Chapter II

Conflicts in South Asia: A Profile

South Asia, an important region consisting of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan, occupies an important strategic position in the world. The countries of South Asia –form a distinct geographical entity¹. The Himalayan mountains bound the region on the north, the Indian Ocean and its off-shoots – the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea – on the south, and mountains and jungles on the east. Only in the northwest where Afghanistan stands astride the junction of South Asia, the Middle East and central Asia, do the external geographic and political frontiers fail to coincide.² Thus, South Asia’s well-defined external boundaries provide one of the prerequisites for regional cohesion. “Traditionally, the South Asian sub-system includes countries of the Indian sub-continent from Afghanistan in the west to Burma on the east and south of Soviet Union’s Asian expanse and China. Both Afghanistan and Burma individually, are ‘borderline’ cases in that they belong to Southwest Asia and Southeast Asia respectively”.³ Barring the states of Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan, the rest of the South Asian region has been subject to colonial rule. These countries gained independence after Second World War. India got independence in 1947 and Pakistan came into existence as a result of partition of India in 1947. Sri Lanka got independence in 1948. Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign state after breaking away from Pakistan in 1971 (put in foot notes).

¹ Some writers include even Afghanistan in this region.
Although these countries differ from each other with regard to climate, race, religion and history, yet they possess some common features and constituted a single region. Most of the countries are economically very poor and majority of their people live below poverty line. The most predominant factor among these states is religion. In fact, some of the states like Pakistan and Bangladesh were created on religious basis. These counties are basically agricultural and industrially backward. These countries commonly faced the problem of unemployment, illiteracy, over-population etc. India has made considerable industrial progress, therefore, is an exception. Most of the countries of South Asia, with the exception of India are faced with the problem of political instability. And most of the countries do not have any close military links with super power.¹

South Asia a distinct entity in political and geographical terms remains essentially an Indo-centric region, with Indian dominance implicit in its political structure. India’s centrality in terms of both its geographical location and power potential is an important feature of the region, notwithstanding the existence of two relatively large states of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the smaller states of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives. Besides an asymmetrical power structure in which India plays the predominant role, the region is also characterised by a shared historical, cultural and linguistic heritage. In some ways, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal belong to the same civilizational area.⁵ This ethnic commonality serves to underscore the underlying unity of South Asia. While both India and Nepal are predominantly Hindu, the Hindus constitute the single largest religious minority in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. India is also having a larger Muslim population than Pakistan. Similarly, both the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka have close ancestral ties with South India. Bangladesh and West Bengal share a common cultural heritage. Language of Pakistan,


Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal figure among India’s important languages. To a considerable extent, the shared legacy of the British colonial rule with its attendant elite values and perceptions also sustains the underlying unity of the region.

In recent years they have realised the strength of unity and need of cooperation. Therefore, regionalism in South Asia is a recent development. The beginning of the 1980s witnessed the idea of regional cooperation receiving greater importance and popularity. Although at the regional level, the need of cooperation seemed to have already existed both in the political and intellectual circles.\(^6\) Yet it was only after May 1980, when the late President Zia-ul-Rahman of Bangladesh formally proposed it, that the government initiatives started. In spite of the initial hesitation and reservation shown by some of the South Asian governments. The idea gradually received wider appreciation and all the South Asian countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – agreed to discuss the matter at the foreign secretary level leading to the declaration of the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SAARC).\(^7\) Despite the efforts made by the South Asian countries to translate the idea of regional cooperation into a reality, the ultimate success of such cooperation still seems to be overcast by the shadow of suspicion and uncertainties that prevail in the domestic as well as regional sphere of the region. If regional cooperation implies establishing ‘creative relationship’ among the states of region, then the South Asian Regional Cooperation cannot be expected to have a smooth sailing in view of the domestic conflicts prevailing in each of the countries of the region and its intricate linkages with the regional interaction pattern in South Asia.

Despite the presence of a number of common features, the countries of South Asia has not been able to evolve cooperative relations and their relations are characterised by numerous conflicts. The countries of South

\(^6\) Bimal Prasad (ed.), *India’s Foreign Policy Studies in Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Vikash, 1979), p. 3.

