdf)>(accessed April 05, 2012).
 - 5 "Water Security & the Global Water Agenda", 2013, at <http://www.unwater.org/downloads/watersecurity_analyticalbrief.pdf> (accessed October 07, 2013).
 - 6 Maryam Mastoor, "Environmental Degradation: Focus on Water Scarcity", *Regional Studies*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, at <http://www.academia.edu/850171/Water_Scarcity_in_South_Asia> (accessed October 23, 2013)
 - 7 "Water Security and the Global Water Agenda: A UN Water Analytical Brief", *ESCAP*, 2013, at <http://www.unwater.org/downloads/watersecurity_analyticalbrief.pdf> (accessed October 16, 2013).
 - 8 "Coping with Water Scarcity: Challenge of the Twenty-first Century", at <<http://www.fao.org/nr/water/docs/escarcity.pdf>> (accessed September 12, 2013).

Water security represents a unifying element supplying humanity with drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, food and fish, industrial resources, energy, transportation and natural amenities, all dependent upon maintaining ecosystem, health and productivity.⁹

Food Security

The concept of food security developed over time and many organizations have come up with definitions from various perspectives. Food security was first officially defined in 1974 by the World Food Summit (WFS). It defines:

Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices.¹⁰

In 1983, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expanded its concept with the following definition:

Food Security ensures that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need.¹¹

In 1996, the World Food Summit (WFS) adopted a more complex definition:

Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.¹²

9 "Defining Water Security", December 17, 2011, at <[http:// watersecurity.wordpress.com/2011/12/17/defining-water-security/](http://watersecurity.wordpress.com/2011/12/17/defining-water-security/)> (accessed October 05, 2013).

10 See <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm#TopOfPage> (accessed December 09, 2012)

11 Ibid

12 Ibid.

The World Health Organization (WHO) introduces three pillars of food security like food availability, food access, and food use.

Health Security

The World Health Organization uses the concept of ‘global health security’. There is no universally agreed definition of health security, although the concept is becoming accepted in public health literature and practice.¹³ The concept came into limelight during the 1990s and early 2000s. Along with threats from biological weapons, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) considered HIV/AIDS as a threat to international peace and security. Since then, the increasing threats of diseases directly connected public health with the concept of human security.¹⁴

The concepts of both human security and public health are deeply intertwined. Health security is one of the preconditions of human security.¹⁵ It means guarantee of a minimum protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles. Due to malnutrition and insufficient access to health services, clean water and other basic necessities, usually poor people are threatened from health insecurity.¹⁶

Environmental Security

There is no clear definition of environmental security. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Health

13 “Health Security as a Public Health Concept: a Critical Analysis”, June 18, 2008, at <<http://heapol.oxfordjournals.org/content/23/6/369.full>> (accessed October 15, 2013).

14 See <<http://www.globalhealthurope.org/index.php/resources/glossary/54-more-pages/97-more-on-human-security-and-health>> (accessed October 04, 2013).

15 See <http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7025&Itemid=> (accessed October 05, 2013).

16 “Health Security Law and Legal Definition”, at <<http://definitions.uslegal.com/h/health-security/>> (accessed October 12, 2013).

Organization (WHO) have not clearly defined environmental security.¹⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has addressed environmental security challenges caused by extreme weather conditions, depletion of natural resources, pollution and so on.¹⁸ For example, in April 2010, a NATO Science workshop in Moscow addressed environmental security and eco-terrorism.¹⁹

Environmental security means public safety from environmental dangers caused by natural or human acts, restoration of environment and natural resources. Threats to environmental security indicate degradation of both local and global ecosystems.²⁰ It also includes preventing or responding to environmentally caused conflicts, and protecting environment due to its inherent value.²¹

The Significance of Human Security in South Asia

Nontraditional security has been most important in the world instead of traditional concepts of security e.g. protection of national security from conflict and violence. Due to natural and environmental disasters caused by climate change, looming food and water crises, lack of health security, high rate of poverty and emergence of displaced persons, South Asia is now one of the most vulnerable regions in the world.²² All of these nontraditional security challenges are creating severe impacts on human security as well as both domestic and regional stability in the region.²³

17 "Environmental Security Study", at <<http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/es-2def.htm>> (accessed October 14, 2013)

18 See <http://www.nato.int/cps/ar/natolive/topics_49216.htm> (accessed October 07, 2013).

19 Ibid.

20 Environmental Security Study, *op.cit.*

21 See <<http://nesastrategist.wordpress.com/2013/04/22/what-is-environmental-security/>> (accessed October 12, 2013).

22 "What is Environmental Security?" at <http://www.envirosecurity.org/activities/What_is_Environmental_Security.pdf>(accessed October 05, 2013)

23 "South Asia Regional Security 2025: From Idea to Reality?", *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, November 8, 2011, India, November 8, 2011, at <<http://www.nbr>.

These issues awakened South Asia's leaders to pay more attention on the seriousness of nontraditional security challenges.²⁴

The present scenario of human security in South Asia is raising alarming threats to regional security because, no South Asian country except Sri Lanka ranks in the top hundred countries in the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index.²⁵ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified South Asia as the most susceptible region in the world due to climate change. However, the international community also recognizes Bangladesh as most vulnerable due to hydro-geological and socio-economic factors e.g. flat deltaic topography with low elevation, climate variability, high population density, poverty and so on.²⁶

Scenario of Human Security in South Asia

Lack of Water Security

South Asia is one of the most populous sub regions in Asia and the Pacific with relatively low agricultural water productivity due to low per capita water storage capacity and increased use of groundwater,²⁷ faster

[org/downloads/pdfs/PSA/SRS_Phase3_BriefingBook.pdf](#)> (accessed October 07, 2013).

- 24 Mahin Karim, "The Future of South Asian Security: Prospects for a Nontraditional Regional Security Architecture", *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, April 2013 at <http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/PSA/NTS_projectreport_April2013.pdf> (accessed October 07, 2013).
- 25 "Peace and Human Security in South Asia: Challenges and Solutions", May 23, 2013, at <<http://www.whiteband.org/en/news/irfan-mufti-peace-human-security-south-asia>> (accessed October 07, 2013).
- 26 "Water Security: The Threat Bangladesh is facing", at <<http://ronyasia.blogspot.com/2011/04/water-security-threat-bangladesh-is.html>> (accessed October 13, 2013)
- 27 "Asian Water Development Outlook 2013: Measuring Water Security in Asia and the Pacific", *Asia-Pacific Water Forum*, 2013, at <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/asian-water-development-outlook-2013.pdf>> (accessed October 05, 2013).

industrialization,²⁸ as well as overexploitation and pollution, poor management and so on.²⁹ One billion people in the region do not use improved sanitation facilities while facing a daunting challenge to drinking water simultaneously.³⁰ According to a new report of the United Nations, about half of the region's 1.5 billion people have lack access to pure water. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also cites that the poorest people in the region have only access to less than 5 percent of the planet's freshwater resources.³¹ A new Asia Society Leadership Group also warns that decreased access to a safe, stable water supply in Asia will have a profound impact on security throughout the region.³² According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, since 1950, per capita water availability in the region has decreased by 70 percent.³³

28 MahbulHaq Human Development Center, "Human Development in South Asia 2013", June 24, 2013, at <<http://www.mhhdc.org/reports/HDSA-2013.pdf>> (accessed October 22, 2013).

29 Ibid.

30 "One Billion in South Asia Lack Access to Potable Water", August 08, 2012, at <<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/islamabad/08-Aug-2012/one-billion-in-s-asia-lack-access-to-potable-water>> (accessed: October 10, 2013).

31 "Hundreds of Millions in South Asia Face Growing Water Stress", *UN Report Warns*, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29797&Cr=Water&Cr1=climate+change#.UIZEiyd_4wo>, February 06, 2009, (accessed October 10, 2013)

32 *Leadership Group on Water Security in Asia*, "Asia's Nest Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future", 2009, at <<http://asiasociety.org/policy/environment/water-and-food-security/asias-next-challenge-securing-regions-water-future>> (accessed September 17, 2013).

33 Nick Langton and SagarPrasai, "Will Conflicts over Water Scarcity Shape South Asia's Future?", March 23, 2012, at <http://csis.org/files/publication/120323_WadhvaniChair_IssuePerspective.pdf> (accessed September 22, 2013).

Map: Global Physical and Economic Water Scarcity

Source: World Water Assessment Program (WWAP), March 2012.³⁴

The map shows that most of the South Asian countries fall under either physical water scarcity or economic water scarcity. The Himalayan River Basins are affecting internal and cross-boundary development and security in the region.³⁵ In addition, due to diversion of rivers flow, hundreds of millions of South Asians are facing water stress. For example, major water and energy conflicts in South Asia exist between Indo-Pak, Indo-Bangladesh, and Indo-Nepal whereas minor water crises do exist between Indo-China, Pakistan and Afghanistan as well.³⁶

Climatic variability has been a source of water stress in India.³⁷ Even, Kashmir lacks water despite having many rivers and few people.³⁸ India is facing acute shortage in its groundwater resources that is hitting

34 See <<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml>> (accessed October 10, 2013).

35 Åshild Kolås, "Water Scarcity in Bangladesh and South Asia: Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation", August 2011 - Dec 2012, at <<http://www.prio.no/Projects/Project/?x=969>> (accessed October 17, 2013).

36 Zaheerul Hassan, "Way Forward to South Asian Water Crisis", *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.01, 2013.

37 *Report of Leadership Group on Water Security in Asia*, "Asia's Next Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future", April 2009, at <<http://asiasociety.org/files/pdf/WaterSecurityReport.pdf>> (accessed October 04, 2013).

38 "South Asia's Water: Unquenchable Thirst", November 19, 2011, at <<http://www.economist.com/node/21538687>> (accessed September 26, 2013)

agricultural productivity of the country.³⁹ Environmental analysts say that at least 100,000 Indian villages are under severe water shortages.⁴⁰ Pakistan is already a water-strained country. In Pakistan, per capita water availability dropped from 5000 cubic meters per annum in 1951 to 1100 cubic meters per annum in 2006. With increasing population of 173 million in 2010, the per capita availability of fresh water was fallen closer to 1000 cubic meters that was declared as 'water scarce'. It is also warned that this figure may decrease almost 700 cubic meters per capita when the population figures are likely to cross 221 million by 2025.⁴¹ Every 35 to 40 years, Afghanistan suffers from droughts.⁴² Similarly, Bangladesh in particular is heavily dependant on water for human consumption, crop irrigation, transportation, and conservation of biodiversity. Several factors such as rapid population growth, gap between demand and supply, over exploitation, water pollution, random contamination of surface and ground water, absence of comprehensive water sharing with neighboring countries and mismanagement in preserving rain water have made the country highly vulnerable.⁴³ Nepal also faces severe water crisis due to urban sprawl.⁴⁴ The country also experiences severe impacts of climate change due to less rainfall during

39 Maryam Mastoor, "Environmental Degradation: Focus on Water Scarcity in South Asia", Vol. XXVII, Winter 2008-2009, No 1, at <http://www.academia.edu/850171/Water_Scarcity_in_South_Asia> (accessed October 05, 2013).

40 "India on Brink of Water Crisis,World: South Asia", at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/185791.stm> (accessed October 10, 2013).

41 Wilson John, "Water Security in South Asia: Issues and Policy Recommendations", *ORF Issue Brief*, February 2011, at<http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/water_1297246681981.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2013).

42 Ehsan Pasha, "The Water Crisis", January 2013, at <<http://www.saglobalaffairs.com/cover-stories/1365-the-water-crisis.html>> (accessed September 25, 2013).

43 ÅshildKolås, August 2012, *op.cit.*

44 Prasad Ramesh, "The Dead Rivers of Kathmandu", May 31, 2011, at <<https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/4321-The-dead-rivers-of-Kathmandu>> (accessed October 27, 2013)

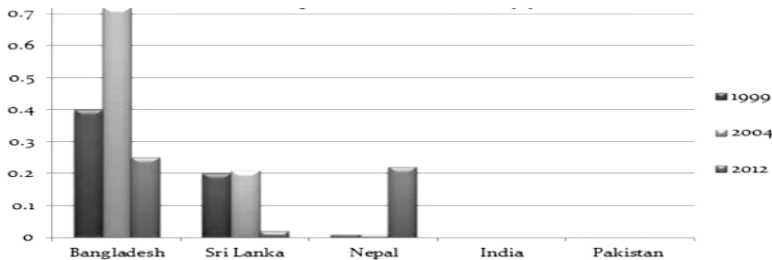
monsoon season as well as drought in winter season.⁴⁵

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in a report stated that over 26 cubic meters of groundwater had disappeared from aquifers in areas of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and New Delhi between 2002 and 2008.⁴⁶

Lack of Food Security

The Asia-Pacific region has seen much success in this regard, whereas South Asia continues to face a grave scenario of food insecurity.⁴⁷ From 2004 to 2008, the rise of global commodity prices caused tremendous development challenges to South Asian countries. Between January 2003 and April 2008, South Asia suffered from cumulative income loss equivalent to some 9.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The surge in food prices created a tremendous adverse social impact in South Asia. Net food importing countries like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh suffered most from due to high food price.⁴⁸

Figure: Rice Imports in Million Tons by Year



Source: <<http://www.agricultureandfoodsecurity.com/content/2/1/10>>

45 "Nepal: Kathmandu Faces Worsening Water Crisis", September 24, 2009, at <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/86273/nepal-kathmandu-faces-worsening-water-crisis>> (accessed October 25, 2013).

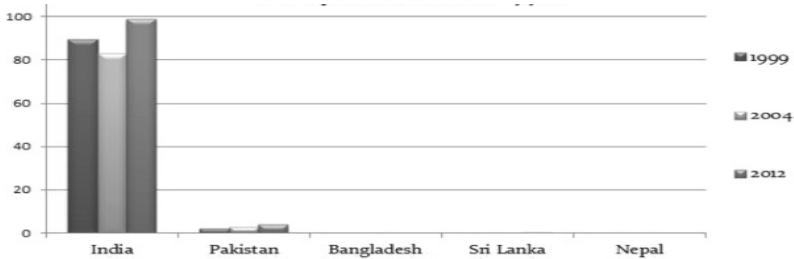
46 Wilson John, *op.cit.*

47 Bangladesh-Striving for Food Security, October 2012, at <<http://www.saglobalaffairs.com/back-issues/1319-bangladesh-striving-for-food-security.html>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

48 "Tracking Inflation in South Asia", *The Daily Star*, March 02, 2011.

The table shows that except India and Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are highly dependent on import from other countries and the biggest importers of rice in South Asia.

Figure: Rice Exports in Million



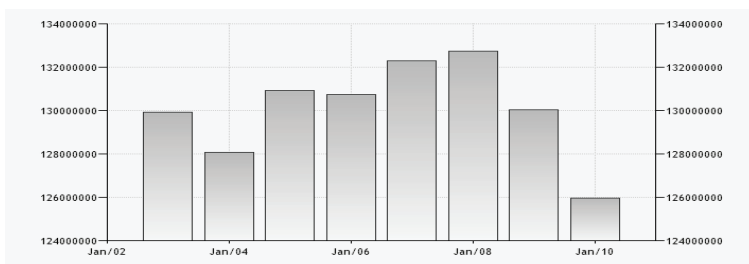
Source: <<http://www.agricultureandfoodsecurity.com/content/2/1/10>>

On the other hand, India is the major exporter of rice in South Asia in 2012. Pakistan is the only other exporting country but the volume is much lower compared to India. It also indicates that Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal have no high record in rice export.

Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal fall in net marketing position against large majority of households. Rural people in South Asia are net buyers of food due to more likely high food prices.⁴⁹ For example, about 80 percent and 70 percent of households in Bangladesh and Nepal are net buyers of rice, whereas 77 percent of households are net buyers of wheat in Pakistan. Food price inflation has severely increased poverty ratio that has particularly threatened the poorest of the poor.⁵⁰ Agricultural land areas are being declined in rapid scale in South Asia due to increasing level of urbanization.

49 *The World Bank*, "Food Price Increases in South Asia: National Responses and Regional Dimension", 2010 at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/223546-1269620455636/69072651287693474030/South_Asia_Regional_Food_Prices_Final.pdf> (accesses October 22, 2013)

50 *Ibid.*

Figure: Land under Cereal Production Hectares in South Asia

Source: “Land under Cereal Production in South Asia”, 2010.⁵¹

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries due to continuous food shortage since 1990s. According to a report of Unnayan Onneshan, a Dhaka-based research group, if the present trend of population growth of two million people per year continues, Bangladesh will undoubtedly face severe food shortages in the next few years reaching a critical level by 2050.⁵² It is estimated that flood destroys about 20 percent of Bangladesh’s total agricultural output every year.⁵³ According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the country loses about 80,000 hectares of arable land due to droughts, salinity and floods.⁵⁴ The London-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in its Global Food Security Index 2012 ranked Bangladesh as the least food secure country among the six South Asian countries. According to the index, Sri Lanka is the most food secure country in the region securing 62nd position in overall ranking with a score of 47.4 points on a scale of 100. The index

51 “Land under Cereal Production in South Asia”, 2010 at <<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-asia/land-under-cereal-production-hectares-wb-data.html>> (accessed October 08, 2013).

52 See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89920/BANGLADESH-Unemployment-food-prices-spur-growing-hunger>> (accessed 14 January, 2013).

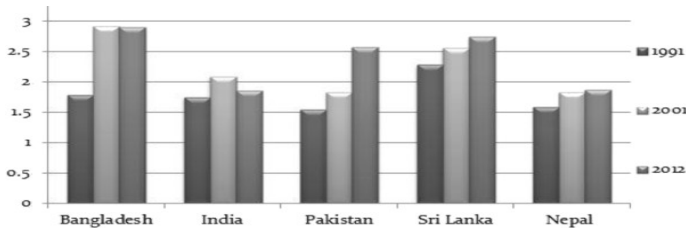
53 Please visit <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/7118970/Agriculture-in-BD>>(accessed 24 December, 2012).

54 See<http://www.live-pr.com/en/bangladesh-agribusiness-report-q-r_10498277_15.htm> (accessed 12 January, 2013).

placed Bangladesh at the 81st position with 34.6 points while India was ranked 66th with 45 points and Pakistan 75th with 38.5 points.⁵⁵

Pakistan is also facing severe food crisis. According to World Food Program (WFP), due to rise of food price at annual rate of 20 percent, large numbers of people in Pakistan run the risk of falling back into poverty. The World Bank listed Pakistan among 33 countries that put the country at risk. However, Sri Lanka is also at risk of starvation because of tightening food situation. Simultaneously, 44 percent of households in India are deficient in calorie intake.⁵⁶

Figure: Yield Production in South Asia (1991-2012)



Source: <http://www.agricultureandfoodsecurity.com/content/2/1/10#B12>

The figure shows that Bangladesh has been the highest rice yielding nation since 1991 in South Asia. All the countries except India have shown an increasing yield since 2001 while Bangladesh has undergone a sharp decline.

Threat to Health Security

People in South Asia are at a higher risk of infectious diseases rather than from people in industrialized countries. The root causes are poverty, unhygienic living conditions, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of

55 “Bangladesh Least Food Secure in South Asia: Global Food Security Under Threat: EIU”, *The Daily Financial Express*, August 11 2012.

56 Syed Imran Sardar, “Food Insecurity: A View from South Asia”, 2009, at <http://www.academia.edu/2333343/Food_Insecurity_A_View_from_South_Asia> (accessed October 22, 2013).

clean water,⁵⁷ pollution, lack of sanitary facilities, and lack of awareness about health security. For example, only in the year 2000, over two thirds of the estimated 3.7 million children died in South Asia due to infections such as pneumonia, diarrhea, and measles.⁵⁸ According to the report of the World Bank of 2009, South Asia has both highest percentage and largest number of undernourished children in the world. Malnutrition affects 43 percent to 46 percent of young children in India, Bangladesh and Nepal.⁵⁹ The number of malnourished people in the region as a whole rose from 283 million in 1990 to 314 million in 2005. Over 20 percent of children less than five years of age are underweight in most of the South Asian countries. Compared to 29 percent of global population, about 74 percent of South Asian population has no access to improved sanitation facilities.⁶⁰

The table 1 shows that all of the South Asian countries are in vulnerable situation from the percentage of malnutrition, underweight, low birth weight. The rate of improved sanitary facilities, adult literacy, and access to pure water is also very low.

57 "Burden of Infectious Diseases in South Asia", April 01, 2004 at <<http://www.bmj.com/content/328/7443/811>> (accessed September 26, 2013).

58 Wilson John, "Water Security in South Asia: Issues and Policy Recommendations", ORF Issue Brief, February 2011, at <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/water_1297246681981.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2013)

59 Harald D. Frederiksen, "The World Water Crisis and International Security", at <<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/world-water-crisis-and-international-security>> (accessed October 22, 2013).

60 Vibhuti Hate and Seth Gannon, "Public Health in South Asia", *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, at <http://csis.org/files/publication/100715_Hate_PublicHealthSouthAsia_Web.pdf> (accessed October 05, 2013).

Table1 : Poor Health Situation in South Asia

Indicators	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Population (thousands), 2009, under 5	16463	70	126114	27	3505	24121	1784
Percent of Infants with Low Birth Weight, 2005-2009	22	9	28	22	21	32	17
Percent of Under- fives (2003 - 2009) Suffering from Underweight, moderate and severe	41	14	43	26	39	31	21
Percent of Under-fives (2003 -2009) Suffering from: Wasting, moderate and severe	17	3	20	13	13	14	15
Percent of Under-fives (2003 -2009) Suffering from: Stunting, moderate and severe	43	48	48	32	49	42	17
Percent of Population using Improved Drinking- water Sources 2008	80	92	88	91	88	90	90
Percent of Population using Improved Sanitation Facilities 2008	53	65	31	98	31	45	91
Total Adult Literacy Rate (percent), 2005-2008	55	53	63	98	58	54	97

Source: <<http://www.mse.ac.in/pub/WORKING%20PAPER%2075.pdf>>

Table 2: Under-nourished Population in South Asia
(in millions, and as proportion of total population in brackets)

Countries	1991	1996	2000	2007
Bangladesh	44.4 (38 %)	54.2 (41 %)	42.3 (30 %)	41.4 (26 %)
India	177 (20 %)	167.1 (17 %)	208.0 (20%)	224.6 (19 %)
Maldives	0.0485 (9 %)	0,0495 (9 %)	0.05052 (8 %)	0.0515 (10 %)
Nepal	4.2 (21 %)	4.4 (20 %)	4.6 (18 %)	4.7 (17 %)
Pakistan	29.5 (25 %)	28.6 (20 %)	36.3 (24 %)	42.8 (25 %)
Sri Lanka	4.8 (28 %)	4.5 (25 %)	3.9 (20 %)	3.9 (20 %)

Source: <<http://www.mse.ac.in/pub/WORKING%20PAPER%2075.pdf>>

Undernourishment is also widespread in the region because approximately 600 million South Asians live on less than US\$1.25 a day. For example, nearly 21 percent of the population is undernourished whereas more than 41 percent of children are underweight and 8 percent die before reaching the age of 5.⁶³ Some studies also indicate that South Asia is the home of nearly two-thirds of world's malnourished children. Besides, more than 56 percent of the world's low-birth weight babies are born in South Asia.⁶⁴ Among other South Asian countries, Bangladesh is also vulnerable because nearly half of Bangladesh's children are underweight.⁶⁵

Another major challenge of health security in South Asia is HIV/AIDS. The National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) estimates that nearly 2.3 million HIV positive adults live in India, the highest estimate for any country. On the other hand, though Pakistan's adult

63 P. K. Joshi, "Greening Agriculture in South Asia", May 10, 2012, at <<http://www.ifpri.org/blog/greening-agriculture-south-asia>> (accessed October 04, 2013).

64 SAARC Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC), "Food Security Situation in South Asia: Problems and Prospects", October 2012 at <<http://www.shrhc.org/doc/training/2012/Food%20security%20%282-7%20October,%202012%29/Food%20Security%20%28October%202-7,%202012%29.pdf>> (accessed October 09, 2013).

65 Bangladesh - Striving for Food Security, *op.cit.*

prevalence rate is 0.1 percent, the rate is increasing.⁶⁶ Moreover, about 36 percent of the population of Sindh and Punjab was exposed to high arsenic levels in Pakistan.⁶⁷

Poverty in South Asia

South Asia remains the region with largest number in extreme poverty.⁶⁸ Nearly 40 percent of the world's poor earning less than a dollar a day live in the region. South Asia is home to 22 percent of the world's population generating only less than 2 percent of global income.⁶⁹ South Asia is also the home of 23 percent of humanity, amongst them 31.7 percent are living in abject poverty.⁷⁰

According to the latest survey, percentage of poverty rate is very high in most of the South Asian countries respectively 44 percent in Bangladesh, 36 in Afghanistan, 31 percent in Nepal, 27 percent in India, 23 percent in Bhutan, 22 percent in Pakistan, and 15 percent in Sri Lanka.⁷¹ A report titled 'Food Price Increases in South Asia: National Responses and Regional Dimensions' states that due to high food price,

66 Vibhuti Hate and Seth Gannon, "Public Health in South Asia", *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, at <http://csis.org/files/publication/100715_Hate_PublicHealthSouthAsia_Web.pdf> (accessed October 05, 2013).

67 Wilson John, *op.cit.*

68 Ashish Shukla, "Human Security with Special Reference to Food Security in South Asia", 2011, at <http://www.academia.edu/3067414/Human_Security_with_Special_Reference_to_Food_Security_in_South_Asia> (accessed October 07, 2013).

69 Dinakar Peri, "Understanding Human Security and Climate Change in South Asia- A Review", May 11, 2013, at <<http://strategicstudyindia.blogspot.com/2013/05/understanding-human-security-and.htm>> (accessed October 07, 2013).

70 Dhananjay Tripathi, "Human Security in South Asia: Challenges and Solution", January 12, 2008, at <<http://www.newstrackindia.com/newsdetails/3693>> (accessed October 07, 2013).

71 C.S.C Sekhar and Yogesh Bhatt, "Food Security in South Asia: Prospects for Regional Integration", November 2012, at <http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ecidc2013misc1_bp6.pdf> (accessed October 07, 2013)

thousands of South Asian fall into poverty line and remain starvation.⁷² If food prices continue to rise without a matching increase in incomes of people, it is estimated that approximately 100 million people could be pushed back into poverty.⁷³ Though economic growth has reduced poverty rate in South Asia, its total number of poor people has increased. The number of poor people living on less than \$1.25 a day increased from 549 million in 1981 to 595 million in 2005. Only in India, the number of poor people increased from 420 million in 1981 to 455 million in 2005.⁷⁴ In addition, India's 44 percent people lives below the international US\$1 per day poverty line. Best estimates suggest that about one-third of poor population in South Asia is chronically poor between 135 and 190 million people, of whom from 110 million to 160 million are Indians. However, Bangladesh and Pakistan are also the majority of the remainder.⁷⁵

Threat to Environmental Security

South Asia, the world's most vulnerable regions due to widespread environmental stress is probably more exposed to natural hazards.⁷⁶ From 1970 to 2000, the region recorded 15 out of 40 major disasters in the world. Natural disasters have severely damaged natural resources and caused human casualties in the region. For example, during the 2004 Tsunami, the rehabilitation cost was estimated to US\$ 3 billion.

72 "Food security in South Asia Worsening", at <<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullToday.php?headline=Food+security+in+South+Asia+worsening&NewsID=353257>> (accessed October 10, 2013).

73 Farooq Sobhan, "Nontraditional Security Challenges in South Asia", at <<http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=511#.UkPTpyeNZkg>> (accessed September 26, 2013).

74 Ejaz Ghani (ed.), *Poor Half Billion: What is Holding Back Lagging Regions in South Asia?*, October 28, 2010, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.

75 "Understanding Chronic Poverty in South Asia", at <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/CPR1_chap7.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2013).

76 "Security in South Asia: India's Emerging Role, Security in South Asia: India's Emerging Role", December 2005 - December 2013, at <<http://www.prio.no/Projects/Project/?x=790>> (accessed September 26, 2013).

The overall cost of the October 2005 earthquake made cost at approximately US\$ 5.2 billion. Besides, disasters killed nearly half a million people in South Asia over the last 25 years.⁷⁷ Over 60,000 people were killed by Tsunami in India, Sri Lanka and Maldives.⁷⁸ The earthquake of October 2005 killed at least 73,000 people and severely injured or disabled another 70,000 and rendered 2.8 million homeless in northern parts of Pakistan.⁷⁹ The natural disasters in Pakistan in July 2010 had blown out almost one fifth of Pakistan's total land area, directly affected close to 20 million people and also made cost up to \$43 billion.⁸⁰ Floods in South Asia are also very common. Almost 20 million people stranded or displaced across the region by massive flooding.⁸¹

Map: Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2011



Source: "David Braun, 2010 ⁸²

77 Farooq Sobhan, *op.cit.*

78 Syed Rifaat Hussain, "Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Challenges in South Asia", at <<http://www.google.com.bd/url?sa=t&rc=tj&q=&src=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEcQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rsis-ntsasia.org%2Fresources%2Fpublications%2Fpolicy-briefs%2Finaugural-meeting%2Frcss.doc&ei=tStxUtIMNsi5rgfip4GoBw&usg=AFQjCNGqsWkS3xhsAntlbNxVDZosNDWrw&bvm=bv.55617003,d.bmk>> (accessed October 22, 2013).

79 Syed Rifaat Hussain, *op.cit.*

80 Ehsan Pasha, *op.cit.*

81 "Tragedy in the Himalayas and Ganges-Brahmaputra Plain-Flood, Drought, Earthquake and Cyclone", at <<http://www.sos-arsenic.net/english/development/waterlogging.html>> (accessed September 28, 2013).

82 David Braun, Bangladesh, India Most Threatened by Climate Change, Risk Study Finds", October 20, 2010, at <<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/>>

The map shows most of the South Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, and Afghanistan fall under extreme risk of climate change. According to calculations by the British global risks analysis company Maplecroft, “Bangladesh and India are the two countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change over the next 30 years”.⁸³

Bangladesh is also one of the most vulnerable countries for natural disasters. According to the Disaster Management Bureau of Bangladesh, every year about 500,000 people are displaced only by riverbank erosion.⁸⁴ The Associated Press cited some 2.3 million people were affected by Aila in 2007 and many of them stranded in flooded villages. Home to roughly 25,000 residents, the coastal island Nijhum Dwip was completely submerged.⁸⁵ The ‘World Risk Report of 2012 also ranked Bangladesh as the top 5th risk-prone country among 173 nations for severe exposure to natural hazards such as tropical cyclone, storm, flooding, and tidal surge etc. Recent studies also demonstrate that if adaptive measures are not taken very soon, the number of vulnerable people will raise 110 percent with current population growth by 2050.⁸⁶

India is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Around 1.2 billion people live in vulnerable areas to natural hazards such as floods, cyclones, droughts and earthquakes. Around 76 percent of its coastline is prone to cyclones and tsunamis, while 59 percent of the

2010/10/20/bangladesh_india_at_risk_from_climate_change/> (accessed October 23, 2013).

83 “David Braun, 2010, *op.cit.*

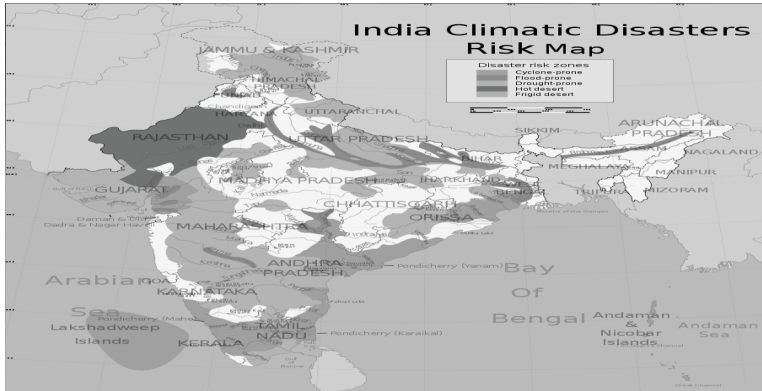
84 “To Be or Not to Be a Climate Change Refugee, that is the Question”, December 31, 2011, at <<http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/student-theses/2012-0503-200420/Final%20MA%20thesis%20CS%26HR.pdf>> (accessed October 24, 2013).

85 Tragedy in the Himalayas and Ganges-Brahmaputra Plain - Flood, Drought, Earthquake and Cyclone, *op.cit.*

86 Choyon Kumar Saha, “An Upshot of Cyclone Aila”, *The Daily Star*, May 22, 2013.

country is vulnerable to earthquakes, 10 percent to floods and river erosion and 68 percent to droughts.⁸⁷

Map: India Climatic Disasters Risk Map



Source:

<https://www.google.com.bd/?gws_rd=cr&ei=jFCEUvurNceUrgfloYHYDg#q=Map%3A+India+Climatic+Disasters+Risk+Map>

One of the most severe threats of human security due to climate change is trigger environmental migration in the region.⁸⁸ The environmental scientists warn that by 2070, millions of people could become homeless in the Asia-Pacific region due to rising sea levels, whereas Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, China and Pacific islands are at most risk.⁸⁹ The Inter-government Panel on Climate Change Convention (IPCCC) has predicted that 1 meter rise in sea level may submerge around 17 percent-20 percent of the total land mass of Bangladesh,

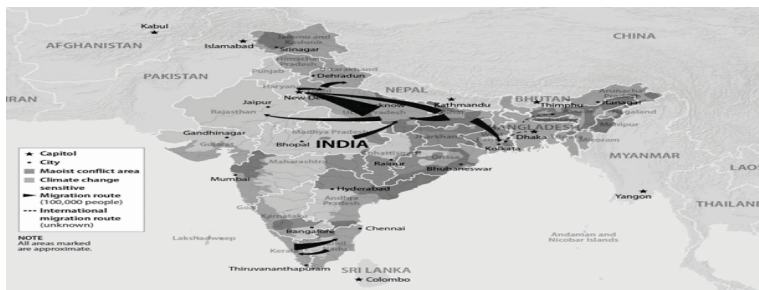
87 "India Must Stop Viewing Disasters as Acts of God – Report", August 29, 2013, at <<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/08/29/india-natural-disaster-idINDEE97S0C420130829>> (accessed October 22, 2013).

88 Tragedy in the Himalays and Ganges-Brahmaputra Plain - Flood, Drought, Earthquake and Cyclone, *op.cit.*

89 See < <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/1009-06.htm>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

creating 25 million to 30 million climate refugees.⁹⁰ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also mentions that rise in sea levels would have devastating consequences in low-lying areas of South, Southeast, and East Asia rendering millions of people homeless in Bangladesh, India, and China.⁹¹

Map: Climate Change Sensitive Migration Routes



Source: <https://www.google.com.bd/?gws_rd=cr&ei=jFCEUvurNceUrgfloYHYDg#q=climate+induced+migration+routes+in+south+asia>

‘Blue Alert, Climate Migrants in South Asia’, a new Greenpeace report warns that global temperature increase between 4-5°C will drive mass migration in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁹² It also estimates that more than 120 million people in India and Bangladesh will be homeless due to climate change. It is also a matter of concern that 22 million Bangladeshis could be displaced by 2050. The island nation of the Maldives, off the west coast of India is at high risk of environmental refugees.⁹³

90 “Climate Change and Bangladesh: A Perspective on Where are We”, December 14, 2007 <<http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=15364>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

91 Mahin Karim, April 2013, *op.cit.*

92 “Unchecked Climate Change = 125 Million Refugees in South Asia”, March 28, 2008, at <<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/climate-change-refugees-india-280308/>> (accessed October 07, 2013).

93 “Concerns over Climate Refugees in South Asia”, April 22, 2009, at <<http://www.climaticoanalysis.org/post/concerns-over-%E2%80%98climate-refugees%E2%80%99-in-south-asia/>> (accessed October 03, 2013).

Vision of South Asia regarding Human Security

Vision for Water Security

Improving Water Security

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) may endeavor to improve water security throughout the region by 2025. Conservation of technologies, comprehensive integrated watershed management through addressing longstanding water-related problems including flood havoc, desertification and flash flood may mitigate water crisis.⁹⁴ It also should be the vision of SAARC to include disaster-warning systems and international coordination in response to water-related disasters.⁹⁵ Well-maintained watersheds and clean water bodies, rivers, lakes, and ponds may also be involved in SAARC's vision of water security.

Preservation of Water and Global Water Partnership

Major SAARC initiative for water security by 2025 may include water preservation. South Asian countries may take strict environmental laws like command and control for controlling water pollution.⁹⁶ SAARC may also search for global water partnership for ensuring a water secure world as well as for supporting sustainable development and management of water resources at all levels.⁹⁷ It may need to manage ground and surface water resources. In order to make it effective, SAARC also needs to develop a collaborative work plan and seek financial support to set it in motion.

94 "Integrated Management a Must to Address Water Problems in South Asia", *The Daily Star*, July 10, 2010.

95 "Asia's Nest Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future", at <<http://asiasociety.org/policy/environment/water-and-food-security/asias-next-challenge-securing-regions-water-future>> (accessed September 17, 2013).

96 See <<http://www.idonline.com/Articles/WATER%20SECURITY%20AND%20ENVIRONMENTAL%20SUSTAINABILITY.pdf>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

97 *Global Water Partnership*, "Groundwater Resources and Irrigated Agriculture", at <http://www.gwp.org/Global/The%20Challenge/Resource%20material/Perspectives%20Paper_Groundwater_web.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2013).

