Building Bridges

Strengthening Physical, Emotional and Economic Linkages in South Asia

Report of the Regional Dialogue
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Report drafted by Panchali Saikia, Pradeepa Viswanathan and Ruhee Neog
Research Officers, IPCS

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

CONSORTIUM OF SOUTH ASIAN THINK TANKS

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BRIDGING POLICY RESEARCH IN SOUTH ASIA

Konrad
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There is a lack of political will, the major reason for which are vested interests of security and intelligence agencies who cannot allow a tension free environment. South Asia is privy to democracies on paper, which are actually political dynasties in practice. The political leadership is kept in power by these very agencies and hence cannot remedy the situation.

PR Chari

Making Borders Irrelevant

PR Chari
Visiting Professor, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi

The theoretical concepts on which ideas of borders irrelevant are based on highlight the confidence-building measures (CBMs) modality to normalize relations between adversarial states. CBMs were very much the academic fashion about twenty years ago, and the high priest of this modality was Michael Krepon - he drew a distinction between military and non-military CBMs and State and people-centric CBMs; and believed that track 1.5 (which the ASEAN does very well) and track 2 initiatives ought to supplement track 1 initiatives.

It must be realized that borders also have a certain relevance, such as the unlikelihood of conflict over defined borders. Also, borders recognize the socio-biological compulsions of the territorial imperative. Non-recognition of borders is therefore a prescription for conflict. It could also be argued that borders have become irrelevant in any case with the advent of the nuclear age, because ICBMs have no respect for territorial divisions.

In 1947, the Border Commissions under Radcliffe was tasked with ascertaining contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims but also to take into account other factors in the division of Punjab and Bengal during Partition. The other factors were not defined but were supposed to include natural boundaries, communications, water courses, and irrigation systems. In practice, geographical principles were given short shrift and eventually Radcliffe made the divisions on communal lines which left its own anomalies. Building bridges therefore has to be seen against this backdrop of disruptions in the geo-strategic entity of South Asia which created deep psychological fissures. Thus, an enlightened reconstruction of past patterns of linkages and interactions is important.

Strengthening Physical, Emotional and Economic Linkages

With this as a background, what can be noted for future deliberations?

- Revive people-to-people contacts. There are fears that young minds will get subverted if there is a great deal of contact between countries, especially those that have had an adversarial relationship, but this can be overstated
- Re-establish disrupted patterns of communications and labour and capital mobility to play on ancient socio-economic and political linkages
- Set up joint institutions in border areas to improve quality of life and stem disruptive migrant flows
- Investigate joint developmental projects, such as development of irrigation, hydroelectricity and river valleys, which need not respect borders
- Revise retrograde visa rule which impede easy movement within the region
- There will always in winners and losers in any commercial relationship because of the different interests of traders and industrialists. There is therefore a need to find areas that will be agreeable to both
- Poor governance in border areas leads to state governments feeling edgy about freeing up borders

There is a lack of political will, the major reason for which are vested interests of security and intelligence agencies who cannot allow a tension free environment. South Asia is privy to democracies on paper, which are actually political dynasties in practice. The political leadership is kept in power by these very agencies and hence cannot remedy the situation. Building bridges therefore does not work easily in South Asia.

Education as a Regional Weld

Imtiaz Ahmed
Director, Centre for Alternatives and Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka , Dhaka

At the 13th SAARC Summit in 2005, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh proposed the setting up of a South Asian University. The Main campus was to be in Delhi, which meant that there would be regional campuses. There were regional dissenters who had a problem with the term 'main campus' but a compromise was reached at the last moment. Despite these compromises, the presence of the university itself allows for lessons to be learnt from past mistakes.

Education is a soft power and there is therefore a chance that it will not be neglected. However, it has to be dealt with strategically. The Chinese model is useful in this regard - there are 10,000 Indian medical students in China; after the US, students now prefer to go to China for higher studies.

An important discourse within building educational bridges is nationalism and the construction of the modern nation-state. This can be derived from Foucault's 'governmentality', which illustrates the application of governmental control or techniques to various ideational constructs. The very structure of inter-governmental negotiations is nationalist, rendering the structure of making borders permeable problematic. There is evidently a 'Lumpenization' of the

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mind and matter – South Asia is yet to produce a university ranked in even the first 500 in the world. The literacy rate is terrible. The complicity of the State in trying to control public universities is rampant – in Bangladesh, for instance, the vice-chancellor of a university will change as the regime changes.

To think that a history of mistrust and suspicion borne out of the idea of nationalism can be suddenly overcome is wishful thinking. South Asia does not have a post-nationalist poster-boy, apart from Tagore and Gandhi, for the present generation. Living with the discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries in the era of globalization is not going to work. Serious philosophical input, which goes beyond territoriality, is required. There is a need to reinvent 'South Asia' – the term currently looks at South Asia geographically and politically and has a limited focus - it should be expanded to include civilizational and historical perspectives.