Asia share a relationship of conflict and cooperation. This is so partly because
the common heritage has paradoxically also given rise to problems of national
identity among India’s smaller neighbours and consequently led to some kind
of a psychological distance. South Asia is a region that has been
experiencing periodic upheavals ever since the British departed and the
countries of the region attained independent status. Conflict and tensions
arose in South Asia mainly because of hasty departure of the British who left
many complicated and potentially explosive issues unresolved. The situation
was further complicated when the apprehensions generated, not only
exacerbated the existing sense of insecurity but also induced the leading
states of the region to opt for divergent paths. In addition, the early linkage of
regional interests with global developments not only cemented the adopted
divergent pursuits within the region but also periodically caused certain
amount of adjustment among the involved powers like U.S., Russia and
China.8

From the very onset of the process of decolonization, the South Asian
region has been beset with numerous inter-related domestic and inter-state
conflicts. These conflicts were rooted in the colonial past as well as the
dynamics of post-colonial socio-economic and politico-cultural development of
the South Asian societies. Intra and inter-state conflicts in the region have
often been compounded in the process of interaction with the outside world.9
The inter-state relations in South Asia and the overall security situation
prevailing in the region created a fertile ground for the involvement of extra-
regional great powers in South Asian conflicts.

Due to a bitter Hindu-Muslim rivalry in the sub-continent, the united
anti-colonial front of the two communities fell apart. However, on certain

8 Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, “Threat Perceptions in South Asia and their Impact on
Regional Cooperation”, in Bhabani Sen Gupta, ed., Regional Cooperation and

Outlook”, in Itekhaziruzzaman, ed., South Asia’s Security: Primacy of Internal
occasions, colonial and pre-colonial antagonism survived and even revived in politically relevant forms. Thus, post-colonial dynamics of intra and inter-state relations generated numerous conflicts between and among the South Asian countries which gradually transformed the region into an area of permanent mistrust endemic conflicts and recurrent wars.\textsuperscript{10} During the entire cold war period, two antagonists – India and Pakistan, dominated the conflict scenario in South Asia. The extra-regional great powers were also divided along the same line – the US and China on Pakistan’s side and erstwhile Soviet Union on India’s side. Along with India and Pakistan, these three powers – the US, the Soviet Union and China – have been the determinant of regional politics in South Asia with regard to conflicts. Conflicts in the region have often been complicated by such external competitive involvement.\textsuperscript{11}

The conflict scenario in South Asia, however, remained virtually unaffected by the withdrawal of competitive involvement of extra-regional great powers from the region. The primary reason is the fact that it has only removed the external inputs from the conflicts, which have been partly responsible for their outbreak or sustenance and never played the decisive role. A complex web of reasons on which conflicts in South Asia survive is rooted within. The regional situation is also a reflection of the domestic conditions prevailing in each of the countries of the region. If the countries in the region are marred by domestic conflicts of some sort or the other, the region is likely to pass through tension and instability. South Asian region had often been highly volatile. It is not only because of the severest disputes between the regional actors, especially India and Pakistan, but also because the individual states in the region had been perennially confronting serious domestic conflicts. Such conflicts are bound to have ramifications over the region in general. This has been well realised by the South Asian countries while agreeing to the framework for SAARC.\textsuperscript{12} The provision for the exclusion

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. p. 4.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. p. 5.
of bilateral and contentious issues from the SARRC deliberations in this regard illustrates nothing but the delicate nature of the South Asian regional situation.

At best, SAARC has got a limited success. A major reason why it has not been able to mark greater strides is the hard and painful fact that bilateral differences between member states continue to cast long shadow on the prospects for meaningful regional cooperation. These differences are basically political in nature and include internal political tensions affecting inter-state relations, bilateral disputes and differences; and conflicting external perceptions and security alignments. Internally, the South Asian nations are far from stable. The contributory factors to such instability are, glaring socio-economic disparities, ethno-linguistic strife and group feelings of political alienation and economic deprivation. These internal tensions have a shattering impact on the national social fabric and have a propensity to spill over the borders for a number of reasons, including the presence of similar ethnic groups across national frontiers, the phenomenon of transmigration of populations and the tendency of governments in South Asia to use the ‘external’ threat for distracting attention from or for overcoming domestic political and economic crisis. Because of the historical, religious and ethnic patterns, which cut across state boundaries in South Asia, these domestic problems cannot be separated from relations between states.

