



New Paradigm of Security, Confidence Building & Regional Cooperation in South Asia

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South Asia is a region rich in culture, natural and human resources. It has given profound influences to the world by giving birth to the Buddhism, the Hinduism, Ayurveda, etc.

Nowadays, however, while the region contains more than 20% of the world's population, it is home to 40% of the world's poor. According to the World Bank Annual Report 1999 and 2000, the reasons for this situation are:

- a) Under-investment in human capital and poor health conditions, (South Asia has the world's lowest adult literacy rate (48%) and one-third of the world's maternal deaths. More than half of the region's children under 5 years are malnourished and some 29 million, i.e. more than a third of the world's working children aged 10 to 14, live in South Asia),
- b) Little integration into the world economy, (South Asia accounts for only 1% of world trade and receives just 3.6% of net private long-term capital flows to developing countries.),
- c) Widespread civil conflict and political unrest, (Afghanistan, Bangladesh <political strikes, hartals>, civil conflicts in Sri Lanka, Maoists insurgency in Nepal, long-standing conflict in Kashmir), and,
- d) Environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and social exclusion.

Environment degradation is affecting human lives in following ways:

- a) **Some 20% of the total burdens of disease in South Asia are due to environmental causes**, of which over half from diarrheal diseases and lack of water and sanitation. In India alone, illness related to water and sanitation lead to about 0.5million deaths a year of children under five, indoor air pollution from cook stoves is estimated to cause another 0.5million deaths a year of children and women.
- b) **Urban air pollution in South Asian cities and industrial pollution account for three percent of the burden of disease translating into over 100,000 premature deaths a year.** (World Bank 1999 "Environment Matters")
- c) **Global warming is an important threat to the security of the people and nations of the South Asia.** The rise of sea water level will have a critical effect of the existence of island countries, such as the Maldives. **Around 80% of its land area is less than one meter above sea level.** They are also vulnerable to droughts and saline intrusion into their fresh water aquifers. A 1-meter rise in sea level would cut Bangladesh's rice production in half. (World Bank, "World Development Report 2000"). Larger-scale droughts will hit adversely agricultural production and will cause large costs of human, animal and plants lives. These problems will be augmented by related massive flow of refugees. (Lal. 2000)

These actual losses of human lives and financial costs in the past and potential ones in future are definitely much more significant than the number of soldiers killed during military conflicts in the region and expenditures made in relation to these operations.

What is the way to get out of current situation in the South Asia? What is a new idea required to overcome present difficulties? Who should take initiatives to turn idea/dreams into realities? These questions will be dealt with in this paper.

The views expressed in this paper are purely author's personal views and do not necessarily represent the view of FASID (Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development, Tokyo, Japan).

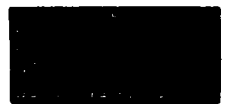
1. New concept of security

Establishing a new concept of security, which encompasses not only military security but also broader issues as poverty reduction, environment conservation, energy and food sufficiency, will be critically important. Countries in South Asia can promote regional cooperation based on this new concept of security. The very process of promoting regional cooperation will enhance mutual trust and confidence in the region.

It is encouraging to note that in South Asia a number of research institutes' directors having military background increasingly share this new concept.

For example, Maj.General (Retd.) Dipankar Banerjee, Executive Director, RCSS (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka) argues that the globalization (including communication revolution,) is making national boundaries much less important and progress of democratization, coupled with the economic aspiration of the people, will make the role of economy a paramount factor. The change to see more importance in

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security of food, energy and ecology will cause a shift from a state-centric security perception to individual security and human security. (ICRIER 1998)

Air Commodore, Jasjit Singh, Director, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, cites followings as issues of concern in relation to the security in the region:

- a) Transnational challenges, some of them promoted through ideological processes,
- b) Drug trafficking,
- c) Proliferation of small arms and light weapons, tools for terrorism,
- d) Poor record in human development, in education, well-being, access to safe water, and so on,
- e) Energy security (India's import dependency on crude oil increased from 33% in 1986 to 51% in 1997, it will jump to 70% in a few years.)