Regional Cooperation for Enhanced Water Security in South Asia

One of the primary goals of SAARC ought to be identifying local solutions in order to use ground water, rain water and surface water judiciously. SAARC needs greater international interactions as well.⁹⁸ SAARC may also set a vision of sustainable use of water in order to achieve the goal of an environment conducive to balanced social and economic development.⁹⁹ SAARC may also take effective mechanisms by 2025 through regional cooperation on nontraditional security issues specially for resolving South Asia's long-standing water disputes.¹⁰⁰

Trans-boundary Water Management

One of the major features of SAARC' vision would be institutional framework for trans-boundary water management and for river basin management. Through the implementation of integrated water strategy and integrated water resource management process, SAARC can ascertain its vision of trans-boundary water management project.¹⁰¹ Following trans-boundary water disputes in South Asia as well as considering miseries of the people due to both droughts and floods, the governments of all South Asian countries may address collective solution of acute shortage of energy and water.

98 Anna Nath, "An Offering of Clean Water for Healthy Living", *One World South Asia*, Mar 20, 2010 at <http://southasia.oneworld.net/archive/weekend/an-offering-of-clean-water-for-healthy-<living/?searchterm=rohini#.UoJGrSfy41k>> (accessed November 09, 2013).

99 *Sri Lanka National Water Partnership*, "Water Vision 2025: Sri Lanka", 2000 at <<http://publications.iwmi.org/pdf/H025883.pdf>> (accessed November 08, 2013).

100 "Nontraditional Regional Security Architecture for South Asia", *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, at <<http://www.nbr.org/research/initiative.aspx?id=39#.UoNTsSfy7IU>> (accessed November 06, 2013).

101 Brenda Bateman and Racquel Rancier (eds), "Case Studies in Integrated Water Resources Management: From Local Stewardship to National Vision", *American Water Resources Association*, November 2012, at <<http://www.awra.org/committees/AWRA-Case-Studies-IWRM.pdf>> (accessed November 03, 2013).

Access to Safe Drinking Water

The member countries of SAARC would be committed to provide sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2025.¹⁰² High quality of water, supply of rural water, efficient use of water, and availability of safe water may ensure access to pure drinking water in vulnerable regions. SAARC needs to manage water at local level, have conjunctive use of water, and integrate the use of both ground and surface water as well.¹⁰³ Both governmental and non-governmental organizations in South Asia may play effective role in raising awareness among the people about improved sanitation and safety environment that could also bring about huge possibilities of universal access to safe drinking water in the region.¹⁰⁴

Joint Watershed and Sustainable Water Management

It is the vision of SAARC to ensure well-maintained watersheds and clean water bodies, rivers, lakes, and ponds throughout the region within 2025.¹⁰⁵ SAARC also aims to include water in security policy planning. It is the vision of SAARC to ensure water management and develop integrated water management capacities. South Asian countries must actively pursue the possibility of setting up a framework for joint watershed management. SAARC could also set up a regional centre for water management with representatives from each country. The centre could facilitate studies and dialogue on the joint mechanism and help draft the agenda and make other necessary modalities. SAARC's vision of water security may include joint monitoring mechanism on water. It may also involve both government and non-government sectors in order to help educate people as well as encourage policy makers. There is a

102 *International Monetary Fund*, "Bangladesh: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper", October 2012, at <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12293.pdf>> (accessed November 05, 2013).

103 Anna Nath, March 20, 2010, *op.cit.*

104 See <<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/bangladesh/docs/MDG/MDG%20Report%202012.pdf>> (accessed November 09, 2013).

105 *Water Vision 2025: Sri Lanka*, 2000, *op.cit.*

possibility of institutional framework for trans-boundary water and river basin management. It may also include a regional platform on integrated flood and drought management.¹⁰⁶

Equitable Regional Water Sharing

SAARC may envision a South Asian region by 2025 in which each person would get the access to hygienic and safe water and sanitation as well. The self-reliance on food would be the centre of planning and action.¹⁰⁷ To achieve equitable sharing of water, SAARC must initiate regional cooperation for enhanced water security in South Asia. SAARC can also ensure equitable water distribution through resolution of trans-boundary river conflicts and creating trust among South Asian nations. SAARC needs equitable share of water resources for minimizing the impacts of spatial and temporal variations.¹⁰⁸

Vision for Food Security

Intra-regional Food Trade

The vision of SAARC is to enhance intra-regional trade for enhancing food trade in the region. Simultaneously, South Asian nations may need to promote efficient food markets through physical and infrastructural development. It may pay more attention on South Asian transit arrangements for facilitating intra-regional trade, including trade in agriculture and food products. It may also need to develop regional

106 <<http://www.gwp.org/Global/About%20GWP/Publications/Colombo%20Synthesis%20Report%20Climate%20Change%20Food%20and%20Water%20Security%20in%20South%20Asia,%20final.pdf>> (accessed October 12, 2013).

107 *Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council*, “Vision 21: A Shared Vision for Hygiene, Sanitation and Water Supply and A Framework for Action”, at <<http://www.unwater.org/downloads/vision21.pdf>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

108 *Water Vision 2025: Sri Lanka*, 2000, *op.cit.*

value chains in the agro-industry to exploit South Asian countries' individual comparative advantages for mutual benefit.¹⁰⁹

Long Term Planning for Balanced Food

The vision of SAARC for 2025 may recognize sustainable food security as a crucial element of its long-term strategic framework. The operational plan for sustainable food security in South Asia would address barriers of achieving the goal of food security by focusing on three areas of influence such as productivity, connectivity, and resilience.¹¹⁰ SAARC may use improved seeds such as higher-yielding, salt-tolerant, drought-tolerant, flood-tolerant and incorporating sustainability into agricultural policies.¹¹¹ In order to protect food from severe impacts of climate change and warn member states of the region, SAARC may establish sub-regional grain insecurity early warning system. SAARC may also move towards the framework of establishing South Asia grain security system.

SAARC Food Security Reserve

SAARC food security reserve may constitute an important component of the visions 2025 of South Asian countries. It may include emergency food reserve, humanitarian food aid, sufficient supply of food in vulnerable areas, reduction of food prices, balanced food security, alternative food storage and so on. SAARC may also formulate particular scheme and framework for food storage that may be guided by emergency monitoring and information system. In addition, regional reserve and national stock agencies should achieve some level of

109 See <<http://www.sawtee.org/featured-events/regional-consultation-on-trade-climate-change-and-food-security-in-south-asia.html>> (accessed September 27, 2013).

110 "Operational Plan for Sustainable Food Security in Asia and the Pacific", December 2009, at <<http://www.adb.org/documents/operational-plan-sustainable-food-security-asia-and-pacific>> (accessed October 04, 2013).

111 "Southern Asia Food Security Paradox", May 2012, at <http://thesecondgreenrevolution.blogspot.com/2012/05/southern-asia-food-security-paradox.html#.Uljb8id_4wo> (accessed October 12, 2013).

organizational capacity for effective response to food security crises. Moreover, laws, policies, and regulations should be harmonized across member countries to facilitate food security and quick and orderly transfer of rice stocks.¹¹²

Sustainable Agriculture and Hunger Free South Asia

The vision of SAARC is to continue collective development process.¹¹³ Sustainable agriculture would bring about huge opportunities towards hunger free South Asia because it will likely produce high quality, safe and healthy food. It would also be environment-friendly because sustainable agriculture mitigates the risks of climate change. It may help build hunger free South Asia through providing multiple agronomic and ecological benefits throughout the region.¹¹⁴

Stable Food Price and Self-sufficiency in Food

In order to ensure self-sufficiency in food, SAARC may formulate pre-established mechanisms for pricing, releasing, transportation, border crossing and distribution of food grain. SAARC may bring together researchers and practitioners as well as facilitate dialogues on key issues of food security in the region.¹¹⁵ It may need food safety

112 Roehlano M. Briones, "Regional Cooperation for Food Security: The Case of Emergency Rice Reserves in the ASEAN Plus Three", *Asian Development Bank Sustainable Development Working Paper Series*, November 2011, at <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/adb-wp18-regional-cooperation-food-security.pdf>> (accessed November 08, 2013).

113 Anna Nath, March 20, 2010, *op.cit.*

114 *European Commission*, "Sustainable Agriculture for the Future We Want", at <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/2012/rio-side-event/brochure_en.pdf> (accessed November 04, 2013).

115 Krishna Prasad, "Regional Approach to Food Security in South Asia: SAARC Food Bank", at <<http://www.sawtee.org/presentations/SessionThree20Dec2012.pdf>> (accessed October 07, 2013)

protocol for testing the safety of genetically modified food.¹¹⁶ Under the strategy of 'Hunger Free South Asia', SAARC may ensure minimum 2,122 k. cal of food for all poor people and standard nutritional food to at least 85 percent of the population by 2021. South Asian governments would pay more attention to the agricultural products in order to keep food price stable and affordable for the poor. It can include other key long-term policy issues e.g. stock management, input-output pricing, safety nets, and regional cooperation etc.¹¹⁷

Regional Food Distribution System

Inclusion of regional food distribution system supported by regional transport system like 'Asian Highway Network' and 'Trans-Asian Railway' may constitute an important segment of SAARC vision. SAARC needs to ensure that people, even isolated and alienated parts of the region have access to food grains. SAARC may also initiate agriculture-related social services in order to provide technology, information, and transportation facilities across the region. The vision of food distribution may not only connect producers, such as farmers and fishermen to consumers, but also allocate food accordingly. As a result, foods need to be transported to a central location and then distributed to outer cities and villages.¹¹⁸ Along with this, South Asian countries may launch emergency food distribution system throughout the region.

116 Amitava Mukherjee, "Food Insecurity: A Growing Threat in Asia", 2008, at <<http://www.unapcaem.org/publication/FoodInsecurityInAsia.pdf>> (accessed October 22, 2013).

117 Sadiq Ahmed, "Managing Food Price Inflation in South Asia: An Agenda for Reforms", *Policy Research Institute*, December 21, 2011 at <http://www.pri-bd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=268:managing-food-price-inflation-in-south-asia-an-agenda-for-reforms&catid=46:global-economy&Itemid=60> (accessed October 12, 2013).

118 See <<http://12.000.scripts.mit.edu/mission2014/problems/inadequate-food-distribution-systems>> (accessed October 23, 2013).

Vision for Health Security*Elimination of Contagious Diseases*

In order to ensure health security, South Asian countries need to largely focus on reducing the threat of underlying causes of mortality risk such as HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and anemia etc. Launching SAARC regional strategy with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS would substantiate SAARC vision. South Asian governments may also develop different schemes like access to health service, insurance, housing schemes, social maternity benefits in order to reduce the rate of health risk. It may build guidelines on addressing malnutrition and manufacturing regional framework for providing adequate health care to all children, girls and boys throughout South Asia.¹¹⁹

Women Development Activities

The vision of SAARC is to provide communities with a wide range of information and services in order to support women's development activities. These programs include sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, counseling, community-based awareness rising in order to change attitudes and increase family education. It also aims to improve living conditions for vulnerable people in all ages.¹²⁰ South Asian countries need to improve coverage of services as well.¹²¹

Reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate

SAARC's vision may aim to reduce maternal mortality rate by

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- 119 <http://www.google.com.bd/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CGkQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2Fwww.unesco.org%2Fnew%2Ffileadmin%2FMULTIMEDIA%2FHQ%2FSHS%2Fpdf%2FWorkshop-Social-Inclusion_SAARC.pdf&ei=5ZwUpSUKceFrQf63oGgDA&usg=AFQjCNHuB6eJNFXGd0DZaoMIeWfPpD8HA&bvm=bv.55617003,d.bmk>
- 120 <<http://www.helpage.org/who-we-are/our-affiliates-/affiliates-in-south-asia-/>> (accessed October 07, 2013)
- 121 M Mathai, "To Ensure Maternal Mortality is Reduced, Quality of Care Needs to be Monitored and Improved alongside Increasing Skilled Delivery Coverage Rates", July 21, 2011 at <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-0528.2011.03104.x/pdf>> (accessed October 12, 2013).

two-thirds by 2015¹²² as women are intensely vulnerable to the effects of costs incurred during child birth.¹²³ It may target reducing maternal, newborn and child death in South Asian region. It may setup National Commissions on Macroeconomics and Health for Resource Mobilization with a view to reducing the vulnerability.¹²⁴ SAARC has also the aspiration of reducing malnutrition and mortality rates, raising education and literacy as well as awareness among rural people.¹²⁵

Reduction of Malnutrition

In order to reduce malnutrition, SAARC might build a framework for care and protection to the children. It may also focus on participation of children in disasters because the vulnerability of children is exacerbated during disasters, and children have suffered disproportionately in almost every disaster-torn area in the region.¹²⁶ The long-term vision of the multi-sector nutrition plan over the next years is to accelerate the reduction of maternal and child under-nutrition,¹²⁷ and to reduce prevalent rates of chronic malnutrition.¹²⁸

Clean and Healthy South Asia

One of the major visions of SAARC could be ensuring clean and healthy South Asia. SAARC needs to achieve ecological sanitation

122 <<http://www.givewell.org/files/Cause1-2/+UNICEF/Lancet%20Maternal%20Mortality%205.pdf>> (accessed October 24, 2013)

123 Ibid.

124 <http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=11> (accessed October 05, 2013).

125 <<http://www.actrav.itscilo.org/actrav-english/telearn/global/ilo/blokit/saarcd.htm>> (October 05, 2013)

126 See <<http://saarc-sdmc.nic.in/pdf/Publications/SAARC%20Framework.PDF>> (accessed October 21, 2013).

127 See <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Nepal_MSNP_2013-2017.pdf> (accessed October 05, 2013).

128 “Multi-sector Nutrition Plan: For Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal and Child Under-nutrition in Nepal”, September 2012, at <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Nepal_MSNP_2013-2017.pdf> (accessed October 02, 2013).

throughout the region.¹²⁹ In order to fulfill the vision, SAARC needs to ensure access to adequate sanitation and sewerage facilities for promoting personal and environmental health.¹³⁰ Members of SAARC countries may adopt common regional development program by 2025 for building clean and healthy South Asia. SAARC may adopt various mechanisms for clean and healthy environment in the region.

Professional Exchange of Doctors and Trans-boundary Health Care Services

The relaxation of immigration policy would help the South Asians towards the movement of people within the region. It could be helpful to provide trans-boundary health care services, exchange of efficient doctors as well as boost mutual understandings, hopes and aspirations among nations. Trans-boundary health care services may be increased through negotiation of SAARC's member states on health care services and governmental procurement on medical devices and pharmaceuticals.¹³¹ However, the opening of bus routes, interaction among doctors, academicians, and researcher would not only enhance trans-boundary health services but also contribute to an easing of tensions among neighboring countries.¹³² Moreover, SAARC may also sign a Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with World Health Organization (WHO) in order to promote the level of health service throughout the region.¹³³

Vision for Environmental Security

Climate Action Plan

SAARC's vision of 2025 may include the formation of climate action plan with common but differentiated responsibilities. SAARC may expand the mandates of Comprehensive National Climate Change

129 Anna Nath, Mar 20, 2010, *op.cit*.

130 Water Vision 2025: Sri Lanka", 2000, *op.cit*.

131 <http://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/documents/research/en_jan_30_final_draft_tpp_briefing.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2014).

132 Brenda Bateman and Racquel Rancier (eds), 2012, *op.cit*, p.204.

133 See <<http://saarc-sec.org/2013/06/28/news/SAARC-and-GIZ-sign-a-Memorandum-of-Understanding/121/>> (accessed November 07, 2013).

Strategy in order to address vulnerable threats of climate change as well as to overcome those threats. SAARC's members should articulate common position on climate change.¹³⁴

Legal Frameworks for the Protection of Climate Refugees

SAARC has the aspiration of formulating legal frameworks in order to protect climate refugees. It may need to enhance the capacity of all governments in the region in order to cope with climate-related displacements or increased number of climate refugees. SAARC may also share the responsibility of climate refugees among the nations.¹³⁵ The focus would be on equitable burden sharing of the challenges of climate-induced migrants.¹³⁶ South Asian countries may take some legal regional initiatives on refugee protection. Regarding this, it may also promote regional refugee law, regional human rights law, as well as develop public law in the region. SAARC may also focus on making clear definition of climate refugees as well as supporting them with adequate protection.

Sustainable Development Strategy

SAARC aims for Sustainable Development Strategy of South Asia (SDS SA) in order to identify common trans-boundary goals of South Asian states as well as to achieve sustainable development mainly in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It may also target some major goals such as eliminating poverty, creating national security, conserving natural resources, protecting tropical forests, and strengthening institutional system.¹³⁷ SAARC may

134 See < http://www.saarcchamber.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=400:saarc-cci-conference-on-climate-change-and-energy-cooperation-in-south-asia&catid=3:main-news-articles&Itemid=911> (accessed October 06, 2013).

135 *Climate Brief*, "Regional Views", at <http://www.lead.org.pk/attachments/climate_briefs/climate_brief_04.pdf> (accessed October 09, 2013).

136 Ibid.

137 See <<http://www.rrcap.ait.asia/nsds/uploadedfiles/file/sa/reference/SSDS%20SA.pdf>> (accessed October 26, 2013).

have also some road maps for ensuring bio-security, bio safety, and bio-diversity in the region.¹³⁸ SAARC's sustainable development strategy may also include afforestation programs and natural reintegration measures as well.¹³⁹ In this regard, South Asian countries may ratify several notable environmental treaties as part of their mandates that would be maintained as countries' obligations.¹⁴⁰

Disaster Risk Reduction

SAARC needs to put priority on disaster management.¹⁴¹ Within 2025, the members of SAARC would largely be committed to address threats of climate change and reduce risk of disasters despite facing severe challenges.¹⁴² SAARC may build a framework of regional cooperation and integration for reducing the threats of disasters as well as initiate Climate Change Adaptation Program in South Asia. It may also develop institutional infrastructures for making proper agendas and building networks with other regional organizations.¹⁴³ South Asian governments would also take several initiatives to promote programs for advocacy and awareness of climate change and to inculcate habits towards a low-carbon society, including incorporation of science-based

138 *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation*, "Fifth Meeting of SAARC Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development", 5 – 6 August, 2009, at <http://saarc-sec.org/uploads/document/SAARC%20Agriculture%20Vision%202020_20100420040327.doc> (accessed November 03, 2013).

139 "Sustainable Agriculture for the Future We Want", *op.cit.*

140 Saleem H. Ali, "Ecological Cooperation in South Asia: The Way Forward", *New American Foundation*, January 2013, at <http://www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Ali_EcologicalCooperation_NAF_0.pdf> (accessed November 05, 2013).

141 Zaglul A Chowdhury, *SAARC and its People: A Study on State of South Asian Cooperation*, Dhaka, News Network Publication, August 2005, p.56.

142 See <http://saarc-sec.org/uploads/document/Common%20SAARC%20position%20for%20COP16_20110123094124.pdf> (accessed November 09, 2013).

143 Rattan Lal, Mannava V.K. Sivakumar, S.M.A. Faiz, Mustafizur Rahman, Khandakar R. Islam (eds.), *"Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia"*, New York.

educational material in educational curricula.¹⁴⁴

SAARC Climate Change Fund

SAARC may develop comprehensive climate change fund involving all the nations, both government and private sectors, civil society stakeholders to garner broad-based support at the local, national, regional and global levels and help member states in meeting urgent adaptation and capacity building needs as well. SAARC may also set up climate innovation centers in South Asia with a view to developing sustainable energy technologies based on indigenous resource endowments.¹⁴⁵ SAARC can also expand network with other regional organizations in order to raise climate fund.¹⁴⁶ It would call the leaders of SAARC to contribute in climate change trust fund with a proper guideline of environmental protection and good governance.¹⁴⁷

Vision for Poverty Reduction

Independent South Asian Commission for Poverty Alleviation

SAARC countries should come to an agreement to put poverty at the center and adopt pro-poor strategies for the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) as SAARC lacks clear profile of the poor in South Asia. SAARC's regional poverty eradication strategies should be able to facilitate access to basic services, including social protection and safety nets. A Plan of Action should be able to define objectives, targets, and operational mechanisms in order to alleviate poverty and promote agricultural development, and ensure

144 Haroon Habib, 2008, *op.cit.*

145 "India Announces SAARC Climate Change Fund", April 28, 2010, *The Hindu*, at <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-announces-saarc-climate-change-fund/article413918.ece>> (accessed November 04, 2013).

146 "Strategizing Climate Change for Bhutan: National Environment Commission Royal Government of Bhutan", January 2009, at <<http://www.rrcap.ait.asia/nsds/uploadedfiles/file/bhutan.pdf>> (accessed October 09, 2013).

147 *Asian Development Bank*, "Climate Change in South Asia: Strong Responses for Building a Sustainable Future", at <<http://www.geasiapacifico.org/documents/Climate%20Change%20in%20South%20Asia.pdf>> (accessed October 03, 2013)

food security.¹⁴⁸ The plan would also focus on poverty reduction in South Asia through productive employment.¹⁴⁹

Strengthening Livelihoods

SAARC intends for strengthening the livelihoods of poor home-based workers through raising awareness and capacity building, providing intensive training and gaining a fair share of mainstream market. SAARC's vision may also include improving access to livelihood assets and reducing vulnerability of poor rural people. It may also identify policy options for improving access to livelihood assets through both changed rights and entitlements and improved capabilities to access existing rights.¹⁵⁰

Comprehensive Mechanism for Poverty Eradication

The vision of SAARC ought to stress on alleviation of poverty through improving the welfare of the people and quality of life.¹⁵¹ In order to bring about comprehensive development in South Asia, SAARC may set a goal of increasing both transport and people to people connectivity within the region by 2025. There is likely to trigger a range of cross-border infrastructural projects, including highways, gas pipelines, electricity grids, inter-port linkages etc to mobilize the process beyond the region.¹⁵² As there are huge economic prospects in the region, SAARC could make a platform of opportunity in the region in order to expand trans-boundary business sectors as well as roar

148 <http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/publication/972/SAARC_0309.pdf>

149 <<http://southasiaforum.in/download/PovertyAlleviation.pdf>> (accessed October 08, 2013).

150 <<http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/2449/Default.aspx>> (accessed October 08, 2013).

151 Saman Kelegama, "What has been the Role of SAARC in Ameliorating Poverty in the Region", at<http://www.cpd.org.bd/saesiv/documents/Papers_session_wise/Plenary%20II/Saman%20Kelegama.pdf> (accessed November 05, 2013).

152 Dipankar Banerjee and N.Manoharan (eds), *SAARC towards Greater Connectivity*, New Delhi, July 2008, P.217

economic sectors.¹⁵³ As a part of poverty eradication, SAARC may take effective mechanisms for ensuring social and gender equity through empowerment and capacity building. SAARC also needs to recognize basic human rights for making the process successful.

South Asian Development Fund

SAARC may consider raising development fund and poverty alleviation fund for the poor people in the region. South Asian countries may initiate concessional financing for the poorest member countries of the region. It may also design poverty alleviation fund project for the eradication of poverty and empowerment of rural and urban poor. SAARC could also launch integrated approach of building institution, providing micro-credit loans, granting small scale infrastructure projects etc. Purview of poverty alleviation fund could also include rebuilding lives, fostering resilience and restoring assets for the poor.¹⁵⁴

Way Forward

Improving Water Security

In order to improve water security throughout South Asia by 2025, the trans-boundary water disputes needs to be resolved. SAARC also needs to adopt conflict resolution mechanisms for addressing both intra and trans-boundary water disputed issues.¹⁵⁵ South Asian countries should respect each other's rights and collaborative efforts should also be taken with a view to resolving the problems of the rivers to avoid water conflicts in future.¹⁵⁶ SAARC may take some mechanisms to make balance

153 Dipankar Banerjee and N. Manoharan (eds), *SAARC towards Greater Connectivity*, New Delhi, July 2008, P.214.

154 See <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/0,contentMDK:21609794~menuPK:158937~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:223547,00.html>> (accessed November 06, 2013).

155 "Asia's Nest Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future", at <<http://org/policy/environment/water-and-food-security/asia-next-challenge-securing-regions-water-future>> (accessed September 17, 2013).

156 Md. Shariful Islam, "Indo-Bangla water conflict/cooperation", *The Daily Star*, September 28, 2011.

between salt and fresh water and to ensure equal distribution of natural resources among the South Asian countries.¹⁵⁷ SAARC may also take effective initiatives for water storage, productivity and conservation for the future generation. As bilateral disputed issues do not take place in SAARC's charter, South Asian countries can undertake ecological agreements in order to enhance cooperation in disputed issues like water. For example, international environmental treaties, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands protection, which have trans-boundary cooperation within their mandates, can also provide a mechanism for linking ecological cooperation to widen resolution of disputes and enhance regional security.¹⁵⁸ SAARC countries can also build judicious settlement of disputes and management of water resources through win-win diplomacy rather than zero-sum policy, whereas all nations will get the equal priority.¹⁵⁹ South Asian countries may also arrange regional summits regularly highlighting the future threats of water scarcity in the region.

Preservation of Water and Global Water Partnership

South Asian countries should be concerned for the preservation and rational utilization of water resources. The governments of South Asia can initiate new environmental treaties and agreements based on international standards for the sustainable use of natural resources.¹⁶⁰ South Asia can enhance global water partnership through expanding the region's strategic networks and strategic alliances that will intensify Area Water Partnerships. For example, the Karachi Water Partnerships, Zonal Water Partnerships and Local Water Parliaments serve as ground-

157 "TRANSBOUNDARY WATER ISSUES IN SOUTH ASIA", Research Project for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 2007,

158 Saleem H. Ali, "Ecological Cooperation in South Asia: The Way Forward", January 14, 2013, at <http://newamerica.net/publications/policy/ecological_cooperation_in_south_asia_the_way_forward> (accessed May 19, 2014).

159 *The Daily Star*, "PM for end to global conflicts over water", May 21, 2013.

160 Shamima Nasreen, "Trans-boundary water matters!" *The Daily Star*, April 16, 2011.

level mechanisms for multi-stakeholder dialogues. It is also necessary to develop funding strategy to secure public, corporate, and private supports.¹⁶¹ Growing competition for water resources needs to be addressed through better public policies, greater investment in critical water infrastructure, and active participation by all states.¹⁶² Regional awareness should be increased for reusing, recycling and judicious use of the limited groundwater resources.¹⁶³

Integrated Water Resource Management

Due to trans-boundary water disputes, widespread scarcity, gradual destruction and aggravated pollution of freshwater resources, South Asian region may build integrated water resource management program. Such integration must cover all types of interrelated freshwater bodies, including both surface water and groundwater. The natural resource management also needs to include the optimum use of trans-boundary water resources to riparian states. In this connection, cooperation among those states may be desirable in conformity with existing agreements and other relevant arrangements, taking into account the interests of all riparian states. Right implementation of river laws and policies is also inevitable due to severe impact of water crisis and degradation of natural resources.¹⁶⁴ Vulnerable countries can continuously stress on the crucial necessity of building regional consensus on the vital issues of trans-boundary water sharing. For example, Bangladesh should pay special emphasis on resolving disputes over Teesta water sharing with India. There should also be cooperation among two nuclear powers, like Pakistan and India to resolve trans-boundary water disputes. Governance challenges in water management

161 <<http://www.gwp.org/gwp-in-action/South-Asia/>> (accessed May 18, 2014).

162 Noeleen Heyzer, "An unfinished agenda", *The Daily Star*, May 24, 2013.

163 *The Daily Star*, "Make universal water supply key UN agenda: PM", May 20, 2013.

164 Shamima Nasreen, "Trans-boundary water matters!", *The Daily Star*, April 16, 2011.

must be addressed through improving homegrown initiatives.¹⁶⁵ In order to ensure equitable water sharing, South Asian countries need proactive diplomacy. Especially the policy makers of the low riparian countries may urge to take necessary diplomatic initiatives for sustenance and navigability of the rivers, equitable sharing of water of other trans-boundary rivers, and securing river basins and ecosystems.¹⁶⁶

Access to Safe Drinking Water

Ensuring safe drinking water in South Asian region must be the primary agenda of SAARC. The regional development planning must include the issue of improving agricultural water productivity, achieving energy, and satisfying growing industrial water requirements in an integrated manner. South Asian governments may also build collaboration in development and transformation of technology for effective tackling of arsenic contamination of groundwater, successful harvesting of rainwater and recycling of waste water.¹⁶⁷ The most common method might be water-harvesting, which involves capturing rainwater and then using it to recharge groundwater sources and refill ponds. Another source of water that has the potential to be recycled and made fit for consumption is wastewater.¹⁶⁸ Better water management and sound water governance are vital to ensure safe drinking water in south Asian region. Safe, affordable water and sanitation must be the core issues of agenda at regional, sub-regional and national levels in order to ensure inclusive, sustainable and resilient use of water.¹⁶⁹

165 *The Daily Star*, "Make universal water supply key UN agenda: PM", May 20, 2013.

166 *The Daily Star*, "Make universal water supply key UN agenda: PM", May 20, 2013.

167 *The Daily Star*, "Make universal water supply key UN agenda: PM", May 20, 2013.

168 "Safe Drinking Water: The Need, The Problem, Solutions, and an Action Plan", Safe Drinking Water The need, the problem, solutions and an action plan", Report of the Third World Academy of Sciences, at <<http://www.g77.org/sshlcst/TWAS.pdf>> (accessed May 19, 2014).

169 Noeleen Heyzer, "An unfinished agenda", *The Daily Star*, May 24, 2013.

Food Security

Intra-regional Food Trade

Promoting efficient food markets through physical and infrastructural development can be better way of enhancing intra-regional food trade in South Asia. Expansion of regional trade may promote specialization, efficiency and improve quality of exports, which will benefit all South Asian countries. There is scope for joint ventures in agro-based industries that will particularly benefit small South Asian countries, as they lack necessary resources to undertake industrial investments efficiently. SAARC countries must take every effort to turn South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) into a success and to expedite economic development.¹⁷⁰ SAARC should also commence the emergency export-import system, operational modalities, South-South technology transfer, liberalization of trade, reduction of both tariff and non-tariff barriers, and regional cooperation for the conservation and proper use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in order to reduce food shortages. Transit arrangement for facilitating intra-regional trade, including trade in agriculture and food products is also vital to enhance intra-regional food trade in the region.¹⁷¹ Intra-regional trade in the region can also be enhanced through bilateral, multilateral and regional initiatives.

Long Term Planning for Balanced Food

SAARC nations need to prepare regional budget in the areas of science and technology, adaptation and mitigation of climate finance to protect agricultural products from severe impacts of climate change.¹⁷² It is also necessary for the successful implementation of the SAARC Food Bank.

170 "Trade cooperation in South Asia: An overview", at <<http://www.centad.org/resources/demystifying-trading/87-backgrounders/840-trade-cooperation-in-south-asia-an-overview.html>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

171 <<http://www.sawtee.org/featured-events/regional-consultation-on-trade-climate-change-and-food-security-in-south-asia.html>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

172 <<http://www.sawtee.org/featured-events/regional-consultation-on-trade-climate-change-and-food-security-in-south-asia.html>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

The bank needs to act as a regional food security reserve for SAARC member countries during food shortages and emergencies, as well as provide regional support to foster inter-country partnerships and regional integration, and remove regional food shortages through collective actions.¹⁷³

SAARC Food Security Reserve

SAARC needs to adopt necessary mechanisms in order to foster inter-country partnerships and regional integration, and tackle regional food shortages through collective mechanisms. It should include quality reserve of food grains, replenishment of the reserve and delivery of food grains by member countries from their reserve, stable food price, institutional arrangements, and proper functions of the food bank.¹⁷⁴ The member countries also need to implement the principle of article II of the SAARC Food Security Reserve, which includes, “the member countries undertake to provide adequate storage facilities for the food grains that they have earmarked; to inspect the food grains periodically and to apply appropriate quality control measures, including turnover of the food grains, if necessary, with a view to ensuring that all times the food grains satisfy the required quality standard”.¹⁷⁵

Hunger Free South Asia

Taking into account the challenges of climate change, free trade and sustainable agriculture, SAARC needs an unwavering commitment to create a poverty-free South Asia in which all its citizens would lead a productive and meaningful life.¹⁷⁶ SAARC may move towards consequential strategy in order to achieve stable growth and sustainable

173 *The Daily Star*, “SOUTH ASIA: Regional food bank gets go-ahead”, August 07, 2008.

174 M. Abdul Latif Mondal, “Making Saarc Food Bank operational”, *The Daily Star*, October 31, 2010.

175 <http://www.iatp.org/files/451_2_106814.pdf> (accessed May 18, 2014).

176 Kim Hak-Su, “The goal: a poverty-free South Asia”, *The Hindu*, November 30, 2006, at <<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/the-goal-a-povertyfree-south-asia/article3054740.ece>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

agricultural output through long-term investment in agricultural sectors of the region. Agro-forestry systems combined with trees, shrubs, crops and livestock production may also be fruitful for sustainable agricultural production in South Asian region.¹⁷⁷ Through the improvements of regional food supply and the gradual elimination of dietary deficiencies, each South Asian country may improve the overall nutritional status of population. Furthermore, it also brings about qualitative changes in the production, processing, distribution and marketing of food which will enhance the local consumption before trade. Food sovereignty, food self-sufficiency as well as formulation of food security policy are also very significant. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food strategies must not merely be directed at ensuring food security for all, but must also achieve the consumption of adequate quantities of safe and good quality that together make up a healthy diet.¹⁷⁸ Improving agricultural production and access to sufficient nutritious food to stabilizing food supplies and cutting post-harvest losses can drive for ending hunger and malnutrition. It will enable all people, particularly the most vulnerable, to contribute fully to economic growth, while strengthening resilience to shocks, addressing inequality, promoting peace and stability and empowering women and smallholder farmers.¹⁷⁹

Stable Food Price and Self-sufficiency in Food

As low and fluctuating prices are core problems for stable food production, flexible exchange rate, balance between inflation and recession, demand and supply, export and import as well as formal

177 European Commission, "Sustainable Agriculture for the Future We Want", at <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/2012/rio-side-event/brochure_en.pdf> (accessed November 04, 2013).

178 "Food Security in South Asia", November 2011, at <http://www.coastbd.org/FOOD%20SECURITY%20IN%20SOUTH%20ASIA_OKS.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

179 FAO, IFAD, WFP, "Imagining a world free from hunger: Ending hunger and malnutrition and ensuring food and nutrition security", May 2012, at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Think%20Pieces/6_food_nutrition.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

movement of food grains can be the pathway towards ensuring stable food price. SAARC needs to ensure competitive regional trade system in order to curb supply-side constraints and unstable food prices. It is important to formulate regional food security strategy based on self-reliance and self-sufficiency through domestic production. There should be the practice of comparative advantage whereas each country can import food from regional market when prices are cheaper than domestic market.¹⁸⁰

Regional Food Distribution System

Regional food distribution system can be enhanced through investing in transport and communication. Distribution of income and wealth are also significant to produce enough food grains for their own consumption or to purchase the quantities needed for a healthy subsistence.¹⁸¹ Fair and balanced intra-regional trade, operationalization of SAARC food bank, proper utilization of SAFTA, liberalization of trade and economy may ensure equal distribution of food among South Asian countries.

Health Security

Reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate

SAARC can adopt an equitable, well-resourced, accessible and integrated health system that is vital pre-condition for guaranteeing health security of women and reducing maternal deaths. Each country needs human resource strategies including increasing the number and quality of health professionals and improving terms and conditions that will be the key for reducing maternal mortality. Ensuring women's access to maternal health and other sexual and reproductive health services may require to address discriminatory laws, policies, practices and gender inequalities in health care and in society that usually prevent women

180 Uttam Deb, Mahabub Hossain, and Steve Jones, "Rethinking Food Security Strategy: Self-sufficiency or Self-reliance", BIDS Policy Brief, May 2009, at <<http://bids.org.bd/files/pb5.pdf>> (accessed May 21, 2014).

181 Wolfgang-Peter Zingel, "Food security in South Asia: Much needed regional cooperation", *The Daily Star*, December 01, 2012.

and adolescents from accessing good quality services. It is also important to ensure services for indigenous people and other minority groups besides scaling up technical interventions or making the interventions affordable. Access to health information and education, affordable and physically accessible health care, enjoyment of the right to health on the basis of non-discrimination and equality can play significant role in reducing the maternal mortality rate in the region.¹⁸² The key to bringing down mortality lies not in institutionalising more women during childbirth, but in increasing the provision of pre-natal care so all women receive medical check-ups during pregnancy. Improving education and making better use of local networks to ensure all pregnant women receive pre-natal support are essential to bring down the rate of unnecessary deaths.¹⁸³

Reduction of Malnutrition

Health care services, goods and facilities connected to preventing maternal mortality must be available, accessible, and acceptable. A policy that is animated by human rights, including the right to health, is likely to be more effective, equitable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and participatory.¹⁸⁴ It is therefore essential to evaluate different distribution strategies in order to determine which is most effective for preventing malnutrition and reducing child mortality. Increasing purchasing power, modernization of food systems, and increased maternal as well as paternal education may improve nutrient intake, thus contributing to reducing stunting prevalence in the region. South Asian countries also need to improve environmental hygiene and access to preventive health

182 Paul Hunt and Judith Bueno De Mesquita, "Reducing maternal mortality: The contribution of the right to the highest attainable standard of health", at <https://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/reducing_mm.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

183 *Dhaka Tribune*, "Reduce maternal deaths", May 31, 2014.