India is the ‘core state’ of the region with common boundaries and maritime links with the rest of the member states of South Asia. It has been involved in running disputes with almost all the other South Asian countries. As India and Sri Lanka have had serious differences over the Tamil question, with Sri Lanka suspecting its fostering irredentism being supported from across the narrow waters by word and by deed. Similarly, India-Bangladesh tensions are the consequence of several irritants, not the least among them

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14 Ibid.
being the questions of cross-border movements and incursions, alleged Indian involvement in the Chakma insurgency, unresolved disputes over their common maritime and land boundaries, the (now resolved) Teen Bigha dispute, the Farakka Barrage and sharing of river waters issues. India-Nepal relations for their part are troubled by the presence of large numbers of Indian migrants in Nepal, landlocked Nepal’s economic dependence on India and its need for equitable and separate trade and transit arrangements with its southern neighbours and Nepalese perceptions of Indian interference in their internal affairs. India exercises virtual control over the external policies of Bhutan, and the 1988 coup attempt in Male has been seen by some as providing India the opportunity to project its power across the ocean and establish its influence in the Republic of Maldives.

While South Asia is an integrated civilizational area and all the states in it started their evolution as nation-state simultaneously. There were basic differences between India and other countries. India was democratic, secular and federal and its states enjoyed linguistic autonomy. With the exception of Sri Lanka, India’s other neighbours were not democratic and all of them are theocratic states with Bangladesh teetering on the edge. None of them accepted linguistic autonomy or had a federal structure. While all countries of this region are poor and therefore needed developmental assistance. The leverage of our neighbours vis-à-vis aid donors was less than India’s because of its size and developmental level and therefore their vulnerability to intervention was much higher on this account also. Before going into detail about the inter-state relations, conflicts and cooperation among South Asian countries, it would be appropriate to provide a broad profile of the countries of this region.


Ibid.

South Asia: Broad Profile

India

India, comprising a natural sub-continent, situated between the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Extending from the Himalayas in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, India is inhabited by various linguistic, ethnic and socio-religious groups, which together form a national population second in size only to that of China. India is one of the oldest civilizations. After a prolonged struggle against the colonial rule, it attained independence on 15 August 1947. It adopted its own constitution proclaiming India as a sovereign democratic republic. India was partitioned on religious basis between India and Pakistan.

India has 72% of the region’s area and 77% of its population. It generates 78% of the GNP of South Asia. Indian union has a land area of 3.28 million sq. kms. It has one of the world’s most diverse populations, with most of the major races represented. There are Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and other minorities. India has over one billion population. Hindi, the official language of India, is the language of 30 per cent of India’s population. English is used as an associate language for many official purposes. The Indian constitution recognises 18 regional languages and 1600 dialects. The main languages are Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, and Malayalam etc. New Delhi is the capital of the country. According to the census, about 82 per cent of the population are Hindu and 11 per cent Muslims.

India is a union of states and union territories. The Constitution of India, which envisages a parliamentary form of government, is federal in structure with unitary features. The President of India is the constitutional Head of the Executive of the Union. The constitution provides that there shall

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be a council of ministers with the Prime Minister as head, to aid and advise the President, who shall in exercise of his functions, act in accordance with such advice. Real executive power, thus, vests in the council of ministers with the Prime Minister as head. There are governors of various units i.e. states and they are headed by the Chief Ministers. The legislature of the union consists of the President and two houses and is called the Parliament. Therefore, Parliament is bicameral comprising House of People and the Council of States. The House of People is popularly known as the Lok Sabha and Council of States is popularly called Rajya Sabha.