He recommends regional energy cooperation among South Asian countries.

Natural gas trade between Bangladesh and India as well as power supply to India from Bhutan and Pakistan are viewed as candidates for that matter. Joint ventures among South Asian entrepreneurs can be established in communications, inland waterways, ports etc, he argues. (ICRIER 1998.)

These views are also supported by some of Pakistan's former high officials. Mr. Shahriyar Khan, former foreign secretary of Pakistan, says that economic, social and humanitarian deprivation of population will increase the risk of fundamentalist terrorism. Children of poor families are sent to Madrasa, where parents do not have to pay and children get a meal a day. He also feels that regional cooperation in energy, gas pipelines, power sharing, water management, communications, highways should be promoted. (ICRIER 1998)

The background paper for a "Workshop on Environmental Security in South Asia" organized in October 2000 by TERI (Tata Energy Research Institute) in New Delhi shows South Asia's environment degradation, coupled with massive poverty and population increase will have negative impacts on agricultural and fishery production leading to large scale displacement and cross-border migration. Followings are some of concerns raised. (TERI 2000)

- a) **Land degradation:** In India 45million tons of agricultural production is lost due to soil erosion annually. In Pakistan salinity is known to reduce crop yields by as much as 30%.
- b) **Water availability:** In India the per capita water availability declined from 6000 cubic meters per annum (cm³/yr) in 1947 to 1998 cm³/yr and is expected to decline further to 1600 cm³/yr by the year 2017. Ground water depletion has emerged as a major concern in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. 70-80% of the agricultural production in India depends on ground water irrigation. The aquifers in Mehsana and Coimbatore districts have been depleted and in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Gujarat the extent of over exploitation of ground water ranges from 100%-260% as compared to the critical level of 85%. In Bangladesh, arsenic contamination of groundwater has been linked to the intensive use of fertilizers and is a potential hazard for about 1 million people.
- c) **Migration:** Environmental degradation as well as population pressures on the scarce natural resources in Bangladesh have contributed to a large-scale migration of Bangladeshis to the north-eastern states as well as to some of the large urban centers in India. About 12-17 million Bangladeshis were estimated to have migrated to India by the year 1993. This has resulted in the on-going civil strife in Assam.

It is important to note that poverty has been the major cause and effect of envi-

ronmental problems. It is therefore futile to deal with environmental issues without considering poverty reduction. Resource rich countries need to recognize that environmental vulnerability of weaker neighbours will lead to spillover effects that may prove to be detrimental to the well being of the region as a whole.

The transboundary nature of global environmental problems suggests that cooperation and not competition, between states represents the best strategy for addressing these concerns effectively. Responding to environmental problems and jointly attacking poverty could be an important means to generate trust and goodwill among disputing groups of people as well as among neighboring countries.

2. Regional cooperation as a mean of confidence building

(1) GMS

Until late 1980's, relations among the six countries that share the Mekong River (NB) were strained and trade and other forms of cooperation were very limited.

(NB) Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

After the end of the Cold War and start of transition to market economy in former socialist countries in the region, ADB initiated inter-country consultations in early 1990s. This initiative has led to establishment in 1992 of the **Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Program. (GMS Program)**. However, it is important to note that ADB's role was one of the facilitator and important decision on promoting the GMS Program have been always taken by participating countries themselves.



In pursuing the program, a pragmatic and a result-oriented approach was adopted. In the third Ministerial Conference in April 1994, an important agreement was reached that GMS projects could be implemented without having a consensus of all GMS member countries, if relevant countries agreed on them. Initial focus of GMS Program was on basic infrastructure that would help link the subregion and enable development of the resource base. Transportation and energy infrastructure were the main priorities. Later on, increasing attention has been given to other sectors: human resource development, tourism, the environment, trade and investment. (Human resource development initiative have included attention to training standards and accreditation/certification, and to ways for mitigating the transborder spread of communicable diseases.)

For many of these sectors, working groups and sector forum, with the participation by the World Bank and other donors, have been established.

