



SAARC

# Confidence Building in South Asia: *Problems & Prospects*

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In contrast to other regions around the world, South Asia remains mired in conflicts tensions and distrust. Inhabited by one fifth of the mankind in South Asia failed to reap the peace dividends of the end of the cold war. Judged by any set of socio-economic indicators, this region ranks among the poorest, the most illiterate and most malnourished region of the world for instance.

- ✓ Its GDP per capita is \$ 430 lowest among the developing world;
- ✓ Its annual real growth is just about 3.7%;
- ✓ Total exports of goods and services is just about \$ 71 million abysmally low in the total world trade of over 4 trillion dollars;
- ✓ Net aid flows are 0.9% of the GNP or in other words \$ 4 per person;
- ✓ External debt of South Asian countries run into billions of dollars;
- ✓ The total population is 1.5 billion and rising;
- ✓ Extreme poverty has risen from 495 million to 522 million by the end of last century;
- ✓ Yet paradoxically, the poorest region is heavily and lethally armed with nuclear, missile and other weapons of mass destruction. The defence expenditure in South Asia has risen to 301% of the combined GNP and is likely to increase more,
- ✓ The stark reality is that South Asia stands marginalized in a highly competitive and efficient globalized world.

It is not too difficult to comprehend the reasons for South Asia trailing far

behind other regions despite all attempts to reduce tensions, resolve conflicts and improve the socio-economic performance of the region. India-Pakistan adversarial relations right from the day when both neighbours emerged as independent sovereign states remained full of tensions the three wards fought between them over the Kashmir issue, serious differences over the sharing of Indus Basin waters as well as the Farraka Barrage issue in the erstwhile East Pakistan, India's ambitions to establish its predominant status in South Asia and the strong resistance by Pakistan against such hegemonic ambitions of India are some of the glaring illustrations of India-Pakistan confrontation. In other words India-Pakistan relations kept the entire region hostage and prevented it from realizing its full potential. Furthermore other causes of tension of friction between other South Asian countries added to the regional tensions and lack of trust and understanding among the seven countries. The major factor in South Asia has been the problem of asymmetry, which remains unresolved even today. The centrality of India in South Asia because of its large size, population, military, economic, industrial, technological together with its huge human and material resources has generated more fear and apprehension than trust, and confidence among India's neighbours. The other regions including European Union and the ASEAN have succeeded in resolving the asymmetry problem. In South Asia, it is upto India to decide as to how it intends to use its centrality whether to develop mutually advantageous and good neighbourly relations with its neighbours or whether to impose its predominant position to its own advantage at the cost of others.

Other regions including the European Union, ASEAN, APEC, EFTA and NAFTA established regional groupings long before South Asia was goaded in 1985 into launching SAARC. But even at its birth, SAARC was put in a straight jacket by the two crippling limitations included in its Charter namely that no political or contentious issues could be discussed in SAARC and secondly all decisions should be taken unanimously by all seven members. Even the initially agreed areas of co-operation included only peripheral areas and excluded the vital areas of trade and economic co-operation which form the core of meaningful economic integration.

In its fifteen years of existence SAARC has fallen far short of the expectations reposed in it. While other regional groupings have restructured and reformed themselves to meet the challenges and derive benefit from the opportunities of the economic globalization, SAARC has fallen a victim to a suspension of all its activities since 1999 when the SAARC Summit was postponed for reasons totally unrelated to its charter. Instead of moving together, working together and acting together South Asian countries seem to be drifting away from the vision of SAARC as evolved by the SAARC Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) to move towards the eventual establishment of a South Asian Economic Community by 2010.

## Potential of South Asia

South Asia has the potential, the human and material resources to become a vibrant and attractive large market. It is strategically located between East Asia, West Asia and the Central Asia. It lies astride the Indian Ocean – one of the busiest sea-lanes for global trade and economy. With the availability of cheap and large labour force, its industrial and technological progress could be accelerated and made competitive at the global market.

\* Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC)



### Prerequisites

However, there are inescapable prerequisites for South Asia to fulfil—

**Firstly**, to grow and prosper, South Asia will have to adjust to the global economy.

**Secondly**, to increase its collective bargaining South Asia will need to resume and accelerate the SAARC process.

**Thirdly**, to contribute to its prosperity and security, South Asia will need to resolve the outstanding conflicts that bedevil the relations between the countries of the region.

**Fourthly**, South Asian countries would have to resolve the problem of asymmetry. The centrality of India with its large size, population, military, economic and technological strength creates a pervasive fear of India amongst all its neighbours.

**Fifthly**, India-Pakistan adversarial relations have kept the entire region hostage and prevented it from realizing the full potential of cooperation and integration. Other regions have overcome the political hurdles and moved faster towards highly advantageous cooperation.

**Sixthly**, taking a leap from the regional groupings, it is evident that South Asian countries have to create a climate of mutual trust, goodwill and understanding through specific, concrete and sustained measures. Such measures are usually described as Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).

### CBMs

CBMs are not new to South Asia. Several CBMs in the military and non-military fields were introduced in India-Pakistan relations in the past decades. It may be useful to recall some of these CBMs particularly in the military field:-

- ✓ Hotlines between the Director General of Military Operation; hotline between the Sector Commanders;

- ✓ Hot line between Pakistan and Indian Air Forces;
- ✓ Communication between the naval vessels and Aircraft of the two sides when in each other's vicinity.
- ✓ Advance information about the military exercise and invite military observers from either side.
- ✓ Agreement on prevention of air space violations.
- ✓ Advance notification of Ballistic Missile Test.
- ✓ Agreement on non-attack on each other's nuclear installations and list of such installations to be exchanged annually.
- ✓ Joint Declaration on the prohibition of Chemical weapons.

### Non Military CBMs

- ✓ Hot line between the two Prime Ministers
- ✓ Establishment of Joint Ministerial Commission
- ✓ Liaquat-Nehru Pact on minorities
- ✓ Indus Water Treaty
- ✓ Tashkent Agreement
- ✓ Ram of Kutch Agreement
- ✓ Simla Agreement
- ✓ Lahore Declaration

The fundamental point which deserves emphasize is that implementing CBMs require political will on the part of countries concerned. There is no substitute for political will to facilitate transition from conflict avoidance to confidence building.

CBMs can be useful when preconditions exist for trust and confidence. CBMs should be transparent and aimed at —

- ✓ Preventing conflict
- ✓ Providing indications and warning of troubling development
- ✓ Avoiding unwanted escalation
- ✓ Non-threatening deployment of forces in peace time
- ✓ Establishing a nuclear restraint and stabilisation regime in South Asia which has become highly desirable after the May 1998 nuclear test by India and Pakistan
- ✓ CBMs should have a direct, visible and positive effect on strength-

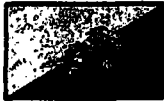
- ening stability and security
- ✓ CBMs should be pursued in a sustained process aimed at eliminating the root causes of tension and conflict.
- ✓ CBMs should be aimed at reducing the dangers of armed conflict through misunderstanding or miscalculation
- ✓ The possibilities of new technologies and their applications to CBMs should be fully used
- ✓ CBMs should be aimed at enhancing trust, stability and a greater security for tension free relations between the South Asian countries
- ✓ CBMs should cover the military, non-military fields including economic, social and cultural.

### Nuclear CBMs

The May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan radically changed the regional security environment and the entire security outlook of both countries. The nuclear tests brought into open the two old adversaries form a state of ambiguity to an overt nuclear weapon capability. There was world-wide concern that India and Pakistan have already fought three wars over the disputed Kashmir State without resolving the issue. It was argued that the presence of nuclear weapons and means of their delivery in the arsenals of two hostile neighbouring countries increased the likelihood that nuclear weapons could be used in a future conflict between the two countries. The UN Security Council, the P5 and the G8 urged both countries to exercise restraint and address the core issue of Kashmir, which was the root cause tension and conflict.