India has very higher rank among the industrialised states of the world. It ranks among the top ten industrial nations of the world. It has an increasingly powerful middle class. Most of the mineral resources, which are necessary for development in the economic sphere, are possessed by India. The Indian economy is potentially very strong with its large industrial output, technological knowledge and extensive reservoir of skilled manpower. Major exports include cotton goods, iron, raw jute and jute products, coffee, electrical goods, leather, handicrafts, diamonds, chemicals and software. The major imports are machinery, petroleum, chemicals, cereals, copper and zinc. The main industries are textiles, cement, iron, steel, and jute goods. India has the third largest pool of scientific manpower and is among the seven countries in the world having technological capacity to erect a complete nuclear power plant.

The majority of Indians (64%) earn their livelihood from the land with agriculture accounting for about 35% of national income. In fact, Indian economy is predominantly agriculture. Agricultural commodities are the main source of export as the tea accounts for about 40% of the agricultural exports.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Parmanand, no. 15, pp. 3-4.
Bangladesh

Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign republic on 16 December 1971, following the dismemberment of East Pakistan – as a sequel to Indo-Pak war. Bangladesh, with a territory of 55,600 sq. miles, is estimated to be the eighth largest in the world. It is also the world’s most densely populated country. It’s official name is the ‘People’s Republic of Bangladesh’. It lies in southern Asia. It is bounded on the west, north and northwest by India, on the east by India and Myanmar (formerly Burma) and on the south by the Bay of Bengal. It comprises the eastern arms of the Ganga, the Jamuna and the Meghna rivers. Their deltas, with many islands, form Bangladesh’s coastline on the Bay of Bengal. The country has a tropical monsoon climate and suffers from periodic cyclones. The average temperature is 19°C (67°F) from October to March rising to 29°C (84°F) between May and September. Dhaka is the capital of Republic and about 95% of the population speaks Bengali, the state language, while the remainder mostly uses tribal dialect. The national flag is dark green with a red disc slightly off centre towards the hoist. The Independence and National Day of Bangladesh is 26 March.

The population of the country currently stands at around 126 million. About 80 per cent of the people live in rural areas. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. Sixty per cent of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture is the single largest sector in the economy producing about 30% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product and employing around 60 per cent of the total labour force. Based on both indigenous and imported raw material, Bangladesh has a considerable number of small, medium and large sized industries in both the public and private sector. Sixty four per cent of the total area is under cultivation. Rice is the most important

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Parmananda, no. 15, p. I.

food crop. About half the world’s production of raw jute is produced in Bangladesh, which is the main foreign exchange earner. The main industries are jute, manufacturers, cotton, textiles, silk, fertilizer, engineering, shipbuilding, steel, oil refinery, paper, newsprint, sugar, chemicals, cement, leather etc. Main export items are jute and jute products, tea, leather and fish.

Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity are the four major religions in the country. More than 88 per cent of the people are Muslims and Islam is the main religion of the state. Hindus constitute only about 10 per cent of the population. The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees religious and cultural freedom to all citizens of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a unitary, independent and sovereign republic comprising three basic organs: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The President is the Head of the State and is elected by the members of Parliament. There is a council of ministers headed by a Prime Minister and a Parliament called the Jatiya Sangsad. The President acts in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister.²⁶

Bhutan

The kingdom of Bhutan lies in the Himalayan range mountains with Tibet (the X-izang Autonomous region) part of China to the north and India to the south. Bhutan has an area of 46,000 sq. kms. The Bhutanese call their country Druk-yul, the land of the Drukpas (the people) and of the Druk (Thunder Dragon as in the national flag of Bhutan). The ancient history of the Kingdom remains shrouded in mystery. Since the 8th century A.D., however, it is clear that Buddhism has played a large part in shaping the course of Bhutan’s history. Although Bhutan was unified under a central authority in the 17th century, evidence strongly suggests that it had existed as an independent entity from very early times. Bhutan’s population currently stands at 638,000 people. The Bhutanese population is formed of two main ethnic groups – the Drukpas, who are of Mongoloid origin and are Buddhists, and the

²⁶ Ranjit Kumar, no. 16, p. 231.
Lhatsampas, or the southerners, of Nepali origin, mainly Hindus. The official language is Dzongkha, spoken mainly in western Bhutan. Written Dzongkha is based on the Tibetan script. The state religion is Mahayana Buddhism, primarily the Drukpa school of Kagyapa sect. Nepalese settlers practice Hinduism, who comprises about one-quarter of the country’s total population. The Nepali speaking Hindus dominate southern Bhutan and are referred to as southern Bhutanese. Thimpa is the capital of Bhutan.