184 Paul Hunt and Judith Bueno De Mesquita, "Reducing maternal mortality: The contribution of the right to the highest attainable standard of health", at <https://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/reducing_mm.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

services.¹⁸⁵

Clean and Healthy South Asia

South Asia can build clean and healthy region through adopting environmental and sustainable development programs facing severe challenges due to high levels of soil erosion, highly variable rainfall, and degraded forests. It may include structural transformations for reducing the costs of environmental degradation on human health and eliminating pollution from key sources.¹⁸⁶ A comprehensive approach should also be taken into account to save rivers from pollution. Regional approach is also necessary for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection. SAARC needs to address the key challenges of land degradation, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and deforestation etc.¹⁸⁷

Environmental Security

Climate Action Plan

The climate action plan may include some thematic areas of climate change e.g. climate change mitigation, technology transfer, financing and investment mechanism, education, training and awareness, monitoring, assessment and management of risks due to climate change throughout the region.¹⁸⁸ A climate change action plan that lays out a strategy, including specific policy recommendations should be implemented to address the risks of climate change and reduce its greenhouse gas

185 <http://apps.who.int/nutrition/landscape_analysis/MozambiqueNationalstrategyreductionstunting.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

186 <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/EXTENVSTRATEGY/0,,contentMDK:23205752~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:6975693,00.html>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

187 <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/EXTENVSTRATEGY/0,,contentMDK:23205752~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:6975693,00.html>>

188 Haroon Habib, "SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change", July 5, 2008, The Hindu, at <<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/saarc-action-plan-on-climate-change/article1447194.ece>> (accessed November 08, 2013).

emissions.¹⁸⁹ The action plan may comprise immediate, short, medium, and long-term programs.¹⁹⁰ Each country should also be committed to promoting programs for mass awareness on climate change in order to build a 'low-carbon society'.¹⁹¹ In order to implement the action plan, SAARC may instigate clean development management, exchange of information on disaster preparedness, exchange of meteorological data, monitoring the impacts of climate change, supporting international negotiation process and sensitizing media in this issue.¹⁹² Each South Asian country needs to be fully committed to taking all kinds of necessary measures so that people are fully protected from the adverse impacts of climate change promised in the manifesto of climate action plan. The vulnerable countries will get the first priority of this plan.¹⁹³

Legal Frameworks for the Protection of Climate Refugees

The vulnerable and low riparian countries must be prepared for a worst case scenario of the climate refugees. Investment is also needed to build human capacity and to facilitate migration out of these countries. Proper healthy rehabilitation is needed to prevent people ending up in slum areas with no safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter or services. As migration to other exposed areas does not solve the problem, rehabilitation policy is needed to stop further displacement. Policy makers must consider how best to deal with future possibility of environmental migration in a way that can maximize win-win solutions for all the victim countries i.e. by supporting migration within and out the country and protecting those who are most vulnerable. The

189 <<http://epa.gov/statelocalclimate/state/state-examples/action-plans.html>> (accessed May 22, 2014).

190 <http://www.moef.gov.bd/climate_change_strategy2009.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2014).

191 <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/79097/asia-south-asian-countries-unite-to-combat-climate-change>> (accessed May 22, 2014).

192 Ibid.

193 <http://www.moef.gov.bd/climate_change_strategy2009.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2014).

vulnerable countries should develop policies to deal with massive population shifts as a result of climate change such as sea-level rise and variable monsoons. The governments of vulnerable countries of this region need to use new financial instruments including ‘catastrophe bonds’ and special insurance schemes for climate refugees. Above all, South Asian countries should take comprehensive efforts to bring about cooperation among the countries for protecting climate refugees. Specially, both Bangladesh and India should make bilateral policies for climate refugees so that it cannot create conflict between the two countries.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Like climate action plan, the sustainable development strategy may include the exchange of information on disaster preparedness and extreme events, exchange of meteorological data, clean development mechanism projects, capacity building and exchange of information on climate change impacts, including glacial melting and threats to biodiversity, and mutual consultation in international negotiation processes.¹⁹⁴ Development must ensure both adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Each country must consider its development and vulnerability contexts, which should include, among other things, especially its geographic location, in terms of its position with regard to exposure to sea, confluences of major rivers; its landscape, aridity, floodplains; its economic profile, social status, infrastructure etc.¹⁹⁵

Disaster Risk Reduction

South Asian countries may develop innovative financial risk management tools such as index insurance to help smallholder farmers and pastoralists and manage risk associated with changing rainfall patterns and drought. They may distribute drought-resistant seeds and

194 < <http://www.irinnews.org/report/79097/asia-south-asian-countries-unite-to-combat-climate-change>> (accessed May 17, 2014).

195 <<http://www.pecm.org.bd/attachment/library/CCA-and-DRR/Changing-way-we-develop.pdf>> (accessed May 18, 2014).

promote management practices that increase farmers' ability to cope with climatic impacts.¹⁹⁶ To reduce unacceptable risks and improve preparedness for climate change, the disaster risk reduction mechanism should include the long-term management of risks and uncertainties of climate change. It may promote partnership with both government and non-government agencies to provide long term and immediate needs.¹⁹⁷ Regional comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders toward understanding the risks and vulnerabilities of climate change and then responding to these through concerned sectors, agencies and stakeholders can be effective way to mitigate severe risks of climate change. Ministers, bureaucrats, scientists, and businessmen may cooperate to this issue.¹⁹⁸ Considerable achievements can be realized with the appropriate use of meteorological, hydrological and climate information as part of a comprehensive multi-sector, multi-hazard, and multi-level approach. An essential starting point for reducing risks is a quantitative assessment which combines information about the hazards with exposures and vulnerabilities of the population or assets e.g., agricultural production, infrastructure and homes, etc. Countries can develop risk management strategies using early warning systems to reduce casualties; medium and long-term sectoral planning such as land zoning, infrastructure development, water resource management, and agricultural planning to reduce economic losses and build livelihood resilience. This must be underpinned by effective policies, legislation and legal frameworks, and institutional coordination mechanisms as well as information and knowledge sharing, education and training. South Asian countries may take collaborative efforts and work together in order to reduce the vulnerability of climate change following frequent floods, cyclones, salinity, sea-level rise and other climatic issues.

196 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/president27sclimateactionplan.pdf>> (accessed May 18, 2014).

197 <<http://www.pecm.org.bd/attachment/library/CCA-and-DRR/Changing-way-we-develop.pdf>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

198 <<http://www.pecm.org.bd/attachment/library/CCA-and-DRR/Changing-way-we-develop.pdf>> (accessed May 20, 2014).

SAARC Climate Change Fund

South Asian developed countries may initiate climate change fund whereas transparency and accountability should be maintained from both donor and recipient countries. There must be firm commitments to make fruitful negotiation in order to provide substantial funds on mitigation and adaptation of climate change as well as logistical supports to poor countries. The vulnerable countries also must be committed to the proper utilization of climate finance in order to save the people from the threats of climate change. Regional action plan can be initiated for the adaptation to climate change and mobilization of climate funds. South Asian countries may also come into an agreement to create a special fund for enhancing public adaptability to face the challenges of climate change.¹⁹⁹

Poverty Reduction

Strengthening Livelihoods

South Asian policy makers may come forward to remove all barriers to increase trade volume for strengthening livelihoods in the region as a significant number of people in this region still live under the poverty line. The South Asian region can hardly reap the benefits of global trade, as the countries have limited negotiating skills.²⁰⁰

Comprehensive Mechanism for Poverty Eradication

SAARC's poverty eradication mechanism may include the reduction of population living below the poverty line through rising economic opportunities for the poor, implementation of policies regarding their empowerment, improved access to physical and social assets and social safety nets for those who are too weak to participate in the market-

199 Ripan Kumar Biswas, "Saarc must act as one on climate change", *The Daily Star*, July 02, 2008.

200 Refayet Ullah Mirdha, "South Asia should cut tariff to increase trade", *The Daily Star*, February 03, 2009.

based growth process.²⁰¹ Creating new economic opportunities for uplifting poor, high income jobs, charity-based humanitarian assistance to poor, affordable financial services for poor to uplift them and initiating new business models giving access to poor countries may be fruitful methods of poverty eradication in the region.²⁰² Transparency in decision making and policy formulation, accountability and competition need to be introduced for continuing sustainable development in the region. Due to differences in the policymakers' perception of poverty reduction and the physical aspects on the ground, planners need to carefully identify the policy gap.²⁰³ The comprehensive mechanism must include women's empowerment at both national and regional levels. The poverty alleviation process of SAARC needs to be supported by necessary fund. SAARC member states can commence collective approach supported by necessary funds to deal with such an overwhelming problem of extreme poverty in the region.

South Asian Development Fund

The development fund needs to be formulated stressing the importance of bilateral and multilateral funding in support of the implementation of activities, programs, and measures in the climate change area.²⁰⁴ To distribute funds for development projects, each country must consider various factors. At first, a kind of survey or evaluation research must be done to the whole country to understand the statistics or the status of poverty in Bangladesh to figure out the problem areas and the factors that directly contribute to poverty. The research must investigate the

201 Mukunda Prasad Acharya, "SAARC Initiatives In Poverty Reduction", at <http://www.gorkhapatra.org.np/detail.php?article_id=4350&cat_id=7> (accessed May 21, 2014).

202 <<https://peopleint.wordpress.com/2011/05/09/top-5-methods-to-reduce-poverty-in-world/>> (accessed May 21, 2014).

203 Muhammad Zamir, "Poverty reduction in South Asia", *The Daily Star*, March 20, 2004.

204 "Accessing Resources under the Special Climate Change Fund", *Global Environment Facility*, at <http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/publication/23470_SCCF.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

organizations, both government and non-government organizations that intimately work with poverty reduction projects. It is essential to find out the experience and the length of time of the organization's involvement in such projects. In addition, these organizations must show a degree of ease and accessibility to people at grass root level as well.

Conclusion

Human security in Bangladesh has become a challenging issue even in the age of globalization. As the high population growth continues, all the South Asian governments should be more concerned about the current challenges of human security in the region. SAARC as an organization has a major role to play. SAARC needs to have a particular vision for the future so that it can set a common stage of hopes and aspirations of the people of South Asia by helping to combat all the threats of human security through this. It is expected that SAARC's policy documents are formulated that focus on poverty alleviation, improving agricultural production, and attaining food security in the region. By building non-traditional regional security architecture, SAARC can promote human security in the region. The European Union could be a model to emulate for the future vision of SAARC. South Asians must address the issues of poverty, peace and, environmental degradation of the region, smartly and efficiently in the ever changing dynamics of economic, security and climatic challenges.

Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union

Nihal Rodrigo¹

The vision of a South Asian Union has been long with us, but some cynics consider it to be an impossible dream. There have been setbacks/obstacles within South Asia, and beyond it, delaying and hampering progress on implementing decisions of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on processes and projects that would help the region. Although SAARC Summits are due to take place annually, the 17th SAARC Summit took place in Addu City in the Maldives way back in 2011 and the 18th Summit will now take place in Kathmandu only later in 2014.

The theme of the last Summit in Maldives, at which I too was present, was “Building Bridges”. The Summit projected and endorsed a number of issues of practical connectivity that SAARC needed to establish, both within South Asia, as well as beyond, in the inter-linked globalized world. A special session at the Summit provided valuable opportunities for States outside the South Asian region, with Observer status wishing greater interaction with SAARC, to express their views. They included Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and the United States of America. Yet, their respective formal engagements with SAARC are, not as extensive as those of the Dialogue Partners of ASEAN.

The Addu Summit focused on the need to substantially engage the interests and concerns of *the people* of South Asia, and to provide them opportunities to develop their potential. The Summit’s Declaration was

1 Former Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka; Secretary General of SAARC; Ambassador to China and to the UN.

“mindful of the plurality of cultures and diversities within the region and cognizant of the need to promote inter-cultural harmony through greater contact and interaction between people”. Heads of State in their Final Declaration reaffirmed the resolve “to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of their people through people-centered sustainable development”. At the Summit itself, several Heads of State focused on the human condition and welfare of people in the region and responsibility of their Governments to provide practical opportunities for such development. Nepal’s then Prime Minister, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, frankly asserted that “the increasing gap between the rich and the poor has given way to enormous stress on social harmony.....peace and security in the region. The challenges demand poverty alleviation strategies be comprehensive and socio-economic processes be more people-centred and justice-based”. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa focused on the situation among the emerging youth. He said that, rising in South Asia was, “a mood of urgency, impatience” because “a large and influential part of our societies consist of younger people, inspired by new ideas, looking forward with enthusiasm to a promising future. They cannot wait long”.

Clearly, there is need to engage, rather than enrage, the people in all SAARC countries. The human element in economic development must not be neglected. National statistics of rising development activities may seem commendable, without revealing grave, underlying, social inequities. As I indicated at a South Asia-China Cooperation Conference in Kunming, democratic governance also clearly needs to protect and preserve rural communities from dangers of excessive greedy corporate exploitation leading to damage, even destruction, of dwindling forest reserves and pollution of water resources which sustain remote areas. Bhutan’s Prime Minister, focusing on “excessive greed”, including at corporate levels, described it as “employing our genius and technology to extract more, and faster, sell and consume more, waste and pollute more - in our singular aim for material, personal gain and mistaken symbols of success”. The Vision of a South Asian Union needs to go

beyond economic strategies and statistics proceeding to ensure comprehensive human security.

The process of poverty alleviation in the region is being gradually developed. Excellent perceptive studies made are not adequately made use of. Poverty alleviation needs to be more comprehensive, reaching out to remote areas which are perhaps the worst affected. Urban development moves at faster pace, but those in depressed slum areas need greater attention.

Gender, caste, religious, ethnic and socio-economic discrimination need be halted, to the extent possible, in realizing the vision of a South Asian Union in which the human dimension is covered comprehensively. SAARC processes, avoiding as its Charter demands, “bilateral and contentious issues” at formal official meetings, need nevertheless to promote, beyond official sectors, more social and human engagement together with economic corporate development.

In the globalizing world, South Asia is not safe from perils posed by unscrupulous locals deviously collaborating with external criminal cartels including those engaged in the illegal arms trade, drug trafficking and people-smuggling. Many security dangers faced by people within South Asia are due to illegal activities of local criminal and terrorist groups profiteering from devious links with global criminal syndicates.

The terrorist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, which has now been defeated, had secured considerable external funding and support through collaboration with globalized criminal corporate trafficking in arms and narcotic drugs as well as in people-smuggling. The SAARC Declaration adopted in 2011, specifically called for coordinated, concerted action to root out terrorism which still lingers across South Asia, specifically “taking into account its linkages with illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and small arms” and called for “an early conclusion” of the proposed “United Nations Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism”. The Summit also called for implementation of the text of the SAARC Regional

Convention on Preventing and Combatting Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution”.

In the current globalized economy, the Vision of a South Asian Union needs to engage in mutual cooperation beyond the region as well. The Addu Declaration called for “a comprehensive review of all matters relating to SAARC’s engagement with Observers. Sri Lanka’s bilateral relations with Australia for example have enabled, to a major extent, to hold back people-smuggling across the Indian Ocean. Australia has also made available patrol boats which will help Sri Lankan authorities to halt illegal movements of asylum-seekers in frail, vulnerable crafts before they sail, in grave peril to their own lives, victimized by people-smugglers across turbulent high seas to Australia.

Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union needs SAARC to also consider practical links with the already visible dawn of the more extensive concept of the “Asian Century” being promoted by China. China aims at closer, more profitable connectivity being developed across the entire Asian region including particularly with South East Asians such as Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore. During my service as Secretary General of SAARC, the current Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi (at the time, Assistant Minister) discussed with me, at the Secretariat in Kathmandu, way back in 1999, prospects of building closer China-SAARC cooperation. He anticipated, with great perception, emerging aspects of global economic connectivity and cooperation despite ideological differences. Today, (Communist) China’s largest economic partners are the (Capitalist) European Union and the United States. Differing, even contrasting, economic ideologies are now no longer a bar to mutually beneficial cooperation among states.

Already, by August 2012, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had presented its prophetic Report, “Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century” at a Forum in Tokyo. The ADB President, introducing the Report, stated that the Asian Century could not be that of Asia alone, but clearly a “century of shared *global* prosperity”. He indicated that building Asia’s regionalism would need “collective leadership”, recognizing a “concept of balance of power among all of Asia’s major economic forces”- China,

India, Japan, Korea and Singapore. The views expressed at the 2014 CSAS-KAS-COSATT Conference in Kathmandu by H.E. Ong Keng Yong, Singapore's current Ambassador to Malaysia, who served earlier as Secretary General of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), are particularly relevant in this context.

The United States National Intelligence Council (USNIC) also presents Reports of forthcoming global trends based on an academic consultative process combining views of the US Government, the corporate sector, economists and think tanks. Its Report, "Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds "(2013), stated that "by 2030, China will probably have the largest economy, surpassing that of the US a few years before 2030". China has of course already surpassed Japan to be the world's second largest economy.

In these circumstances, the Vision of a South Asian Union, on the rocky highway to its realization, needs therefore to develop closer economic collaboration with China, soon to be emerging as the largest economy in the world. There is also some reasonable speculation about the graduation of India soon to the rank of a major economic power. Clearly, the Vision of a "South Asian Union" needs to take into account the broader, and now more or less globally accepted, concept of the "Asian Century". SAARC countries need to identify, explore and develop more extensive issues of cooperation with the rest of Asia, including on related sensitive security issues as well.

Last year's Annual Conference of the Boao Forum for Asia (China's version of the European Davos Conference) had a wide theme of cooperative connectivity: "Asia Seeking Development for All: Restructuring, Responsibility and Cooperation". Chinese President Xi Jinping, acknowledged that the world is experiencing "profound and complex changes" increasingly "interconnected and independent" yet "far from being peaceful". Though 50% of global growth now stems from Asia, President Xi Jinping, who is also a poet, identified 4 main challenges essential to deal with, when realizing the emerging Asian Century:

i) to “break new ground for boosting common development” as “nothing remains constant”; adjusting economic structures to make “life better for the people”. It implies also major changes in Communism; ii) to boost common security, working together. In poetic terms, he said it was essential “to turn our global village into a major stage for common security: not an arena where gladiators fight each other”. iii) to promote both the South-South and the North-South dialogues that would help evolve balanced development so as to successfully consolidate the stable growth of the whole global economy; and iv) to respect the right of each country to independently choose “its own social system and development path”.

In May 2013, early after assumption of power, President Xi Jinping invited Sri Lanka’s President Mahinda Rajapaksa to pay a State Visit to China. Following the visit, China-Sri Lanka relations despite size differentials were uplifted to a Strategic Cooperative Partnership which, inter alia, covers trade and investment facilitation; promotion of cultural, academic and tourism links; and close security cooperation in combatting the “Three Evils” of extremism, separatism, and terrorism.

Given common security threats faced by the two countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), including corporate criminal activities and non-traditional security issues, a China-Sri Lanka Joint Committee on Coastal and Marine Cooperation will also be promoting ocean surveillance and observation, eco-systems protection, marine and coastal zone management, search and rescue operations, and combating piracy and people-smuggling. All these aspects are also essential for the security and well-being of the SAARC member-states who are Indian Ocean States. China and Sri Lanka also agreed to “further intensify exchanges and pragmatic cooperation” between their Parliaments, political parties, armed forces and law-enforcement authorities. Subsequently, in May 2013, the Chinese President visited India and Pakistan heightening the Vision of South Asian Union and the Asian Century,

It was in June 2013 that President Xi visited the United States, where he clarified aspects of the Asian Century and China’s expectations

from it. Although the US Congressional Research Service indicated that there was some concern that a “rising China” challenges the US economy and US global leadership, President Obama was quoted informing President Xi that “it was very much in the interest of the United States for China to continue its peaceful rise, because if China is successful, it helps to drive the world economy, putting China in position to work with United States, as equal partners, dealing with global challenges that no nation can address by itself”. President Xi had indicated during discussions between the two countries the need to “build a new model of major country relationships” with a “common path” avoiding past “confrontation and conflict”.

In September 2013, President Obama’s bilateral talks with then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh helped to “highlight shared democratic values” and that “the US and India should look to each other as partners of first resort” addressing global changes. Significantly, in relation to the US “rebalance to Asia” and the “Look East policy” of India, the two countries have also expressed “a desire to partner closely” in the Asia-Pacific, including “greater coordination with Japan, China and ASEAN.”

The common concerns shared by China and the South Asian countries mentioned are an indication that the visions conceived, respectively, for the South Asian Union and the larger concept of the Asian Century, could complement each other despite some divergent views and even clashes as well.

I was participant at the China-South Asian Countries Think Tank Forum held concurrently with the first China-South Asia Expo in Kunming, China in June 2013. It is now institutionalized as an annual close encounter of the beneficial kind between China and South Asia. China has also initiated a New Silk Route/Road initiative over land and sea based on the historic economic and cultural connectivity between China and South Asia which was also initiated by China. It helps provide fresh opportunities for trade and tourism engagement virtually across all SAARC countries. At the 2nd China-South Asia Expo held in Kunming in June 2014, Chinese Vice Premier, Wang Yang said that both China and

South Asian countries “are enjoying a harvest season, benefiting from multilateral cooperation in commerce, trade, culture and infrastructure cooperation”. 46 countries and regions participated in the Expo. Over 700 indoor display booths were exhibited. The first China-South Asia Science and Technology Ministerial Conference was also held this year and will continue.

Historically, Sri Lanka’s own strategic location in the virtual centre of the Indian Ocean has provided marine connectivity for centuries. The Chinese navigator, Zheng He, visited India and Sri Lanka in the 15th century. He even reached the Eastern shores of North America in 1421 A.D., well before Christopher Columbus.

Annually, Sri Lanka hosts the Galle Dialogue which focusses on multifarious issues particularly relating to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). At its last session in November 2013, Sri Lanka’s Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa said that “throughout history, the IOR has been a major conduit of international exploration, migration and commerce”. Therefore “the overall security and stability of the entire Indian Ocean Region is critical for the global economy”. Participants at the Galle Dialogue included Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, the UK and the USA among others. At the present time, safe marine connectivity for securing Middle East oil resources; trade connectivity across the Ocean; refueling facilities; ship-breaking and other basically economic operations are essential for China and the many countries involved. China has, therefore, collaborated also in the joint development of SAARC naval ports, respectively in Gwadar (in Pakistan); Hambantota (in Sri Lanka), Chittagong (in Bangladesh), and beyond the SAARC region, also Sitwe (in Myanmar). This econo-strategic network was described as a deadly “string of pearls” strategy by China to stifle/strangle India. Former Indian Army Chief General J.J.Singh has of course ridiculed the theory at a recent event in Punjab University organized by the India- China Friendship Society on China’s National Day last year. Edward Snowden, whistle-blower and former computer

systems administrator has been named by many sources as author of the not too sober analysis for Booz Allen Hamilton.

China's concept of the Asian Century is, however, being hampered, not by Snowden's theory, but by a number of bilateral issues that China herself needs to deal with in the South China Sea. This includes China's bilateral relations, particularly with Viet Nam, Republic of Korea, Japan and The Philippines. These issues posed difficulties even at the last ASEAN Summit held in May 2014 in Myanmar. When it came to the adoption of its final Declaration, the Summit spokesman stated that ASEAN countries have "different opinions on the South China Sea. No one will say which country is right or which country is wrong". Eventually, the ASEAN Declaration avoided being critical of China although a separate consensual statement called upon all parties involved "to refrain from taking actions that would escalate tension" and called for progress on a code of conduct between ASEAN and China to govern interactions in the South China Sea. These developments followed US President Obama's visit to some of the ASEAN countries in the previous month to assure its allies of US commitment to implement "strategic rebalance into the region". President Obama indicated that the US is not seeking to contain, control or cripple China and that the focus of US foreign policy has "moved away from deploying combat troops, but now towards avoiding errors".

A major dramatic change in the political and economic weather in South Asia, and indeed beyond as well, took place in India in May 2014 with Gujarat's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, heading the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), decisively winning India's national elections. The New York Times in an article in June 2014 reported on his answer to the rhetorical question, "At the end of the day, who is Government for?" Prime Minister Modi's response had been as follows: "For the poor. For the rural areas, farmers, untouchables, the weak and the pained. (My) Government is for them. To meet their aspirations and hopes, this is our priority, our vision, because our weakest, our poorest have sent us (to govern). I will do everything to fulfill their aspirations".

Major political impacts resulted from Prime Minister Modi's invitation to all SAARC Heads of State and Government to be present when he was being formally sworn in. He also had subsequent bilateral talks with each of them. He thereby dramatically demonstrated the new Indian Government's firm commitment to SAARC and the major priorities he attached to bilateral relations with all the South Asian leaders. Additionally, it boosted SAARC's collective importance as a viable regional institution in the so-called Asian Century. China too responded by sending its Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, for a bilateral encounter of the close kind within a week after Prime Minister Modi assuming duties. This augurs well for South Asia's own global vision and SAARC's relations with the rest of the world including China. PM Modi's Cabinet, at present, consists of only 40 odd members in contrast to that of his predecessor Dr. Man Mohan Singh which had over 65 members.

The Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) in Colombo organized on July 21st this year a panel discussion on the theme, "India Under Modi: Relevance for the (South Asian) Region and the World". Major representatives of the new Indian Government clarified its domestic as well as foreign policies and answered questions frankly. This followed their meeting with Sri Lanka's President. The panelists included Dr. Subramanian Swamy, Chairman of the BJP Committee on Strategic Action and a former Union Minister; Dr. Seshadri Chari, National Convener of the BJP Foreign Policy Cell; Dr. Suresh Prabu, member of the Shiv Sena and former Union Minister; Dr. Swapan Dasgupta, senior journalist and Madav Nalapat Professor of Geopolitics at Manipal Academy. The Panel was chaired by H.M.G. S. Pallihakara, former Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary.

Dr. Swamy described the major changes that the new Government in India would be making in foreign policy as follows: First, priority would be given to SAARC countries as already dramatically demonstrated by the presence of the South Asian Heads of State/Government at Prime Minister Modi's inauguration. Second, India would be "non-aligned in interactions between China and the US". Third, "in the long run, there should be a restructuring of the global power set-up". In

respect of relations with Sri Lanka, India would be “very active in promoting devolution, but not the way that the previous (Indian) Governments did”. He stated clearly that devolution has to be “carried out within the sovereignty of Sri Lanka” and that India would not “allow any (Indian) State, particularly Tamil Nadu to override the national objectives of India. National interests of India will not be sacrificed for Tamil interests”.

Dr. Chari, in a similar vein, stated that “the Modi Government is in a position of strength and is not dependent on any regional Party.... We expect the political parties in Tamil Nadu to formulate their opinions, in keeping with the realities of the situation.... India considers Sri Lanka as an important ally in all facets relating to peace, progress and security in the (Asian) region, especially in the Indian Ocean”. He also described Prime Minister Modi as “shaping India’s foreign policy on the twin templates of principles and pragmatism” and that the Modi Government is committed to “improve on the existing relationship (with Sri Lanka) and give it a positive twist for long term mutual benefit”.

Meanwhile, the 6th Annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue in early July this year between USA and China appeared to have however ended in a stalemate which some reports described as “an agreement to disagree”. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, at a press conference subsequently, had said the US urged China to resolve conflicts (specifically in the South China Sea) “through the legal structures that exist for resolution of those kinds of disputes” rather than through “unilateral actions to enforce a particular assertion of sovereignty.” Chinese President Xi Jinping had said that China wishes to build a “new model of major country relations” with the United States. John Kerry, idealistically talked of any “new model” as not to be defined as the US “carving up areas and suggesting that these are spheres of influence against other States”. Rather, he said that it is “going to be defined by our mutual embrace of standards of global behavior and activity that protect the values and interests that we have long worked for by norms of international behavior”.

China sees the US as being in decline, growing weaker as China grows stronger. An Editorial even in the *New York Times* described US-China talks in Beijing as “minimally productive”. It claimed that “they left largely unresolved profound differences on major issues that, if not managed carefully could have damaging consequences”. These included the issues in the Indian Ocean Region and the South China Sea. Cooperation between the US and China, or at least lack of clashes, are vital to global stability.

In July 2014, beyond the Asian region, the leaders of Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa, members of the so-called BRICS group, in Brazil, announced, inter alia, the setting up of a New Development Bank aimed at dealing with what is viewed as lapses and failings of the International Monetary Fund to assist the developing world. The new Bank’s initial capital is expected to be around \$ 50 billion, hopefully to double, plus \$100 billion Contingency Reserve Arrangements. The BRICS members have differing political /economic systems and, according to a *New York Times* Editorial Report of July 23rd, “are talking about creating a regional security alternative” to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Practical measures of politico-economic cooperation have been reached engaging corporate cooperation between the two Asians in the BRICS Bank. The Bank will be located in the world’s largest Communist State, China; while its Executive President is from the world’s largest democratic State, India. Such linkages would also help building confidence for both SAARC’s “Vision of a South Asian Union” and China’s “Asian Century” as complementing each other.

Beyond the region, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has vital strategic meetings lined up with US President Obama and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot, apart from Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japan’s PM Shinzo Abe as well - all within this year. All these augur well for practical cooperation within the Asian continent as well as beyond.

South Asian Union – A Dream or a Reality?

Amb. (retd.) Sohail Amin¹

South Asia is home to one fifth of humanity. Located on the confluence of West, East and Central Asia, along the shores of the Indian Ocean and in the neighbourhood of China, it assumes even greater significance. Unfortunately, all the South Asian countries face the daunting challenges of poverty and under development. What further complicates matter is that many of the South Asian nations do not consider themselves to be living in a friendly neighbourhood. This was the background in 1985 when SAARC was established to promote regional economic cooperation between South Asian countries. Almost three decades later, the background remains the same. Ambiguities persist within South Asian countries on what should be the guiding force towards regionalism. Member states are still at different levels of economic strength. What is encouraging is the fact that SAARC is still functioning and this is the tool that can ultimately lead the South Asian countries towards realizing the dream of establishing a South Asian Union.

Emergence of China as a rising economic power and dynamism of East Asian economies as engines of growth of the global economy together with the oil wealth of West Asian countries, the twenty-first century is being termed as the Asian century. This economic progress has helped millions of people of the Asian continent to come out of abject poverty. Asia's economy is expected to expand at robust rates and it is likely to account for more than half of global output by the year 2050. A 2011 study by the ADB found that an additional three billion Asians could enjoy living standards similar to those in Europe today. If

1 President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute.

this projected position is realized by Asia, its average per capita income could rise above US\$ 40,000 (in constant purchasing power parity terms). The Asian century will, however, be realized if the continent's growth is broad-based and its prosperity extends across the continent to South Asia, Central Asia and the Pacific Islands.

South Asia's growth rate in the recent past makes the region currently the fastest growing area in the world. It has experienced six per cent average economic growth annually over the past twenty years which has resulted in impressive improvement in human development indicators. The present decline in growth rates in South Asia appears to be a temporary phase. Some analysts predict that South Asia's growth rate will rise again and progress at six to eight per cent until 2030. Comparing this to the declining growth of the global economy, it is believed that South Asia will play a major role in future development of the Asian continent.

South Asian countries fully realise that economic growth can be better achieved through greater regional cooperation. Cooperation creates interdependencies and several points of convergence in bilateral relations emerge among the participating countries. Economic interdependence can also lead to greater cooperation at international fora and international financial institutions which can supplement regional efforts in achieving economic prosperity. South Asian leaders are of the view that high and sustained growth rate can be speedily achieved by pooling regional resources through mutual economic cooperation. The Addu Declaration issued at the end of the SAARC Summit at Maldives in November 2011, firmly resolves to realize the objective of regional economic cooperation. The 17th Summit in Maldives has resolved to achieve regional economic cooperation leading South Asia to an economic union. For that the road blocks that impinge on making any progress will have to be removed.

Let me first evaluate the status of SAARC as it is the only tool we have to build mutual trust and create enabling environment for establishing a South Asian Union. Regional economic cooperation actually began in the 1990s with the unilateral trade liberalization

introduced by the South Asian countries. Sri Lanka was the pioneer in this regard as it liberalized its trade regime in the 1970s.

While SAARC may have along list of achievements but the fact remains that a lot still needs to be done for which the member states themselves will have to assume responsibility. One of the inherent impediments in regional cooperation is the variance in degree of economic development of member states which leads to economic inequalities. Member states do not have the capacity to restructure the economies of less developed partners. Competition within South Asia is, therefore, the common practice. No doubt, SAARC has developed numerous mechanisms to promote regional cooperation but the spirit to benefit from such initiatives is lacking. On many occasions SAARC Summits have been postponed due to bilateral problems which have dwarfed the capacity of an otherwise vibrant organisation. SAARC Summits and Trade Fairs are to be held annually but there is no regularity in their schedule. Implementation of SAFTA is moving at a snail's pace. In place of SAFTA, preference is being given by member states to bilateral Free Trade Agreements.

SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services signed in 2010 took two years to enter into force and the schedule of specific commitments is still being negotiated. Recognising that the South Asian region is energy deficient, SAARC established task forces, panels of experts and Study Groups but promoting regional cooperation in the energy sector could not be kick started. Regional efforts on poverty alleviation remain stalled despite the fact that we are passing through SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation from 2006 to 2015.

It is believed that political issues between member states have scuttled SAARC initiatives on fostering economic cooperation. The SAARC Charter does not allow any discussions on contentious political issues among member states and decisions are taken on the basis of consensus. Removal of mistrust leading to resolution of bilateral political disputes among member states is, therefore, essential before raising our expectations from SAARC initiatives.

As a first step we need to make SAARC an effective, and a dynamic organization. Its focus should remain on priority areas that affect all the South Asian states collectively. SAARC members themselves have to play a lead role in this regard. It should not be the responsibility of SAARC Secretariat but that of individual states to ensure their presence in all activities. Many initiatives have not been able to progress due to lack of participation of one or more member states. It is easy to delay or scuttle any SAARC process by any member state through declaring non-availability for a particular meeting. It is also important to review the status, role and engagement of observer states in SAARC activities and programmes by making them dialogue partners of SAARC. It will help SAARC in raising its profile globally. Added advantage will be the addition of diverse and varied experiences.

It is important to develop stronger economic linkages through South Asian Free Trade Agreement, SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services, regional connectivity and development of programmes for the social uplift of the people. Such programmes should include poverty alleviation, environment and climate change, disaster management, disease control, food security and energy projects. Cooperation in the field of energy is pivotal to the economic development and integration of the region and it is necessary to push forward with programmes in this field.

On trade and economic cooperation, there are a number of agreements and technical committees and sub groups. SAFTA was enforced in 2006. A SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry also exists. These arrangements are aimed at integrating South Asian economy. Since the signing of SAFTA, seven SAFTA meetings at Ministerial level and nine meetings of SAFTA Committee of experts have been held. Almost every member state has brought down the number of products on their sensitive list. Pakistan has brought these down from 1169 to 936 in 2012. Despite all that, trade under SAFTA remains under three billion dollars. We should all be realistic and must understand that trade and economic cooperation can flourish if all stake holders make

profit and thus have an incentive to facilitate arrangements in this regard

Cooperation in the field of energy, connectivity, environment and water management is also extremely essential. A SAARC Energy Center has been set up in Islamabad to act as a catalyst for collective activities on energy. For further cooperation, an infrastructure on transmission lines and public and private sector arrangements between buyers and sellers are required. Connectivity encompassing road and rail links, telecommunications and travel is another requirement. In the field of environment, all the South Asian countries rely on glaciers of the Hindu Kush, the Karakorum's and the Himalayas. We must all accept the challenge of protecting these glaciers to ensure water security. The issue of water management requires intelligent and integrated domestic and intra- regional measures.

It will be for the betterment of one-fifth of the world population if the dream of South Asian Union gets realized. But first its parameters and modalities are required to be identified. At this stage no ambitious targets are required to be set. I am saying this as when we talk of South Asian Union, models of European Union and ASEAN immediately come to our minds. Our beginnings should be humble but should be pursued with steadfastness. The European Union is in a very advanced stage of integration and member states have even done away with many of their federal tools. They now have one currency, a Central Bank, a budget, a civil service and even a parliament. Similarly, ASEAN has already set in motion a plan to bolster economic growth in the region through formation of a single market. The target of the exercise that began in 2007 is to make ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) a reality by 2015. The ASEAN Economic Community has four important components: a single market and production base, creation of a competitive economic region, encouraging equitable economic development and finally integrating ASEAN economy into global economy.

There is no bar on emulating European Union or ASEAN for the formation of a South Asian Union. However, to achieve that objective, we need to carry forward the processes set in motion by SAARC to lead us to

the establishment South Asian Union. The driving force behind this effort will be the mutual desire of all the South Asian states for economic integration.

Pakistan as a member of SAARC is convinced that regional economic collaboration will benefit all South Asian countries in their economic development and in alleviating poverty in the region. To pave the way for this objective, it is important that mutual political differences and disputes impeding the process of economic cooperation should be resolved as a priority with sincerity and mutual accommodation through result oriented dialogue. This is the only way out unless South Asia wants to remain stuck with old disputes that have done no good to people of the subcontinent who certainly deserve better.

SAARC countries can benefit from China's close and expanding economic relations with South Asian countries. During the past ten years, relations between China and SAARC countries have expanded. But the level of economic integration between China and SAARC is the lowest when compared to other regional organisations. We appreciate plans like the Silk Road Economic Belt and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which will enhance Sino-SAARC cooperation in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to say that SAARC is an important platform for creating an economically integrated regional block. We should invest our energy in strengthening regional mechanisms. ASEAN has worked wonders for its people and its networking with neighbours and major global powers has set a new example. We should emulate that example in SAARC. SAARC will enable us to ensure shared prosperity in the region. The entire regional neighbourhood should work together for development, prosperity and stability. We are all too close to be not affected by what happens in our neighbourhood. Pakistan is ready to play an effective role for the common cause of achieving prosperity and development.

Resurrecting South Asia's ties of History and Culture: Need for Institution Building

Amb (retd.) I.P. Khosla¹

Considering the importance of culture in human relations and, in particular, so far as convergence among neighbours is concerned, it is somewhat surprising that so little attention has been paid to it in terms of SAARC activities.

