Dimensions of National Security in the SAARC Countries

With the shrinking of our world, the perceptual parameters of the term "security" has paradoxically broadened. Security is the predominant concern of every nation which generally implies territorial integrity, stability of the government and realizations of other national and internal interest and safety of the life and property of their citizens from any threat (External or internal) which can damage their national core values. There are many threats to the security of a nation, which come in diverse ways and forms, varying in range and intensity of violence and pose risk to the security in diversified manner. The concept and nature of security differs from nation to nation, and time to time. Keeping in view the domestic policies and geo-political considerations.

As far as national security of SAARC countries is concerned, it is more complicated not only because of their border disputes, inter-state conflicts, aiding and abetting of militancy in other states, terrorist and secessionist problems, but also the nuclear capability of this region.

The extra-regional threats are posed in the South Asian region with the emergence of China as a nuclear power state, presence of big power's military bases in Indian ocean and the fall out of a possible nuclear conflict at the global
level, and the interventionary activities of developed countries in the internal affairs of SAARC countries. The SAARC member countries like other third world countries are economically, socially and politically backward. This backwardness has become a source of exploitation in the hand of strong powers, especially the developed countries of the West, and the International Monetary organizations such as World Bank and IMF, which amount to abridgment of their right to decide their own ways of economic, political and social development. The USA, from the very beginning, after the decolonization, used its economic assistance programme as instrument of coercion to effect changes in the policies of South Asian Countries as per its foreign policy objectives.

The other problem is the inter-state conflict and mutual apprehensions in the region. India and Pakistan have fought three times and nobody can completely rule out the possibility of these two countries engaging in an armed conflict again. The suspended miniwar in the Siachen Glacier and the continuing tension on Kashmir issue may be kept in mind. So it is said that peace and security of this region depends on India and Pakistan relation. When these two countries are at peace with each other South Asia by and large is at peace. If these two countries have troubled relations, South Asia is uneasy.
The third level of security concerns in South Asia is of internal stability and peace. South Asian region is now in the grip of sectarian and destructive forces, e.g., the problems of Kashmir, North-East, Gorkha Land and Punjab in India, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the Chakmas' problem in Bangladesh, the terai and hill tribes in Nepal, the Nepali origin in Bhutan and of North-West frontier, Baluchistan and Sindh in Pakistan. All these problems are fast assuming grave dimensions and if they are not tackled properly and in time, they may tear the South Asian Societies apart.

There are several views on the security of South Asian countries. But these views differ from state to state, keeping in view their domestic policies and geo-political locations. This is particularly true for the periphery states. While India, as a core state is inclined to evolve a security framework in regional terms, the periphery states tend to guide by inter-regional rivalries leading to trans-regional linkages.

Pakistan's security framework is conditioned by its rivalry towards India and by the Afghan problem. Nepal and Bhutan have the problems of weak buffer states sandwiched between India and China and linked traditionally to the dominant regional powers in South Asia. Bangladesh almost
surrounded by India. is faced with a different set of propositions. Sri Lanka and Maldives are island republics whose orientations are bound to be governed not only by their status as South Asian states, but also by the Great Powers policies in the Indian Ocean.

It is thus obvious that the basic problems of national security of the SAARC countries are more of perception. It is South Asian region where constituents have apprehensions and suspicions about each other. The political, legal, and territorial aspects of the problem in fact, revolve around the psychological problem. The national security problems of member countries can be settled and resolved if attempts are made towards greater regional cooperation, and confidence building in other words, if the SAARC is more strengthened.