Bhutan is a monarchy; the head of the state is called King. It is ruled by the Wangchuck dynasty, which was founded in 1907 by King Ugyen Wangchuck. Over the years, the monarch of Bhutan has been the fountainhead of far-reaching and often dramatic changes in the legislative, judicial and administrative system in the country.

The roots of Bhutan’s economy are its natural resources: the agriculture and animal husbandry. With over 80% of the people dependent on subsistence farming, the Bhutanese economy is pre-dominantly rural. The share of the agriculture sector in the Gross Domestic Product has dropped to less than 50 per cent with the increase in the contribution of hydroelectric power generation and sale, which now accounts for over 30 per cent. The country has the potential to generate 30,000 MW of power from its rivers. Besides, electricity, Bhutan exports calcium carbide, wood products, and cement. The chief products are rice, millet, wheat, barley, maize, potatoes, oranges, apples, handloom, clothes etc. Bhutan also abounds in valuable forests. Tourism is the largest source of foreign exchange. The tiny Himalayan state, Bhutan has a geostrategic significance for India; India lies along the entire length of its south border with Tibet to its north from which it is separated by the relatively narrow part of the high Himalayas.

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27 Ibid., p. 232.
29 Parmananda, no. 15, p. 3.
Maldives

In the countries of India’s neighbourhood, the Maldives has been the least known and till recently the most insular. The civilization of Maldives as far as can be estimated dates backs more than 2000 years. Archaeological findings from many ancient sites in Maldives show ruins of old Buddhist structures. The evidence shows that at the time of conversions to Islam in 1153 AD the population of Maldives was mainly Buddhist.

Throughout its history, Maldives has remained independent, although the Portuguese occupied the country for 15 years in the 16th century. From 1887, Maldives was a British protectorate until it became fully independent on 26 July 1965. The Republic of Maldives is in southern Asia, which is an archipelago of tiny islands located in the central Indian Ocean. This country lying about 675 km (420 miles) southwest of Sri Lanka. The archipelago of the Republic of Maldives is made up of a chain of 1190 small and low lying islands. stretching over 800 kms. from north to south. Out of them only 198 islands are inhabited. Despite its relative closeness to the Indian landmass, it is unnoticed in the annals of history. The climate of Maldives is hot and humid. Male is the capital of Maldives. The population of Maldives is 270,101 (2000 census), Maldivians comprise of mixed race, unified through sharing a common history, language and religion. Divehi is the national language and English is used as a second language. Islam is the state religion and strength and backbone of the country. Islam permeates the entire fabric of the Maldivian culture, polity and civil society.

The Maldives political system is a unique blend of its history, traditions, Islamic faith and modern democratic principles. It has evolved over a period of many years, the first written constitution having been proclaimed in 1932, though unwritten constitutional principles had been in existence long before then. The Republican form of government in 1968 replaced the constitutional monarchy, with an executive President as the Head of State. A new

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1. Ranjit Kumar, no. 16, p. 234.
constitution, that is more comprehensive and in tune with the country’s democratic principles was adopted by the country on 1 January 1998. Elections are held on the basis of universal adult franchise and political parties do not exist.

The mainstay of the Maldives economy today comprises fisheries and tourism. Nearly 19% of the labour force is engaged in the fisheries sector, which accounts for over 6 per cent of the GDP. Tourism, which became a major industry since the mid-eighties accounts for 33% of the GDP. Industrial activity consists of a traditional and modern sector. The traditional sector consists of boat building, mat-weaving, rope making, blacksmithing, handicraft and other cottage industries. The activities in the modern sector include fish canning manufacture of garments, construction of fiberglass boats, production of cleaning fluids and bottling of aerated water. The country’s main imports are food (mainly rice), ships and boats, petroleum products and chemicals. The state has no road or railways. Island-to-Island transport by boat is the main means of communication.