Meetings of different bodies of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation have generally focused on economic cooperation, with a special concentration on trade and economic exchanges, but also paying attention to infrastructure and intraregional connectivity, financial flows and, most recently, the possibility of constructing a South Asian Economic Union, taking inspiration from the European effort in this regard. It is expected that economic integration, by eliminating the barriers which impede the flows of goods, services and finance between the SAARC member states, by making the entire region into a single economic space, will lead to a general increase in self reliance, and thereby also of prosperity, growth and welfare, objectives which are enshrined in the SAARC Charter.

Culture has, in comparison, received scant attention. There is a regional cultural centre in Kandy, Sri Lanka, and it has regularly organised regional programmes, but it has to be said that this has made little impact, simply because the size and resources devoted to it by the region has been so limited; the programmes have been held on average once a month, including film festivals, conferences on subjects of mutual interest, art exhibitions, but participation is often confined to only a few of the SAARC member states, usually not more than four or five. There is

1 Member, Executive Committee, IPCS, New Delhi.

a sense that the required enthusiasm is lacking, as far as the region as a whole is concerned. There is a regional audiovisual programme, which clearly would have cultural impact if it was popular; exchange of chairs, fellowships and scholars; and now, most recently a South Asian University, all of which have cultural impact, even if that is not their central purpose. To top this, there has been a burst of enthusiasm among non-governmental organisations which have been arranging seminars, conferences, literary festivals, film festivals, and exhibitions for the academics, thinkers, writers, film makers, and dance and other performers from the region, but in the absence of adequate support from governments, especially in the form of granting easy travel facilities for such exchanges, this has been somewhat of a stop-go exercise.

In general, cultural cooperation has been a minimalist programme. On the other hand it is central to the initiation of full fledged regional cooperation. The SAARC Charter asserts in the Preamble that the hope of fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation in the region arises out of the 'ties of history and culture' that bind the region. It is the existential bond that gives special coherence to the region as distinct from other regions or countries. Above all, without a minimal cultural understanding between the member states of the region and their people none of the other efforts at cooperation is likely to make much headway, for all efforts will be dogged by suspicion in the same way as they have in the past. This is the point that has been explained in what follows.

This does not imply in any way that other kinds of cooperation are to be downgraded in importance, since economic integration in particular has not only been shown historically to be an essential foundation for regionalization, but political and other forms of coordination are also of importance. It is simply to underline that without cultural understanding as described here all the other forms of cooperation become difficult to achieve.

Ideas of Culture

It is necessary here to define the concept of culture more carefully, since

it has often been used in the literature and is, indeed, one of the central concepts in any theory of human behaviour. Immanuel Wallerstein is a leading social scientist who starts his definition by specifying that while all members of the human race share some characteristics with all other members (universal) and all have certain traits which they share with no one else (idiosyncratic), there are specific traits which certain members share with a few others but not with all. "When we talk of traits which are neither universal nor idiosyncratic we often use the term 'culture' to describe the collection of such traits, or of such behaviours, or of such values, or of such beliefs."² Going beyond this it is also necessary to separate those characteristics of the group which comprise all those distinctive patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, which includes what and how you eat, how you greet and interact with family, with friends, with strangers (so to speak their primary culture) from those which are placed within the term higher culture, meaning only the arts, sciences, education, literature, philosophy, views about the cosmos and of man's place within it and so on, which are typically refinements of the mind, and of civilizing influences. For purposes of human behaviour and of cooperation in particular, it is the first or primary culture which is important. Clifford Geertz has pointed out the importance of this primary culture, explaining that it is antecedent to the final stage in the evolution of mankind and the "fact that the final stages of the biological evolution of man occurred after the initial stages of the growth of culture"³; so that this is a required precondition for the very existence of man. In other words, it is not that man evolved to maturity physically and mentally and then acquired culture; it is that along with the other characteristics acquired during a long evolutionary process, there is also, as an integral component of culture. At this basic level means the way humans interpret the world around them, including other humans, how

2 Immanuel Wallerstein, Culture as the Ideological Battleground of the Modern World-System, in Mike Featherstone (ed.) Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalization and Mordernity, Sage, London, 1990.

3 Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, Basic Books, New York, 1973, pp. 82-83.

they treat them and so on, what has been called the software of the mind.

This is familiar from the South Asian context. For example, it is well known that a feeling exists among many in Nepal that India either wishes to or actually does exercise a kind of hegemony over that country, or at least has been involved in some way in Nepal's domestic political developments. It has been pointed out that no matter how far India goes to demonstrate the contrary, many Nepalese would continue to believe this.⁴ The Pakistan government's suspicions of India's aggressive attitude are also well known and would be quite hard to remove, probably even harder than to remove the widespread suspicion in Sri Lanka that India's policies there are dictated more by the interests of the Tamil community there and the repercussions in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, than considerations of larger geopolitical or economic interests. Deep rooted mutual suspicions between the leadership of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which extends to several important groups in each country, are also going to be difficult to erase. All these aspects are included in what has been called the primary culture, the one that came to humans along with the evolution of human biology and of the mind.⁵

Continuing this argument, and to underline the extreme difficulty of advancing substantially in the fields of economic or political cooperation without a backdrop of cultural understanding, it has been pointed out that cultural relations precede political relations in international relations theory. The biological origin of culture as an integral component of human evolution was paralleled by individuals acting within a social order, and that the social order is antecedent to the individual. Things like language, rationality, an economic system and modes of acceptable behaviour can be taken as the pre-contractual bonds, so to speak, which bound human interaction into one whole and

4 For more on this see I.P. Khosla, *How Neighbours Converge, The Politics and Economics of Regionalism*, Konark, New Delhi, 2014, p. 143.

5 There is more on the convergences and divergences of each of India's SAARC neighbours in I.P. Khosla, *op.cit.* above, Chapter 6, SAARC: Histories and Cultures.

enabled it at all. Thus in relations between nations “the international system, in the form of culture (diplomatic language and systems of representation) does not follow the interaction of states, but makes that possible.”⁶ This is a direct consequence of the idea that it is a world system of culture that makes states possible, not the other way around.

The centrality of culture

This line of thinking postulates the centrality of culture in national life; and, indeed, in the idea of nation as a political unit defined by its culture. In other words, if national identity is a basic requirement of the formation of a nation, then culture is what distinguishes that identity. There are many ingredients that go into making a nation, comprising both the primary culture as well as that higher culture that goes into civilizational aspects; these include the sharing of a language or a dialect, a religion or a sect, ethnicity or blood ties of some sort, geography and pride in historical achievements, as well as others, but all of these can be given the generic heading of culture. Above all, and this is important for our argument, these ingredients are not static or given once and for all; they are subject to change and evolution; they can be moulded by leaders, even invented and made into traditions of long duration through a process of social engineering which makes the people of a given nation believe in their nationhood. Thus culture is both biologically incorporated into our systems in its primary form as well as, in its further development into higher forms, susceptible to change and moulding by those who would use it for their own or for the nation's purposes.

This is evident in the case of South Asia, which has repeatedly recognised, at summit level as well as other levels, that cultural commonality is the basic bond for cooperation. Thus the tenth SAARC summit at Colombo in 1998 reiterated the sentiment that had been expressed in different words earlier, that the ‘region was heir to a profound common civilizational continuum of great antiquity which

6 Albert Bergesen, *Turning World Systems Theory on its Head*, in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Op. Cit.*, p. 76.

constituted a historic basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the people’.

Here we can note that of the two trends, unity and diversity, within which this basis operates, the latter has in fact been foremost in the years since 1947. On the one hand there is the fact that, apart from the evident geographical unity of the subcontinent, for two thousand years or more the region has had a unified civilizational tradition and long periods of rule under the same monarch, with a range of common values, a shared view of the cosmos, of the way man is connected to his environment, unifying religious practices and languages, as well as other aspects of life which distinguish it from other regions, like ways of greeting and of eating and clothing, the combination of gestures, of showing how people feel towards each other, of bodily hygiene, of dealing with those who entered the region from outside. When we talk of South Asian architecture or sculpture or painting, we can use the term in a clearly understood way. The obvious commonalities in music, dance forms and the other performing arts are recognisable the world over. On the other hand there is the undoubted diversity, which has grown over the years as languages separated, religions were diversified and ethnicity was emphasised. There are multiple sub-regions and sub-cultures, while identity politics emerged quite early and then grew so that now there are around four thousand communities in the region, with differences in how they see themselves in ethnic terms, in where they are placed in the social hierarchy, for example in terms of caste, in their religious practices, in their languages and dialects, in social and economic status. In brief, it seems reasonable to conclude that while a common civilizational continuum may provide the basis for cooperation, it will be the ability of essentially diverse communities to live together harmoniously enough to cooperate that will actually determine the way cooperation goes forward.

A framework for Culture in International Relations:

At this point, we may examine in more detail the basic driving forces that make culture so important in relations between nations. Richard Ned Lebow, in his seminal work on culture and international relations

theory, has done this examination.⁷

He has taken the Greek idea of the psyche' as his starting point, and this accords well with the postulate that culture emerges in parallel with human biology, including a larger brain and that in fact the large size of the human inferior parietal lobule was integrally connected to a process of evolution which also brought culture into being. This psyche' is propelled by four drives: appetite, spirit, reason and fear. All four of these can be located within specific cultures, in each of which they have identifiable fields of action. The strength of operation of one drive or another varies from one period to another within the same culture as well as from one culture to another; no combination can be counted superior to another. Lebow gives the nodal position to the spirit. If this predominates then people, individually and collectively, seek self-esteem, the sense of self-worth that makes them feel good about themselves. Self-esteem requires a sense of self, of course, but also and more importantly, the need of the self for society. And it is closely connected to honour and to hierarchy, ones standing in society or the nation's standing in international society. The higher your rank, the greater the privileges you enjoy, but also the more demanding your role. This leads to a corresponding depreciation of the appetite and to an extremely competitive quest for honour which is restricted to a self-reproducing elite, since upward mobility in such a society is limited. But the elite feels a strong sense of obligation towards society, which is therefore robust. Warfare or conflict is frequent in such societies, but it is limited in its ends and means and governed by rules. Cooperation is actually the norm here, based on friendship, common descent and a sense of mutual obligation among the members of the elite.

Appetite, another drive, may be innate though its expression is largely constructed by social norms. The theories of international relations based on liberalism comprise the quintessential paradigm of this way of thinking about the subject. Material well-being is at the heart

7 Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.

of this drive, and is generally abetted by the prosperity of other actors, but even so, just as with spirit based worlds, so here too wealth leads to hierarchies. Economic interests are at the foundation of liberal theories of IR, though in fact these comprise only one of the motives for human action, and so can explain only part of what happens in IR. In general, appetite based worlds incorporate cooperation as a routine, though competition, usually of a non-violent kind, is also obviously present. In societies where reason predominates, the first two drives of spirit and appetite are constrained and educated to achieve a balanced and happy life. Actors on the international stage are willing to cooperate even when this may be against their immediate self-interest, and in the context of broad agreement about values. It is easy to resolve conflict because actors share fundamentally similar goals, the same values and conception of justice and the view that cooperation, finally, allows all to advance their respective interests better than any conflict. Unfortunately these insights into reason as an independent drive have been forgotten after the Greeks; today reason is taken as an instrumentality for the pursuit of other drives or goals. Thus a reason based world can only be thought of as an ideal of Platonic form.

The fear based world is the foundation of the realist theory of IR. In such a world actors pursue parochial goals; then other actors fear for their ability to satisfy their spirit or appetite drives and perhaps even their very survival. The resulting escalation threatens order. So fear based worlds are highly conflictual, characterized by arms races, alliances, forward deployments, dominated by the security dilemma. Hobbes' world of a war of all against all is the typical example of such a world.

Cultural prototypes in history

In ancient Greece as also in classical Rome, according to Lebow, honour was an important, perhaps the most important, driving force for the elite, while appetite was rejected or at least downgraded. The spirit as basic drive also dominated the post-Westphalian world. Appetite was not suppressed; wealth was flaunted, corruption and fraud were a constant problem. But honour and prestige were more important than

security and wealth, courtly manners marked most especially by the aristocracy under Louis XIV, not to mention Versailles, that spectacular project designed to ensure the hegemony of French culture in Europe; and this was an honour based elite. Peace and civility spread through the countryside. Wars were fought, of course, and on a larger scale than before, but they were less frequent and, most important, their ends and means were limited. They were fought more for *la gloire*. The rise of the modern state cannot be understood without taking account of the historical importance of this dominance of the spirit in the post-Westphalian world.

The nineteenth century, on the other hand, was an era which legitimized appetite as drive and as source of economic growth and political order, and rejected the spirit. Conspicuous consumption by individuals in the form of vulgar displays of wealth and by nations in the form of large show-piece projects like canals and massive buildings, was manifest. The source of standing in society was now wealth; the values of the bourgeoisie came to dominate and the devaluation of the spirit became the strategy of that bourgeoisie to undercut the erstwhile power of the aristocracy. One key conceptual innovation of this change from spirit to appetite was Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' by which it was sought to be shown that individual self-interest serves society. Where imperial expansion was concerned, it was the spirit that retained its earlier eminence. The newly emerging middle and working classes found in imperialism the means to build or enhance self-esteem and even national honour. So imperialism had nothing to do with trade or investment; studies show that at the time trade and investment were largely between the colonial powers, not between them and their colonies.

As for the two World Wars, scholars have argued that the most important characteristic of those years leading up to them, hence the causes of the wars, were strategic, political or economic goals; all of them are reducible to appetite, but very little attention has been paid to the role of honour and standing. On the contrary, as per Lebow, war and peace depended on the policies of the leaders, and spirit is the key

underlying cause. It explains why leaders like Hitler and Mussolini came to power, in one case the promise to the German people to restore Germany's position in Europe and their self-esteem, in the other by his exploiting the common post-1918 sentiment among ordinary Italians that during the first war their leaders had stabbed the nation in the back and robbed it of its rightful due. Mussolini invoked the glories of ancient Rome and modern Italy's achievements as a nation of poets, artists, of heroes, saints and scientists to steer himself to power, as the one who could lead them to greatness. Japan's leaders in the 1930s also sought recognition and standing for their country. Nationalists also defined Japan as a nation of divine warriors, of samurai with their loyalty, self-sacrifice and stoicism.

During the Cold War and what followed, super power goals had little to do with security; it was actually about a contest for standing; leaders never openly spoke of the Cold War as a competition for standing, but after Stalin in particular, it increasingly assumed this character. Continuing in the same vein, Lebow asserts that after 9/11, security did seem to move to the top of the agenda but actually the events of 9/11 only provided a political cover for an invasion that was long planned, had nothing to do with terrorism, but much to do with American insult and anger at being attacked by such an insignificant group as Al-Qaeda and the need to restore standing. The invasion of Iraq, too, had nothing to do with the desire to control Middle Eastern oil, nor did it have anything to do with security since Saddam Hussein was more a nuisance than a threat. Honour and standing were the principal goals of the highest ranking administration officials while for Bush himself, a man of low self-esteem and few, if any, serious accomplishments to his name, standing may have been an important personal consideration.

Lebow does not take his examples into our region, but, similarly, if we apply the cultural theory of international relations to the case of South Asia, we can clearly perceive the spirit, reflected in the seeking of self esteem and the competitive quest for honour lie behind a great deal of the political tensions that mar the progress of regional cooperation. For one thing, to give quick examples, there is the Pakistani attachment

to the honour and standing of its claim to Jammu and Kashmir, which is never expressed as a simple territorial claim, but one based on history, the circumstances of the partition of India in 1947 and the majority population. Behind this there is the desire of the Pakistani leadership to have their nation seen internationally as equal to India, and for India, especially, to accept this. In the same way it is Nepal's sense that its *amour propre* has been wounded by the way India has treated this bilateral relationship since 1950 that matters much more than the fact of any disagreement over specific aspects of cooperative projects, such as on the rivers. With some other of India's neighbours also this could be pinpointed.

Lebow postulates that he has in mind an ever changing social reality rather than any fixed structure or unchanging world. The changes create the conditions for the dominance of one or other of the given four motive forces of the human psyche', and this very dominance sharpens inner tensions and leads to further changes; now agency is of fundamental importance, but actors are also socialized to motives. Nothing in this pattern is preordained; chance, leadership and leadership qualities, elite behaviour, among other capricious factors, go to determine whether a particular order gets established or not. As for the future of our international system fear is likely to decline as a foreign policy motive, while appetite and the spirit are likely to increase accordingly. In such a world, states would view even more negatively the use of force in the absence of unqualified international support. More specifically, since what we now have is the affluent society, the future will see a search for meaning beyond affluence, which can only go in the direction of the spirit, to honour and recognition and self-esteem.

Institutions for South Asia

It will be clear from the above discussion that the three drives of fear, appetite and spirit are closely linked to the primary culture with which humans have been endowed by the processes of evolution; from there these drives have gone on to become fundamental to the way in which international relations have developed, and are therefore difficult to change within a short period. Reason, on the other hand, is more closely

connected to higher culture, that of advancing civilizations, and offers far greater susceptibility to change.

It is also clear that interactions in the world of learning, the arts and literature among diverse peoples, all of which are based on reason, can more easily lead to understanding than any effort to change the primary kind of culture. Such understanding would necessarily be extremely slow in its effects, indeed such interactions may have only minimal effects, but these will be positive; they may not lead to an early dilution of the three primary drives, nor would they lead to the immediate solution of differences and disagreements, but it is one option for action in the attempt to change mindsets and in fact it is likely to be an essential supplement to all the other efforts, such as in the field of economic integration, creating a South Asian infrastructure and so on. Just one cultural centre, as is now the case, is not in any case enough for this purpose, even supplemented by all the efforts of those outside government. A far more broad-based project to change mutual mindsets, prejudices and pre-conceived notions is needed.

The suggestion here is that, as a small beginning, each SAARC member state should create institutions for cultural understanding and cooperation in the so called higher civilizational arts and culture, all those aspects of culture as Lebow has interpreted it which are driven by reason, and that these institutions should be funded from a central regional fund which is overseen and approved by all the governments. It has been seen in practice that when writers, artists, musicians, performing artist generally come together from all the countries of the region, the bonds established not only have durable effect, unless governments get in the way, but can even lead to the incipient creation of trans-cultural forms, of the so called 'intermezzo' cultures which have ingredients of more than one culture, and which are best exemplified by the way diasporic communities from different parts of the sub-continent have come together in many developed countries. There is also already a great deal of this in the region, encouraged and birthed by non-governmental efforts. But now governments also need to get involved. Hence it immediately comes to mind that at least four kinds of

institution based cooperation need to be initiated in each member state: a centre for the performing arts, dance, music and so on; one for representational arts, including painting, sculpture, ceramics; a third for the literary arts, for writers, poets, as also journalists (there is SAFMA for the South Asian media but its efforts could well do with some supplementation); and a fourth for education, since there is a South Asian University which has been established in Delhi and there is clearly a need for it to be duplicated either by branch universities or by independent ones, in every part of the region so as to create a sense that in the field of intellectual efforts, the reality of the region as an entity which includes but yet is separate from individual member states, has come into being.

This may not mean literally the setting up of four separate institutions in each member state, since some member states do not have the resources to do this; and, in any case it is a very small beginning, so just one institution may suffice, if it is given the resources, regionally, to generate different forms of cooperation.

The intention is to recognize the importance of culture as an essential ingredient for successful cooperation in our region, rather than to make a plan for time bound cooperation programmes.

Contemporary Thoughts on Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union: A Bangladeshi Perspective

Maj Gen. SM Shafiuddin Ahmed¹

Introduction

South Asia as a region covers approximately one per cent of the world's total land, accommodates 22 per cent of the world's population, and shares one per cent of the world's trade volume. The region is, nevertheless, marked by abject poverty, representing half of the world's poorest people, and is often afflicted by catastrophic natural calamities, border disputes, and ethnic and religious discord.² South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the cooperative regional arrangement with the purpose of integrating countries stretching from Afghanistan in the West to Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and The Maldives. Since its inception, SAARC has taken various significant steps in regional cooperation; however, the true potential of the regional integration remains largely unrealized due to political, economic, and other differences. South Asia is among the fastest growing regions in the world, with a burgeoning demographic dividend, rising and expanding middle class population and many other promising growth and development potentials. In the so-called "Asian century", the history is destined to favor the people of this region with common aspirations. Therefore, making effective

1 Director General, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka.

2 Yussuf A. Harun, "Bangladesh Country Note – Promoting Regional Integration in South Asia: A Bangladesh Private Sector Perspective", Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004.

regional cooperation more effective and upholding a common vision regionally towards achieving South Asian union are the key preconditions to garner the opportunities and to reap the benefit of a more prosperous and stable South Asia.

SAARC Summits, which are considered the highest authority in SAARC,³ usually come up with major decisions towards achieving the goals of cooperation. The country that hosts the Summit also holds the Chair of SAARC. Bangladesh hosted the 13th Summit in November 2005 in Dhaka. The 17th SAARC Summit was held in the Maldives on 10-11 November 2011. The theme of the Summit was 'Building Bridges' which denotes both enhanced physical connectivity within the region as well as political dialogue with more emphasis on the people-to-people linkages than the state-centric approach. It concluded with the adoption of 20 Points Addu Declaration reaffirming the member states' commitment to peace, confidence building, human dignity, democracy, good governance, and human rights. It is also interesting to note that increasing number of extra-territorial countries are taking interest in SAARC Summits. The latest Summit was attended by nine representatives from observer states - Australia, China, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, the USA and the EU.

In such a background, the objectives of the paper are to discuss the main issues of the 17th SAARC Summit, to analyse the outcome of SAARC Summit for regional cooperation, to find out despite so much commonalities, why the regional body is not as effective as expected, and finally to find out the options and challenges for Bangladesh in the context of regional cooperation.

The paper is divided into six sections including the introductory section. The second section deals with the major issues discussed in the 17th SAARC Summit. The third section touches upon the latest efforts of South Asian countries towards more integrated region *viz.* a South Asian

3 Muhammad Jamshed Iqbal, "SAARC: Origin, Growth, Potential and Achievements", available at: http://www.nihcr.edu.pk/Latest_English_Journal/SAARC_Jamshed_Iqbal.pdf, accessed on 13 July 2014.

union. Options and Challenges of regional cooperation—especially from a Bangladesh perspective—has been explored in section four. Section five makes an effort to examine challenges for regional cooperation focusing on recent initiatives. The final section provides the concluding remarks.

The Outcome of the 17th SAARC Summit

The last few top level meetings of SAARC identified a number of areas of cooperation for further consolidating the regional integration and member states have been working towards that end. The latest 17th SAARC Summit should be seen in the same light. Some analysts argue that the ‘Addu Declaration’ “shed some of the despondency reflected in the previous Summit held in Thimphu”, the capital of Bhutan.⁴ Since the previous Thimphu Declaration ended with unfulfilled expectations over a “number of initiatives not translating into tangible and meaningful benefits to the people,” the 17th Summit attempted to recognize the significance of ‘bridging differences’.⁵ While the highest-level meeting of SAARC touched upon many issues, nevertheless, the core issues discussed with the concrete outcomes were limited to regional connectivity, intra-regional trade and economic growth, the challenges of food insecurity and how to feed large population that South Asia houses, energy cooperation to meet the demand of future for unhindered development of the region, environmental degradation and resultant threats to the region, prevention of terrorism and drug trafficking, maritime piracy, poverty alleviation and so forth.

It is now widely recognized by the SAARC member countries that without unfettered regional connectivity, the dream of a South Asian union cannot be fulfilled. Because expansion of business, trade and people-to-people contacts are all contingent upon how well-connected the region is. To that end, especial attention is being paid to conclusion

4 R. K. Radhakrishnan and SandeepDikshit, “SAARC sets timeline for framework for rail, sea connectivity”, *The Hindu*, Tamil Nadu, India, 12 November 2011.

5 *Ibid.*

of a regional railways agreement and motor vehicles agreement⁶ before the next round of summit-level meetings. Bangladesh, India and Nepal are also interested in demonstration run of a container train among these three countries.⁷ In this respect, the leaders at the Summit had agreed to finalize a Regional Railways Agreement and complete the initial procedure related to an Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service.⁸

Intra-regional trade and inclusive economic growth have become some of the top priorities of SAARC in the recent years towards the common goal of development. The proposal for greater flow of financial capital and intra-regional investment has been under consideration for quite some time.⁹ With regards trade, importance was given on effective implementation of the free-trade agreements, cutting down the sensitive lists, removing non-tariff barriers and harmonizing various standards and customs procedures for enhanced trade and commerce.

The collective effort of SAARC countries to jointly tackle the challenges emanating from food insecurity is justified by the fact that all nations of the region are more or less vulnerable to the same threat. Several concrete steps have been taken in this regard over the last years. The member countries had agreed previously to resolve the operational issues related to the SAARC Seed Bank to ensure its effective

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- 6 Dipak Kumar Dash, "Saarc nations to harmonize norms for motor vehicles", *The Times of India*, Mumbai, India, 20 May 2013.
 - 7 Syful Islam, "Viability of BD-India container train service being scrutinized: Nepal link found to be not viable", *The Financial Express*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 16 September 2013.
 - 8 D. K. Singh, "Regional ferry service on SAARC table" *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, India, 08 November 2011.
 - 9 Anil Giri, "SAARC: A Crusade for Regional Integration", *The Diplomatic Courier*, Washington, D.C., USA, 18 November 2011, available at <http://www.Diplomaticcourier.com/news/topics/summitry/1424-saarc-a-crusade-for-regional-integration>, accessed on 10 July 2014.

functioning.¹⁰ This will help greater availability of quality seeds and spread of high yielding improved crop varieties, exchange of seeds and plant genetic resources and sharing of the practices, technologies among the member countries who are mostly agrarian economies.

Poverty alleviation is another common challenge faced by all members. The member countries, time and again, reaffirmed their commitment to reduce poverty and lower income inequalities with a view to improving the quality of life and well-being of their people through people-centred sustainable development. One of the key challenges for SAARC in the coming decades is to sustain the pace of economic growth. The demand of energy thus becomes quintessential. Therefore, the member countries “need to ensure energy security, reduce the costs of energy supplies, and cushion themselves from possible oil price shocks”.¹¹

Environmental degradation and ensuring climate change has also posed a common challenge for the countries of the region and it demands a common effort. In the 16th SAARC Summit held in 2010 the leaders of the region came up with the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change which provided as a “development-focused conceptual framework”¹² to deal with the climate changed induced issues. Ensuring implementation of the Statement has received priority in the recent years. In addition, development and promotion of tourism industries in the region drew the attention. SAARC is also thriving to achieve a goal of “Destination South Asia”¹³ by engaging public and private sectors to

10 Reaz Ahmad, “Sarc nations push for seed bank”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 08 October 2011.

11 Sultan Hafeez Rahman, Priyantha D. C. Wijayatunga, HerathGunatilake and P. N. Fernando, *Energy Trade in South Asia: Opportunities and Challenges*, The Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2012, p. 4.

12 J. Scott Hauger, “Climate Change and Environmental Security in the Asia-Pacific Region”, available at <http://www.apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/J.-Scott-Hauger.pdf>, accessed on 20 July 2014.

13 “Saarc summit adopts 20-point declaration”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 12 November 2011.

promote this thriving sector on a global level. To that end, 11th SAARC Trade Fair and Tourism Mart was held in Dhaka in 2012.¹⁴

A collective approach to deal with the common menaces of the region has also been paid adequate consideration by the nations concerned. Prevention of terrorism and arms and drug trafficking as well as maritime piracy have received especial focus during the recent years. The member states agreed on principle to devise a mechanism to deal with terrorism and piracy in the Indian Ocean region.

The importance of people-to-people contact and linkage between civil societies of the member countries, academic exchanges and their “potential benefits would accrue to the entire region after the realization of the regional association”¹⁵ Although not much has been attained to that direction, however, it remains on the priority list as evident in the deliberations of SAARC summits. The concerned nations rightly prioritized exchange program among academic and research institutions, and think tanks. Mutual recognition of academic and professional degrees and harmonization of academic standards and establishment of long-term linkages among concerned institutions are being worked out.

SAARC's Potential for South Asian Union and the Latest Efforts

Transit and Connectivity: The existing transport infrastructure available in South Asia was inherited from the British colonial period. The transport network still persists to be fragmented due to various historical, political and economic reasons and is in need of reconstruction within the context of greater political harmony in South Asia. There is no accurate estimate of the likely benefits that SAARC countries will get if regional connectivity becomes functional. Transit may be on the issue of bilateral trade with India and Nepal. The Asian Highway and the

14 “Sarc trade, tourism fair begins in capital”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 31 March 2012.

15 Pratyoush Onta, “Where is the ‘SAARC process’ in academia?”, *Himal Southasian*, Kathmandu, Nepal, March 1998.

Trans Asian Railway (TAR) projects of UNESCAP have identified the major road and rail links among the countries of South-Asia (See annex 1).¹⁶ The SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport System (SRMTS) also identified a number of routes in road, rail, Inland Water Transport (IWT) and aviation which could provide efficient regional connectivity and thus bringing economic prosperity for the countries involved. Bangladesh is a signatory to TAR proposal and consented to implement the recommendation put forwarded by SRMTS.¹⁷ To carry out the recommendations of TAR and SRMTS, a technical committee will be put in place to perform the feasibility study in terms of space availability, existing infrastructure, ports, and other related safety measures. The leaders of SAARC nations considered proposals to allow greater financial capital flows for long term regional investment.¹⁸ In the transport sector, early conclusion of the regional railways agreement and ‘dry-run’ of a container train linking Bangladesh, India and Nepal on the negotiation table.¹⁹ Despite SAARC oft-talked-about ‘slow progress’, there are evidences the region’s furtherance towards more integrated region.

Regional Integration and Economic Growth: While South Asia achieved tangible progress in terms of gradual integration with the global economy, integration within the region has not progressed as it was expected. The lack of conducive policies within the region has stymied the benefits of cultural affinity, geographic proximity on movement of both goods and people. Some scholars claim that these factors have limited the SAARC trade to 10 per cent of its actual potential.²⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that South Asia is the least

16 Dr. Mohammad Mohiuddin Abdullah, “Transit and Connectivity: Regional Approach”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 March 2011.

17 *Ibid.*

18 “Saarc moves ahead for economic union”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 31 January 2012.

19 Dr M Rahmatullah, “Regional Transport Connectivity: Its current state”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 20 March 2013.

20 Thomas W. Hertel and Tasneem Mirza, “The Role of Trade Facilitation in South Asian Economic Integration”, Chapter 2, World Bank Report, 2007.

integrated region in the world. Intraregional trade as a share of total trade is the lowest for South Asia (see Annex 3). The lack of integration can be properly understood by a number of factors. Some argue that “There is little cross-border investment within South Asia. The flow of ideas, crudely measured by the cross-border movement of people, or the number of telephone calls, or the purchase of technology and royalty payments, are all low for South Asia.”²¹ This statement clearly shows where South Asia stands, when it comes to regional integration.

Nevertheless, progress has been made. Countries of the region showed political will to reduce the sensitive list within the region under the South Asian Free Trade Area Agreement. India, as being more economically better-off provided concessions to other least developed countries of the region. “The most important form of concession offered has been the grant of duty free access to readymade garments up-to a limit of 8 million pieces.”²² Thus, a more integrated region in terms of economy has been on tract. South Asian Free Trade Area’s (SAFTA) trade liberalization program included terms and timeframe for tariff reduction, reducing sensitive lists, rules of origin, revenue compensation process, and special and differential treatment for the LDCs.²³ Nevertheless, it is also true that the regulations described under SAFTA do not have enough mechanism to more functional. As a result, bilateral trade agreements between South Asian countries continue to play a more prominent role than SAFTA in governing trade flows. This deserves immediate attention to attain the dream of a union.

Energy Cooperation: The economic growth of South Asian countries is constrained by significant shortages in energy supply. There

21 Sadiq Ahmed and Ejaj Ghani, “South Asia’s Growth and Regional Integration: An Overview”, Part I, *South Asia and Regional Integration*, World Bank, 2007, p. 2.

22 Nisha Taneja, Saon Ray, Neetika Kaushal and Devjit Roy Chowdhury “Enhancing Intra-SAARC Trade: Pruning India’s Sensitive List under SAFTA”, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Working Paper 255, April 2011.

23 Katherine Loh and Nina Merchant-Vega, “Can Greater Regional Economic Cooperation Unite “Two South Asias?””, The Asia Foundation, 5 January 2011.

is no gas pipeline in existence within the region crossing the national borders or between SAARC and its neighbors. According to World Bank, there are still huge opportunities for South Asian countries in regards to energy cooperation.²⁴ Pakistan and Afghanistan are geographically well-placed to play an important role as transit states for the rest of South Asia, as they provide the best route for access to Central Asia's energy. Bhutan's unexploited hydropower potential exceeds 23,000MW and that of Nepal exceeds 43,000MW. Iran-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (IPI) could supply 150 million cubic meters per day of gas to India and 60 million of gas to Pakistan. These all would enormously benefit the region.

On the energy cooperation front, SAARC is made considerable progress as well. As per the decision in the last Summit, leaders avowed to channel no less than two per cent of the national income towards the respective countries' renewable energy investment.²⁵ The regional body also agreed to dedicate more financial resources towards developing renewable energy in the respective countries and direct the conclusion of the Inter-governmental Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation and the Study on the Regional Power Exchange Concept.²⁶

In such a background, as far as energy cooperation is concerned, the Summit focused on developing and sharing of regional hydro-electric potentiality (see Annex 3), grid connectivity, and gas pipelines and urged for commissioning a definite survey to determine actual quantum of energy resources. A Framework for Energy Cooperation Agreement has

24 "Potential and prospects for Regional Energy Trade in the South Asia Region", Formal Report 334/08, Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme and the South Asia Regional Cooperation Programme, World Bank, 2008, available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional_Energy_Trade_in_South_Asia_Final_ESMAP.pdf, accessed on 15 June 2012.

25 "Sarc ministers pledge energy security", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 11 September 2011.

26 Shahiduzzaman Khan, "Energy ring best option to solve regional needs", *The Financial Express*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 12 March 2012.

been much discussed despite various obstacles on the way.²⁷ The efforts under its umbrella would incorporate harnessing more hydro-power.

Terrorism, Maritime Piracy, Arms and Drug Trafficking: There is a growing realization within the region regarding the common challenges confronting the concerned nations at present in the shape of non-traditional security threats, viz. transnational crimes and terrorism, ethnic and religious violence, illegal migration, proliferation and trafficking of small arms as well as drugs (see Annex 4), spread of contagious diseases and so forth. Terrorism and trans-border crimes have increased manifold in South Asia in the post-cold war days raising the level of mistrust and suspicions amongst nations and peoples. Despite the increase of incidents of piracy in the Indian Ocean region, however, there is no noteworthy mechanism for regional approach to combating piracy. The agreements are restricted to bilateral ones which appear to have worked well. Addressing transnational vulnerabilities such as terrorism, human trafficking, small arms proliferation and trade, cross-border smuggling and illegal trade is another priority regionally. To fight these vulnerabilities, the countries are investing on infrastructure building and security sector reform (SSR)²⁸ to improve the efficacy of the law enforcement agencies. Countries are opting to engage both bilaterally and multi-laterally to coordinate cross-border anti-threats measures and intelligence sharing and established regular exchange and dialogue with neighboring border security forces.²⁹

27 Dr. Muhammad Pervaiz, "The Energy Cooperation in South Asia under SAARC Umbrella", Paper presented at *6th Japan- SAARC Energy Symposium*, 6-7 March 2013 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

28 Dr. Maqsudul Hasan Nuri, "Security Sector Reforms in South Asia", available at: <http://www.fairbd.net/Details.php?id=164>, accessed on 26 July 2014.

29 For a detailed analysis of cooperation within SAARC in this regard, see: Mussarat Jabeen and Sargodha Ishtiaq A. Choudhry, "Role of SAARC for Countering Terrorism in South Asia", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, July-December 2013, pp. 389-403.

Food Security: SAARC being an over-populated region, the question of food insecurity always haunts the nations of the region. Over the last decade, much has been admittedly attained as member states joined hands in working together. It should be noted that Bangladesh earlier prepared a concept paper to explore the possible ways to achieve this end. SAARC seed bank was an enormous achievement which came into existence through an agreement at the New Delhi SAARC Summit in 2007 but its functionality remained in question³⁰, despite the fact that the New Delhi Summit provided for creating a stock of 2,41,580 tonnes of food grains from the SAARC member nations.³¹ However, at the Thimpu Summit in April 2010, Bangladesh proposed to establish a ‘regional seed bank’, which was later incorporated in the Declaration.

Although the natural calamities and, in some cases, state policy failures have led to food crises in the past, South Asian countries have succeeded over the past decades to attain a level of self-sufficiency or near-self-sufficiency in food grains, owing to continuous effort in this regard.³² This has been a remarkable achievement. Indeed, continued regional cooperation is imperative to meet such common challenges in the future.

Climate Change: As the gradual environmental degradation occurs across the globe, it is now widely recognized that natural disasters like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and Tsunami will increasingly pose grave threats to regional development. All the South Asian countries are facing the negative impact of climate change. Evidence shows that Bangladesh one is the most vulnerable countries, in addition to The Maldives. In fact, the phenomena related to the issue of climate change constitute common challenge for all nations and require collective action at the national and regional levels. The 15th Summit in

30 Reaz Ahmed, “Sarc nations push for seed bank: Agriculture ministers meet in Dhaka Wednesday”, *The Financial Express*, 08 November 2011.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Uttam Deb, Mahabub Hossain, and Steve Jones, “Rethinking Food Security Strategy: Self-sufficiency or Self-reliance” *BIDS Policy Brief*, No. 0905, May 2009.