In preparation of the projects, ADB has supported 34 technical assistance (TA) projects under the GMS Program, involving US\$44 million of resources from the Bank, cofinanciers, and the GMS governments. Some of these TAs were for the preparation of infrastructure projects and support of Ministerial and forum/working group meetings. (Japan Special Fund to ADB has contributed in funding more than half <US\$23 million> of these TAs).

There have been nine Ministerial-level Conferences on Subregional Cooperation. These Conferences, attended by economic ministers rather than foreign affairs ministers, were vital in setting the agenda and direction for subregional economic cooperation. Based upon these directions, priority projects and initiatives are endorsed and donor assistance mobilized. ADB's TAs and experience in aid coordination and its role as a cata-

lyst in mobilizing cofinancing have been useful in pushing through the GMS Program. (The GMS unit of ADB, supported by the technical expertise of the Sector and other Departments of ADB, has been providing advisory and secretariat-type supports to the Ministerial Conferences, sector forums/working groups of the GMS Program).

To date, ten subregional infrastructure projects are under implementation or have been completed with overall investment amounting to about US\$ 2 billion. ADB has provided US\$772 million in loans and mobilized US\$234 million in cofinancing for six transportation and energy projects.

Regional cooperation in infrastructure being implemented, the GMS Program is increasingly focusing on supporting private sector initiatives related to joint ventures, small scale industries, and so on. It is envisaged to strengthen cooperation with chambers of commerce in developed countries. A pre-investment study on East-West Corridor linking Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Myanmar has focused not only on transport but also on economic potentials around the Corridor.

While the peace process in Indochina brought the political support to the GMS Program, the collaborative process of promoting the Program in its turn has reinforced the mutual trust among the member countries.

In November 1999, the "Agreement for Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Goods and People" was signed the Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. In April 2000, the "Commercial Water Navigation Agreement for the Upper Mekong/Lancang River" was concluded among the Lao PDR, PRC, Myanmar and Thailand. Further, regional power trade, transmission master plan, GMS telecommunications "grid", customs procedures simplifications will be discussed.

The GMS Ministerial Statement issued at the Ninth Conference on Economic

Cooperation (Jan. 11-13, 2000, Manila) sets forth four GMS strategic thrusts:

- a) Development of the Economic Corridors, ...East-West Economic Corridor, linking Viet Nam, Lao PDR, and Thailand, and extending to Myanmar.
- b) Opening borders for the freer movement of people and goods,
- d) Environment Strategic Framework ...Focusing on transborder issues of water utilization management, particularly with regards to the cumulative environment impact assessment of hydropower projects, deforestation and trade in illegal timber and wildlife products.
- e) Targeting regional cooperation for poverty reduction ...GMS Program should ensure that regional cooperation initiatives are designed to assist the poor. ADB considers that regional cooperation can be instrumental for pro-poor growth in the GMS countries by:
 - a) stimulating growth in border areas that are often the poorest areas of the country;
 - b) facilitating access to markets through infrastructure that could further enhance agricultural production and raise rural incomes;
 - c) reducing the marginal cost of providing services, such as telecommunications and electrification to the rural areas through region-wide transmission links; and
 - d) strengthening participation of stakeholders particularly affected people by the GMS projects, civil society, and NGOs.

(2) SAARC

SAARC regional cooperation has been a subject of discussion among politicians, high-level government officials and research institutes, rather



than that of detailed examination of specific project proposals.

Though SAARC exists since December 1985, the progress toward regional cooperation has been slow. Major focus has been on trade rather than regional cooperation at specific sector/project level.

Japanese government has been supporting SAARC since 1993, by inviting SAARC secretary general, director generals of ministries in charge of SAARC in member countries, SAARC chamber of commerce, and also by funding number of symposium/seminars on South Asian economic integration and regional cooperation.¹ Japan is the only country outside SAARC to have created a special fund in support of SAARC. (Total cumulative contribution by the government of Japan to "Japan/SAARC Special Fund" amounts to US\$212.5 million.) However, it is important to note that Japan's role is one of the facilitator and important initiatives on promoting the SAARC cooperation have to be taken by SAARC member countries themselves.