In comparison to other south Asian states, the state of the Maldives is the most homogeneous in cultural terms. Till recently, Maldives has been the least known and most insular of the south Asian states. In the last two decades, however, its leadership has shed this isolation to a considerable extent and has been actively engaged in decisive various strategies to give an impetus to socio-economic development of the state, which falls in the category of the Least Developing Countries (LDCs).33 Religion has provided it with a strong national identity and cultural distinctiveness. The disadvantage of being small in size has several security implications.34

Nepal

The documented history of Nepal begins with the Changu Narayan temple inscription of King Manadeva I (464 A.D.) followed by Malla rulers

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among other important ones. Before Nepal’s emergence as a unified nation in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the designation of Nepal was applied only to the Kathmandu valley. Nepal had been segmented into more than 52 small principalities. Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Great King of Gorkha, was the maker of modern Nepal who united the country by 1769 by conquering Kathmandu valley and making it the capital.35

Nepal a militarily weak and economically underdeveloped state falls in the central Himalayan region between two colossal neighbours – China and India.36 “Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world”.37 Nepal is rectangular in shape and it covers an area of 1,42,212 sq. kms. with an average length of 885 kms and width of 193 kms. About 1/6 of the total land area is under cultivation and all the remaining land is covered by high mountains, snow and forests. The northern boundary of it is linked with Tibetan region of the People’s Republic of China. It is surrounded by India on the east, the south and the west. That’s why it is called as an India locked state. 83% of the land of it comprises high mountain and the hills and the remaining 17% forms the plains known as the Terai.

Nepal has a population of about 23.9 million made up of over 61 ethnic groups living in different regions. Speaking 70 languages and dialects. Nepali is the national and official language. Other languages include Maithili and Bhojpuri etc. Hindi is also spoken extensively in the Terai.38 Hinduism is the official religion of Nepal and Hindus constitute over 85% of the population. Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born in Nepal about 563 B.C. and Buddhists account for 7.8% of the population. A small minority of Nepalese adheres to Islam and Christianity.

35 Ranjit Kumar, no. 16, pp. 234-235.
37 Parmananda, no. 15, p. 5.
38 Europa, no. 22, p. 2856.
After 1951, Nepal has exercised multi-party democracy except during the period of about three decades from 1961 to 1990 when a party-less Panchayat system existed. But again Nepal restored a multiple system with a constitutional monarchy following the democratic movement of 1990. His majesty the king is the Head of State and the Prime Minister serves as Head of Government. Constitutionally, there are two houses of Parliament namely Pratinidhi Sabha (House of Representatives) and Rastriya Sabha (National Assembly). Recently, on 1st of February 2005 following the royal coup, King Gyanendra dismissed the Sher Bahadur Douba government and assumed all political powers. He declared a set of emergency and suspended the Fundamental Rights of the citizens. The seven major political parties constituted an alliance called “Alliance for restoration of multi-party democracy” which forced the King to restore democracy. On 24th April 2006 the King announced the restoration of democracy and reinstated the Parliament. G. P. Koirala of Nepali Congress became the President, heading a government of National Unity on 26 April 2006. In September 2006, interim parliament passed a law to strip the King’s post as supreme commander-in-chief.

The economy of the Nepal is mainly dependent on agriculture, which accounts for 41% of the GDP with more than 80% of the people dependent on it. Paddy, maize and wheat are the main crops. Manufacturing, trade and tourism follow farming as the main economic activity of the country. Hand knitted woolen carpets and readymade garments are flourishing industries in the country. Petroleum products, chemicals and drugs, food and live animals, vehicle, machinery and equipment are the major imports of Nepal.

Pakistan

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan appeared on the world map on 14th August 1947, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Quaid-e-Azam (the Great Leader), who is revered as the Father of the Nation. It came into
existence following the division of the Indian sub-continent. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan lies in southern Asia, bordered by India to the east and by Afghanistan and Iran to the west. It has a short frontier with the people republic of China in the far northeast. It is divided into four provinces: Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and the Northwest frontier province. Islamabad is the capital of the country.