Colombo in August 2008 reiterated the need for an integrated action program in this regard in collaboration with the global community. It is now urgent that a comprehensive adaptation plan be developed with mutual collaboration among the neighboring countries under the SAARC umbrella for dealing with climate change impact and adaptation issues. This realization has led the nations of the region to decide to take a collective stand in some of the international negotiations in the past.³³ However, more cooperation is needed, if the countries concerned want to work together in the future on climate change related issues. The SAARC Meteorological Research located in Dhaka, which has some experience in this field may work as a regional platform for this purpose.

Bangladesh and South Asian Union: Opportunities and Challenges

Scholars, policy makers and other stakeholders agree that functional regional integration *viz.* realization of the dream of South Asian Union will create abundance of opportunities for Bangladesh to take advantage of the synergies based on the country's comparative advantage, more investment in cross-border infrastructure development projects, and through coordinated programs to address challenges arising from weak governance, environment vulnerability, social equality and other domains that transcends national borders. An instance of cross-border such business venture is US\$255 million Lafarge Surma Cement plant financed by the Lafarge Group. The plant, commissioned in 2005, is located at Sylhet district in Bangladesh.³⁴ The noteworthy part of the project is that raw materials are supplied from across-the-border limestone quarry in Meghalaya of north-eastern India. It is claimed that the initiative has generated approximately 400 jobs in Sylhet district alone and about 70 jobs in Meghalaya.³⁵

33 "Saarc plans common stance on climate in Mexico" *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 29 April 2010.

34 Yousuf A Harun, "Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Bangladesh Perspective", in Ashok Behuria (ed.), *South Asia: Quest for Regional Cooperation*, IDSA, India, 2009.

35 *Ibid*

The region is locked into a set of common problems that can be resolved only through regional cooperation. For example, most of Nepal's rivers flow into Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India. Indeed the tributaries in Nepal that feed the Ganges join up in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar before entering West Bengal and Bangladesh. Therefore, in utilizing the rivers of the Ganges, India needs to work with Nepal. By the same token, any program of water management by Bangladesh, be it flood control or for the purpose of irrigation, will not be achievable without the active collaboration of the upper riparian nations like India and Nepal. With proper planning and investment, the water resources of the region could well be used for the generation of electricity as well. Another significant potential resource in the region comes from the huge reserve of coal in Assam, Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal. A large reserve of natural gas is found in Bangladesh and the north-eastern part of India.³⁶

The transportation networks of the region used to be one of the most integrated among the developing world, but they got disrupted following the partition of the region into several independent countries. At present, highways, waterways, and rail links that traverse each country stop at national borders and thus are unable to serve the region. The rebuilding of this physical infrastructure has been constrained by security-driven apprehensions, which the countries found impelling enough to sacrifice mutual economic benefit. In the process of rebuilding the transport infrastructure of the eastern region of South Asia, Bangladesh emerges as the hub around which reconstruction of land links could take place. Bangladesh once had a major highway linking mainland India with both north Bengal and north-east India. The development of land alignments, which would provide north-east India

36 "Potential and prospects for Regional Energy Trade in the South Asia Region", Formal Report 334/08, Energy Sector Management Assistance Program and the South Asia Regional Cooperation Program, World Bank, 2008, available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional_Energy_Trade_in_South_Asia_Final_ESMAP.pdf, accessed on 15 June 2012 .

access to the sea through the Bay of Bengal and integrate its market with Bangladesh, could establish this undeveloped region as a staging post for economic links within South Asia and with landlocked south-west China. The Chittagong port could be built up as the nodal point for handling the region's trade.

There are several sectors in which Bangladesh and India can move from a competitive relationship toward a rediscovery of lost complementarity. Examples are:- Ready Made Garments (RMG) of Bangladesh and the textile industry of India. The European Union has allowed Bangladesh special market access, if its raw material is sourced regionally under a regional accumulation system. In the case of Bangladesh, only 65 per cent of total exports to the European Union can access the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) because of noncompliance with rules of origin³⁷. With regional accumulation, it can increase to 90 per cent. If Bangladesh accepts regional accumulation, there could be a significant increase in intraregional trade.

Tourism has remained untapped in the region, attracting less than 1 per cent of the international tourist arrivals, although the cultural and natural riches of the region are beyond dispute. Whether it is ecotourism, religious tourism, or adventure tourism, the region has a spectacular variety of tourism to offer.

There are a number of trans-national security threats in addition to the above-mentioned opportunities of regional cooperation. The following are some of the major transnational security challenges from Bangladesh perspective:

Insurgency and counter insurgency often plague relations between nations because of blame and counter-blame. There have been claims by neighboring countries that foreign intelligence often operate

37 Susil Sirivardana, "Pro-Poor Thought and Strategy: Major Impediments amidst Groundswell of Change", in Ashok Behuria (ed.) *South Asia: Quest for Regional Cooperation*, IDSA, India, 2009.

from inside Bangladesh.³⁸ Bangladesh also had similar allegation in the past. While many of these allegations are very much contested, it is true that such mutual suspicion will reduce the positive outputs of deeper regional cooperation and gradual economic integration. Border clashes often tainted bilateral relations. The border has been used as a route for smuggling various items including livestock, medicines and, more importantly, drugs and narcotics from India to Bangladesh.³⁹ The killing of innocent Bangladeshi by Border Security Force (BSF) of India has caused major irritation in bilateral relations and negatively impacted other issues as well. It has evoked strong public sentiments in Bangladesh. According to a report by Odhikar—a Human Rights Watch organization based in Bangladesh—in a little more than 10 years from January 2001 to March 2012, BSF killed 907 Bangladeshis.⁴⁰

Sharing of Ganges water is another source of conflict in the region - also involves China that shares common border with some South Asian countries. This conflict between two countries was came up when India decided to construct Farakka barrage to divert water from Ganges to Hoogly River in India. According to the Bangladesh perspective of the issue, India's action amounts to 'unilateral diversion' at Farakka to the detriment of Bangladesh which also resulted in reduction in flows inside Bangladesh and had severe impact on its ecosystem. Water sharing has unfortunately hindered relations in other bilateral issues. During Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh, highly-anticipated Teesta water discussion⁴¹ was in vein. Therefore, it clearly shows how this single problem has created recurrent nuisance in bilateral relations. For an

38 "CIA, ISI fomenting trouble in northeast" *The Times of India*, Mumbai, India, 17 October 2013.

39 Mohammad Jamil Khan, "Illegal arms flowing through our porous border", *Dhaka Tribune*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 May 2013.

40 "BSF kills Bangladeshi", *New Age*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 30 April 2011.

41 Tom Wright, "Water Woes Mar Singh's Dhaka Trip", *Wall Street Journal*, 05 September 2011, available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/09/05/water-woes-mar-singhs-dhaka-trip/>, accessed on 10 June 2014.

integrated South Asian union, a regional approach has to be taken to resolve the water sharing issues.⁴²

However, the fruits of deeper regional cooperation among the SAARC countries and moving forward towards the vision of South Asian union outweigh all obstacles and challenges ahead of nations concerned. Therefore, Bangladesh and all other nations within the regional grouping should find ways to work together to in order to minimize challenges and prepare to maximize the benefits of a regional union.

Initiatives for Enhancing Regional Cooperation

In the recent times, nations have taken initiatives to improve relations and enhance regional cooperation. The most recent example of goodwill that South Asian leaders showed is the invitation extended by India's newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi to all leaders of neighboring countries during his swearing-in ceremony.⁴³ The presence of leaders of the SAARC nations shows the enthusiasm of regional countries to be together and such measures would help revitalize SAARC. Indian External Affairs Minister, Shushma Swaraj's visit to Dhaka, soon after new government came to power in India, may be seen as another step in that direction to strengthen bilateral ties with the country.⁴⁴

Several authors have argued that there is "considerable scope for trade expansion among the SAARC countries based on comparative advantages."⁴⁵ What is needed now is identification of areas to exploit

42 Pia Malhotra, "Water: an Opportunity for SAARC?", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, available at: <http://www.ipcs.org/article/south-asia/water-an-opportunity-for-saarc-3127.html>, accessed on 14 July 2014.

43 Praveen Swami, "In a first, Modi invites SAARC leaders for his swearing-in", *The Hindu*, Tamil Nadu, India, 22 May 2014.

44 "Sushma Swaraj returns home after extremely satisfying Bangladesh visit", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, India, 27 June 2014.

45 Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi, Ather Maqsood Ahmed and Ashfaque H. Khan, "Possibilities of Regional Trade Expansion: A Link Model for Pakistan, India,

greater potential along with a program of action for cooperation emphasizing on intra-SAARC trade, joint projects and external exports from the region. It is encouraging to note that leaders of the regional forum has focused to be “benefitted from respective comparative advantages including hydropower and natural resources endorsements, possibilities from the earnings from transit, marine resources, scientific and technological base and above all young population, which will drive consumption and investment in the years ahead.”⁴⁶

Trade reform and facilitations require complementary policies such as a regulatory framework, improved governance, stable law and order, reduced corruption, upgraded infrastructure, and an improved overall investment climate.

There are several challenges that often hinder the prospect of reaching the vision of a South Asian Union. At the national level, Bangladesh, like many other countries, has been facing difficulties associated with logistical shortcomings. The government and public platforms lack capacity and sufficient funding to invest in the necessary infrastructure development. The country’s annual development budget is mostly donor dependent hence do not have financial sustainability. Besides, political instability is a big concern for most of the regional countries.

Another factor that hinders effective cooperation is that countries display significant differences, reflecting country-specific factors that make it difficult to build consensus in many areas. The hostile nationalist legacies and bilateral disputes in some cases dictate the psyche’ of the countries when it comes to the issue of regional and bilateral cooperation.

Further challenge is that despite the existence of the regional instruments and mechanisms, mutual distrust and suspicion among

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka”, *The Pakistan Development Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1984, pp. pages 9-35.

46 “Saarc leaders for collective efforts to reap benefit for peoples”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 11 November 2011.

states in the region and the ongoing processes of consolidating independent political identities have influenced states' reluctance to fully cooperate in common ventures by providing each other required assistance. This has proved a fundamental obstacle to effective regional cooperation.

Besides, the cross-border dimension of many of the internal often interrelated security crises have potential to affect neighboring countries and the absence of an effective, broad-based regional response to the threat can make the situation worse. Despite declarations regarding the need for greater collaboration among states on issues related to border security, mutual legal assistance, suppression of terrorism and law enforcement, cooperation has been slow to materialize in South Asia.

Low level of track II initiatives is also a big impediment in cementing regional integration. The cooperation and exchange among the civil society organization is minimal and most of the cross-boundary ventures enjoy poor governmental support and trust in their endeavors for regional cooperation. Since the channel of regional exchange among the countries is confined to governmental level, track 2 and track 3 levels engagements in the promotion of regional economic and political cooperation have not grown to a satisfactory level.

The lack of political will, problem of governance, economic underdevelopment and disparity, crisis of political leadership, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious divisions, challenge of non-state actors and transnational security challenges are considered to be the major hindrances to the success of regional integration. Another important missing ingredient is a shared perception of common benefit—all the members must feel they are sharing the costs and benefits of the cooperation equally. South Asia as a region ought to come up with its own short, medium, and long-term strategies considering final goal of enhanced economic integration. Each stage should be implemented effectively before moving on to the next in order to build a sound

foundation for progress.⁴⁷ South Asian countries need to address these key issues to move toward successful cooperation.

Conclusion

The discussion of this paper underlines the contemporary thoughts of common vision for a prosperous and peaceful South Asia and how far the region is advanced towards fulfilling the dreams of a South Asian union. Since the establishment of SAARC, series of discussion and dialogue have been pondering over the same objective. Consensus has been reached in many areas identifying several common targets as reflected in the SAARC Charter, SAARC Developments Goals, SAARC Social Charter and dozens of declarations and agreements under SAARC's umbrella. The deliberations of the 17th SAARC Summit, which ended on a positive note with all the members agreeing to infuse new spirit in the organization and intensify regional cooperation for the collective good, were undoubtedly another step towards that direction. The statements as well as tangible decisions coming from leaders of the member states and the document adopted at the conclusion clearly show the determination of people of the region to make a new beginning of cooperation for socio-economic development.

Mutual collaboration and inter-dependency would help create congenial atmosphere for resolution of the political disputes. Nevertheless, time has come for SAARC to move decisively to implement various proposals that have been, so far, confined to papers only. The theme of the Addu Summit was 'Building Bridges' and the member

47 Note: In this context, the development of the European Union may be studied, which is considered to be the most advanced model for regional grouping. European integration evolved over four stages: First, a preferential free trade regime was developed in which member countries reduced or eliminated tariff and nontariff barriers among them; Second, a Customs Union created a common external tariff so that import duties were the same for each member country; Third, the Economic Union was formed, which further integrated the market, eventually leading to a single market, Fourth, a monetary union was established in which the national currencies of the member countries were replaced by a single currency.

states rightly advanced relevant proposals to realize the objective of bringing them closer through connecting road and rail networks, increased economic interaction as well as measures to boost mutual confidence.

However, the most effective way to bridge the gaps and build confidence is, perhaps, to augment trade and business cooperation between and among the nations by including private sector and facilitating track II initiatives among the civil society organizations across the border. Concrete steps towards a gradual expansion of free trade area in South Asia and encouraging harmonization of policies and standards to increase intra-regional trade are also of utmost importance in this regard. Finally, in order to make further progress, it is imperative that both government and civil society organizations take effective measures for consensus building by reducing trust-deficit among them through active engagement, meaningful dialogue and discussions.

Annex 1

Table 1: The following routes could be opened immediately to facilitate movement of goods and passengers based on the recommendations made by the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS):

Rail Routes	Rail Route-1: Mahيسان-Kulaura-Chittagong with a rail link to Agartala Rail Route-2: Gede/Darsana-Jamuna Bridge TongiKulaura - Mahيسان with a link to Agartala Rail route 3: Birgunj-Raxaul-Kathihar-Rohanpur-Mongla Port
Road Route	Road route-1: PetrapoleJessore-Dhaka (via ferry Sylhet- Tamabil
Agartala	Road route 2: Kathmandu-Kaharvitta-Phulbari-Banglabandha-Mongla Road route-3: Thimphu-Phuentsholing-Jaigon-Chengrabandha-Burimari-(Chittagong (966 km), and (ii) Mongla (880 km)
IWT Routes	IWT Routes: Kolkata-Raimongal-Mongla-Narayanganj (a): Aricha-Pandu; and (b): Bhairab Bazar/Ashuganj-Karimganj

Source: Rahmatullah, *The Daily Star*, 24 February 2010.

Annex 2

Table 2: Share of Regional Trade in South Asia's Trade with the World 2008 (per cent)

		Import								
		Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	SAARC
Afghanistan		0.00	0.05	0.00	6.99	0.00	0.00	36.35	0.00	43.38
Bangladesh		0.01	-	0.06	14.69	0.00	0.37	1.24	0.07	16.44
Bhutan		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
India		0.04	0.10	0.06	-	0.00	0.19	0.12	0.15	0.66
Maldives		0.00	0.00	0.00	9.21	-	0.00	0.35	4.51	14.08
Nepal		0.00	0.22	0.00	55.25	0.00	-	0.12	0.01	55.59
Pakistan		0.20	0.19	0.00	3.69	0.01	0.01	-	0.15	4.26
Sri Lanka		0.00	0.08	0.00	18.94	0.12	0.00	1.41	-	20.56
SAARC		0.06	0.11	0.05	2.70	0.01	0.16	0.77	0.15	-
		Export								
		Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	SAARC
Afghanistan		-	0.27	0.00	23.54	0.00	0.00	17.70	0.00	41.52
Bangladesh		0.02	-	0.02	2.34	0.00	0.04	0.58	0.08	3.08
Bhutan		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
India		0.20	1.45	0.06	-	0.07	0.87	0.87	1.40	4.91
Maldives		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-	0.00	0.00	8.54	8.54
Nepal		0.00	9.16	0.00	54.83	0.00	-	0.42	0.01	64.42
Pakistan		8.62	1.25	0.00	1.45	0.02	0.02	-	0.85	12.21
Sri Lanka		0.00	0.18	0.00	4.48	0.68	0.00	0.74	-	6.09
SAARC		1.00	1.32	0.05	0.72	0.08	0.70	0.80	1.21	-

Source: Calculated from IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics Database, cited in Mohammad JasimUddin and MahfuzKabir, 'SAARC's Potential Role in Promoting Economic Development in Afghanistan', *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2011, p. 229.

Annex 3

Table 3: Hydro-electric Potentiality of South Asian Countries

Country	Hydro-Electric Potentiality
Nepal	83,000 MW (techno-economic>45,000 MW)
Bhutan	30,000 MW (techno-economic>16,000 MW)
Myanmar	Significant (~ 40,000 MW)
Sri-Lanka and North-East India	Significant

Source: IrajHossain, "Policies and Strategies on Non-renewable Energy" paper presented at the seminar on *Quest for Energy Sufficiency in Bangladesh*, organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies on 24 July 2011.

Annex 4

Table 4: The following tabulation provides an overview of drug-trafficking in the region.

Country	Status	Major drugs involved	Source of drugs	Destination	Enforcement Authority	Status of global conventions and bilateral agreements
Bangladesh	Producer and Transit country	cannabis, heroin, opium, marijuana, codeine-based cough syrups like Phensedyl	Myanmar, India, and local production in northwestern districts	India by land; and Western countries through Chittagong port and Dhaka airport	Department of Narcotics Control (DNC); National Narcotics Control Board (NNCB)	Signatory to all the three conventions (the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs-1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances-1971, the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances-1988). Bilateral agreement with Myanmar
Bhutan	Transit country made use of mostly by insurgents in northeast India	cannabis, heroin	Southeast Asia	India by land and air routes	Customs Department, Ministry of Home Affairs	Signatory to the 1988 Convention
India	Producer and Transit country	opium, heroin, cannabis, pharmaceutical drugs	Southeast and Southwest Asia and local production in central, north and northeast India, and Western Ghats	Western countries	Customs and Excise Department, Department of Revenue, Narcotics Control Board (NCB), Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN),	Signatory to all three Conventions. Bilateral agreements with 15 countries
Maldives	Transit country	cannabis, heroin	India, Central and Southeast Asia	West Asia, and Europe and for local consumption	Narcotics Control Board (NCB), Drug Control Board (DCB) of Police Headquarters	Ratified all three UN Conventions
Nepal	Producer and Transit country	cannabis, heroin, marijuana, codeine-based cough syrups like Phensedyl	Pakistan, Myanmar, India, and local production	India, and West Europe through land and air routes	Narcotics Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit (NDCLEU)	Ratified the 1961 and the 1988 Conventions and not party to the 1971 Convention.
Pakistan	Producer and Transit country	cannabis, hashish, heroin, opium	Afghanistan, and local production	India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran, Turkey and western countries	Anti Narcotics Force	Signatory to all three UN Conventions. MoU with Iran, and bilateral agreement with India
Sri Lanka	Producer and Transit country	cannabis, heroin	Indian sub-continent, and local production	Europe and West Asia	Excise department, National Dangerous Drugs Control Board (NDDCB), Narcotics Bureau of the police	Signatory to all three

Source: N Manoharan, "Drug-trafficking in South Asia: A Profile" available at <http://www.ipcs.org/article/sri-lanka/drug-trafficking-in-south-asia-a-profile-1113.html>, accessed on 26 December 2011.

Challenges and Prospects of SAARC

Ahmed Saleem¹

Introducing SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was launched in December 1985. It comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as members. Its Secretariat is based in Kathmandu.

The Association was born out of the consciousness that in an increasingly interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity in South Asia are best achieved by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation amongst the countries in the region.

Since the emergence of the Association in 1985, it has convened seventeen Summit meetings, thirty-five regular and two commemorative sessions of the Council of Ministers; forty regular and six special sessions of the Standing Committee; and forty-five sessions of the Programming Committee. The Council of Ministers also meets in informal session on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York.

Poverty Alleviation. Poverty alleviation is the over-arching goal of SAARC. Reports as *Meeting the Challenge*; and *Our Future, Our Responsibility: Roadmap towards a Poverty Free South Asia* provide the rationale and scope of, while Meetings of Secretaries and Ministers of Poverty Alleviation formulate policy guidelines for, cooperation in this area. The Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) plays an advisory and advocacy role, while the Two-tier

1 Former Secretary-General of SAARC from The Maldives.

Mechanism oversees cooperation in this sector. The Plan of Action spells out a range of internal and external policies conducive to poverty alleviation. The SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) set out a compendium of targets in poverty alleviation. A mid-term review on the attainment of SDGs is underway. The Regional Poverty Profiles (RPPs) showcase the best practices and experiences in alleviation in the region. Having declared 1991 as the SAARC Year of Shelter, 1995 as the SAARC Year of Poverty Alleviation and 1997 as the SAARC Year of Participatory Governance, the Member States observe 2006-2015 as the SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation.

Trade, Economy and Finance. The SAARC Study on Trade, Manufactures and Services, the SAARC Study on Implications to Member States on Progression from SAPTA to SAFTA, the SAARC Study on Customs Matters, the SAARC Study on Potential of Trade in Services under SAFTA Agreement which ultimately led to the signing of the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS), among others, provide the basis and possibility of, while Meetings of Commerce and Finance Ministers give policy guidelines for, cooperation in these areas. The Agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) marks a progression from the Agreement on the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), whose implementation is being followed by the SAFTA Ministerial Council, assisted by the SAFTA Committee of Experts. A Working Group actively pursues reduction in the size of Sensitive Lists of Products under the SAFTA Agreement. The Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC) oversees cooperation in the entire gamut of economic field, while Finance Ministers and Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial Issues pursue collaboration in financial issues. The Group on Customs Cooperation administers cooperation in customs matters. Cooperation in the field of statistics is pursued by SAARCSTAT. Following their signing, the Regional Agreement on Trade in Services is being ratified by the Member States, while those on the Establishment of the South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO), on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters, and on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters

have been ratified by all Member States and entered into force. Texts of Agreements on the Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment, and on the Implementation of Regional Standards were signed during the Seventeenth Summit, while the Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Investment is awaiting finalization. The SAARC Arbitration Council has commenced operation. An Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial Issues is seized with the task of developing a roadmap towards realizing the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU). A common position is presented at WTO forums. The SAARC Trade Fairs promote intra-regional trade. Partnership with the private sector is pursued through the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI).

Women, Youth and Children. The Dhaka Resolution on Women, Kathmandu Resolution on Women and Family Health, Dhaka Resolution on Women, Colombo Resolution on Children, SAARC Plan of Action on Children and SAARC Plan of Action on the Girl Child, among others, pave the path of, while the Ministerial Meetings on Women, Children, Disabled Persons, Youth and Health provide policy outlines for, cooperation in the promotion of women and children. The Youth Charter and the Malé Resolution on Youth opens up ample avenues for cooperation in the development of youth. The forum of Heads of National Coordination Committees (NCCs) pursues the implementation of the Social Charter. The Technical Committee on Health and Population Activities and the one on Women, Youth and Children oversee cooperation in their respective fields. Under the overall framework of the Regional Strategy on HIV/AIDS, the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre addresses the menaces of Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The Regional Plan of Action for the Disabled Persons provides the vision for dealing with the differently-abled persons. The SAARC Gender Info Base (SGIB), developed with the assistance of UN Women, acts as a repository of qualitative and quantitative data and information on gender-related issues and women empowerment. The Conventions on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia and on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for

Prostitution provide for legal frameworks for cooperation in the relevant fields. A SAARC Regional Strategy on Communicable Diseases is in place. A SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors Programme (for HIV and AIDS) is in operation.

Agriculture and Food Security. The SAARC Agricultural Vision 2020 and the Colombo Statement on Food Security provide the direction for cooperation in these fields. The Meetings of Agriculture Ministers formulate policies, while the Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Core Group on Agriculture and Extension oversee cooperation in their relevant fields. The SAARC Agriculture Centre coordinates research and implements activities. The SAARC Food Bank reserves food-grains for withdrawal by Member States on emergencies. An Agreement on Regional Seed Bank was signed during the Seventeenth Summit. Regular meetings of Chief Veterinary Officers address trans-boundary animal diseases.

Energy. The concept of an Energy Grid sets out the fabric of cooperation in the field of energy. Under the guidance of SAARC Energy Ministers, the Working Group on Energy pursues cooperation in this field. The SAARC Energy Centre coordinates implementation of regional programs. The Regional Study on Energy Trade, conducted with the assistance of ADB, offers ample vistas of cooperation in the field of, and trade in, energy in the region, recommendations of which are being acted upon.

Transport and intra-regional connectivity. Under the guidance of Meetings of Ministers of Transport, the Technical Committee on Transport oversees collaboration in these fields. The SAARC Regional Multi-modal Transport Study has been prepared with the assistance of ADB and its recommendations are being implemented whose progress is overseen by an Inter-Governmental Group. Two Regional Agreements on Motor Vehicles and on Railways are under negotiation. Preparatory work towards the operationalization of the Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service among India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka is underway. 2010-2020 is declared as the Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity.

Environment, Natural Disasters and Climate Change. The Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment, and the Study on the Greenhouse Effect and Its Impact on the Region provide for the basis and extent of cooperation in these areas. The Action Plan on Environment (1997); the Colombo Declaration on a Common Environment Programme (1998); the Dhaka Declaration and Action Plan on Climate Change (2008); the Delhi Statement on Cooperation in Environment (2009); and the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change (2010) are some of the significant initiatives taken by SAARC to strengthen regional cooperation in these areas. The periodic meetings of the Environment Ministers and Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry take stock of progress and initiate new areas of cooperation. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC), the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC), and the SAARC Forestry Centre (SFC) pursue collaboration in their respective fields. An Inter-governmental Expert Group on Climate Change oversees the implementation of the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change. A SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment was signed during the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (April 2010) and is yet to enter into force. A SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters was signed during the Seventeenth SAARC Summit. The Member States observed 1992 as the SAARC Year of Environment; 1999 as the SAARC Year of Biodiversity; 2002-2003 as SAARC Years of Contribution of Youth to Environment; and 2007 as the Green South Asia Year.

Education and Human Resource Development. The Ministerial Meeting on Education/Higher Education provides for the rationale and scope of cooperation in education and HRD. The South Asian University is in operation, offering quality education at the Postgraduate level. Member States offer scholarships to students across the region under the SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme. The University Grants Commissions of Member States promote collaboration in the field of education. The SAARC Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC) coordinates and offers training in HRD. The SAARC Internship Program

enables students from within the region to undertake researches about the Association and its activities as interns at the SAARC Secretariat.

SAARC Awards. The SAARC Award honours individuals and institutions that contribute to the cause of regional significance. The SAARC Youth Award recognizes extra-ordinary young talents in the region. The SAARC Meteorological Awards recognize outstanding researchers in the field of meteorology.

Information, ICT and Communications. Under the overall framework of the Plan of Action on Communications and the policy guidelines provided by the Meetings of Information and Communications Ministers, the Working Group on ICT and Telecommunications oversees collaboration in these fields. The Heads of National TV and Radio meet regularly to promote collaboration among one another. The SAARC Information Centre promotes exchange of information within the region. The SAARC Documentation Centre acts as a depository of information on technical, scientific and developmental matters. The SAARC Audio-Visual Exchange Programme (SAVE) broadcasts and telecasts programs of and about Member States across the region.

Science & Technology, Biotechnology & Meteorology. Guided by the Report of the Ministerial Meeting on Science & Technology, the Technical Committee on Science & Technology oversees cooperation in the field of S&T. The Working Group on Biotechnology promotes collaboration in this area through the implementation of a Programme for Cooperation in the field of Biotechnology. The SAARC Meteorological Research Centre coordinates research and implements programs in the field of meteorology.

Tourism. The SAARC Plan of Action on Tourism provides for a broad framework of cooperation in the field of tourism. The Meetings of Tourism Ministers provide policy guidelines for, while the Working Group on Tourism administers, collaboration in the field of tourism. SAARC observed 2005 and 2006 as SAARC Years of Tourism.

Cultural Cooperation. Drawing inspiration from the Agenda for Cultural Cooperation adopted by the SAARC Cultural Ministers, the

SAARC Cultural Centre promotes collaboration in the field of culture.

Terrorism. The Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, complemented by an Additional Protocol, provides for a legal framework for cooperation in curbing terrorism. The Meetings of Home/Interior Ministers provide policy guidance in the implementation of the Convention. Cooperation in Police Matters is pursued through a forum of Police Chiefs. The SAARC Terrorism Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) promotes exchange of information on acts of terrorism.

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances sets out a legal framework of cooperation in preventing the abuse of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Under the direction of the Home/Interior Ministers, the Drug Law Enforcement Agencies oversee the implementation of the Convention. The SAARC Drugs Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) enables exchange of information on offences committed within the region.

Good Governance. A Charter of Democracy is in place. At their regular meetings, Cabinet Secretaries and Chiefs of Public Service Commissions deliberate on how best to promote effective, efficient, transparent and accountable governance.

People-to-people contacts. A host of SAARC Recognized Bodies and SAARC Apex Bodies promote interaction both at the popular and professional levels. The Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians promotes exchanges among the people's representatives. The SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme exempts a select group of individuals from visa requirements for travel within the region.

Project Collaboration. The SAARC Development Fund is currently seized with the implementation of regional and sub-regional projects. Following nine Regional Projects have so been initiated under the Social Window of the Fund: (i) Strengthening the livelihood initiative for homebased workers in SAARC Region (Phase I and II); (ii) Strengthening Maternal and Child Health Including Immunization; (iii) Scaling up of Zero Energy Cold Storage (ZECS) technology for the horticultural

commodities in the high hills of SAARC countries; (iv) Empowering Rural Communities "Reaching the Unreached"; (v) South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC); (vi) Post Harvest Management and Value Addition of Fruits in Production Catchments in SAARC Countries; (vii) Regional Inter-professional Master's Program in Rehabilitation Science; (viii) Toll Free Help-lines for Women and Children in SAARC Member States; and (ix) Strengthening of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services in selected areas of SAARC Countries.

Common Positions. SAARC presents common positions at various international forums. These positions are negotiated at the Technical Committee or Working Group level for approval by the Charter bodies of SAARC.

Cooperation with Inter-Governmental Organizations. SAARC collaborates with a number of Inter-governmental organizations, many of which have MoUs with SAARC. In addition, SAARC pursues informal collaboration with organizations like ASEAN, Commonwealth, IPU and ILO, among others. A set of guidelines governs the linkage between SAARC and these organizations. Guidelines allowing regional and international organizations the status of a guest or an observer at SAARC meetings are in place.

Observers. SAARC has nine observers: China, Japan, Republic of Korea, USA, Iran, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union. A set of guidelines governs SAARC's relationship with these observers. An exercise is underway within SAARC to determine the extent of its involvement with observers.

Although SAARC commenced cooperation in a few areas at its initial stage, successive years have witnessed continued enrichment and expansion of the ambit of regional cooperation. Of late, SAARC has laid greater emphasis on "implementation" rather than "declaration" and more so, on "project collaboration." Moreover, SAARC today vigorously follows on the visions of a South Asian Economic Union, a South Asian

Customs Union, a common South Asian currency, a borderless South Asia and, above all, a poverty and hunger-free South Asia, among others.

Prospects and Challenges of SAARC

Cooperation in trade and connectivity: While SAARC is one of the fastest growing regions in the world, it is also among the least integrated regions. While it is true that efforts at liberalizing trade among the Member States have been initiated with measures as SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the volume of SAFTA trade that stands at only \$3 billion today is peanuts compared to what SAARC can really achieve for the economic prosperity of all its Member States. Moreover, for SAFTA trade to grow in content and volume, intra-regional connectivity must be strengthened, allowing easy and free movement of goods and services across the region. Likewise, trade facilitation measures must go hand-in-hand with measures aimed at strengthening physical connectivity between and among the countries in the region. Though some proposals as the Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service among India, Maldives and Sri Lanka; Demonstration run of a container train among Bangladesh, India and Nepal; and Regional Agreements on Motor Vehicles and Railways have been initiated, these are yet to see light of the day purely because of the lack of the political will on the part of the Member States.

SAARC Development Fund: For SAARC to mean something to the people it belongs to, it ought to come out with people-centric programs and projects that bring tangible benefits to them. A good start has been made in this respect with the institution of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) in April 2010, which has now under its Social Window as many as nine projects in the areas of health, social development, agriculture and poverty alleviation. However, many potential end-users of the Fund find the funding mechanism under SDF very cumbersome and complicated. This gives rise to the need to simplify funding procedures of SDF and improve upon its reporting mechanism for the sake of clarity and transparency. Resources of SDF must also be made

available to think tanks and civil society organizations from within the region to enable them to mobilize track II initiatives for the overall development of South Asia. At the same time, concerted efforts must be made to operationalize SDF's other two windows, namely, Economic Window and Infrastructure Window.

Visa-free regime: For SAARC to be meaningful to people of South Asia, another area that SAARC needs to focus on is the creation of a visa free regime, allowing free movement of people across the region. The SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme initiated in 1992 is only a name-sake measure and currently allows only 24 categories of people who are eligible for visa-free travel within the region. The Scheme must be expanded to encompass all the people.

People-to-people contacts: SAARC is of and for the people of South Asia. Strengthening people-to-people contacts can only strengthen SAARC as the viable entity for strengthened regional cooperation in South Asia. Taking due cognizance of these facts, it is essential for SAARC to initiate measures aimed at building people-people contacts in the region. For some reasons, if SAARC as an organization is unable to initiate such measures, then such a responsibility should be handed over to think tanks and civil society organizations like COSATT that are ever willing to supplement the inter-governmental process as SAARC. Such a proposition is premised on the fact that people-to-people contact contribute significantly to the promotion of mutual trust and confidence among one another, which is a prerequisite for the success of SAARC as a regional body. At the same time, SAARC must encourage frequent interactions among the representatives of the civil society to ascertain their feedback on several issues before the organization.

South Asian University: Likewise, South Asian University that came into being in 2010 must be strengthened and considering its potential, all the Member States must start taking it seriously. Problems as irregular contribution to the budget of the University and lack of participation of the Member States in its meetings must be addressed immediately and with all the seriousness these issues deserve.

Appraisal of SAARC: In this backdrop, time is now ripe to undertake an honest appraisal of the process of SAARC, including its mechanisms, in order to make it work like successful regional institutions as EU and ASEAN, among others. If economic cooperation is the objective of SAARC but is thwarted by contentious issues among its Member States, which SAARC is prevented from taking up, the very existence of the organization itself must be questioned. Therefore, the challenge before SAARC today is to ensure that SAARC is more effective than it has been for the past 28 years.

At the directive of the Seventeenth SAARC Summit held in the Maldives in November 2011, for the first time in the history of SAARC, the SAARC Secretariat has prepared a comprehensive Study on strengthening SAARC and its mechanisms, including the SAARC Secretariat, eleven Regional Centres and four Specialized bodies. The Study was tabled before the inter-Summit Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers and some of the recommendations have already been approved, while some are pending for further consideration of the Member States. Some of the recommendations made in the Study prepared by the Secretariat are drastic in nature and require in-depth consultations before they are put into effect. Many recommendations in the Study are far-reaching in nature and will contribute positively towards the revitalization of the SAARC process and its mechanisms. All the Member States must give due consideration to the well thought-out recommendations of the Study in order to change the face and fate of SAARC for the common good of the teeming millions in the region. The success of SAARC in the next decade and beyond will depend entirely on how seriously and timely the Member States pursue and implement the recommendations made in the Study.

As directed by the last Session of the Standing Committee, the SAARC Secretariat is now in the process of preparing two more studies, namely, on the merger/closure of Regional Centres and on the extent of SAARC's engagement with Observers. A Session of the Programming Committee is to convene at the SAARC Secretariat to consider these two

studies, following which some concrete scenarios will emerge vis-à-vis Regional Centres and Observers.

Observers: The ongoing inquiry within SAARC with regard to the role and status of observers, including the question of dialogue partnership needs serious contemplation. With nine observers already admitted, and with pending requests from Turkey and the Commonwealth, SAARC has not only put a moratorium on the admission of new observers, but also asked its Secretariat to prepare a detailed study on the question of its engagement with observers. Many feel that not much has been happening between SAARC and individual observers because of the stringent guidelines SAARC has in place. It is hoped that the Study being prepared by the SAARC Secretariat will come up with conditions and guidelines that are favourable to SAARC's willing observers.

SAARC and China: It is time that a new special relationship between SAARC and China is created to learn from the Chinese experience. Needless to mention, it will only do well to SAARC. India, the major player in SAARC, which makes it such an important organization in the region and in the world, is not only the world's largest democracy, it is also the second most populous country in the world after China. India and China are the fastest developing countries in the world. Most members of SAARC have excellent bilateral relations with China which could play a positive role in the development of these countries. A new kind of cooperation between SAARC and China, led by India and assisted by China, can play a key role in advancing the cause of SAARC. The people-to-people contact that could generate itself by this splendid cooperation will undoubtedly create massive benefits for not only SAARC and its members but also for China in the long run.

The Rule of Law & Human Rights: No regional organization, especially if it is made up of countries that are democracies, can afford not to discuss democracy, human rights and rule of law, which are the basic foundations of any democratic system. When SAARC came into being in 1985, only two Member States were democracies and others were under dictatorships. However, now, 28 years later, all the Member

States are democracies. However, strangely, Member States are still reluctant to discuss or deal with these important subjects. Many spectators of SAARC today firmly believe that it should not be deprived of a regional human rights mechanism similar to the one established by the ASEAN states and other regional human rights bodies in Africa, Europe and the Americas. As the largest democracy in the world, India should take the lead in order to establish such a mechanism within the realm of SAARC. It is widely held that in spite of the fact SAARC had adopted a 'charter of democracy' more than 3 years ago in Thimpu, Member States are still shy or unwilling to accept this reality.