The Ninth SAARC Summit held in May 1997 at Male, Maldives constituted a Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) of SAARC mandated to undertake a comprehensive appraisal of SAARC and to identify measures including mechanisms to further vitalize and enhance the effectiveness of the Association in achieving its objectives.

The GEP listed followings as some important achievements of SAARC during its 12 years between 1985 and 1997:

- * Integrated Programme of Action, forming the core programme for regional cooperation
- * Setting up of four regional centres to supplement the work of the Technical Committees,
- * Conclusion of two conventions to provide a framework for coopera-

tion, i.e. the SAARC Regional Convention on

Suppression of Terrorism (1988), and the SAARC Convention on Narcotic drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1990)

- * Establishment of SAARC Food Security Reserve
- * Promotion of people-to-people contact, i.e. SAARC Audio-visual Exchange Programme, SAARC Chairs, fellowships and Scholarships Scheme, SAARC Volunteer Exchange Programme, and the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme

The GEP, however, pointed out limitations of SAARC. Major issues are:

- * SAARC is still very far from maturing as regional economic grouping. SAARC countries have not developed any collective leverage in global economic forums.
- * Energy, manufacturing, services, money and finance are still outside the pale of SAARC cooperation
- * Decisions taken at the highest political level remain unimplemented, due to absence of clear priorities and plans of actions as well as lack of funding, and so on.

The GEP recommendations include, among others, followings:

Economic Cooperation?

- a) Ultimately, a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) should be established by the year 2020,
- b) The negotiations for the SAFTA treaty should be concluded by 1999
- c) South Asian customs Union (SACU) should be created by 2015,
- d) Trade facilitations measures (standards and custom procedures harmonization, common tariff nomenclatures, adoption of regional rules of origin, adequate transport and transit facilities.)
- e) Transport facilitation (transit facilities, improvements of entry points, transshipment facilities, etc)
- f) Regularization of the informal labour movements in the region,

separating movement of labour for seeking genuine economic opportunities from movement for other purposes),

- g) Partial convertibility of currencies on capital account for the limited purpose of investment in the least developed and small economies of the region,
- h) Common Investment Area for Flow of Foreign Direct Investment,
- i) Size of South Asian Development Fund (SADF) to be augmented to US\$ 500 million.
- j) South Asian Development Bank (SADB) should be created
- k) Regional Infrastructure to be developed, including South Asian energy grid,
- l) Macro-economic policy to be coordinated,

Social Sector Cooperation?

- a) Stabilization of population
- b) Education and Human Resource Development
- c) Empowerment of Women
- d) Promotion of Children Welfare and Health
- e) SAARC Social Charter to be drawn up
- f) Poverty Eradication
- g) Environment Protection

Despite wide range of these GEP recommendations, the actual progress in the SAARC regional cooperation has been slow and a number of the regional projects in infrastructure sector are still at concept stage. (See Table 1 in Page 14.)

3. Regional cooperation from donors' perspective

Regional Cooperation can help enhance mutual trust among the countries concerned. It will enlarge and consolidate security basis of these countries.

It will be an important instrument to achieve poverty reduction, economic growth, and environment conservation and to promote peace and devel-



opment. These are major objectives of Japan's ODA Charter adopted by a Cabinet Decision in 1992. Promoting regional cooperation in South Asia is clearly mentioned in the "Japan's Medium-Term Policy on ODA" announced in 1999. From private investors' point of view, security is one of the prerequisites in deciding investment abroad. In other words, regional cooperation, by providing good security environment, will contribute to bringing larger amount of private investments. From all of these reasons both multilateral and bilateral donors

place high priority in assisting regional cooperation.