Additionally, there is a South Asian fascination with colonial discourses, stemming from the 'white man's burden' of having to civilize the natives. However, this fascination is not accompanied by the realization that the Western experience (which in any case has been fraught with tension, such as the great wars and the Holocaust) could not necessarily be superimposed in South Asia. In the light of this, it must be noted that the educational bridges in existence are of a different kind - the confluence between religious schools and what is commonly referred to as religious fundamentalism. There is talk of modernizing madrassas, but the history of these religious schools is easily forgotten: a pre-colonial madrassa syllabus was divided into the rational sciences and theological sciences. The *Alia* madrassas were established under Viceroy Hastings, and the traditional rational sciences syllabus was replaced to incorporate Western Enlightenment.

Reconnecting and Revisioning the Old Routes

Significant Nepalese Routes for Regional Economic Integration
Nishchal Nath Pandey
Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, Kathmandu

For many decades, Nepal has been a transit point of trading between India and China and has benefited from the growing Sino-Indian trade. The period of the Licchavi dynasty in Nepal was known as the golden period of Nepal's history, and this was because Nepal had well connected road linkages with Tibet and India. But in the latter half of the 20th century the trade routes connecting India and China through Nepal were closed with China's internal political situation deteriorating after 1920 and British rule in India. This led to the decline of India's export basket and affected Nepal's economy.

Some of these trade routes between Nepal-Tibet and India-China which were operational historically are significant for the current trade linkages of these countries. The reopening and reconnecting these old trade routes will not only enhance the economy of Nepal but will also boost regional cooperation.

The Arniko Highway, which has been operational for more than 40 years, is one such significant route. This highway initially connected Kathmandu with Kodari, 115 kilometres north east of the Kathmandu Valley, on the Nepal-China border. It now also connects to the southern plains of Nepal with the Sindhuli Highway in the Terai. The Sindhuli highway further connects to Uttar Pradesh in India.

The second road of significance is the Syafrubesi-Rasuwagadi road which was a much-used traditional entry point for Nepali and Tibetan traders. The Chinese government has developed Kerung, a town 25 km from the border, as a trade centre, and has built a black-topped road to connect it with Rasuwagadi. On the Nepal side the 17 km stress road is under progress with Chinese assistance and will be operational soon. The road once operational will be the second road linking Tibet to Nepal connecting the Trishuli highway of India.

The third project of significance for Nepal is the extension of the Golmud-Lhasa railway. Once the railway is connected to the Nepal border it will be the shortest connecting link form north India to Nepal. It is estimated that the railway to Shigatse in Tibet will be completed by 2013 and to the Nepali border by 2017. The Chinese Ambassador to Nepal recently stated that this railway network will be connected to the Arniko highway.

These three projects are the most significant for the economic integration of the region. This will further provide the bridge for the opening up of the ancient Silk Route. Trade through the Silk Route was an important part of commercial, cultural and technological exchange between traders, merchants, visionaries, soldiers, rulers and nomads linking China, Central Asia, Afghanistan with Europe. It is important to reconnect this whole route not only in the strategic sense but also for the economic development of the region.

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Mariam Safi

The Silk Route and Afghanistan

Mariam Safi

Deputy Director, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS), Kabul

Afghanistan as a connector and bridge in the region is not a new idea; its routes are imbedded on the premise of the ancient Silk Route. The Silk Route connected the eastern world with the western world through the Balkh province in Afghanistan which was once considered the cross centre and convergence of all branches and courses of the 11000 km ancient highway.

The revitalization of the Silk Route can offer a framework for economic, political and security cooperation offering new opportunities for Afghanistan, the region and the international community. During the 5th Regional Economic Cooperation on Afghanistan held in Tajikistan, it was pointed out that stating Afghanistan as a bridge only in Asia is miscalculated and it should be regarded as an international bridge.

In the last eleven years of the nation-building process, Afghanistan has already commenced infrastructural rehabilitation in all sectors of trade and transit. To this effect progress has been made to consolidate its road as a connector and bridge in the region through railway and highway projects. Currently Afghanistan is connected to Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan through its railway projects. A railway agreement has been signed with China to support mineral industries in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is connected to Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also through corridors established along the Ring Road. The Ring Road goes through Kabul, Ghazni, Kandahar, Farah, Heart and Mazar provinces and is considered as the backbone of Afghanistan's transport network.

Afghanistan on 25 February 2012 ratified the International Road Transport (TIR) Convention. This convention is the only universal system that allows goods transit from a country of origin to a state of destination in a seal loaded compartments with custom control recognition.