SAARC Charter: There is a growing realization among the spectators of SAARC that for this regional grouping to be effective, its Charter that was adopted as far back as in 1985, must be amended. Issues that need to change in the Charter are several in numbers. Some of the issues that they think must change relate to SAARC's "conduct of business". SAARC excludes from its deliberations "bilateral" and "contentious" issues. It is so in spite of the fact that these issues do have a bearing on the relationship between and among the Member States of SAARC, and that very relationship determines the success or failure of regional cooperation. Needless to mention, cordial relations among the Member States are the prerequisites for effective regional cooperation.

Another generally held view is that as per the existing SAARC Charter, there is a requirement of "consensus" of all the Member States for SAARC to be able to initiate a new process or a project. Many analysts maintain the view that such a Charter provision has marred the progress on some of the regional projects or collaborative endeavors that are not favored by all the Member States. They perceive that the principle of "consensus" should be done away with, and a new system of voting must be introduced to initiate projects and collaborative endeavors that are favorable to the majority of the Member States. They claim that such a principle of voting should be extended to policy decisions where a consensus is not seen round the corner.

Role of the Chair: The role of the Chair of SAARC must change for the better. The Chair must take proactive role when SAARC becomes sluggish or ineffective in achieving the agreed goals and deadlines. The Chair must also initiate fresh proposals that correspond to the theme of the Summit it hosts. One can cite burning examples why the role of the Chair must be “down to business” than the traditional role of hosting a Summit and wearing the glorious mantle of the Chair. The Maldives hosted the Seventeenth Summit with much fanfare and with as high sounding a theme as “Building Bridges”. One keeps pondering till date as to what the Summit host did subsequently in furtherance of the theme? Another example is the Chair’s inability to convene the inter-Summit Session of the Council of Ministers despite considerable delay. Yet another case in point is the overdue Eighteenth Summit in spite of the Charter provision of one Summit a year.

Secretary-General: There is another general perception that for SAARC to be effective, its Secretary-General must be given a more proactive role than the present roles of the “channel of communication” and the “custodian of documents” as defined by the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the SAARC Secretariat adopted in 1986. In a welcome development that, however, took some twenty years to surface, in 2006, the Standing Committee that met in a special session in Dhaka expanded the authority of the Secretary-General of SAARC by, among others, allowing her or him to initiate proposals for regional cooperation. Many believe that it is now time for the Member States to allow the Secretary-General the corresponding “authority of finance” to enable her or him to do justice with the already given “authority of projects”.

SAARC Secretariat: Many perceive that the SAARC Secretariat, which is the driver of SAARC, must be adequately strengthened to enable it to meet the growing expectations of the Member States in terms of output. Of late, several sessions of the Charter bodies held have been asking the SAARC Secretariat to prepare one study after another, which only speaks of their growing dependence on the Secretariat for credible information. However, many share the view that to enable the

Secretariat to respond effectively to the needs of the Member States, the Secretariat must be manned by experts rather than diplomats. There are, however, two differing views when it comes to the system of appointment of Directors at the SAARC Secretariat. Some people say the Directors must be appointed on the basis of open competition from within the region. Some say they should come from line and sectoral Ministries on deputation. Nevertheless, these groups of people hold the popular view that the Foreign Ministries were necessary at the time of “negotiating” SAARC, but not at “operating” SAARC. Their claim stems from the fact that the role and involvement of the Foreign Ministries had come to an end with the signing of the SAARC Charter in December 1985, with numerous bilateral and multilateral negotiations undertaken both at national and regional levels under the aegis of the Foreign Ministries. They assert that it is long overdue for the Foreign Ministries to hand over SAARC to the Line and Sectoral Ministries to operate it successfully. They say so because this measure will not only help improve the efficacy of the SAARC Secretariat, but will also extend its ownership to the implementing agencies as the line and sectoral Ministries and Departments.

Conclusion

South Asia is a unique region with similarities in abundance than dissimilarities. It is also the region that suffered three damaging wars between two most important Member States of SAARC. Given these bitter realities, SAARC is undoubtedly the best thing to have happened in this part of the world. More than anything else, people in this region should take pride from the fact that another such a war has been prevented since the establishment of SAARC in 1985. Indeed, SAARC has played a major role, directly or indirectly, in maintaining peace in this region. That is precisely the reason why SAARC is indispensable.

If Member States of EU, especially France and Germany, could solve their long-standing differences by making worthy sacrifices in the interest of peace and regional cooperation, why can't the countries in South Asia do exactly the same?

SAARC - the Sri Lankan Perspective

Asanga Abeyagoonasekera¹ and Archana Heenpella²

Sri Lanka, being amongst the founding members of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has always shown steadfast commitment to the furtherance of all SAARC goals and objectives; most prominently its ultimate mission of unifying the South Asian region. Over the years Sri Lanka has mirrored its support and energy in not only founding this organization, but also in the implementation of its recommendations and proposals. Sri Lankan leaders have actively participated in the activities of the organization, providing practical and visionary ideas with the aim of consolidating the integration of the region. One such proposal was that of H.E President Mahinda Rajapaksa, which called for the establishment of a conclave of SAARC Parliamentarians, entrusted to discuss and dissect matters of importance such as democracy, public participation in governance, as well as the involvement of youth leaders in the formulation national and international policies. The President also called for the enhancing of “practical engagement”³ between SAARC members and observer nations. Former President Ranasinghe Premadasa also contributed tremendously to SAARC when he proposed five regional initiatives in 1991, aimed at enhancing regional cooperation. Some of these include the establishment of a South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, as well as Asian Payments Union.

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- 1 Executive Director, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIRSS), Colombo.
 - 2 Research Assistant, LKIRSS, Colombo.
 - 3 Rajapaksa, Mahinda; President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; Sixteenth SAARC Summit; 2010, Thimphu.

Sri Lanka has also hosted several SAARC summits over the years, including the Sixth SAARC Summit in 1991 which was a milestone conference in the organization's history, as it was here that Sri Lanka proposed the establishment of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) by 1997. Sri Lanka also offered to host a Conference on Children in South Asia, which was enthusiastically welcomed by the rest of the members. The Tenth SAARC Summit was once again hosted in Colombo in 1998, and this too proved to be monumental as Sri Lanka was appointed by member states to conduct a regional convocation of researches from a myriad of fields such as the private sector, government sectors, think tanks etc. to examine global, financial and economic factors affecting South Asia. The Fifteenth SAARC Summit was held in 2008, wherein Sri Lanka was entrusted with the task of creating a concept paper aimed at identifying national and regional policies that could positively affect regional trade, investment and economic cooperation in South Asia.

Sri Lanka takes its commitment to SAARC very seriously and carries out its duties responsibly. A proud moment was when the SAARC Cultural Center was established in Colombo in 2010. Given that the South Asian region is rich in its cultural heritage and history, with people belonging to a number of ethnicities and religions, holding various ideas and beliefs, the decision that Sri Lanka was the most ideal place to host the regional cultural center speaks volumes of the vibrancy and pluralism of our own culture. Sri Lanka also hosts the SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) units. The nation's extensive experience in combating terrorism is the best indicator behind the decision to base these units in our country. Sri Lanka also hosted the first ever SAARC International Film Festival in 1999. The Second and Eighth SAARC Trade Fair, aimed at promoting intra-SAARC trade, were held in Colombo in 1998 and 2008 respectively.

Additionally we have honored our commitment to SAARC by implementing the recommendations set forth under numerous resolutions and agreements. For instance, the Thimphu Statement called

for the planting of ten million trees in the region between 2010 and 2015; was enforced vigorously. Sri Lanka planted 3.5 million trees in the country within the span of just one year⁴.

When discussing SAARC, an important question to ask is why hasn't SAARC experienced the same level of regional integration, compared to the EU and ASEAN? Reasons include the long interconnected history, lack of regional commons, unbalanced strength of member-nations, problems between SAARC countries, competing political and economic interests, and differing relationships with outside countries. These reasons, however, do not seem unique to our region. Both the EU and ASEAN have faced similar issues during their existence. Unique to SAARC, is India.

As a result of its size and population, central geographical location, international clout, and growing economy and markets, India is a regional power on the global stage. According to Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey, Director of the Centre of South Asian Studies (CSAS) in Nepal, due to its sheer size, economic clout and power, India has a "disproportionate responsibility" towards SAARC⁵, and states that ideally India has to play the role that Germany is playing in the EU and Indonesia in ASEAN. However due to its history, colored by misunderstanding, an environment has been created where regional cooperation is not easily achieved. India's shared borders prove to be a barrier rather than an opportunity for the region, most prominently its perennial disputes with Pakistan. This has been pointed out on numerous occasions by member nations, specifically by former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed who said "I hope that neighbors can find ways to compartmentalize pending differences while finding areas on which they can move forward. I am specifically referring to the

4 Implementing SAARC Programs: Sri Lanka Plays Leadership Role. *Daily News*, 11-02-14. <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2011/02/14/news03.asp> (Accessed 2014 - 09 - 26)

5 Pandey, Nishchal N.; Thoughts on the 18th SAARC Summit; Sep. 2014, Colombo.

differences between India and Pakistan”⁶. We must realize that India can be used as an opportunity for regional development through strengthening export markets of other SAARC countries. President Rajapaksa has welcomed India as an opportunity, stating that “India’s leadership is crucial for the success of SAARC ventures and Sri Lanka looks forward to working with India in taking forward SAARC operations.”⁷

Member nations must focus on the pivotal role India can play in unifying the region and achieving integration amongst our nations. Longstanding disputes must be addressed and resolved with a firm determination to rebuild battered relationships. The ultimate goal of SAARC of unifying the region in every sphere must be the sole objective of all member nations. Through this we can make long-delayed progress, and reach the capacity and status SAARC is very capable of achieving. Through this we can shed the image of inefficiency and redundancy that seems to have been labeled upon us, and create a new image; one characterized by unshakable unity and integration.

Security

Terrorism, security, and border disputes comprise a significant portion of difficulty to SAARC’s progress. India’s turbulent relationship with Pakistan, for example, greatly impacts regional cooperation and hinders the success of SAARC. As former Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said, “The reason why we have been slow in catching up with the other regional organizations is evident. The political environment in South Asia has been impacted by disputes and trust deficits. We have remained mired in conflict management”⁸. While the future progress of SAARC depends heavily on bordering countries such as Pakistan and India overcoming deep-rooted ethnic conflict, SAARC does have the potential

6 Nasheed, Mohamed; Former President of Maldives; Sixteenth SAARC Summit; 2010, Thimphu

7 President Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Modi Meet in New Delhi. *news.lk*. <http://www.lanka.net/> (Accessed 2014-09-30)

8 Aziz, Shaukat; Former Prime Minister of Pakistan; Fourteenth SAARC Summit; 2007, New Delhi

to be a platform for increased communication and engagement over these challenges and has in fact helped in neutralizing relations between these two nations over the years.

All SAARC countries signed the 'SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism' and agreed that, "Contracting States shall cooperate among themselves, to the extent permitted by their national laws, through consultations between appropriate agencies, exchange of information, intelligence and expertise and such other cooperative measures as may be appropriate, with a view to preventing terroristic activities through precautionary measures."⁹ Despite having ratified these provisions, the South Asian region is yet to witness substantial decrease in violence and conflict. Since the ratification of this resolution, not a single terrorist in the region has been apprehended as per the provisions of this convention.

SAARC should be used as a mechanism to combat terrorism and security issues as one unified region. The EU, for example, has created the Common Foreign and Security Policy pillar which influences member nations to act as a unified front on many issues. We must work to increase genuine integration and support between SAARC countries to strengthen regional security. Equally important, is collectively promoting post-conflict reconciliation as it is essential for ensuring long-lasting peace and genuine cooperation. It is an important part of fighting terrorism and preventing history from repeating itself. SAARC should become a platform for promoting and sharing post-conflict reconciliation strategies. Since political and social conflict serve as barriers to economic cooperation in this region, communication about these issues and regional integration through SAARC can serve as needed precursors to strong economic relationships. In turn, increased mutual economic interests create more regional integration, and ultimately have the potential to influence even greater regional security.

9 SAARC Regional Convention of Suppression of Terrorism, Third SAARC Summit; 1987, Kathmandu.<https://treaties.un.org/doc/db/Terrorism/Conv18-english.pdf> (Accessed: 2014- 09-30)

SAARC should also establish an anti-terrorism unit, which could at times of conflict provide resources and military support. This body will also collaborate with national government and military leaders to formulate strategies to overcome pertinent national and regional security threats, such as piracy and trafficking. Sri Lanka has vast experience in this sphere having successfully defeated domestic terrorists, thus it could provide the requisite knowledge and expertise in the function of this unit, and would be able to provide the support and expertise of its highly trained and skilled military for the purposes of such a unit.

South Asian nations must also review their commitments to international peacekeeping forces. Many countries in the region require military support and strength, and yet we overlook this and commit our resources to UN peacekeeping forces. While there is no harm in doing so, we must first look at the needs of the region and address them; this way we can build solidarity among our nations and help establish peace and security in our region first and foremost.

Poverty and Education

SAARC has also focused on human development. In seeking to create a center for excellence, the South Asian University was established in New Delhi. The university is funded by SAARC members and aims at reaching the capacity of 7000 students and 700 teachers.

SAARC members could introduce a comprehensive SAARC syllabus component into the national curriculum in order to increase awareness and education of SAARC's history, member nations, current and future projects etc. amongst the youth in the region.

Trade

Given the perspective and scope of development pertaining to the context of regional security, we could also assure the benefits of SAARC in the area of trade. Most of SAARC countries had adopted highly interventionist trade regimes in the initial phases of their growth. But this started to change in the late 1970s. From 1977, Sri Lanka began to liberalize gradually. It was followed by others in the 1980s and 1990s.

After the inception of SAARC in 1985, SAARC approved the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) at the Sixth Summit held in Colombo to formulate an agreement to establish a 'SAARC Preferential Arrangement' (SAPTA) by 1997. SAPTA was envisaged primarily as the first step towards the transition to a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) leading subsequently towards a Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union which were undoubtedly mutually beneficial for all member states. The process of economic integration in South Asia gathered momentum with the implementation of the agreement. Through SAFTA's Trade Liberalization Program trade and exports in the region rose exponentially, resulting in an increase of the f.o.b value of exports from the region to \$3billion in 2013¹⁰.

There have also been many bilateral, sub regional preferential arrangements and other trade agreements within South Asia and Asia Pacific Nations. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand)-FTA aims to achieve its own free trade area by 2017. A distinguishing feature of these agreements is that with the exception of BIMSTEC, all others are traditional RTAs which aim at reducing/ eliminating only trade barriers.

Unfortunately despite these efforts into furthering trade relations, as of 2013 SAARC's exports amounted to a mere 2.2% of world exports¹¹. Thus member states must make further effort into taking measures, both domestic and international, in order to increase production and enhance the quality and competitiveness of exports. Some measures could include subsidizing local producers to reduce their cost of production, enabling them to produce more for less. Investment into research and development must also be emphasized, through the innovation and competitiveness of South Asian products could be

10 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) 2013. http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=5 (Accessed 2014 -09-29).

11 Sri Lanka Export Development Board

improved, resulting in a boost in the number of regional exports. In addition to preferential and trade agreements, the SAARC region must extend its reach and further integrate its industries. We should promote multi-national firms to blossom in the SAARC region, such as EADS Airbus industry in EU. SAARC region certainly has the resources and potential to be a global economic force.

Youth

Vocational training institutes must be encouraged and such institutes must be subsidized by the state in order to maximize quality and capacity. Career guidance programs are equally important, and must be firmly integrated into the education system in order to guide youth into promising careers and jobs. Entrepreneurship within our countries must be encouraged as it is a viable, alternative form of employment and it reduces the pressure on the state to create jobs. However in order for these measures a considerable level of innovation within our societies, specifically among our youth must be developed. With the region consistently being labeled as an area characterized by low levels of innovation, this is another significant impediment in our path.

An initiative SAARC could invest in, in order to engage with the youth of the region is an online platform where the voice of the youth can be heard. Opinion on SAARC policies and recommendations for future projects and activities could be aired, and thus the integration of the youth in the growth and development of the region can successfully take place. This would encourage youth to actively take part in national and regional processes, and to increase their participation in political and civic platforms as well. In this sense we give them a much needed sense of control over their future, thereby empower them to become engaged and productive individuals. The website could also feature information on jobs, internships, training program etc. from countries within SAARC encouraging the free mobility of labor within the region.

SAARC should thus create a body specializing in youth matters, to investigate causes leading to youth disengagement in the development process, low participation in political and civic spheres etc. The body can

then create youth country profiles for each country based on this information, and make recommendations exclusive to each of them. Through the cooperation of national governments, the body can be made responsible for enforcing the recommendations in each country.

Environment

Over the years, SAARC nations have also made a firm commitment to the environment through a number of initiatives. The most prominent of these being the establishment a SAARC Disaster Management Center, which provides capacity building training programs in terms of expertise promotion, system development, research etc. It also provides policy guidance to nations in terms of environmental policy. SAARC has also established a number of bodies involved in various spheres such as the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Center, SAARC Forestry Center, SAARC Meteorological Research Center which are mandated to look into matters such as deforestation, climate change etc. and address such challenges.

In addition to these structures, SAARC nations have also adopted the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change which was an outcome document of the Sixteenth Summit in 2010 which operated under the theme of climate change. This statement proposed a number of national and regional measures to address daunting environmental challenges. Such measures include the establishment of the Inter-governmental Expert Group on Climate Change (IGEG.CC) which was required to monitor and make recommendation for the implementation of the proposals made in the Thimphu Statement.

Having made efforts into the accrediting of SAARC to the Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund¹², the region could emulate the spirit of the Protocol, which is the regulation and reduction of carbon emissions, and establish a framework tailored specifically for the South Asian region. Decisions as to how to bring about this reduction should be unanimously

12 Vow to Build Green South Asia, *The Daily Star*, 2010-04-30.<http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/cache/cached-news-details-136570.html> (Accessed 2014-09-30)

decided by member states. A firm enforcement of any measures set forth in such a statement or resolution on this subject must take place across the region. For this purpose a structure could be set up within the organization to monitor and assist governments in achieving the goal.

Science, Research, and Media

SAARC, in over its three decades of existence, has taken several initiatives to develop the region in its 16 setout categories. As an area of SAARC cooperation that should champion innovation, the Science & Technology area has done little to encourage and facilitate advances in either of these fields. The region should create a SAARC Science & Technology Forum where scientists and tech experts can exchange ideas to develop innovation processes for the SAARC nations. The region produces some of the world's most influential scientists and most innovative tech experts. We must foster an environment where science and technology can flourish, and the people behind these fields have reason to continue work in the region. Innovation is key to our progress. After launching five satellites for different nations, Prime Minister Modi instructed ISRO to develop a SAARC a common satellite. This is the perspective we should have to build a common platform.

Furthermore, as an initiative combining two major areas of cooperation which are Education and Science & Technology, the Human Genetics Unit of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in collaboration with the International Genetics Education Network wishes to pioneer and coordinate the SAARC Genetics Education Network. The objectives of the comprehensive 5-year SAARC Genetics Initiative would be to help member states to develop specialist clinical geneticists, help clinical geneticists to set up Medical Genetics Units in their institutions by providing seed funding, fund the setting up of online web based CPD courses in clinical genetics, and help capacity development in clinical genetics and genetic diagnostics through training programs and workshops. Our Sri Lankan coordinator, Prof. Vajira H. W. Dissanayake, Professor and Medical Geneticist at the Human Genetics Unit in the University of Colombo, mentioned that he has already consulted with

other member states. The exchange of knowledge can be a powerful tool to greater regional integration and development.

Other initiatives such as the suggested establishment of the Visa Regime are key initiatives in the overall increased partnership within SAARC. So far it extends exclusively to personnel of 24 categories but it direly needs to be extended further. For instance, Indians don't need to apply for visas to Sri Lanka, they get it on arrival which has not yet been reciprocated by India. SAARC should create a special SAARC Research Visa for academics and researchers to conduct primary research throughout the SAARC region. The SAARC Research Visa will encourage cross-cultural and multilateral engagement in the field of academia.

ASEAN nations strongly support think tanks within its geographical area, promoting and honing them to produce quality research capable of assisting them in making decisions about the region. The European Institute of Asian Studies in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung organizes an annual dialogue between think tanks in the EU and ASEAN in order to enhance cooperation and information sharing between the two regions. Similarly SAARC must also promote and support think tanks within the region; they could be directed to provide policy input as well as research that will help the organization formulate effective and relevant policies, as there is criticism that SAARC has a tendency of delivering policies incongruent to the needs of the region. Similar to ASEAN, SAARC must also promote inter-regional discussions amongst its think tanks in order to further promote track II meetings and interactions.

Furthermore, we must promote discussions about SAARC on an international scale. We can establish a SAARC Column in the media outlets of each SAARC member-nation. The SAARC Column can be utilized as a pathway for engagement and discussion on SAARC issues. At Global forums such as the World Economic Forum also, we could show the world what SAARC is doing. We must engage with the international community as a unified front. Participation in discussions on the global stage will better integrate SAARC internally and externally with other countries and regional organizations.

The previously stated initiatives have great potential, but must be executed at the earnest. SAARC has a history of not implementing past agreements. The agreements to avoid double taxation, proper customs procedures, establishment of the SAU, the SAARC Meteorological Department and the SAARC Food Bank to act as a regional food security reserve for the Member Countries etc. are all initiatives which will benefit members, but do not function up to minimum standards of functionality. This can no longer be the SAARC standard.

SAARC nations must also take the initiative to amend the Charter. Several areas need to be rectified since the original document does not recognize the presence of the 8th member within SAARC, nor does it recognize the provision of Observers. This process has been delayed significantly and it is time for us to review and amend it, signaling a new era for SAARC - an era of cooperation and prosperity.

Comparative to other regional blocs in the world such as the EU, APEC, ASEAN and NAFTA; SAARC is at a back-leg progress in terms of achieving the goals for which it was established. Although the long term goal is to become the largest trading bloc and to achieve the status, sustainability and proportions of the other blocs, there are many practical difficulties in achieving this target. Whilst SAARC has set up a considerable number of initiatives, these ventures have not been successful due to the failure of funding and implementation mechanisms within the body. SAARC nations are also in the habit of signing and ratifying resolutions, with no real intention of implementing them within their nations. Lowering of the tariff on calls between SAARC nations was a proposal that was approved and agreed upon by every member nation in 1993. To this day, this recommendation has not been implemented in any of our countries. We must make an active effort in implementing resolutions and therefore in furtherance of this goal, we should create an enforcing mechanism that imposes penalties on countries that don't honor their commitments. The region can only progress if each and every nation makes an effort to uphold their commitments and promises, and work towards a common future. Until the region as a whole has cleared off the internal misconceptions and

other disputes which stand in the way of the long term development objectives, we must focus on achieving rather short term interim goals which would eventually pave the way to achieving the objectives of SAARC and long term goals such as achieving Visa-free entry and establishing a common currency will be a reality.

As the world's largest regional grouping with close to 2 billion people, SAARC countries possess a powerful collective strength. Therefore, it is imperative that we use valuable forums such as SAARC to discuss, negotiate and implement policies where barriers are removed and pave the way to interregional prosperity. This will become an attainable vision when SAARC countries put their differences aside and work together towards mutual benefit of the entire region.

Concluding with the words of former Sri Lankan President R. Premadasa, "Regional cooperation means sharing and caring for each other; the central motif should be one for all and all for one. Then only can we confront the dangers and threats we face now."¹³

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Building an Effective EU-South Asia Relationship

Gauri Khandekar¹

Introduction

Europe and South Asia² have a long established relationship which finds its roots in the 16th century colonial ties between European powers and the Indian subcontinent. Modern day relations began in the first half of the 20th century when newly independent nations of South Asia established their first diplomatic links with countries of Europe and from the 1960s onwards, with the then European Economic Community (EEC).³ Today, the European Union (EU) is an important partner to South Asia and vice versa. An elaborate three-tier construct of Europe-South Asia relations includes bilateral partnerships between EU member states and countries of South Asia, relations at the supranational EU level with South Asian countries as well as relations between the EU and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as regional organisations. Overall, the EU is one of South Asia's top trading partners and a major export market. South Asia too represents much prospect for global growth and development led by emerging economic giant, India.

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- 1 Gauri Khandekar is Researcher at Spanish Think Tank FRIDE and Head of its Asia Programme, based in Brussels. >gkhandekar@fride.org<
 - 2 Defined here as including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal.
 - 3 EU-Bangladesh relations date back to 1973, EU-Bhutan relations were established in 1985, India was one of the first countries (in 1963) to establish relations with the EU, EU-Maldives diplomatic relations were established in 1983, officially relations between the EU and Sri Lanka began with a commercial cooperation agreement in 1975, cooperation between the EU and Pakistan officially commenced in 1974, EU-Nepal relations were established in 1975.

The EU-South Asia partnership has historically been oriented towards development cooperation and covers financial and technical aid as well as economic measures. Today, inter-regional ties have developed an important political and security component in complement to commercial relations and development cooperation given the rise of India and the fact that South Asia remains one of the world's most volatile regions. Four overarching priorities of inter-regional relations include development, regional stability, the fight against terrorism and trade. As a forerunner of regional integration, the EU has also been a source of inspiration for SAARC. The EU and South Asia as two important regions of the world bear much strategic significance to one another. Yet, while the two regions have substantial motives to consider each other as strategic, EU-South Asia relations have remained significantly underdeveloped, uninspiring and under-performing.

SAARC: Tremendous Diversity, Immense Geopolitical Significance, Weak Platform

SAARC encompasses an area of more than 5 million sq. Km., 1.66 billion people or nearly 23 per cent of the world's population, and \$2.3 trillion Nominal GDP (2011). The organization has a very distinct geographical, cultural, and environmental diversity. Geographically, it includes a microstate, three landlocked countries, two island nations, the world's highest mountain ranges, some of the most disaster prone areas, desert lands, plateaus, as well as some of the most fertile areas. It is the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world, as well as the poorest after Sub-Saharan Africa. In the midst of pockets of growth and prosperity, the region is marred by widespread poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Despite a regional growth rate of 6.4 per cent in 2012; according to the World Bank about 571 million people in the region survive on less than \$1.25 a day and they make up more than 44 per cent of the developing world's poor. Nonetheless, it has the world's largest working age population and a quarter of the world's middle-class consumers. Culturally SAARC member states are similar yet distinct. There are more than 2000 ethnicities, a plethora of languages and dialects and an intense assortment of religions, castes and

sects. Regardless of their interwoven culture and history however, SAARC member states today are vastly diverse in terms of military power, economic and technological development, infrastructure and political influence.

The SAARC region is of immense global strategic significance. It lies at the heart of the Asian continent: between the Middle East, Central Asia, China and South East Asia. India, the world's tenth largest economy and a rapidly emerging power, finds itself at the center of its economic vista. The maritime expanse to the region's south includes the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal which are not only vital international trade routes but also waters of great geopolitical importance. The SAARC region is also one of the most volatile regions in the world including fragile states, two nuclear armed states in high dudgeon against each other, the delicate politico-security state of affairs of Afghanistan, and a hot spot for international and regional terrorism, trafficking and drugs trade. The historical rivalry between India and Pakistan, the unresolved Kashmir issue, the fragile democracies of most members, as well as the geopolitical power struggle between China and India in the region all contribute to the region's strategic weight in international affairs. Growing militarization in the region has led to greater uncertainty: while India has the world's third largest military of about 1,325,000 active military personnel, Pakistan ranks seventh globally with around 617,000 personnel. With the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014, there is mounting pressure on SAARC for cooperative action for the future of Afghanistan and regional stability.

However, SAARC currently remains largely an inter-governmental platform for (limited) cooperation instead of an organization destined for vibrant regional integration. It lacks the political will necessary to push through greater economic integration given the political malaise, high degree of suspicion between member states and limited exchanges at the people to people level. As a regional organization, it is significantly different from others like the European Union, ASEAN, the African Union, Mercosur or others. SAARC has been

criticized for its inability to push through economic integration, distribute prosperity from India to its neighbors, resolve long-standing disputes like the Kashmir conflict, prevent the Sri Lankan civil war, and so on. Despite the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) which was created in 2004, intra-regional trade and investment flows remain one of the lowest in the world due to the constraints like non-tariff barriers and implementation problems, poor physical connectivity, an energy crisis, and a trust deficit among the member states. Intra-SAARC trade is as low as 5% and SAARC share of world trade is just 1%. The organization is assessed to be focused more on summits rather than concrete achievements leading to closer cooperation between the member countries.

The EU and South Asia

The EU aims to enhance overall relations with South Asian countries and with SAARC as a regional organisation for two reasons. One, what happens in South Asia has important bearings on the EU in an increasingly interconnected world. Two, in an emerging multipolar world, the EU aims to undertake its role as a global actor. With progressively growing integration within the EU, the foreign policy dimension of the EU has gained more prominence. As a union of 28 countries, the EU has greater potential for impacting global affairs than the shrinking power and size of its constituent member states. The EU holds ambitions to be a global actor and The Treaty of Lisbon signed in 2009 has underpinned these aspirations with the creation of an External Action Service (EEAS) or a foreign ministry, the post of a High Representative for Foreign Policy and greater role for EU delegations in developing countries. With the changing world order and the shift of the global centre of gravity towards Asia, the European Union has recognised the strategic importance of pursuing closer relations with Asia. Asia's rise has been the defining element of the past two decades and the emergence of China and India in particular, two of the most populous countries in the world, have warranted closer EU engagement with these countries and the regions they dominate. South Asia in

particular emerges as a crucially strategic region for EU interest and for global stability.

EU-SAARC

As the world's most advanced regional organisation, the EU's main ambition vis-à-vis SAARC has been to encourage regional integration and help SAARC to achieve the same peace, prosperity and shared development that it has achieved, perhaps the most effective way in which it could contribute to regional stability. In particular, there is a perception in the EU that the transfer of prosperity from India to its neighbours could create for other SAARC members a stake in India's prosperity and provide greater prospects for peace. Over the years, EU policy has thus been geared towards encouraging SAARC to emulate as much as it can the EU's regional integration model and make progress on greater political cooperation which would *de facto* mean a certain amount of transfer of sovereignty to the supranational level similar to the EU experience. Much emphasis has been laid on sharing of experience and expertise by the EU. In its dialogue with SAARC the EU has consistently affirmed an interest in strengthening links with SAARC as a regional organisation and help consolidate the ongoing integration process through its economic presence in the region, its own historical experience of dealing with diversity, and its interest in crisis prevention.

In 1996 the EC signed a MoU on co-operation with the SAARC Secretariat providing for exchange of information, staff training and technical assistance focussing on trade related issues. The EC subsequently delivered technical assistance to SAARC experts in 1998 on the cumulation of rules of origin for SAARC exports to the EU. The following year, both regional organisations agreed to enhance engagement in four priority areas: market access for SAARC products to the EU, rules of origin, technical support for establishment of SAFTA, and harmonization of SAARC standards. In order to signal the EU's renewed political commitment to regional co-operation in South Asia and to upgrade its interaction with SAARC, the EU applied for observer status in SAARC. On August 2, 2006, SAARC Foreign Ministers formally approved the EU application and invited the EU Presidency and the Commission to

attend the 14th SAARC Summit (held on 3-4 April 2007 in Delhi) as observers. A dedicated EU Ambassador to Nepal officially represents the EU in SAARC.

However, institutional relations between SAARC and the EU remain underdeveloped. As a regional organisation SAARC has made little progress, much to the disappointment of the EU. “SAARC official’s delegations” never travel to Brussels to engage with the EU nor do the Ambassadors of SAARC countries in the EU capital meet their EU peers as a group as do Ambassadors from ASEAN for instance. Lack of a SAARC identity amongst its member countries means foreign policy at the SAARC level (vis-à-vis Europe in particular) remains absent.

EU-SAARC cooperation is outlined in the EU’s Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013 for Asia which focusses on “fostering regional integration in selected areas namely environment, natural resources management as well as disaster risk reduction”. Recently, cooperation between the EU and SAARC has ensued through programmes and schemes targeting capacity building, health and rural welfare. Through the 2007-2013 EU Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for Asia which oversaw an allocation of €12 million for Asia as a whole, assistance foreseen in the fields of capacity-building focused on the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) Trade Development, Sectoral Dialogue Facility as well as the South Asia Civil Aviation (which remains on hold since late 2011). This cooperation albeit with the limited funding available is expected to continue between 2014-2020.⁴ A cross-border cooperation programme in animal and human health – EU Regional HPED Programme in Asia⁵ was established in 2009 with funding channelled to the SAARC Secretariat. A third area for cooperation includes the SAARC-ICIMOD Rural Livelihood and Climate Change

4 [http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details
&news_id=67625](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=67625)

5 http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation/animal-human-health/documents/11.05.10_euaid07a-1012_hped_brochure_lr_accessible_en.pdf

Adaption Programme⁶ which was launched in January 2013 to continue until December 2017, with a total funding of €10 million. With the continuing financial gloom in Europe and mounting challenges in the EU's Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods, the scope for greater funded cooperation with SAARC for the next financial period beginning 2014-2020 remains limited. A singular 3 year project focusing on "support to disaster preparedness in South Asia" is foreseen under the EU's Regional Programme 2014-2020 with a budget of €5-10 million to assist the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in India to implement the SAARC Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management and Disaster Prevention. Beyond this, no new projects are foreseen except for a €3 million EU public diplomacy project launched in 2013, whose focus remains largely on India.

Overview of EU Relations with SAARC Member Countries

The relationship between the EU and SAARC member countries with the exception of India, remains largely donor-recipient oriented. The EU and its member states remain the largest humanitarian aid donor to South Asia and an important development partner over the years. Development cooperation has largely focused on poverty reduction and social welfare schemes. South Asian countries including India also enjoy trade preferences for trading with the EU. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal benefit from the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme which gives least developed countries full duty free and quota-free access to the EU for all their exports with the exception of arms and armaments.⁷ Pakistan benefits from the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Plus System which implies full removal of tariffs on the condition that the develop country ratify international conventions relating to

6 https://www.google.es/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CEEQFjAG&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsaarc-sdmc.nic.in%2Fframe%2Fwork.asp&ei=3byyU-79F-mj0QXh11GoCw&usg=AFQjCNHVzTL-P_CitepdKWP-3eyUyo01hA&bvm=bv.69837884,d.bGQ

7 Everything But Arms (EBA) - http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2013/april/tradoc_150983.pdf

human and labour rights, environment and good governance, and ensure their effective implementation. India, Maldives and Sri Lanka benefit from the GSP (standard arrangement) which allows partial reductions or entire removal of tariff on two thirds of all product categories. With its growing international profile, the EU has sought to enhance the political component of its relationship with South Asia and cooperation in the field of security (counter terrorism, cyber terrorism, counter piracy) with individual South Asian member countries is being developed. The EU is interested in promoting democracy globally and with South Asia, the EU has been interested in promoting good governance, democratic values and the respect for human rights and other fundamental values. The EU has supported various democratic processes including elections in South Asia, as well as civil societies which play an important role in channelling local concerns to the appropriate political level. The EU has also conducted human rights dialogues with various countries in South Asia which has involved a discussion on certain situations of human rights abuses or concerns in the country.

EU-India

The EU realised since the 1990s following India's economic liberalisation that it must engage more closely with India, also a democracy and a country which shares the EU's values. India today has emerged as a global actor. The EU is an important trade partner to India and bilateral trade stands at €72.67 billion (2013).⁸ The world's largest democracy, India appears as an island of stability in one of the world's most volatile regions. India represents an enormous market of 1.3 billion people and one of the world's largest and rapidly growing middle classes. India is also a country with nuclear weapons capability just as its adversary and politically unstable neighbour Pakistan. The EU and India initiated a strategic partnership in 2004 and share an interest in cooperating on bilateral, regional and multilateral affairs. Security cooperation too has emerged as a priority with a roadmap agreed in 2012 which aims to

8 EU-India trade statistics, European Commission - http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113390.pdf

enhance cooperation in the fields of counter terrorism, anti-piracy and cyber security. Since 2000, the EU and India hold annual summits where their top leadership meet and both partners launched talks on a bilateral free trade agreement in 2007 which remains under negotiations. The EU and India are seemingly natural but indifferent partners and the EU-India strategic partnership remains in much need of attention. For the past few years, the EU-India relationship has been slow moving, under-delivering and with limited strategic value.⁹ There has been a visible gap in perceptions and priorities. The relationship was spread thin over a large number of issues and policy areas without much effort at deepening any policy substance whether at the bilateral, regional or multilateral level.¹⁰

EU-Afghanistan

The EU has a longstanding commitment to Afghanistan and its government and has been present in Afghanistan since the mid-1980s, with an office in Peshawar, in western Pakistan, covering the country. While European Member States have contributed militarily to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (some 25 EU Member States have deployed troops in ISAF), reconstruction and development aid are the pillars of EU engagement with the country. Overall, the EU is the second-largest aid donor to Afghanistan, after the United States. The core EU security interests at stake in Afghanistan are terrorism, narcotics, regional insecurity and violent extremism and the EU endeavours to address them through cooperation with the Afghan government on development, social-welfare, good governance, the rule of law and policing.¹¹

9 Gauri Khandekar, *The EU-India summit: on the threshold of change*, FRIDE, European Strategic Partnership Observatory Policy Brief, February 2012

<http://www.fride.org/publication/993/the-eu-india-summit:-on-the-threshold-of-change>

10 For more on EU-India relations, please see:

11 Fact Sheets on the European Union - 2013

On 15 June 2007 the EU launched EUPOL Afghanistan, a civilian mission which aimed to contribute to the establishment of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements under Afghan ownership and in accordance with international standards. The EU endorsed on 27 October 2009 an AF-PAK Action Plan. The plan addresses the areas where the EU has the possibility to make a meaningful contribution. For Afghanistan the plan outlines strengthening local government, legal security and rural development. For Pakistan the plan envisages supporting reforms within the security sector, strengthening civil society and the rule of law, and developing cooperation in areas such as non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and increased trade with the EU.