The climate of Pakistan is dry and generally hot. It has an area of 8,03,400 sq. kms. and its population estimated in 2000 is about 137,510,000. The national language is Urdu while the official language is English. The major native languages are Punjabi (the language usually spoken in 48.2% of household), Pushta, Sindhi, Bluchi, Brahui, and Saraiki. The leading religion of Pakistan is Islam, which is the faith of about 95% of the people. Hinduism and Christianity form the leading minority religions. Other religious groups include the Sikhs, the Parsis and a small number of Buddhists.41

Pakistan’s economy is primarily agricultural. Agriculture and related activities engage 46.1% of the workforce and provide 25% of the GDP. Farm production and industrial growth has increased very rapidly. The main exports include cotton textiles, cotton yarn and thread, clothing, raw cotton, rice, carpets and rugs, leather, fish and petroleum products. The main imports include machinery, electrical equipment, petroleum products, transportation equipment, metal and metal products, fertilizer and foodstuffs. Consequently, Pakistan is now self-sufficient in basic foods.

The first direct elections were held in Pakistan in 1970-71 on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Of the 300 seats for direct elections (162 from East Pakistan and 138 from West Pakistan) Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won 160 seats, Pakistan’s People’s Party (PPP) led by Z. A. Bhutto 82 and others 58. The Indo-Pak war of December 1971 resulted in the dismemberment of East Pakistan giving shape to a new state called Bangladesh. In December 1971 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto replaced Yahya Khan as

41 Ranjit Kumar, no. 16, p. 236.
complain in India that its smaller neighbours are not sensitive to India’s interest and security concerns and are often a cause of domestic tensions. Besides, South Asia and its periphery has been the cradle of Islamic militancy, Jehad and resultant terrorism and which has also been training place and launch centre of Al-Quida brand of terrorism. The western society is now getting a feel of it but this region has been experiencing this menace since long. In fact, a terrorist attack on Indian Parliament in December 2001, led to a 10 months military standoff between India and Pakistan and the western world feared a nuclear war like probability. In this situation, it was difficult to imagine cooperative economic relations and partnership in South Asia.47

No other geographical region is influenced by a single power as much as South Asia is by India. India is not only the largest, strongest, and most developed country in South Asia; it also constitutes the core of the region. Other states of the region – Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives – show either a peripheral outlook or tend to look at other regions in search of identities as do Pakistan and to a lesser extent, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The interest of super power in South Asia further accentuates regional friction.48

Ethnic tensions in South Asia are Indo-centric whether it is a question of ethnic Tamils and Nepalis, Assamese-Bengali-Urdu dichotomy which led eventually to the break up of Pakistan, India, willingly or unwillingly, by virtue or its core geographic location and ethnic-religious pluralism is involved. Domestic ethnic conflicts have a spillover effect across state boundaries. The trans-regional dynamics of the role of expatriates and also of extra-regional powers can further exacerbate these ethnic conflicts.49

17 Ranjit Kumar, no. 16, pp. 126-27.
None of the countries, except Pakistan, can pose any military threat to India. They are all aware of India’s potential for destabilising them politically by taking advantage of their ethnic and religious problems. They are all conscious of the fact that bilaterally they cannot withstand Indian pressure. So they often opt for one of the two strategies; either to regionalise the problem so as to dilute the Indian pre-eminence or to assert their extra-regional connections to blunt the edge of Indian superiority.50

There are apprehensions in the minds of smaller countries that India’s overwhelming economic strength would cripple their domestic industries. Actually, there is a syndrome of asymmetry between India (76% of the total population and 77% of the regional GNP) and its neighbours. This is intensified by the fact that India is situated geographically at the centre of South Asian states, which have no common frontiers. The members of SAARC except Maldives, which is in Indian Ocean, surround Indian borders. They have linguistic and ethnic similarity and relations with the adjoining states of India. But still they live like estranged members of a family.