4. Bottlenecks, constraints and countermeasures in promoting South Asian regional cooperation

Until to date, regional cooperation in South Asia has been moving slowly. Compared with GMS case, major constraints and difficulties seem to be:

- a) **Longstanding political difficulties**
While the GMS Program started after political conflicts among

member countries had been more or less settled, in South Asia these conflicts still persists. (Kashmir on top of them.)

b) **Different size of member countries**

Unlike the case of GMS Program, India is outstanding country in terms of the size of population, economy and military power in SAARC member countries.

c) **Insufficient institutional framework, including SAARC Secretariat**

Promoting regional cooperation involves lot of coordination work at various levels among different ministries (ex; power, transport, environment, etc.) among the concerned countries. In order to materialize good intentions and concepts into well-prepared master plan and feasibility studies, enhanced technical expertise, information and statistical base and sufficient budget allocation are indispensable. Financial soundness of the entities concerned (such as entity to buy power from neighbour country) is essential.

To deal with these issues, following approach may be suggested:

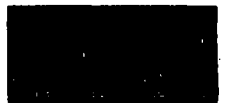
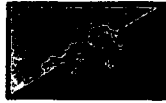
- a) **New concept of security should be shared among countries concerned.** This will reduce political tension and encourage countries to jointly tackle "Common Enemies", i.e. poverty, environment degradation (including critical issues of water and natural disaster). The role of research institutes, journalists are important in mobilizing public support among SAARC countries in this regard. Over a longer term, role of education is critical in nurturing

(South Asian Regional Cooperation Projects in Power, Energy and Transport Sectors) **Table 1**

Existing Cooperation	Feasibility Studies (In process or In preparation)	Concept stage
Between India and Nepal: Nepal exports about 23GWh electricity to the Eastern region of India and imports 60GWh from Eastern and Northern region of India. This helps both countries avoid the constructing high cost grids across mountainous areas.	Between India and Nepal: Based on Mahakali River Water Sharing Agreement in Jan.1996, the two countries have agreed to commission a project report for a 1200MW dam on the Kosi River.	Between India and Nepal: 6000MW hydropower project at Pancheshwar on the Mahakali River and a 600MW project on the Buri Gandhak River in Nepal with the objective of power sharing are under discussion.
Between India and Bhutan: Current shortfall of power in India is about 70,000 MW. Bhutan has hydro potential of 30,000MW. Currently Bhutan has only 345 MW installed power generation capacity. 80% of generated power is being sold to India. This contributes to about 30% of the Bhutanese GDP. Chukha hydro project (336MW), designed and financed by India for Bhutan under an agreement to purchase surplus power by Eastern Grid of India on long-term bases, accounts for quasi totality of the power produced in Bhutan.	Between India and Bhutan: Japanese government (JICA) is supporting a feasibility study of a 765MW hydropower project in Bhutan. 765MW power project is a very large project in Bhutan where the power consumption is only about 70MW. The key question is the affordability of the project costing almost equivalent of total GDP of Bhutan, and the exchange risk associated to debt servicing in foreign currency, while Bhutan will get only Indian rupees from the power export. Financial soundness of Indian power sector needs to be improved. (State Electricity Boards' reform is essential.)	Between India and Bhutan: 900MW Chukha III and 1525MW Sunkoshi (Wengchu) hydro projects are being examined
Between India and Bangladesh (N.A)	Between India and Bangladesh ADB is supporting feasibility study of a power exchange project between Northeast as well as West Bengal States of India and Bangladesh.	Between India and Bangladesh Export of natural gas from Bangladesh to India.
Between India and Pakistan (N.A)	Between India and Pakistan Export of IPP power from Pakistan to India (This does not seem to be moving, particularly after the Kargil incident)	Between India and Pakistan (N.A)
Between Bhutan and Bangladesh (N.A)	Between Bhutan and Bangladesh (N.A)	Between Bhutan and Bangladesh Export of hydro power from Bhutan to Bangladesh (via India)
Between Nepal and Bangladesh (N.A)	Between Nepal and Bangladesh (N.A)	Between Nepal and Bangladesh Export of hydro power from Nepal to Bangladesh (via India)
Among All SAARC Countries (N.A)	Among All SAARC Countries (N.A)	Among All SAARC Countries Regional power grid covering all the SAARC countries to ensure free power trade under SAFTA

Source: Chander S., Nov.2000, and FUWA.Y 2000

N.A. - Not Applicable



deep-rooted aspiration towards regional cooperation among children and youths. Culture and education of Peace as advocated by UNESCO should be promoted among SAARC countries. Even a "SAARC Anthem" (perhaps without language, as there are so many different languages...) might help create a sense of being belonging to this region...because feelings and aspirations among people in South Asia are also important.