At the sectorial level, the EU and its member states initiatives involve support to the Afghan National Police (ANP) capability, engagement with relevant stakeholders to restructure The Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) for more accountability and transparency, support a broad-based strategic dialogue with the Afghan Ministry of Interior, support to gender integration and equal job opportunities in the Afghan National Security Forces. The EU remains committed to Afghanistan in the long-term. Afghanistan continues to receive more than €1 billion a year in aid from the EU and Member States, making it the largest beneficiary of EU assistance in the world.

EU-Bangladesh

EU-Bangladesh relations date back to 1973. The European Union is among the three biggest donors of grant finance to Bangladesh, estimated at € 500 million in 2011. A 1976 trade and cooperation agreement, initially planned for five years, is still in force today. The 2001 Cooperation Agreement considerably broadened the scope of cooperation, extending to trade and economic development, human rights, good governance and the environment. Also agreed was the reciprocal granting of most-favoured-nation status. Textiles & clothing (primarily, ready-made garments) represents about 90% of Bangladesh's total exports to the EU. Together, the US and EU markets account for more than 85% of total Bangladeshi exports. Bangladesh enjoys a significant

trade surplus with the EU and more than half of Bangladesh's total exports go to the EU. The EU has helped bring about greater awareness of corporate social responsibility in Bangladesh especially led by EU enterprises in the country. Priority areas for EU-Bangladesh cooperation include human and social development focusing on education, good governance and human rights, as well as economic and trade development by supporting measures that improve the legal and institutional framework and the policy framework for trade and private sector development, while taking full account of the social dimension of globalisation. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) has been working in Bangladesh since 2002, in both disaster preparedness and emergency response activities. The European Commission has allocated € 3.65 million for Disaster Risk Reduction projects in 2013 and 2014 and has contributed € 12.65 million since 2001 to this end.

EU-Bhutan

Although EU aid to Bhutan started in 1982 and has provided around €90 million in assistance since then, EU-Bhutan relations were officially established in 1985. The EU has been an important partner for Bhutan in achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals and has focused on intensive support for Bhutan's efforts towards poverty reduction, food security and democratisation. The EU has been an active proponent of democracy in the country and deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) when the first National Assembly Elections were held in 2008. Inter-parliamentary cooperation exists between the Bhutanese Parliament and the European Parliament and two visits by the European Parliament have been undertaken to Bhutan in 2009 and 2011. Within the overarching objective of poverty alleviation and taking into account other donors' interventions, EU cooperation in Bhutan for the period 2007-13 focuses on three main areas: renewable natural resource sector (with environment as a cross-cutting issue); good governance and democratisation; trade and economic capacity building (to promote export and WTO access). As yet there is no cooperation agreement between Bhutan and the EU. Since 2011, the EU has contributed € 2.8

mln. to the Local Governance Support Programme (LGSP) under the Government-led multi-donor funded Good Governance Support Programme (GGSP). EU support to the Renewable Natural Resources Sector since 1982 totals around €50 mln. with grants of nearly €11 mln. to promised up to 2015.¹² Additionally, the European Union provides support in the area of Humanitarian Assistance through its Directorate General for humanitarian assistance ECHO with more than €30 million channelled through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to support camps hosting Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. ECHO is also providing assistance to Bhutan to improve disaster preparedness and disaster management. Since the past 10 years over 146 Bhutanese students have pursued studies in Europe.

EU-Maldives

Diplomatic ties between the Maldives and the EC were established in 1983. Bilateral relations have focused on development, climate change, political cooperation, good governance and non-traditional security issues in particular trafficking. From 2011 the EU refocused its strategy into a single focal sector 'Governance', comprising assistance to any of the following areas of intervention: environment, drugs and public administration. The political and institutional instability as well as human rights abuses in The Maldives have over the years affected relations with the EU. Development cooperation has been an important focus of bilateral ties. Addressing Maldives' unique set of challenges, the EU has sought to enhance cooperation in the areas of climate change and drug control given that Maldives is both one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change as well as remains highly susceptible to drugs abuse given nearly half of its population is underage. The EU has contributed around €6.5 million to the Government of the Maldives for the development and implementation of its climate change strategy and action plan. Initially, as a least developed country, Maldives benefitted from the EU's EBA but has since graduated

12 EU Delegation to India, Bhutan - http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/eu_bhutan/20130703_2_en.htm

to the GSP scheme given that the Maldives is not anymore listed as a Least Developed Country (LDC). The EU is Maldives' fourth largest trading partner after Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and India. The EU also remains a vital partner to the Maldives in disaster management: following the 2004 Tsunami, €16 million aid was allocated by the European Commission to Maldives.

EU-Nepal

The EU established diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1973 and an EU Delegation was established in Kathmandu in April 2002. The EU-Nepal relationship has been heavily focused towards development and good governance and over the years, the EU has been an important partner to Nepal. In an effort to support the government's development objectives the EU's assistance during the period 2007-13 had an estimated budget of €120 million and targeted three areas: education, stability and peace building, trade facilitation and economic capacity building. EU assistance to Nepal between 1977-2006 amounted to around €240 million. The EU-Nepal Country Strategy Paper (2007-2013) allocated €60 million to the country.¹³ The EU has in addition provided humanitarian assistance of over €72.2 million since 2001. From development cooperation, the EU has gradually expanded its cooperation to include renewable natural resources (energy), rural development, education, health, environment, human rights, conflict mitigation and export diversification. The EU has also been actively engaged in the Nepali peace process and has deployed large Election Observation Missions to observe both the Constituent Assembly elections.¹⁴ The EU is a major donor of the Nepal Peace Trust Fund¹⁵ and party to the Nepal Peace and Development Strategy 2010-2015¹⁶ which focused on the peace dimension of development. In

13 http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/country-cooperation/nepal/nepal_en.htm

14 http://eeas.europa.eu/nepal/index_en.htm

15 <http://www.mofa.gov.np/en/bilateral-relations-nepal-european-union-163.html>

16 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nepal/eu_nepal/political_relations/peace_development/index_en.htm

January 2011 a Memorandum of Understanding on the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2011-2013 was signed¹⁷ which oversees cooperation in three main sectors of education, support to stability and peace building, and trade and economic capacity building.

EU-Pakistan

EU Pakistan relations date back to their first agreement in 1962. The EU is an important development partner for Pakistan, as well as its largest trading partner. In 2012, the EU and Pakistan signed a 5 year Engagement Plan for cooperation in strategic and political issues, security issues, trade and investment, energy, democracy, governance, human rights and socio-economic development and other sectoral issues. In the same year, the EU and Pakistan held their first strategic dialogue in Islamabad. On 24th June following the fifth meeting on the implementation of the EU-Pakistan five year Engagement Plan¹⁸ both parties agreed to continue cooperation on counter-terrorism, defence, disarmament and non-proliferation. The first dialogue on disarmament and non-proliferation was also held in 2014. The political instability and precarious security situation in Pakistan remains of great concern to the EU and the EU remains committed to addressing security threats together with Pakistan which have a direct impact on security in Europe. In this endeavour, the EU has focused largely on holistic development to help address the root causes of terrorism in the country. The EU's 2007-2013 Country Strategy paper¹⁹ focuses on poverty reduction especially rural development cooperation with Pakistan with a total allocated € 200 million.²⁰ Security cooperation has also extended to dialogue on counter terrorism, disarmament, non-proliferation, anti-radicalisation, religious tolerance, security of commons and disaster response. Regional security and in particular the future of Afghanistan form an important

17 http://eeas.europa.eu/nepal/index_en.htm

18 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/pakistan/documents/press_corner/20140624_01_en.pdf

19 http://eeas.europa.eu/pakistan/csp/07_13_en.pdf

20 *ibid.*

focus of EU-Pakistan dialogue. The EU is Pakistan's largest trading partner. In 2013 total EU-Pakistan bilateral trade touched €8,365 million. Of this, EU imports from Pakistan were worth €4,529 million and EU export to Pakistan €3,836 million²¹. At present Pakistan benefits from the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) plus scheme.

EU-Sri Lanka

Relations between Sri Lanka and the EU are based on an economic cooperation agreement dating back to 1975. EU-Sri Lanka dialogue ranges from political matters to areas such as trade, human rights, development cooperation, fisheries, migration, civil aviation and environment issues. The EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission is the body responsible for the coordination of EU-Sri Lanka relations under the 1995 bilateral agreement. The EU is Sri Lanka's largest export partner and third largest import partner (India being the largest followed by China). In terms of overall (Imports + Exports) the EU is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner accounting for Euro 4.2 billion which represents 19.1% of Sri Lanka's total trading volume. The Apparel and Textile sector accounted for almost 57.6% of the value of Sri Lankan exports to the EU, amounting to more than Euro 1.37 billion. The EU has also been an important partner to Sri Lanka in development cooperation and disaster response. EU assistance to Sri Lanka between 2005-2013 totalled € 587 million with € 112 million provided under the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument in 2007-2013 with a focus on supporting the peace process and poverty reduction in the North and East. EU financial assistance is expected to remain at €110 million for the 2014-2020 period. The EU was also one of the first respondents during the 2006 Tsunami. In 2006, the European Investment Bank extended a credit line of Euro 70 million to finance small and medium scale projects in infrastructure, tourism, energy, telecommunications and other sectors affected by the 2006 tsunami. On 24th of June 2014 the EU handed over newly constructed houses and irrigation systems to 300 resettled families displaced from the conflict in eastern Sri Lanka

21 http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113431.pdf

districts²². This was part of the EU-Socio Economic Measures programme for Sri Lanka, with a total budget of €16 million (2011-2014). The EU-Sri Lanka relationship has been rocky over the years given EU concerns over human rights abuses during Sri Lanka's 26 year civil war. On 15th August 2010, the EU temporarily withdrew "GSP+" trade preferences for Sri Lanka, following an investigation regarding the lack of effective implementation of three UN Human Rights conventions.

Key Challenges of the EU-South Asia Relationship

The main challenges the EU and South Asia face in striking a successful relationship lie in perceptions. Both regions tend to have important misconceptions and lack of understanding about each other. For one, the EU is also perceived incorrectly in South Asia. The region's colonial history has left upon it a deep suspicion of Europe and the countries in the region at times equate the EU with the colonial past of its member states or confound it with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which is chiefly a military alliance. SAARC member states are members of the Non Aligned Movement and western military organisations like NATO are viewed with much disdain. Furthermore, much potential for engagement with the EU remains untapped because the countries in the region do not clearly understand the EU and the benefits of cooperation with the Union. As a post-modern construct, the EU's *sui generis* nature is lost with the countries of South Asia who remain in the process of constructing their Westphalian national identities and relate to other sovereign nations.

The EU continues to have a low profile in South Asia, especially in India. Despite the fact that the EU has been very much present in South Asia primarily through its role in development cooperation, EU member states have overshadowed the EU. The EU has an incoherent image in the region and is overshadowed by its Member States which have deeper cultural and economic ties with greater political flexibility. EU member states have a much more visible profile than the EU and South Asian

22 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/documents/corner/26062014_en.pdf

countries have traditionally preferred to deal with individual EU member states simply for the ease of dealing with them and also because of a lack of understanding about EU competences and the role of various bodies, institutions and representatives. In the EU, competences are divided amongst the EU level and its member states: certain competences like trade deals, competition policy or customs lie solely with at the supranational level while others lie with member states. Very few South Asians, including elite and decision makers have studied the EU. However, understanding the division of competences requires much effort. For an organisation as complex as the EU, diplomatic training in particular before being assigned to embassies in Brussels can be very helpful. Most parliamentarians in South Asia too have little understanding of the EU and its complexities.

The people of the region equate the EU to Europe in general as a continent rather than a political grouping. This tendency leads to a large degree of scepticism regarding the EU as the plethora of senior politicians tend to equate the EU with the 'West' blaming it for global inequalities. Since human rights dialogues are conducted through the EU and not its Member States, the EU is perceived to be hectoring on moral issues with a superiority complex. The EU is also perceived more as a commercial power rather than political especially by India since the EU has not yet delivered significant results regarding key Indian interests such as support for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, migration facilitation and technology transfer. The recent financial and sovereign debt crisis in Europe has further resulted in a deteriorated image of the EU in Asia. At the people to people level, basic cultural and physical differences overshadow the vast similarity in values which South Asia shares with Europe. That said, perceptions across SAARC tend to differ: while India would like to relate to the EU as an equal partner, the other countries in SAARC see the EU as more strategic given the EU's aid to these countries has been significant as well as the trade benefits they receive under the GSP and GSP+ scheme.

On the other hand, the EU misperceives SAARC as another potential 'EU'. The EU's principal aim with SAARC is to encourage

greater regional integration. The slow pace of integration especially on the political side has led to much disappointment amongst EU officials in Brussels. EU academics and officials most often make the error of expecting the EU's experiences, be it in regional integration, the World Wars or Franco-German reconciliation to transpire in South Asia. Such an assessment of "history repeating itself" tends to exclude the understanding of the region's complexities, unique identity and issues. It is therefore important for the EU to pursue an approach whereby it does not appear as imposing its experiences of regional integration, rather as sharing certain successful aspects of it (which will be discussed in the next section) with SAARC members. SAARC's poor integration does not arise from a lack of knowledge in South Asia of the benefits of regional integration, rather the absence of political will to integrate regionally. SAARC countries also perceive the EU as the most advanced form of regional integration accepting that their own progress is nowhere near.

Instead of thrusting the 'EU package' at the official level, more should be done to promote certain aspects of building regional organisations especially at the people-to-people level. Promoting regional integration through greater dialogue at the Track II level through conferences, joint events and publications bringing together participants from SAARC countries and the EU than at the official level could be far more effective. Finally, while pursuing dialogue on human rights, governance, or reforms has put the EU in an unfavourable light as South Asian nations perceive the EU to be lecturing them. In recent years, not only have South Asian countries preferred to conduct such dialogues at the official level behind closed doors, but have also tended to raise issues of human rights violations in the EU (like anti-Semitism, deportation of migrants, racial intolerance, Roma issues, discrimination) in a tit-for-tat manner. Re-packaging such dialogues as 'good governance exchanges' would be more palatable since a large number of cases of human rights violations in the region stem from issues of poor governance (conflict over land, sharing of resources such as water or energy, lack of clarity over laws dealing with diversity management for instance). Given the EU's own experience in managing diversity and

building inclusive societies, such good governance exchanges would perhaps be more welcome.

Building an effective region-to-region partnership – Learning from ‘Europe of the Regions’

Internationally, the less known fact about the EU is that the European integration project has been constructed not only at the nation state level but also through its regions which are divided by geographical, cultural or historical criteria. Regions with their strong identities have played an important role in integration at a continental level in Europe especially given the EU's ‘subsidiarity’ principle which gives precedence ‘levels’ of government best placed to act. The Single European Act (SEA) 1986 which established the European common market underscored strategies targeted at the regional level instead of simply state-to-state integration. Structural funds for development were therefore distributed by regions focusing on those ‘lagging behind’ in order to create a greater level field.

For an integration that has been principally market-led redistributive measures as EU regional funds, which amounted to less than 1 per cent of total EU GDP, were vital to counter the negative effects of integration. Regional authorities in particular have often been the best placed actors to stimulate economic development, and link stakeholders (European officials and parliamentarians, multinational companies, the local bourgeoisie, politicians and trade unions, and educational and training establishments). Regions have also increasingly interacted with other regions in creating transnational alliances. These policies therefore have had a smart specialisation development perspective which have not only underscored innovation and growth but also emphasised the economic potential of a region, given its place within a complex regional system (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2011).

The EU's focus on its regions has neither replaced or displaced nation states or nationalism, nor has it proclaimed the ‘death of the nation state’ and the ‘end of territorially based sovereignty’, because regions can make allies better than states. Where states can see enemies,

regions see interests. It is therefore inappropriate to see the relationship between regions and states as a simple 'zero-sum game' as regions nonetheless, rather than being some independent rivals, continue to be conditioned by the states. It is the member states that set the limits within which regionalism is possible and control the direction and pace of EU integration. Indeed, in some respects it has strengthened rather than weakened the member states, giving them more leverage over economic forces than they otherwise would have.

The European Committee of the Regions created in 1994 is a representative assembly of sub-national authorities (i.e. regions, counties, provinces, municipalities and cities) which was set up as an 'expert body' to be consulted on issues of cross-border cooperation given that about three quarters of EU legislation is implemented at local or regional level, it is essential these representatives to have a say in the development of new EU laws. The CoR not only provides a platform for regions to meet and interact, but also brings about greater legitimacy to the EU project, all while nurturing the European identity.

A key takeaway for SAARC from the EU integration process without copy-pasting the EU model as a whole would be to emulate the role given to EU regions in promoting commercial exchanges and hence integration: the spillover from economics to politics. In the SAARC context, beyond political reasons, poor integration can be attributed to geographical imbalance – India single handedly dwarfs all the other countries combined. In all other successful examples of regional organisations like the EU or ASEAN, member countries tend to be more or less of similar size or with a few bigger member states rather than just one. The massive size of India at the centre of the SAARC geography not only hampers trade between other members, but New Delhi also plays a decisive role in controlling trade with its neighbours. Indian states of Rajasthan or Gujarat could benefit much from trade with neighbouring Pakistan's Punjab and Sind regions; Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand could have greater commercial exchanges than currently with Nepal; Sikkim and Assam have untapped economic and trade potential with Bhutan; just as West Bengal and Tripura have with

Bangladesh. But despite the existing commercial opportunities, interest and potential, it is the Indian capital which governs cross border trade. Facilitating the meeting of Indian states with their neighbouring states in the SAARC countries would certainly help to rectify the poor intra-regional trade which exists in SAARC. Political representatives of Indian states do not have a representation at SAARC political and business meetings whereas a 'SAARC Committee of the Regions' could do much to provide an interactive platform for bordering states, facilitate commercial exchanges and promote integration from the bottom up.

Conclusion

The EU aims to enhance bilateral relations with South Asia and inter-regional relations with SAARC. It wishes to invite countries in South Asia to more actively deliberate upon the EU as such and would like to trigger interest within South Asia for the EU's relations with SAARC. However, both regions have been unsuccessful in building an effective region-to-region relationship. South Asia has largely misunderstood the EU, and the EU has erred in expecting to duplicate its own model of integration in the South Asian context which has cast a shadow of disappointment. While it is essential to understand that South Asia will not achieve the same level of political and economic integration as the EU, at least in the medium term; South Asia too must make efforts to study the complex structure of the EU. There are important incentives in engaging with the EU. The EU has been a significant actor in South Asia, not just in development cooperation, but also in trade, governance, security, science and technology. But South Asia can most benefit from engagement with the EU by understanding its process (and not only model) of EU integration. Promoting greater engagement and interaction between Indian states and other SAARC countries like in the EU could help unlock the progression of regional integration in SAARC, helping it to manage its insecurity through shared prosperity. A SAARC Committee of the Regions which provides such a platform would be ideal.

Finally, relations with the EU can be enhanced by increasing the momentum of inter-regional relations and developing an institutional partnership.

Tackling the Deterrents to a South Asian Union

Dr. Binoda Kumar Mishra¹

In the post-Cold War era regionalism emerged as an important international behaviour of States aspiring to grow at a consistent pace. All over the world countries are trying to find economic rationale for forming regional blocs. Regional economic blocs formed before the end of the Cold War flourished rapidly in the absence of ideological rivalry. New regional arrangements are being put into place with the sole purpose of mutual economic gains. Most of these arrangements are yielding dividends but only one regional arrangement refuses to take off, i.e. the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Formed in 1985, SAARC has always looked promising to emerge as a strong regional arrangement. One can go to the extent of expecting it to emerge as a union owing to the region's historical and cultural commonalities. But surprisingly SAARC remains stagnant and yet to evolve into an effective cooperative arrangement let alone a union. It is argued that the rivalry between India and Pakistan is the reason for SAARC not realising its cooperative potential. The second and the more forceful argument is that India has failed to provide leadership to SAARC leading to its non-performance.

Both the arguments for the failure of SAARC are true but it is unfair to blame India for this. It is true that India has failed to provide leadership but this is not due to India's lack of ability to provide leadership or lack of political will to do so. Rather it is a structural constraint that prevents India providing the necessary leadership to the

1 Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development (CSIRD), Kolkata, India.

region. I wish to argue that the most debilitating hindrance to South Asian cooperation comes from the attempt to adopt an alien concept in forming states in the region. Historically, political systems in South Asia have always been territorial states without any reference to nationalities and nationalism. The concepts of nation and nationalism are of recent origin to the region and like every other concept are heavily loaded with modern/western characteristics. In the absence of suitable socio-economic base, the western/modern political concepts have created a conflict that now seems unending. The introduction of the nation-state system and modern democratic forms of governments have given rise to a tussle for acceptance between the traditional institutions of authority and the modern ones who are supposed to replace the traditional ones. The blame can be squarely put on the introduction of the modern nation-state concept because before the advent of the colonisers, the Indian subcontinent's political systems were highly decentralised, mostly secular and the central authority enjoyed nominal sovereignty. The idea of state was purely secular and did not have any communal characteristic whatsoever. This was an evolved system in which, in the words of Ayesha Jalal, the "central sovereign authority was symbolically acknowledged, frequently challenged but only rarely rejected."² The introduction of the concept of nation-state demanded that some homogeneity has to be evolved among the population that want to form a nation. The introduction of this rigid form of nation-state, created the first friction in the Indian subcontinent that later became a South Asian phenomenon. So much so that the thousands of years old, secular credential of the subcontinent was sacrificed at the altar of homogenous nation-state. The partition of India at the cost of million deaths and millions of displacement, was aimed at creating viable nations in the lines of nation-state of the West. Of the two so-called viable nation-states created through partition, one adopted secularism with the hope of evolving an accommodative political system whereas the other followed its unavoidable path of building a nation-state on the base of religious

2 Ayesha Jalal, "South Asia," *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, Academic Press, 2000, p.7.

homogeneity. The experience of both the states tell us that neither have succeeded in building a modern nation-state.

Thus the partition of the subcontinent, while failed to create viable homogenous nation-states, created permanent fissures having potentials to put the subcontinent on the path of fission. Important here to note is that there were resistances to the efforts of introduction of modern nation-state in the subcontinent and the resistance was from within the two major religious communities of the subcontinent, i.e. Hindus and Muslims. Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal, the two leading poets and philosophers of the then contemporary India criticized the introduction of the notion of modern nation-state as the root cause of conflict in the subcontinent and opposed the concept of homogenous nationalism as they were rightly apprehensive of its suitability for the socio-political consciousness of the people of South Asia. While Tagore denounced nationalism as a destructive force having the potential to destroy the Indian civilization, Iqbal blamed the western notion of nationalism for creating modern conflict in Indian subcontinent by making religion relative rather than universal and by making religion territorially specific and unsuited to the temperament of other nations.

However, in a manner of predestination, the South Asian subcontinent was divided on religious grounds. The two infant nations set out to build nation-states that would be viable as modern states and united as nations. The attempt was desperate but there seem to be irreconcilable problems that had posed and is posing threats both to the viability of the state and the unity of the nation. The national leadership in India was hoping to capitalise on the nationalist fever that swept the country during the independence movement. The Pakistani leadership was hoping to ride on the religious nationalism that they had made the base for statehood and won, to create a strong and united nation. But both the nations are still struggling to build viable nation-states and the primary threat has come from the question of “ethnicity” that has been haunting both India and Pakistan.

John Stuart Mill once observed that representative government was not possible until the nationalities question had been solved.³ After creating one religious nation out of the South Asian subcontinent, it was hoped that the process of nation building would be smooth with both India and Pakistan adopting representative forms of government. The independence movement was called the “nationality” movement to underscore the national unity of the Indian state. Similar eulogy was used in Pakistan for evolving an Islamic nation. But no sooner than the division was effected, the seemingly benign fissures in the social spheres started widening and a web of nationalities appeared not only in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic India but also in the so called homogenous Pakistan. The religious nationalism that was supposed to be the cohesive force for the Pakistani nationhood, was challenged by another form of nationalism namely, linguistic nationalism. The Bengali-speaking majority of Eastern Pakistan asserted their “Bengali” linguistic national-ism and Bangladesh was created.

It is a geopolitical and even cultural reality that South Asia is India centric. The natural expectation thus is that India would provide leadership to the region and with that would gain world attention. But to the contrary, the complaint has been that India has failed to provide that leadership to South Asia. Lack of ability, of political will, and hard power has been identified either separately or in combination at various points as the reason for such failure. Their role in limiting India’s effective role in South Asia cannot be denied, but what is more important in explaining this alleged failure of India is the domestic situation in India’s neighbouring countries. It is a reality that emerging out of colonialism, the nations in South Asia are in nascent stage of nation-building and no state, including India, can claim to have completed the process.

3 John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in *Three Esseys*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Chap. 16, cited in T.V. Paul, G. John Ikenberry and John A. Hall (eds.), *The Nation-State in Question*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.3.

And being carved out of, once upon a time, a composite whole, the issues of nation-building are intertwined. Issues that are very important to one nation's national identity and national stability are related to the issues, events of another country and even the actions of another neighbouring country. Given the geographical centrality of India to South Asia, where no country shares land or water border with any other country but India⁴, the issues of nation-building in all these countries are related to India. In most of the cases the relationship is negative in character. A look at the important bilateral issues between India and any other South Asian country will make it clear.

Barring Bhutan and to some extent The Maldives, all other South Asian neighbours have nationalistic issues negatively related to India. To start with Bangladesh, in the birth of which India played the role of a midwife,⁵ one would have expected Indo-Bangladesh relation to have been better than India's other bilateral relations. But in no time the relationship turned sour and it vacillates between normal and tensed. Several issues cast their shadows over India- Bangladesh relationship, including water sharing, disputed border, over land transit, illegal migration, smuggling, etc. But at the core of Indo-Bangladesh relationship lies the question of Bangladeshi identity. Though it seceded from Pakistan riding on linguistic nationalism within the larger Muslim identity, it is in no position to shed the Muslim identity of its own and forces within Bangladesh are actively promoting the cause of Muslim identity for itself that can only be articulated by a negative reference to the Hindu image of India. While issues like water, over land transit, migration, etc. can be resolved, the relationship cannot be expected to improve to the extent of Bangladesh accepting India's leadership in the region so long as Bangladesh does not decide on its own the basis of nationalism without reference to India. Therefore, instead of working towards improved relationship, scholars close to the establishment in

4 Only the case of Pakistan and Afghanistan is an exception caused by Afghanistan joining SAARC in 2007.

5 Shahid Javed Burki, *South Asia in the New World Order: The role of regional cooperation*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011. p.26.

Dhaka from time to time have expressed their worries about India's relations with external powers such as the US fearing India may be attempting to bring the region under its hegemony.

Nepal was believed to be completely under the strategic influence of India through the Indo-Nepal Friendship treaty of 1950. But the political forces in Nepal are not quite comfortable with the treaty and have used it as a pretext for domestic politics. "The rulers of Nepal usually have perceived India as the more dangerous of its neighbours"⁶. Given the history of Nepali political system which has been a story of attempts to establish authoritarianism either by the monarchy or the Maoists and the centrist parties too having failed to provide political stability, nationalistic spirits have been invoked in the form of anti-Indianism.⁷ To the rulers of Nepal, India seems to be posing an existential threat. Referring to migration of Indian casual labourers, the leaders of Nepal invoke the fear of changing population profile in Nepal leading to Nepalis reducing to a minority in Nepal.⁸ The recent demand for relook and/review of the Indo-Nepal friendship treaty adds to the nationalist aspiration of the rulers of Nepal to escape out of India's sphere of influence. Both the old and the new rulers of Nepal have never hesitated to play the China card in order to poke India.

One need not discuss Pakistan's nationalistic issue with India. With regards to the birth of Bangladesh, interestingly, the linguistic nationalism, through shared borders across the Islamic community, did not accept the Bengali speaking Hindu population either of India or of Eastern Pakistan. The new nation that emerged setting the precedence of secession of nations from nation-states, was called Bangladesh, meaning a nation of Bengalis or Bengali speaking population. Pakistan

6 Rose, Leo E., *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, Bombay: Oxford University Press. 1971. Cited in, Uddhab Pd. Pyakurel, "Some Reflections on Nepal-India Relations in the context of Nepali Nationalism," *Think India* Vol. 13, No. 4. 2010.p. 312.

7 Pyakurel, Ibid.

8 Lok Raj Baral, "India, Bhutan and Nepal: Perceptions and Relations," in Rajen Harshe and K.M. Sethi (eds.), *Engaging with the World: Critical Reflections on India's Foreign Policy*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2005, p.192.

blames India for this severing of a part of herself. The issue of Kashmir is over discussed as an issue for Pakistan.

Sri Lanka was troubled by over three decades old ethnic conflict. At the root of the problem is the question of assimilation and accommodation of Tamil minorities in Sri Lankan Polity. The sense of deprivation of the Tamils in Sri Lanka leading to the militant movement of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam is at the core of Sri Lanka's nation building worries. It is now crushed but the Tamil issue is linked to India directly through ethnic links. There is wide perception in Sri Lanka that India had a role in instigating the Tamils to raise an armed war. And this also finds vindication in India's highhandedness of the issue during early 1980s.⁹ Sri Lanka's Sinhalese suffer from the notion of India trying to intervene in their domestic affairs due to India's domestic compulsions. Sri Lanka in her final war with the LTTE, sought military assistance from China and Pakistan, which goes on to prove that Sri Lanka attempts to break free from India's sphere of influence and to involve other powers in and outside the region to arrest possible increase in India's domination of the region.

The above discussion makes it clear that the regional environment in South Asia is not a facilitating one within which India can play an important role and thus can assume the status of a regional leader. It is clear that no matter how powerful India becomes in absolute hard power parameters, its acceptability as a major player and a great power is not going to increase among immediate neighbours. In South Asia, India's acceptability is limited by Indo-centric structure of the region that generates a sensation among her neighbours who all fear India's hegemony over the region leading to their complete subjugation. Secondly, all the South Asian countries neighbouring India are in the process of nation-building or national consolidation in which, issues sensitive to this process are negatively associated with India. Therefore,

9 DeVotta, Neil, "When Individuals, States, and the Systems Collide: India's Foreign Policy towards Sri Lanka," in Sumit Ganguly (ed.), *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.35.

contrary to increasing acceptability, the more India acquires hard power attributes, the more fear and anxiety will it generate among her immediate neighbours.

However, there is a newfound base for optimism about India emerging as an effective regional power, i.e. soft power. It is argued by soft power enthusiasts that India has a better story to share with the world and thus can attract others towards herself.¹⁰

India's million years of civilizational heritage, multi-culturalism, secularism, democratic polity, moral values like non-violence, expanding popular culture, etc,¹¹ no doubt make India a super power in soft power calculation. But the essential question again is how acceptable (attractive) are India's soft power attributes to her neighbours in the region? If one looks around India's neighbourhood where once India reigned as civilizational reference point, everywhere an attempt is being made to articulate civilizational heritage outside the Indian cultural compact on their society. India's multiculturalism hardly finds favour among India's neighbours like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka that are more interested in establishing homogenous nation-states. Similarly India's secular credentials are unattractive to fundamentalists of various hues in India's neighbourhood. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and of course Pakistan are witnessing rising influence of fundamentalist forces rendering secularism as a value to be discarded and opposed. Finally India's credit as the largest democracy is more of an eyesore to the regimes that surround India, including China and Myanmar and periodically in Pakistan who work towards preventing decimation of India's democratic values among their subjects. Thus one can refute Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s argument that "those who deny the importance of soft power are like people who do not understand the power of seduction".¹²

10 Tharoor, Shashi, "Indian Strategic Power: Soft," *Huffington Post*, May 26, 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shashi-tharoor/indian-strategic-power-so_b_207785.html

11 For a detailed discussion on India's soft power attributes, see Tharoor, *Ibid*.

12 Nye Jr., Joseph S., *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. 8.

At least this is not applicable to India. Therefore, to negotiate the regional structural impediments and increase acceptability among her neighbors as a leader, India needs innovative skills beyond conventional diplomacy.

It is thus clear that there exist no scope for India to lead SAARC to success in the traditional sense of interstate relationship. The situation in SAARC region is a situation of lack of trust and an environment of competitiveness wherein everyone is thinking in terms of relative gains rather than absolute gains. In specific, most of the SAARC countries are evaluating their pay off in relation to the gain of India which always seems to be more and contributing to India's increasing strength in the region. And owing to the compulsions of nation-state building, India's gain is looked as unacceptable. Any initiative that aims at promoting cooperation among countries positioned in a complex of trustless relationship must factor in the psychology of the smaller players in the region. Whether India wishes or not to lead or hegemonise the region, all of India's initiative must look lucrative enough for the other members of the region. It should not only look lucrative but also at the same time be inductive enough. The initiative must offer to serve some of the interests of the smaller players and hold bigger promise on reciprocation. The approach I am suggesting is built upon a model of cooperation in nuclear reduction suggested by Charles Osgood between the two superpowers during the height of Cold War. His unique model called *GRIT (Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction)*¹³ is designed to induce cooperation from both the superpowers on nuclear elimination during the Cold War that a typical period of mutual distrust. GRIT prescribes unilateral cooperative initiatives in nuclear (tension) reduction that will induce the other to reciprocate to carry forward to cooperation for the common objective of nuclear elimination.

A cooperative model can be improved upon the basic logic of GRIT. Unlike in the nuclear case where nuclear (tension) reduction or

13 Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative To War Or Surrender*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962.

ultimate objective of nuclear elimination was the common shared objective of the superpowers; in the case of SAARC there may be no common objective than self development of the participating country. Though this can be called a common objective but it is not shared common objective. Thus the interpretation of any initiative in its utility for any nation may vary from nation to nation. Therefore, any initiative started by India in the region must be benign enough to eliminate any scope of misinterpretation to be exploitative and must instill enough confidence among others that if they reciprocate they would gain enough that would not have been possible without the initiative being there in the first place. There are a lot of issues in SAARC region that are benign and have lot of confidence building potential. Issues such as environment, water, disaster management, pandemics control, etc. which can be made the starting point for India to initiate unilateral measures. It must not be interpreted as an approach that is going to yield immediate results. The initiatives in any particular issue must be graduated and spanned over a period of time divided into many stages and at each step the initiator must offer something more. If a number of initiatives are simultaneously offered by India and each offering new incentives at each stage for a period of time; one can expect that other members of SAARC would gain enough confidence to reciprocate on one or many of the cases. Such prolonged and sustained initiatives in multiple areas is more likely to induce cooperation from the neighbours. The approach can thus be articulated in our context as *Graduated Reciprocation in Inducing Cooperation (GRIC)*.

This is not an approach just for India to adopt. All the members of SAARC may adopt this as their regional policy and come up with initiatives on issues they are in a position of offering gains to the region. A web of such unilateral initiatives in itself will create a condition where mutual perception will start to change from utter negativism towards positivism. The most likely success in any or some issue areas will provide enough confidence to each of the SAARC members to initiate or reciprocate to unilateral initiatives of other members of the region. If the process is sustained over a period of time the regional environment will

change into one where SAARC members, both big and small, will not see cooperation and the gains from it in relative terms; rather each cooperative initiative will be evaluated in terms of the absolute gains any particular nation is going to obtain by being part of the initiative.

The chances of success of this approach can be further boosted by involving the stakeholders and technocrats (irrespective of nationalities) in charge of the institutional mechanisms created around each of the issue areas. While involvement of stakeholders would ensure sense of purpose, involvement of technocrats would reduce the fear of domination by any particular nation. The most pertinent question related to the success of *GRIC* is articulation of such initiatives on behalf of the nations; both the perceived 'big brother' and the smaller nations in the SAARC region.

Here the role of think-tanks is important and prominent. The think tanks must get together in delving into the various issue areas that need regional cooperation and prepare blue prints for states to articulate their unilateral initiatives. The second role the think-tanks must play in *GRIC* is through spreading the value of absolute gains from each cooperative initiative. They must disseminate the success of every unilateral initiative that is reciprocated in contributing to the interest of each participating nation and thus sustain a cooperative psyche' within SAARC. Unless this complex approach is followed for a considerable period of time within SAARC, the prime deterrent to South Asian Union, i.e., lack of trust will keep deepening. Fuelled by nationalist spirits, lack of trust it will only promote more antagonism and the most feared apprehension of fission of the region may gain added momentum.

Unleashing South Asia

Sujeev Shakya¹

South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions of the world housing more than a quarter of humanity and growing more rapidly than anywhere else. A region of more than 1.6 billion people has little of formal trade (less than 5%) between them, though informally they remain connected despite the political boundaries. India, the largest country in the region attribute to only 2% of its trade to this region, while Nepal, which shares an open border with India and preferential treaty with India, has 46% of its trade with countries in the region.

If the South Asian nations can push their intra-region trade to half of that of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), i.e. half of 25%, then this would push intra-region trade 6 times! Further, big initiatives such as common electricity grid can be developed. Such a grid between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal alone equals the electricity markets as big as Nordic countries running into billions of dollars.