Though people in Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh speaks the same language and has same culture. Similarly, Tamils in Indian state of Tamil Nadu have across the sea cultural and language affinities and similarities with the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Likewise, the people in Indian Punjab and across the border in Lahore in Pakistan also and have similar life style and speak similar language. Even the Nepalese have relatives in Indian state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and they send their children for good and higher education to India. But among all these similar communities living across the border, the anti-India feeling persists. The animosity between the “estranged sisters” is a barrier to regional cooperation. It has isolated the region from other dynamic region. This stand is in sharp contrast to the emerging world trends towards cooperation. It is, therefore, logical that conflict prevention and resolution should be the foremost priority in the region.

50 Economic and Political Weekly, 19 February 1972, pp. 475-76.
In fact, after years of failed negotiations and tough talking the countries of South Asia would have to be serious to resolve their differences and simultaneously carry forward the process of peace, economic development and cooperation with all earnestness. For this a proper climate of trust and give and take has to be created to come to a possible resolution of the complex issues that divide, the sub-continent. The road to create conducive climate for peace perhaps lies through deeper economic and people to people contact between the two nuclear neighbours. Thus business leaders are pushing for this approach to create a positive atmosphere of cooperation in South Asia. Making a fervent appeal to the SAARC leaders to adopt the economic route to resolve political differences, the President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and industry, Mr. Macky Hashim said, “We admit that SAARC has an image of a giant who is still sleeping. The painful fact is that after a very promising start and several positive steps in the initial years, the SAARC process had seemed to have come to a virtual standstill, much to the disappointment of the business community, the political differences laid down a major hindrance in the field of trade and liberalisation. It is crucial for the development of the region to ignore our political differences as when economic advantages become obvious will political support be ensured”.

The concept of conflict resolution is not entirely new for South Asia. One of the most significant development with regard to conflict resolution between India and her smaller neighbours has been the resolution of the conflict between India and Bangladesh over the sharing of the Ganga water. Another important milestone, in this regard, has been the peace accord on Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) signed on December 2, 1997 between National committee on CHT and the Parbatya Challagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). An understanding reached between Dhaka and New Delhi in 1996 to cooperate with each other in dealing with cross border insurgency paved the way for the signing of the peace accord. The accord is in the process of implementation. The resolution of these two issues generated a remarkable

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51 SAFTA Seminar, New Delhi, 3rd March 2004.
confidence among the nations in the region and created a hope that other conflicts could also be resolved amicably.

Conflict Resolution process of non-military conflict were initiated between India and Nepal and between India and Sri Lanka. In 1996 India and Nepal reached an agreement on the integrated development of the Mahakali River. In 1998 India and Sri Lanka instituted a free trade zone.

The Resolution of the bilateral conflicts boosted mutual confidence in relations between India on the one hand and Pakistan on the other, in a significant manner. Facilitated by improved relations through conflict resolution mechanism, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal moved towards forming a sub-regional grouping within the broader framework of SAARC. One of the crucial outcomes of recent Indian initiative in the SAARC summit has been relative improvement of the bilateral mechanism for conflict management.

The conflict over the sharing of Ganga water has been resolved through conflict resolution approach whereas the conflict over Kashmir issue has yet to be resolved. In fact, the resolution of the conflict between India and Bangladesh over the sharing of Ganga water has been one of the significant developments with regard to conflict resolution in South Asia. Thus, conflict resolution approach between India and Bangladesh marked an end to the oldest and the thorniest conflict between Bangladesh and India. Likewise, the resolution can be applied to conflict between India and Pakistan as well as because since the late 1990s the region has become a nuclear flashpoint.

A highly complex process in the Indo-Pak relations, particularly along the line of control in Kashmir has also been accompanied by the efforts on the part of the two countries aimed at conflict resolution. Because the resolution of the other bilateral conflicts in South Asia boosted mutual confidence in relations between India and Pakistan. Therefore, the conflict resolution approach in Indo-Pak conflicts will strengthen the viewpoint that cooperation and mutual understanding facilitate peaceful resolution of the conflicts without making use of violence and war.