INTRODUCTION

The research reported in this dissertation is based upon a questionnaire sent to individuals who could affect policy dimensions in five SAARC countries: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The mailing list was drawn up in order to include both persons with academic interests and those professionally involved in informatics. A higher response came from Pakistani residents abroad than from those residents at home, although complete confidentiality had been assured. An important empirical finding that emerged was that in all the five SAARC countries the foreign policy and strategic policy communities place informatics at the forefront of new developments which can help in dispute settlement and conflict resolution. Although none of the respondents suggested an alternative conceptual framework, yet there is a remarkable convergence of interests and objectives when the suggestion is made that conflict resolution can be advanced by developing the linkage between technology and human resources through the optimum use of information and communication networks. The respondents continue to reflect the strong divergences in policy concerns between different SAARC countries (particularly Pakistan and India), but informatics is clearly perceived as a "window of opportunity" by nearly all the respondents. Much more
empirical work would have to be done than has been possible for this study, in order to provide comprehensive cross national research in the potential for informatics in the SAARC. The data generated by the limited survey for the present study is a useful aid to interpretation of the scope for political cooperation in SAARC region through the development and diffusion of information technology products in South Asia.

Table I gives the number of concerned persons in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka who replied to the questionnaire and also provided an overall judgement on the possible role of informatics in helping SAARC to achieve peace and development in South Asia.

Table II provides the text of the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to provide their personal views in addition to their "official views"; in many cases these were provided orally and taken down in short hand; in other cases unsigned notes were provided.

An effort was made to balance the respondents who were politicians on the "left" - "right" political dimension. Other categories covered included academics, experts in information and communication technology, economists, media representatives and members of the foreign policy and strategic studies community.

All the respondents were invited to give "policy
conclusions" which could help to set new priorities for SAARC at the regional level. Most of the replies although nationally oriented support the need for regionally coordinated science and technology efforts, with special emphasis on information and communication. Although a few respondents warned against the negative consequences of collaboration in informatics, most of the respondents stressed the advantages of a new techno-economic paradigm for utilising informatics in furthering peace and development in the SAARC countries.