### Restraint by India and Pakistan

It is now well established that both India and Pakistan having achieved a minimum deterrence have demonstrated a remarkable sense of responsibility and realism. Both have imposed moratorium on further nuclear tests. Both have issued regulatory orders to control the export of



nuclear technology and materials. Both sides agreed to resume their bilateral talks at the level of Foreign Secretaries who agreed on an eight item structured agenda to discuss all the contentious issues between the two countries in an integrated and simultaneous manner.

#### Lahore Summit (February 1999)

The Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met at the Lahore Summit (20-21 February 1999) which was described as a "defining moment" in Indo-Pak relations. In the Lahore Declaration and other related documents, both leaders reaffirmed their resolve to take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons and discuss the concepts and nuclear doctrines with a view to elaborating measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields aimed at prevention of conflict. A small group of Indian and Pakistani experts met to produce a joint paper on nuclear CBMs. In view of the worldwide concern and in the light of experience of other nuclear weapon countries the CBMs in the India-Pakistan nuclear context should include —

#### Strategic and Nuclear Doctrine

Both countries may immediately evolve strategic and nuclear doctrine, which should emphasise:-

- ✓ Policy issues to be decided by the civilian governments;
- ✓ Final authority to authorise the use of nuclear weapons to rest with the Prime Ministers;
- ✓ Implementation of the policy only by an authority designated by the respective governments;
- ✓ A structure for command, control, communications and intelligence should be institutionalized in both countries;
- ✓ Both should evolve suitable and transparent mechanisms in totally eliminating chances of accidental and unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, and missiles.

#### Minimum Deterrence

- ✓ Both countries may reach understanding on what constitutes minimum deterrence for both sides;
- ✓ Both sides may not exceed modest arsenals that can assure minimum deterrence to them;
- ✓ The minimum nuclear deterrence capability should be credible. In other words, the nuclear deterrence may be modest but adequate to survive attack and deliver retaliation;
- ✓ Stockpiles of the fissile materials should be taken into consideration in evolving credible nuclear deterrence;
- ✓ Both countries should consider possibility of creating Nuclear Risk Reduction Centres;
- ✓ The negligible warning time about nuclear and missile attacks should be fully converted into a factor of mutual stability and restraint;
- ✓ Both countries may consult each other on Nuclear Safety Measures in South Asia to prevent nuclear hazards and to share their experience with each other on technical safety and security issues.

#### Political - cum - Nuclear CBMs

- ✓ Bilateral talks between India and Pakistan should be resumed to promote mutual understanding on security related issues,
- ✓ Both may discuss to arrive at mutual understanding in addressing issues concerning NPT, CTBT, FMCT and other disarmament issues,
- ✓ Arms control must be comprehensive and not selective. To be effective and meaningful, these measures should cover nuclear, missile and conventional fields,
- ✓ Both countries may pledge not to indulge in an arms race - nuclear or conventional in South Asia,
- ✓ Peaceful settlement of the outstanding issues will create opportunities for the reduction in the defence budgets of India and Pakistan and the mutual and balanced reduction of their military forces,

weapons systems and armaments,

- ✓ Steps may be negotiated for creating greater public awareness about the cost and effect of the nuclear arsenals, about the danger of over confidence and the pitfalls of political blackmail,
- ✓ The hazards of using nuclear weapons in the fields of political, military, economic and human safety should be widely disseminated,
- ✓ Both may amicably reach an understanding on the non-use of nuclear weapons. India had proposed a non-first use of nuclear weapons. Pakistan on the other hand had proposed renunciation of use of force - nuclear and conventional and peaceful settlement of disputes. Pakistan feels that its proposal would automatically subsume the Indian proposal. Furthermore Pakistan argues that the nuclear and conventional CBM's are hard to separate from each other.