Along with these developments, the most essential facilitator of connectivity are energy and natural resources. Afghanistan has large deposit of copper, iron, gold, lithium and mineral fuel resources such as gas, coal, oil and uranium. The extraction of the mineral resources will help to build a strong private sector which will have the primary role of plugging the gap that the decline of international aid will create in the post-2014 period. In the energy sector, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline was launched on 11 December 2010. The Afghanistan -Tajikistan gas pipeline has also begun, and the transmission line from Turkmenistan to Kabul has been established. An electric grid from Tajikistan to Afghanistan has been established which will produce energy beyond what Afghanistan can use and hence the surplus can be sold to regional neighbours. Furthermore, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) will develop oil blocks in the Amu Darya Basin in Afghanistan which is estimated to hold around 87 million barrels of oil.

Afghanistan's linkages with regional forums such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), among many others, have provided a way forward for the development of the country. In post-2014 period Afghanistan will require greater assistance and opportunities. The country requires not international involvement but regional involvement. Also, in order to revision the old routes like the Silk Route it is important to fully integrate the region. President Karzai in the recent Bonn conference stated that a stable and prosperous Afghanistan can only exist in a stable and prosperous region.

Linking South Asia with Southeast Asia via Bangladesh
AKM Nazrul Islam
Director General, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka

The unique geo-political position of Bangladesh serves as the bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is in a position to allow access, through its two existing sea ports as well as its proposed deep-sea port, to landlocked countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet (via Nepal) and areas like Northeast India to the Bay of Bengal. If regional connectivity is provided by Bangladesh to these hinterland countries and territories including access to its sea ports, tremendous opportunities could open up for Bangladesh to trade in transport services.

Transportation by road plays the most dominant role in Bangladesh-India trade relations, although this mode of communication is not cost effective. A significant proportion of freight and passenger traffic is carried by road. Benapole

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AKM Nazrul Islam

(Bangladesh) and Petrapole (India) border points are the two most important land ports for overland trade between the two countries. Approximately 70 to 80 per cent of bilateral overland trade passes through these ports. This is a highly congested Land Custom Station (LCS) and has a road not broader than 5.5 metres. Bangladeshi highways have only two lanes with a load limit of 8.2 tonnes. In order to ensure steady flow of traffic from India and the neighbouring countries, wider roads with higher axel-load limits are required which will need a huge investment.

The development and utilization of the Bangladesh surface transport infrastructural network will bring enormous economic benefit to the region. Also essential is developing the rail networks; there are only three broad-gauge rail corridors operational between Bangladesh and India, namely, Darsana-Gede, Rohanpur-Singhabad and Benapole-Petrapole.

Also, it is important to focus on the alternative routes through the Northeastern states of India. The four inland water routes via eastern Bangladesh in which the vessels of both the countries can ply are Kolkata-Pandu (in southern Assam), Kolkata-Karimganj (in southern Assam), Rajshahi (in Bangladesh)-Dhulian (in southern Assam), and Karimganj-Pandu. There are four ports of calls in both the countries: Narayanganj, Khulna, Mongla and Sirajganj in Bangladesh, and Kolkata, Holdia, Karimganj and Pandu in India. However, to date no passenger movement takes place between the two countries through the waterways and even for trade purposes the water links are not being used extensively due to a number of problems. These problems include, among other things, the navigability crisis caused by siltation and the shortage of ports of call.

The two countries are also reluctant to designate certain port as ports of call as there is a divergence of opinion regarding their capacity to handle large-scale cargo. Due to lack of infrastructure development some of the ports are underutilized.

According to a report submitted by the core committee to the commerce

ministry on 7 April 2011, there are seven road routes and six rail routes to facilitate transit. Three of the seven probable land routes would give Bangladesh access to Bhutan and Nepal across India, and one of the six rail routes connects Bangladesh with Nepal. The implementation of these projects will help to boost regional trade.

Experimenting with the Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Model
Panchali Saikia
Research Officer, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi

The reopening of the old routes towards building bridges within the region is essential and one such route connecting India's Northeast with its neighbouring countries is the Stilwell Route/Ledo Road. Built during World War II this route is a medium to extend India's trade linkages with Myanmar and China. But there has been very little progress in resurrecting this route. This has been due to major disagreements between Indian and Myanmarese governments who are wary of the threat of increased insurgency in the Northeast, increase in the volume of contraband coming in from the Golden Triangle, and a rise in arms trafficking.

Furthermore, even if the Stilwell route is operationalized, will this benefit the Northeastern region? Will the region be able to bear the responsibility as a trading hub? Will the region be able to cope up with the growing development and improved connectivity of the Southeast Asian countries and China?

First, to improve the trade linkages between India and its eastern neighbours, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia, the priority should be to develop Northeastern region as a regional hub. It is required to develop the connectivity within the region which is extremely poor. The communication and transport linkages are bad not only between the states but also within the states. The presence of national highways is quite negligible in most of the Northeastern states.

