PREFACE

The concepts of region and regionalism occupy central place in the politics and international relations literature. Today, the systemic structure of international relations rests on regional cooperation. Collective actions of sovereign nation-states are a conceptual and practical challenge to all countries. It is especially obvious in Central Asia, where the newly independent states of the region are still in search of effective multilateral framework to enter into cooperative arrangements.

This thesis presents a comprehensive analysis of the distinct patterns of regional cooperation in Central Asia. It seeks to answer the questions: what are the issues involved in the process of regional cooperation in Central Asia; why there has been mixed result of regional cooperation in Central Asia; why there has been a gap between precept and practice when it comes to the rhetorical pledges to cooperation initiatives and their poor implementation in the period 1991-2003.

While exploring answers to these questions, this thesis seeks to test following set of hypothesis. Experiences from the era of former Soviet Union form the basis of regional cooperation among Central Asian states. Interdependence theory on interstate cooperation lends credence to this hypothesis. Secondly, competing ambitions of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for supremacy in the region have a direct bearing on regional cooperation in Central Asia. Thirdly, prospects of regional cooperation in Central Asia hinges on the role played by the great powers of the region like China and Russia and also United States of America. Certain aspects of hegemonic theory and their application to Central Asia prove this hypothesis. Fourthly, the character of post-Soviet states also mattered in shaping the nature of interstate politics that unfolded in the post-Soviet space. Regime approach illustrates this point. Other aspects of interstate relations in Central Asia can also be explained within the framework of realism and neo-realism. In short, one finds that realism and neo-realism that stress conflicting national interests among the local states, overall, offer a plausible account of why regional cooperation could achieve only mixed results in Central Asia.

The key task of the thesis is to analyse efforts at interstate cooperation in Central Asia and to assess how the outcome of such initiatives can best be
understood. The thesis is concerned primarily with multilateral cooperation, but also discusses bilateral cooperation wherever relevant.

In the present work a broad scope for analysing regional cooperation in Central Asia has been deliberately chosen by addressing all major linkages namely economic (trade, transport, transit), natural resource (water and energy), and security. There are several reasons behind this approach. First, all the areas considered are important in their own right as cooperation in these areas has a direct bearing on the process of economic development and modernisation in Central Asia. Secondly, there are important linkages between many of these areas, e.g., between trade barriers and concerns about security, between water and energy, and between trade competitiveness and transportation infrastructure.

The study consists of six chapters, including the conclusion. First chapter provides a theoretical understanding of regionalism with the help of various international relations theories on regional cooperation. While explaining significant convergences and divergences among the Central Asian Republics it also sheds light on the history of regionalism and the lessons which Central Asian states could learn from them.

Chapter two begins with an elaboration of the fallout of the break up of the Soviet Union and then moves on to analytical definition of trade cooperation. While outlining the current economic position in Central Asia, a detailed account of regional trade patterns is presented. This chapter also covers the process of institutionalisation of cooperation efforts in Central Asia in the sphere of economics. Then it deals with a comparative analysis of the declared goals and the real progress made in the past. The reasons of failure in regional economic cooperation have also been put under special scrutiny. An attempt has been made to outline the current economic position in Central Asia by discussing the requirements for regional cooperation and also the prerequisites for future transformation process in the individual Central Asian countries.

The key argument of this chapter is that conflicting national interests provide the best overall account of why regional cooperation in trade stalled. However, this factor was closely linked with that of divergent economic reform policies, which shaped the states' interests in relation to trade cooperation.

The third chapter deals with political and security cooperation. In the sphere of political and security cooperation concerns about national interests and
sovereignty are clearly the central features of cooperation patterns. The perceived threats from 'Islamic extremism', drugs and illegal migration are common to all Central Asian states, and as such, the states bear high degrees of interdependence. Faced with a common threat like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Central Asian countries declared their unity and intention to work together. State leaders used the forum of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) to project unity and resolve in tackling common threats. At times the countries were advocating a *de facto* 'defence union'. But in practice interstate cooperation was riddled with difficulties. In reality Uzbekistan's unilateral mining of its areas bordering Kyrgyzstan stalled the genuine cooperation in the sphere of security.

Chapter four gives an exhaustive account of interstate cooperation in Central Asia in the sphere of sharing of river waters, energy and transportation. In Central Asia water and energy issues are interlinked and it is more pronounced in the Amu Darya region. Few parts of the world need regional cooperation as much as Central Asia does in the field of water, energy and transportation. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan both export and import electricity to and from one another. The water that irrigates cotton fields in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan flows from rivers which originate in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In spite of these natural linkages effective interstate cooperation in these areas still remains elusive. This chapter also analyses transportation as an integrative factor in Central Asia primarily due to their shared Soviet past.

Chapter five sums up the problem areas which account for the slow progress made in regional cooperation in Central Asia. The post-Soviet Central Asia is characterised by a number of challenges arising from various primary problem areas. These problem areas can broadly be categorized into economic and non-economic categories. These Central Asian Republics are the titular nations which frequently represent the ethnic majority of their populace with the boundaries of the respective states also containing large minorities of other ethnic groups of this region, as well as sizeable Russian population. Thus the ethnic diversity, which created a conflict situation in Tajikistan also presents problems inside Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Second, the boundaries of the nation states that were created after the collapse of the USSR did not evolve from historical processes of ethnic settlement patterns, but
were more or less established by the Soviets in 1920s. Third problem area is the current economic situation which, in all Central Asian states, with the exception of Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan is cause for great concern and has been showing few signs of stabilization. Fourth, after the independence of the Central Asian states, serious conflicts have arisen over the regional imbalance over the usage of natural resources, especially, water. Whereas, some countries possess sufficient supplies of water others particularly Uzbekistan, are dependent on water supplied by neighbouring states. Fifthly, the environmental degradation of several regions, particularly the area around the Aral sea, has taken on dramatic proportions resulting in the rapid deterioration of living conditions, including a noticeable reduction in life expectancy. These developments may also engender destabilising tendencies. Sixth, the relatively similar economic structure of the Central Asian Countries also presents certain disadvantages for regional cooperation. The experiences of the countries of other regions have shown that regional cooperation projects frequently fail because the economies of the countries involved are too similar and do not complement each other. Some authors believe that this problem exists in Central Asia and are, therefore, holding little hope for the success of regional cooperation in Central Asia. Finally, the Central Asian Regional Cooperation has suffered an account of the clash of leadership ambitions between the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov and President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. Besides the above mentioned problems, the external factors are also posing some challenges in the way of regional cooperation in Central Asian countries.

While summing up the discussion, last chapter also makes an assessment of the prospects of regional cooperation in Central Asia.