- b) India should play a key role in promoting SAARC regional cooperation, given its outstanding large-and-strong country status in the region. By making strategic unilateral concessions in number of economic aspects, India will be able to contribute to the region's stability and sustainable development, which will be India's own national interests over long term. It is encouraging to note that India has already started taking this approach in trade and investment discussions with other member countries.
- c) As for insufficient institutional framework and lack of financial resources, proactive cooperation with external donors might be useful. The GMS Program suggests that result-oriented collaboration with donors like ADB, having facility of providing both technical and financial assistances and having a function of mobilizing resources from other donors and private sectors, can go a long way in promoting regional cooperation. Though GEP's recommendation covers an extensive areas of cooperation, given various constraints, more focused step-by-step result-oriented approach might be advisable. The role of economic and technical ministries in identifying and preparing regional project is important. Their active participation to the SAARC regional cooperation should be es-

sential. Given the time, resource, and political constraints, SAARC sub-regional cooperation, such as South Asian Growth Quadrangle concept, involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, can be promoted.

- d) While political support to regional cooperation is essential, technical ministries should be encouraged to promote sector-level initiatives for cooperation with neighboring countries. Private sector should also be invited to take own commercial decision at micro project planning and execution. Depoliticization of deals will avoid unnecessary national prejudices and facilitate focussed discussions.
- e) Regional perspective should be brought into the sector planning process of each country. A "stand-alone" national infrastructure project can have substantial positive impacts at regional level. Jamuna Bridge (now called "Banghabandu Bridge") opened in June 1998 with financing from the World Bank, ADB, and Japan, connects the western and eastern half of Bangladesh. But it will be instrumental for promoting Indian traffic as well as Nepalese and Bhutanese trade by utilizing Mongla and Chittagong Ports in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Railways conversion to dual gauge track from Jamuna Bridge to Dhaka and onward extension of dual gauge and/or broad gauge will ultimately facilitate traffic with India's north-eastern states. ADB is preparing a project of about \$250 million for approval in 2001 for developing a North-South Road Corridor, linking Siliguri in the north of West Bengal to Calcutta, and Haldia Port in the south. A third investment project for inland waterways in West Bengal will be taken up in 2003. All these projects, especially the North-South road corridor, are important strategic components of a larger program of development for the South Asia Growth Quad-

rangle as a whole. Thus, "Think regionally, and act locally" may be a good indirect way for supporting regional cooperation.

5. Conclusion

The "enemy of nation" is not a neighboring country. There are many common enemies against which countries in South Asia should fight together. Those enemies are persistent poverty, degrading environment, lacking water and power, natural disasters and droughts associated with global warming, illiteracy, insufficient healthcare, and so forth. These factors are threatening daily lives of current as well as future generations, particularly the vulnerable groups of populations.

Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia, Director & Chief Executive, ICRIER (Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi) wrote:
QTE

There is no underestimating the need for a high level of preparedness in the context of national security. But equally, the only durable and sustainable route to peace and prosperity in the region must have at its base, not only discussion and consultation but also economic cooperation. The challenge before the policymakers in all countries of the region is how to rise above partisan politics and reorient their economic policies towards greater integration and better cooperation. This will make us all stakeholders in the prosperity of the entire region. Only then can we feel truly secure.

UNQTE - (ICRIER, 1998)

What can it be of use, if a national frontier is protected but poverty and pollution and poverty threaten the lives of the population?

If, however, countries in South Asia succeed in agreeing and acting on

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common approach towards peace and sustainable development in the region, it will be a "model-to-be-replicated" in the other parts of the planet. Yes, South Asia can be a model and donors, including both multilaterals and bilaterals should support any efforts to tackle jointly any problems. Despite current "measures" (sanctions) introduced in India and Pakistan after their nuclear tests in 1998, all donors should support new initiatives towards regional cooperation among countries in this region.

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