However, with India being the leading economy in South Asia, the onus is largely on India to lead the path of South Asian cooperation and if what the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has indicated till now is any indication, it seems this is definitely something that can be realized.

Where Does China Fit In?

Skeptics in India are more concerned about what China is doing rather than what India can do vis-à-vis the region. With its high growth

1 Chair, Nepal Economic Forum, Kathmandu. He is author of bestselling book "Unleashing Nepal" (Penguin 2013).

achievement and the need to sustain the same, China will definitely look for opportunities everywhere in the world. If China is reaching out to countries in Africa and South America, it is quite natural to expect China to approach the neighboring countries first to explore investments and trade opportunities. India will have to compete and collaborate with China in this regard. If China produces cheaper hardware and India produces cheaper software, Bangladeshi or Nepali businesses that require both and supplement with local mindware can boost local employment.

The discussions around the future growth of South Asia will have to taken by taking China into consideration and understanding the fact that China needs South Asia to integrate its western part of the country where lack of opportunities and governance distances are brewing trouble.

Beyond SAARC

While SAARC was created as a great mechanism for South Asian co-operation, there is nothing that it can showcase as being successful. The SAARC Development Fund, has been a failure. It funds cultural exchanges rather than real projects. The annual SAARC meets have been more like disgruntled cousins getting together for an ancestral family meet rather than business folks in a board meeting of an economic zone that can push economic growth. The mechanisms of economic growth has to be beyond the mechanism of SAARC and if India -Pakistan row is something that has and will stall SAARC impact, then there has to newer mechanisms to be experimented without the baggage of this squabble.

Sub Regionalism with East South Asia

The low hanging fruit here is to push the East South Asia agenda, a sub-region that comprises of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and East and North East India – Bihar, Bengal and the seven sisters.

India's federal structure and the concentration of power in Delhi since independence has left the country being identified more with northern South Asia. Back when illiteracy loomed and knowledge of far-off places was not easily accessible through the internet as it is today, it

was obvious for the size of eyes and skin colour to be the differentiators. But today, when knowledge about different people and places is easily attainable, it is sad to see the way a whole region of over 450 million people is viewed.

Assamese, Bodo, Manipuri and Nepali are among the 22 languages recognized in the Indian Sixth Schedule. Bangla is a language and *lingua franca* to over 300 million people in the region. There are two distinct consumer sub-groups in the region – the Himalayan people including a big portion of the Northeast and then the Gangetic Plains people extending from India to Bangladesh. Tastes and lifestyles differ, but the homogeneity within the subgroups is amazing. The Himalayan region has an economy that is more subsistence oriented and spending patterns are completely different here than in the flatlands. You can easily spot a hill driver amongst the many cab drivers. There is a culture of the importance of the self, be it in how one looks or how one wants to be seen. For instance, consumers in Nepal and many young people in the Northeast emulate Korean fashion rather than Bollywood. The products they demand are thus entirely different.

Furthermore, the buying behaviour of consumers is very different. People will pay more for better packaging without even comparing the content in the packages, which explains why confectionery and biscuit aisles in supermarkets are cluttered with nicely packaged products from Malaysia or Thailand. The way instant noodles has almost become a way of life in the entire region also shows how consumption patterns are different. Nepal, with its opening up to international tourists in the 1960s, brought in the café culture and international cuisine, making Kathmandu the cosmopolitan heart of South Asia. Today the Northeast cities would like to emulate Kathmandu rather than Kanpur!

Hydro, agriculture, tourism and service are the major potentials of this area are similar and have been talked about for ages. The region's great bio-diversity makes it unique and with advances in transportation and communication shrinking divides, its potentials make more commercial sense than ever.

The distance from Kathmandu to Guwahati is just over 1,000 kilometres, the same distance as from Kathmandu to Delhi. Furthermore, Guwahati is closer to Yangon than Delhi. As road and rail infrastructure improve, it will become easier to move people and products across the region. Tourism continues to be the biggest potential as there are so many unexplored areas and with a semblance of political stability, more people will start to travel to this region.

Myanmar and China

The importance of the region has only increased with Myanmar, the world's 24th most populous country with a market of over 60 million people, opening up to the outside world. China is already making inroads into Myanmar through which it will connect with India and Bangladesh. Myanmar will help connect China's economic laggard Kunming aka India's Northeast with the far-off areas of economic boom. Many suggest Myanmar will ape the Chinese way of growth. But it is also felt that the influence of India during the early parts of the 20th century and a culture molded around the erstwhile India would cause the Burmese to look for intellectual freedom, cultural renaissance and a stable democracy in the long run.

People in Nepal and Northeast India are better poised to understand the Myanmar market and bring in networks to make many businesses, especially in the service sector, work. The diaspora from these regions currently in Myanmar will be more than happy to link up with businesspeople from the regions.

Integration

Greater acceptance of the market economy will only lead to improved integration of the South Asian markets, irrespective of how the future pans out politically. For instance, Indian satellite receivers that provide good quality at reasonable prices are now being put up in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, all illegally. These businesses will have to become legal at some point, as the push from consumers will force the laws to change. Large banks such as Standard Chartered, which has a presence in every South Asian country, will likewise push for integration

of the financial markets, as banking is today software-based with centralized operations. Having a uniform platform will make their products and services homogeneous across the region, and will reduce management costs substantially.

The integration process will touch many industries. Telecom integration will take place, as the business's focus will increasingly be on value-added services such as video downloads, e-mail or Internet, rather than on simply making a call. Private airlines in all South Asian countries are already clamoring for the region's skies to open up, so that a Sri Lankan airline would be able to fly to Kathmandu via Delhi. Companies in the other South Asian countries would also like to list their shares on the Bombay Stock Exchange, as it is emerging as one of the major global stock markets. Similarly, the other exchanges stand to attract the Indian companies, thereby bringing about cross-listing of shares in various regional exchanges. The reality is that in businesses the bigger ones will keep on gobbling up smaller ventures, such as the recent takeover of Hutch by Vodafone or the way global banks are eating up Indian companies. The key would be to ensure that there is enough retention of profits in the country by making it mandatory for such countries to go public. Another factor would be to ensure the benefits of technology transfer.

At this point, while it may not work in the arena of geopolitical integration, the structure of the European Union would seem like a good example for the South Asian markets to follow. Markets could first be opened for goods and services, and later for human resources as well.

To address another longtime concern, the sovereignty of a country does not stand to be affected by a process of market integration. Indonesian sovereignty, for instance, has never been affected by the fact that most Indonesian businesses are today more comfortable operating out of their 'financial capital' of Singapore, as they find the overall business environment better than their own country. Of course, the movement of people will need to be monitored, and technological advancement in this regard is already thoroughly underway. The introduction of 'smart card'-based passports or other identity systems

ensure that not only will an individual's national identity not change, but that each government can keep due track of the activities of its citizens.

A common visa protocol, such as the *Schengen* in Europe, is one solution. Initially, we will surely see significant movement of people to other countries in search of work, but this will inevitably stabilize over time as economies rise together. For example, when East European countries joined the EU, there were fears that there would be large-scale problems with immigration. However, over the years the more affluent countries have realized how better services are being delivered due to greater supply of labor to supplement the diminishing young workforce in their own countries.

In the end, an economically integrated South Asia simply offers the people of the region more benefits than does the alternative. It has been proven that regional blocs have always helped economies to grow. The reduction of tariffs between the member states of APEC (Pacific Rim forum known as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, which came into being in the early 1990s) has reduced cost of goods and services for its members. Similarly, increased employment opportunities of a regional bloc can act as a huge social-security net.

Investments Available

With the slowdown in US and Europe after 2008 financial crisis, focus is shifting towards emerging and frontier markets. There are many smaller funds in these regions that are not being able to pay their financial advisors from the returns they are earning from their investments; therefore, they are bound to explore newer markets. Africa, Central and South America have benefited tremendously from these funds and countries like Nepal and Bangladesh can benefit too. Further, there are more people with investment surpluses growing in India, that are looking at investments in areas they know rather than risk going to bigger markets. For instance, an investor in Siliguri, India who has US\$ 2 million to invest will be keener to explore investments in Eastern Nepal rather than Delhi or Chennai.

Towards RUPA

Ultimately, this could lead to the envisaged common currency, the 'rupa', becoming a reality. When the EU began to work on a common euro, federated India was taken as a case study by which to understand how a single currency – one that has different purchasing power in different parts of India – could be not only acceptable, but could ultimately work. Perhaps the single currency would form the basis of market integration. Nepal has benefited significantly from having a fixed exchange rate with India, and the buoyancy of the Indian economy acted as a shock absorber for the insurgency-hit Nepali economy over a full decade.

Regional access to markets could work on a hub-and-spoke model, wherein the booming parts of India in the west, south and northwest would be the hub from which the other South Asian countries and the more dispossessed parts of India could fan out. We can start looking at South Asia as West South Asia, East South Asia and South South Asia. While the Indian companies would be able to tap into a large population in these countries, the neighbors would also have the opportunity to perform as outsourcing and service industries, and to offer the human resources that will be needed to drive growth. The new leadership in Delhi does offer an opportunity to further this discourse.

India Grows – Region Benefits

Finally, as per one of the most significant anxieties in the region, while the primary economy – in this case India – generally does grow the most, under a system of regional economic integration, others too stand to see clear benefits, which would otherwise not accrue. Indeed, the growth experienced by being a member of a larger South Asian economic bloc would inevitably generate more wealth than that experienced by an individual country on its own. When a highway is built, after all, the landowner who has the largest parcel of land benefits the most, but so too do those that have smaller plots.

Afghanistan's Perspective on SAARC Cooperation

Sayed Mahadi Munadi¹

I am very pleased to have got an opportunity of taking part at this regional conference on *“Realizing the Vision of a South Asian Union”*. I must say that in Afghanistan we believe on great potentialities of SAARC for regional economic and security management and for upliftment of the people.

Therefore, I express my gratitude to the organizers of the conference, especially Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), for the conference and warm hospitality.

Afghanistan is located in the heart of Asia; In the north it is neighboring SCO, in the west with Middle East and in the south with Southern Asian region. Also a good opportunity for Afghanistan has been the membership of the country in SAARC which was granted in 2007. Despite SAARC, Afghanistan has the privilege of involvement in different organizations which facilitate its relations with the region's countries. At the current status, Afghanistan is involved in cooperation and integration with SCO, ECO, SAARC, Istanbul Process, CICA and different other projects such as TAPI, Casa 1000, etc. Among them, Afghanistan considers South Asia as an important region for its development. For this purpose, SAARC as a mechanism can link Afghanistan to South Asian potentialities to increase benefits and reduce the threats.

We Believe:

Afghanistan and South Asia are linked with each other, Strategic success in South Asia is critical to strategic success in Afghanistan, and vice versa...”

1 Research Fellow at Center for Strategic Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kabul.

Although certain opportunity is given to Afghanistan via SAARC but mechanisms to reduce the threats coming from FATA region and strengthening economic relations with other South Asian countries is an issue which remains unsolved. In other words, we have not obtained considerable successes in threats reduction or economic growths.

Common Regional Threats:

- *Low level of development, Human security:* While South Asia is home to 1.5 billion people or 23% of the world's population, currently only about 2.3% of the world's GDP is generated in this region.
- still 73.9% of the South Asian population have to live on less than 2 US \$ per day,
- There are other historical problems that cannot be solved easily.
- *Radicalism and Extremism in the Region:* Radicalism is spread in all over south and central Asian countries. FATA, Fergana valley and Chechnya are critical sources of radicalism which strongly linked and support each other. (*The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is a semi-autonomous tribal region in northwestern Pakistan, bordering Pakistan's provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan to the east and south, and Afghanistan's provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Khost and Paktika to the west and north. In 2001, the Tehrik-e-Taliban militants have been known to have originated from this area.*) This region of Pakistan provides a useful and relevant example of this point.

The FATA region consists of largely ungoverned space and serves as a safe haven for numerous violent extremist organizations, many of which conduct operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. These groups are a significant source of Afghanistan's present instability, and will remain so after 2014.

Fergana Valley is a region which is shared by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. IMU, IMT are the important terrorist actors in this region. These insurgents conduct training and planning in FATA region and implement them in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These

terrorists are considered as the origination to FATA Radicalism. Terrorism in Chechnya is also considered as another crucial source of conflict beside Fergana Valley. There are many Chechens among our rebel bodies within Afghanistan, which were fighting besides the FATA terrorists against the Afghan government.

Therefore, when the source of insecurity is spread throughout the region in this manner, it is necessary to have better relations and coordination with other responsible organizations. Afghanistan's membership of regional organizations highlighted above must be viewed in this context.

- **Fragile and failed states:**

Most of SAARC countries are fragile or failed states. Extremism, radicalism, terrorism, separatism and conflict are our biggest problems. SAARC cannot remain oblivious of these phenomena.

Afghanistan Ability:

Afghanistan constitution lays down the foundation for country's democratization. Since 2001, we have made considerable progress on different aspects such as school enrollment, media, governmental structure, National Security Forces, etc. And we believe Afghanistan can facilitate and augment the SAARC and its other members in the following manner:-

- Through its geopolitical position Afghanistan can link South Asia to center and west of Asia.
- Afghanistan possesses the ability to transfer energy from other parts of Asia to South Asia.
- Afghanistan can change the dynamism of SAARC. Afghanistan can facilitate cooperation between India and Pakistan.
- As Afghanistan is a member of other platforms such as SCO, ECO etc. we feel we can bring in new dynamism to SAARC. Linking Central Asia to South Asia will introduce energy cooperation and help reduce the old tension of SAARC.

- Afghanistan can be a new market for goods of the rest of South Asian countries.

Afghanistan's Expectations from SAARC

It is natural that we also expect from SAARC to deliver concrete for peace and progress of our country:-

1. **Changing the Pakistan relation and perspective toward extremism.** Positive transformation of Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan is greatly needed because Pakistan serves as a connector for Afghanistan with other South Asian countries and it is one of the most important components influencing Afghanistan's relations with SAARC countries. It is also necessary for SAARC to understand and do something tangible to protect our region against the common threats of terrorism, extremism, narcotics, organized crime, human trafficking, injustice and corruption. In order to strengthen the internal capacity of SAARC it is important that SAARC seeks new ways of engagement, interaction and discussion on these issues of great importance.
2. **Afghanistan expects SAARC to increase its Trade Relations with South Asian countries:** The special type of Afghan-Pakistan relation causes difficulty for economic relation between Afghanistan and SAARC's members. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has also deterred other SAARC countries from investing in mining and infrastructure in Afghanistan. If these conflicting politics are reconciled, the new period of cooperation between Afghanistan and SAARC countries will be established. We are waiting for SAARC mechanism to consider Afghanistan specific programs. Under no circumstances should the SAARC member countries compromise their need for energy resources from central Asia where Afghanistan can play a key role of a Transit Bridge.

Despite of several years of our membership, SAARC Mechanism is still unable to help us. So we believe on reconsideration and restructuring of SAARC mechanisms.

Obstacles to Engagement within SAARC

Indo- Pakistan confrontation:

While we set an analysis about future of SAARC cooperation, beside India- Pakistan's confrontation, there is no other issue that hinder cooperation. Although in the 17th Summit held in The Maldives, the leaders of India and Pakistan publicly expressed their desire to open a new chapter in their relationship, even minor border incidents have halted the peace process. This has been frequently demonstrated in the past. Pakistan is looking toward deeper commercial relations with Nepal, but India is not interested to provide easy transit. That could be another reason that Pakistan too does not facilitate economic relations between Afghanistan- Central Asia and India.

- **SAARC Member countries pay more attention to ASEAN than Central Asia.** Central Asia is just as important for India and Pakistan as ASEAN countries. However, they consider forging better relations with ASEAN countries, more valuable than with Central Asian republics.
- **Pakistan is finding new route with Central Asia through China and a tunnel across vakhana.** Pakistan is trying to Skip Afghanistan altogether to obtain Central Asian resource. If this is successful, this will further distance Afghanistan from the rest of South Asia.

Recommendations:

1. According to an old saying, if you are not obtaining the result, bring changes in actors. SAARC has not found the desired results thus far; it is the time for changing its modus operandi. It is the time to change the old style of functioning and add new dynamism. New actors bring new dynamism.
2. We strongly believe, when the number of economically powerful countries gets increased in SAARC, the ability of SAARC to reducing tension also will be increased. When there are more than one or two strong actors, the desire for dominance will be reduced.
3. We strongly believe SAARC platform can be improved and energized through increasing its members and forging new ties

with other regional organizations. It is also true that newer players bring in newer challenges but this is worth the effort.

4. For reducing internal rivalry, I recommend a strong organizational link between:

SAARC+ SCO+ ECO+ EU (for energy security). EU is already an Observer of SAARC. These organizations have put in strong emphasis on economic cooperation.

SAARC+ Istanbul Process+ CICA+EU (for political negotiations). Istanbul process and CICA can bring in their experiences of dialogue and partnership on regional issues of global importance which is lacking within the SAARC process. Afghanistan can play a significant role in all these possible engagements.

South-Southeast Asia: Northeast India as a Bridge

Aparupa Bhattacharjee¹

Introduction

The cultural, historical and religious linkages between the countries of South and Southeast Asia have been emphasised and mentioned by several scholars and historians. The common struggle for establishment of a functional independent polity after ages of colonial rule further bonded these nation states of both the region into a common thread. Since 1990s South and the Southeast Asian economies are growing rapidly. The dynamic growth of both the region could be attributed to the expanding regional production networks, integration with the global economy, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), removal of the trade and investment barriers, a commodity boom, and heightened demand from a rising Asian middle class¹.

However the limited integration of the two growing regional economies of South and Southeast Asian nations have hindered both the regions from enjoying the fruits of cross-sub regional trade and investment. For an example since 1990 to 2011, Southeast Asian share of South Asian trade has rose only by approximately one percent that is from 11-12 percent. Further the South Asian share of the Southeast Asian trade has also been insignificant, over the period of eleven years it has only grown by nearly two percent that is from two to four percent. Similarly, investments in each region by the other have also been recorded to be poor.

The challenges such as lack of infrastructures connecting the regions, trade barriers, lack of initiatives on behalf of the regional

1 Research Officer, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi.

organisations and most importantly underdevelopment of Northeast India- the only land mass connecting the South Asian Countries to the Southeast Asia has limited the trade and investment between these two regions.

This paper will analyse the importance of Northeast India as an overpass between the two regions and the impediments in the path of the development of this land bridge.

I. Northeast India Bridging the Gap

The event of disintegration of the USSR (close ally of India since 1970s) and the economic stagnation in Europe and America compelled India to look towards the Southeast and East Asian nations for trade and commerce. Thus the Look East Policy (LEP) was enacted and developed in 1991, by the then Prime Minister of India P.V. Narashimha Rao. Under LEP India has taken efforts to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia. The common historical, cultural and ideological links with these countries assisted India to easily develop close economic and commercial ties. Additionally, it also paved a way to a increasing strategic and security cooperation with these countries. Result was evident when India received Sectoral Partner status in ASEAN in 1992. Further in December 1995, India was granted Full Dialogue Partner Status, ahead of China. Presently India-ASEAN trade amounts to US \$ 80 billion and by 2016 the goal has been set for achieving the target of US \$100 billion.

However the trade between India and other Southeast Asian countries is only operated through the sea routes. Most of the trade is facilitated through the Haldia (Kolkata), Paradeep (Orissa) and the Vizag (Andhra Pradesh) ports whereby Singapore acts as a transit point. Interestingly, India's imports of pulses from Myanmar, also comes by sea route through Singapore. Although Myanmar is an immediate neighbour of India and shares a border; nevertheless the business has to be operated through sea routes due to the lack of infrastructural development in the land route-through Northeast India.

The strategic location of northeast India explains in itself its importance in order to bring the two regions closer to each other. Northeast of India comprises of seven states-Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh-together they are also referred as 'seven sisters'. This part of India shares a 4,500 kilometres long international border. It is surrounded by China on the north, Bangladesh on the southwest, Myanmar in the east and Bhutan in the northwest thus truly connecting South Asia to Southeast of Asia. However it is connected to the rest of India through a 22 Kilometre narrow land corridor-Siliguri corridor in West Bengal also known as 'Chicken's neck' due its shape in a map. This corridor opens into the state of Assam and through which connects the rest of the north-eastern states. Furthermore, poor infrastructure adds up to the underdevelopment of the connectivity and linkages with these seven states. It also explains one of the major obstacles in the way towards the development of this area. Infrastructural development of Northeast would enable better connectivity of India, Bhutan and Nepal to Myanmar, Thailand and three Indo-China countries. Thus there is a growing need for development of the infrastructure in the Northeast in order to benefit the cross sub-regional economies.



Furthermore, the ethno-cultural, linguistic, and religious similarities between most tribes in India's north-eastern and groups in other South and Southeast Asian countries provide a foundation for greater assimilation. For example, Meghalaya's Bhoi, Maram, Nongtrai, War-Khasi, War-Jaintia and other tribes have ancestry in Tibeto-Burmese and other Southeast Asian ethnic groups; Arunachal Pradesh's Singphos are related to Myanmar's Kachins. The eclecticism of the mosaic of Northeast India's ethnic groups whose roots trace back to South and Southeast Asia is thus made evident.

II. Northeast and its Hurdles towards Progress

One of the drawbacks of LEP was that due attention was not given to the Northeastern region at the early phase of LEP. Whereas, the strategic location of this area explains that the development of Northeast should have been the core of LEP. The New Delhi government realised its mistake, and since 2000 the governmental planning's have given predominance to the upliftment of this region. In 2004 an India-ASEAN car rally was held, that had started from Guwahati in Assam and ended in Batam Island in Indonesia. In this rally, the then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had mentioned Northeast to be the "springboard" in order to enhance the LEP policy.² This initiative was further documented in the 'Northeast Region Vision 2020'. This document envisages the aim to work towards placement of Northeast as a successful economy within India; and it also focuses on all round development of the seven states.

Northeast region comprises of 40 million population (according to the 2011 census) which is approximately 3.1 percent of the total population of 1.21 billion. The region is also rich in terms of natural resources. The area is gifted with a large reserve of forest, fertile land, mineral deposits, natural gas and petroleum. Thus, both the manpower and resources makes it evident the huge potentiality for this region to reach to peak of economic growth. In addition, the government in New Delhi along with providing financial support has initiated several developmental and infrastructural projects; the paper will be studying these projects in details in the next section. However the outcome of the

development has not been visible in reality. No significant growth has been recorded in the economic environment of the region even after six years since the Northeast Vision 2020 had been introduced. Most of projects initiated with governmental efforts are yet to be completed.

There are several reasons that have been affecting the progress of this region. The Government of India should first and foremost address these obstacles, as allocation of funds for the development of Northeast is not sufficient- implementation of these funding in the right juncture is important. Thus it is essential to recognise the obstacles that have delayed the advancement of this geographical land bridge between the South and Southeast Asia.

Conceptualisation: The first and foremost problem that hinders the development of the Northeast is conceptualisation. The government in Delhi has approached the development of Northeast region as an important geographical linkage with the other ASEAN countries. Nevertheless the approach should have been more as the region is an integral part of the country and not only as a connecting land mass. Thus impetus for the development of the region initiated by Delhi was founded on a platform which instigated anger among the people of Northeast and injured their sentiments. Furthermore, the drive for the development was initiated very late-as mentioned above only after 2000. Most of the scholars especially those from the region blamed the central government for purposeful delay in the development of the region especially the infrastructural development. The 1962 Sino-India war had installed a fear in the Indian leaders that infrastructural development in Northeast will provide opportunity to the Chinese to invade through these routes. However this pre-conceived fear among the leaders had to be kept aside when they realised the importance of the development of the Northeast India for the success of LEP.

Nevertheless, the major task remained cooperation with the state governments of the seven states, which was difficult as they did not take the new initiative of the Government with enthusiasm. The conceptualisation of Northeast as just a land mass connecting to further eastern countries have affected the initiative on behalf of the states to

participate in the newly introduced development projects. Thus the half hearted initiative from the northeastern states definitely impacts the progress of this entire region.

The North Eastern Council (NEC) an advisory body regarding the socio-economic development of the seven states was established in 1972 by an Act of Parliament, North Eastern Council Act of 1971. Furthermore, in 2001 the Union Government of India set up a Department of Development of North Eastern Region which was later upgraded as a ministry in 2004. These two governmental bodies act as connector between the Union government and the Northeastern State governments. Both the institutions work toward reducing the gap between New Delhi and the seven states. The lack of cooperation between the union and state government at some levels due the conceptualisation has hindered the progress of development of the Northeast India.

Flawed Administrative Structure: Additional to the gap between the Union and the State government, the poor administrative initiative is another reason that affects the progress in the Northeast. The lack of synergy between the different ministries such as Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. This delays initiation of projects of development and also allocation of necessary funds for these projects. Furthermore, chronic corruption infected administrative structure within the northeastern states does not let the funds to reach the allotted projects. Instead the funding goes to different administrative officers, local political leaders and even sometimes to different insurgent groups.

There are several border points that once developed would not only enhance the formal cross-border trade but also lead to development of the economy of the northeastern region. However there are several administrative lacunas that affect the optimum development of these border points. The Moreh (in Manipur-India) and Tamu (in Myanmar) are only so called operational border points between India and Myanmar. Although, both the land customs centre and currency

exchange centre are present in the Moreh-Tamu border point they are dysfunctional and understaffed³. Thus the only “operational” border point in between India and Myanmar is enhancing trade only in papers, in reality it is only providing an excuse for the further growth of the thriving informal trade in between these two neighbours. Another border point Zokhawthar (in Mizoram-India) and Rhi (Myanmar) will be operational as soon as the land customs building is build. However, unless administrative initiatives are taken this border point will also meet the same fate as the Moreh-Tamu border point. Other border points such as Dawki (Meghalaya-India) connecting Bangladesh, Longwa (Nagaland-India) and Yankyong (Myanmar), and others are yet to be developed. The lack of basic infrastructural facilities and initiatives of the local administrators are reasons behind the lack of developments of these border points. This was also one the reason that the system of Public Private Partnership (PPP)⁴ was highly recommended in the document of Northeast Vision 2020 for the development of the region.

Troubled Northeast: All the states of the Northeast are infected with several ethno-religious insurgency movements that has its toll on developmental aspects of the respective states. As mentioned in the Vision 2020, “Law, order, especially the internal security”⁵ plays a pivotal role for the economic upliftment of the individual States. The rampant insurgent lead violence has its affect on the infrastructural projects induced by the Union government in order to improve the linkages of this region with Myanmar-Thailand in east and Bhutan-Nepal in its north. Several initiatives have been taken by the Indian government to resolve the hostility in region. However the success of these initiatives has only percolate into the states of Tripura and Mizoram and has been stagnated to the borders of these states.

The 1979-1985 religious strife in Assam was pacified with the help of an accord between the Indian Central Government and the All India Students Union (AASU) in 1985. Nevertheless another problem crept up in the form of demand for “Bodoland” by the All Bodo Students Union first and later by the Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF). As a solution to the persisting violence, an accord was signed between

representatives from New Delhi and BLTF. This led to the establishment of an autonomous council called Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council (BTAC) under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However it failed to establish peace and further aggravated the situation. The area allotted to the BTAC constitute of a population of mix ethnic tribal content, thus giving powers to the Bodos made the other ethnic and tribal groups minority in this area. The result is continuous conflict between the Bodo's and the non Bodo groups and also among the Bodos who are also fragmented within its one nomenclature. Furthermore the BTAC leadership under the insurgent-politicians are ill-equipped to control BTAC. Thus the ongoing conflict in this area not only affects the administration and development of the whole state of Assam, but also hinders the connectivity of the Northeast to the mainland India. Most of the rail and the road connecting Siliguri and Assam cross through BTAC zone; the infrastructures are systematically targeted by the Bodo insurgent groups. On 26 January 2013 a bomb explosion had barely missed a crowded passenger train near Kokrajhar (a town that fall under the BTAC zone). The resurfacing of communal violence in the BTAC area since the 2014 Parliamentary elections has heightened the connectivity problem between the mainland India and Assam which further connects with other six states of Northeast. As mentioned above Bodo are not the only insurgent groups that demand for separate statehood, others such as Karbi and Dimas demands for separate states is often exhibited by disrupting the rail and road linkages between India and the Northeastern states.

Insurgency also has its impact on the connectivity networks in between India and Myanmar. The major road corridor that connects India to Myanmar through Northeast is the national highway no.39 that cuts through Assam, Nagaland-passes through its two commercial cities Dimapur and Kohima and enters Imphal-Manipur's capital city connecting it to the frontier town Moreh (on the India-Myanmar border). This highway is regularly affected by violence and blockades that sometimes continue for months with grave impact on the commutation of goods in between India and Myanmar through the land

routes. Another route the national highway no.53 connecting Assam's Barak valley and Imphal through Jiribam has been affected by the ongoing Naga insurgency lead violence and turbulence⁶. Any blockade on this route completely detaches Manipur from the rest of India. Thus explaining how the rampant insurgent activities obstruct the process of development of the Northeast as a major land bridge between the South and Southeast Asian regions.

India-Bangladesh Relationship: Transit through Bangladesh is another option that would evade the hurdles of connectivity of Northeast of India to both the South and Southeast Asian countries. In fact, similar to Myanmar, transit (both land and water) facility through Bangladesh also forms the core of the process of connectivity through the Northeast in order to enhance India's LEP. In the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) sub-regional group initiated car rally last year from Kolkata (India) to Kunming (China), participants had entered Northeast through Bangladesh rather than crossing the Silliguri corridor. The rally had started from Kolkata and entered Bangladesh at Petrapole-Benapole crossing the cities of Jessore, Dhaka (capital city) and Sylhet before entering Northeastern States on its way to Myanmar and China. Although the Bangladesh stretch of the rally was shorter than in Myanmar, however this rally had highlighted the importance of an alternative connectivity of Northeast through Bangladesh.

Another example in order to stress for the transit through Bangladesh for the development of northeastern states of India could be cited in the case of Palatana Project in Tripura. The 700 Mega Watt project had to be suspended for five years as the roads and bridges connecting the state of Tripura to mainland India were not strong enough for the transport of heavy equipment such as transformers for the project⁷. Thus India started a long process of negotiation with Bangladesh government to allow the transport of these equipments through the Chittagong port and further till Asuganj by river-way. Finally in 2009, with Awami league in power, India got the permission to use the Chittagong port which lead to successful completion of the Palatana project. The above mentioned incident not only highlights the

necessity of transit through Bangladesh but also pin points the fact that the nature of India-Bangladesh relationship have always swung according to the political objectives of elected governments in both the countries.

The relationship between India-Bangladesh has been affected under the leadership of BNP-Jamaat coalition in Dhaka. In comparison, the relationship has been cordial under the Awami League governments under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. In 2009, the Awami League coming to power had facilitated successful negotiation on several pertinent issues to both the countries. Apart from the transit facilities provided in the above mentioned Palatana project, in same year Bangladesh also provided assistance to India in order to chase out the insurgents of the Northeast who had taken shelter in Bangladesh taking the advantage of the porous border. Bangladesh also became the part of the Asian Highway network in 2009. The Asian Highway 1 and 2 under the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development Project (ALTID) once constructed will link India's Northeastern region and Bangladesh with Myanmar-Thailand and then to rest of the Southeast and East Asian countries. Furthermore a MoU between India and Bangladesh have also facilitated a construction of a railway link connecting Agartala (capital of Tripura) to Akhura (Bangladesh). This will enhance the cross border trade and also promote people to people contacts.

It should be noted that transit issue between India and Bangladesh is sensitive, be it any given state of relationship in between the governments. Unfortunately transit facility has been used by Bangladesh as a political trump card. This was clear when in 2012 Bangladesh refused to allow a passage to Indian goods through the Chittagong port into the Northeastern states. The reason for the rejection of this facility was due to the failure of signing of the Teesta water sharing agreement on behalf of India. Although the central government under Dr. Manmohan Singh was eager to sign the agreement, opposition from the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamta Banerjee disrupted the deal. Thus there are several unresolved contentious issues that hinder connectivity between these two

neighbours even if the governments in power at the centre share cordial relationship.

III. Connecting the South and Southeast Asia

There are several infrastructural projects initiated to connect the south and Southeast Asian region that cuts through Northeast of India. Some of the projects that are worth mentioning are:

The Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development Project:

In 1992, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific in its forty eighth session had launched this project. This project has three main components-the Asian Highway network, the Trans-Asian Railway network and the development of land transport.⁸ The Asian Highway project is a collaboration project between Asian and European countries. Under this project that has been initiated by United Nations in 1959, not only connects India to seven ASEAN countries-Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore. This Highway will also provide a better connectivity in between India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, once it has been completed.

Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) network plans to build a trans-continental railway network connecting European countries to the Pacific ports in China. Seventeen Asian countries are the part of the TAR agreement signed on 10 November 2006. Among the SAARC countries, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are signatories of the TAR agreement. Out of ten members of the ASEAN-seven of them are the signatories of this agreement. The seven members are Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. Target has been set to complete the railway link within 2015. This will give a major boost to the economic cooperation within the SAARC and ASEAN countries. Thus both the Asian Highway and the TAR are the two ongoing projects that would integrate the two regions into one big economic market and also enhance the tourism industry with the help of better connectivity in between the South and Southeast Asian countries.

India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway: In April 2002 the three countries-India, Myanmar-Thailand- signed an agreement that

initiated the construction of an all weather road connecting these three countries. The highway was initially planned to start from Moreh (Manipur, India) and runs through Bagan (Myanmar) and end in Mae Sot (Thailand). India has also proposed the extension of this highway to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The trilateral highway was initiated with the plan to facilitate the expansion of trade, tourism and people to people contacts among these countries⁸. Thus, extension of this road to the other ASEAN countries would enhance similar growth among the region and later it could also be extended to some South Asian neighbours of India.



Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT) project: The lack of transit through the Chittagong port in Bangladesh forced India to look for an alternative sea route. In 2008, India signed the agreement on the project for the development of the Sittwe port in the Rakhine region in Myanmar. This port once developed could be easily linked with the state of Mizoram in Northeast India. The project includes the plan to building waterways and roads in order to link the Sittwe port to Mizoram through the Kaladan River. Although the plan is an ambitious one, completion of this project will open a broad door way to entire South Asian countries to easily access the market in Southeast and East Asian region.

Sub-regional Groups: There are three sub-regional groups that works towards paving better linkages in between the South and

Southeast Asian countries. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was launched in 2000, in order to inculcate cooperation and studies on different aspects such as education, tourism, culture and others. India and the five Mekong river basin countries-Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam are the members of this grouping. Among several other projects both bilateral and multilateral level, initiated by this group, the project on “East-West Corridors” play a pivotal role in connecting India and other Southeast Asian countries. Another group BCIM(Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) also known as Kunming Initiative also focuses on the development of connectivity. This grouping is an outcome of an acclamation of a conference on cooperation and development in Kunming, China in 1999. The focus is on the development of communication between the south-western region of China and Northeastern region of India. In particular, the emphasis is on the revival of the World War I era *Stilwell Road* connecting India to China through Myanmar.

The third sub-regional group should be given priority as it includes the countries of both the South and Southeast Asia. Unlike the other two sub-regional groups integration of the South and Southeast Asian region forms the core of the foundation of the third group. This group is called the BIMSTEC- initially named after the member countries-Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand economic cooperation. However, with the addition of two more members-Nepal and Bhutan, in 2004 the name was changed to the Bay of Bengal of Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation that forms the same acronym. The group was commenced with the view to integrate the contiguous areas of the South and Southeast Asian countries that constitute a geo-economic and socio-cultural entity. Lack of initiative of the member countries and lack of unity within them has affected the progress of this group also. Although established in 1997, the third summit took place only in 2014; additionally, since 2004 BIMSTEC members are trying to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) without any success. The establishment of a Permanent secretariat in Dhaka has not only provided the group an institutional

body but also raised the expectation from this group. BIMSTEC could be a perfect example of a regional group that integrates the region of South and Southeast Asia as one unit.

Conclusion

As outlined in this paper, infrastructural development and economic upliftment of the Northeastern part of India plays a pivotal role in connecting South Asia to the Southeast Asian region. However there are several imperative steps that have to be initiated especially on behalf of GOI in order to overcome the hurdles that delay the development.

- As highlighted by the North Eastern Vision 2020 Public-Private Partnership could be initiated to overcome the administrative lacunas that disrupt the growth of development projects in Northeast. More effort should be initiated by both the union and state governments of Northeastern states in order to curb twin problems of insurgency and corruption.
- Union government should also make an effort to develop a better synergy with the state governments in Northeast. The synergy between these two units is much need for any progress in the region.
- BIMSTEC should be given greater predominance, as this sub-regional group works towards the integration of the South and Southeast Asia as one region. Nevertheless the sub-regional group should focus on growth of soft trade. The emphasis could be given more on the trade of bamboo, handicrafts, textiles and others. This focus will also enhance the participation of Northeast that further lead to the growth of its economy.
- Indian government should also try to encourage soft power to build people to people contacts within the South and Southeast Asian countries. The soft power projects could include development of sports infrastructures in Northeast, classes on South and Southeast Asian languages, student exchange that involve students of Northeastern states and other parts of India, etc. Additionally, the Northeastern youth of India have strong base in English language

which could be utilised. Both Myanmar and Bangladesh are in dire need of English teachers, thus this will also provide both employment opportunity to the youth of Northeast and also lead to the development of the people to people connection. Along with the development of the infrastructural projects the soft power projects will also enhance connectivity. Furthermore this will also help to integrate the Northeastern people in the process of development and they would feel being part of the process. In fact this can assist India's union government to overcome the problem of conceptualisation.

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