#### Economic CBMs

It needs hardly any emphasise that the SAARC process should be resumed without further delay. The postponed 11<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit should be reconvened along with the related meetings. SAARC's inability to meet regularly at a time when challenges posed by globalisation and a rapidly evolving global economic and political architecture have created a situation in which the South Asian region has been unable to evolve a cogent and a cohesive response at the regional level to these new challenges. South Asia has thereby been unable to fully take advantage of opportunities offered by the multidimensional process of globalisation.

SAARC has largely remained on inter-governmental process, but the civil society must be enabled to involve itself in SAARC activities. SAARC needs a people's focus and broad base its programs whose impact first and foremost be felt at the



level of common people of South Asia.

The decisions taken at the successive SAARC Summits should be implemented particularly the decision to establish Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and move towards the eventual establishment of a South Asian Economic Community.

All round efforts must be made by the government and the civil societies to make a dent on poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation and social and other pressing problems through value added programmes.

### **Confidence Building and Civil Society**

With the rapidly changing global geo-strategic environment, the concept of peace, security and development has been radically defined. Peace no longer means peace at the battlefield. It means peace where we live, peace where we work, peace where we worship. In other words peace in the entire civil society.

Security is no longer measured in military terms only; it includes economic security, human security and indeed comprehensive security.

Development has undergone a profound change. The Right to Development has been recognised as a fundamental human right. Its object is the individual human person and not the government. The right to development includes individual's political rights, economic rights social rights and cultural rights. These rights are inter related, indivisible and universal. These rights can best be enjoyed in a participatory democracy in which all segments of civil society participate for the common good of all.

**The Civil Society** has thus a vital role in confidence building in South Asia. Apart from the institutions, the Track – II process has contributed towards confidence building in South Asia. According to a research paper prepared by a Canadian think tank, there were

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approximately 38 such Track II channels working in South Asia in 1998-99. Regular interaction between groups of scholars, experts and retired diplomats and military officials has been going on between India and Pakistan for the last ten years when the well-known India-Pakistan Neemrana Initiative was launched in October 1991. Another Track II initiative related to interaction in nuclear related issues between the experts from USA, China, India and Pakistan known as the Shanghai Initiative. Four rounds have already been held in Shanghai, Geo, Islamabad and Washington D.C. to evolve nuclear confidence building measures.

**Similar Track II** interaction has been going on between India and Bangladesh between India and Nepal and among other South Asian countries.

**NGOs** are playing an increasingly positive role in reducing tensions and cre-

ating goodwill and understanding between the civil societies of the South Asian countries.

**People to People Contact or Track III channel** have proliferated and all segments of civil societies have been brought into regular contacts with their counterparts in South Asian countries.

**The Role of Technology** particularly the Information Technology in the CBM process in increasing and a quantum jump is on the horizon within the next few years.

**The Role of Media** is vital in the CBM process and regional institutions such as SAMA (South Asian Media Association) can make positive impact on the CBM process in South Asia.

**Establishment of a Peace and Security Forum In South Asia**

In South Asia, the absence of an institutionalised framework for considering regional peace and security issues has

hindered the progress towards forging mutual trust and confidence. At the 1988 Male's SAARC Summit, the leaders of the seven member states, started an informal process of political consultations to enhance goodwill and confidence. In its report the SAARC Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) endorsed this process and unanimously recommended that the process of political consultations be carried forward and operationalized. South Asia can learn from the experience of ASEAN where ARF was established to consider the political and security issues in a sustained and regular manner. Likewise the OSCE has enabled the European Union to create a formal forum for evolving response to security issues in Europe. There is an imperative need to establish a South Asian Security Forum to provide a formal framework for regular consultations at the various levels to the seven South Asian States. This would be the most effective confidence building measure in our tension-ridden region.