Second, to successfully implement the projects to extend linkages with the neighbouring countries, what is required is cooperation and understanding among these countries. It is essential that there is a deeper element of regionalism among these countries. The fast paced integration and cross-border connectivity of the Southeast Asian countries under the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic cooperation programme (GMS) portrays a successful sub-regional initiative in Asia. This initiative provides a benchmark for successful sub -regional and cross-border cooperation and has achieved significant progress in the construction of road networks and transportation regulatory arrangements.

In South Asia too there have been several initiatives in the last one decade to concretize sub-regional cooperation such as the Kunming Initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India and Myanmar (BCIM) initiative, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Techno-Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC). However, nothing concrete has come out of these initiatives and the GMS model has cast a shadow over these regional

Similar to the GMS structure where the Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are at the front line of China's participation in the regional structure, the Northeastern states too needs to be integrated into the sub-regional grouping in the eastern periphery of South Asia.

Panchali Saikia
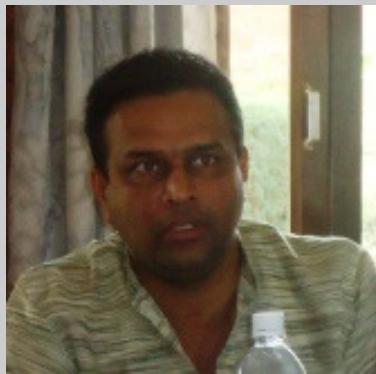
groupings.

A major bottleneck in these existing structures is the absence of active participation from India's Northeastern region. Similar to the GMS structure where the Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are at the front line of China's participation in the regional grouping, the Northeastern states too needs to be integrated into the sub-regional grouping in the eastern periphery of South Asia.

Under the sub-regional grouping a review and monitoring team could be formed to ensure transparency and time-bound implementation of projects such as the Kaladan multi-modal transit-cum-transport project, Stilwell Road etc. Effectively monitoring/evaluating progress in the development projects will also keep a track of the flow of funds. Also, the representatives of the member countries should meet frequently at ministerial and summit-level meetings to endorse a strategic framework for the regional development. The summit level dialogues will help provide information to business groups and investors on the possible openings.

South Asia as a Tourism Orbit

Formulating a Regional Tourism Strategy
Chaminda Hettiarachchi
Associate Director, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo

Tourism is soon going to be the largest industry in the world in terms of revenue generation, and there are various opportunities that tourism can capture in South Asia. The region is making economic advancements and there is the availability of higher disposable incomes, increasing the prospects of intra-regional tourism.

South Asia has many avenues for tourism that can be capitalized on, such as religious, historical, cross-border (for those with relatives beyond borders),

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Chaminda Hettiarachchi

diaspora tourism for those that are South Asian by consciousness, medical and so on. One lucrative facet that is currently developing is Meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions (MICE) tourism.

However, despite these many advantages, the region has its weaknesses as a tourist destination. It is not viewed as tourist-friendly and many are deterred from visiting due to security reasons. In addition, locals are very often not involved in the tourism planning strategies despite their role as stakeholders. Sea and air connectivity within the region is poor, which dissuades the average tourist from travelling through out the South Asian circuit.

With the exception of Maldives and Sri Lanka, tourism is not seen as very strategically important industry in South Asia. It should be a part of national and regional planning with a strategic focus and must take into account that it is an integrated industry - connectivity, human resources training for service and management, skill development, maintenance of acceptable standards of hospitality, all have a role to play.

Recommendations:
- Facilitate intra-regional tourism
- Improve connectivity
- Improve facilities and utilities. For instance, cell phone usage on roaming is expensive – There could an identified intra-regional circuit which would offer cell phone services at subsidized rates.
- A strategic plan for the region as well as individual countries
- Information management: development of internet facilities for easier access to application for visas and so on
- Learn from tourism strategies of other regions
- Emulate national products that have developed well (Sri Lanka: ecological tourism, Maldives: beach resorts/'sea and sand') as good business models beyond national borders
- SAARC investments in tourism must be reviewed
- South Asian circuits can go beyond the region to connect to other hubs such as Bangkok, Doha, Dubai
- Implement people-oriented policies that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation

Reviewing the South Asian Visa Regime
Sangay Thinley
Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS), Thimphu

Bhutan bases its tourism policy on a high value, low impact ideal. The country recorded approximately 38,000 regional tourists in 2010-2011. Of this, 80 per cent hailed from India, Bangladesh and Maldives, primarily because citizens of these countries do not require a visa to enter Bhutan. This suggests that the visa regime in South Asia will first have to be addressed, especially with a view to identify a comprehensive South Asian tourist circuit. Also, regional connectivity

"It is important to recognize areas in which developments can be made towards improving tourism strategies, both nationally and regionally, and one way to do this is through publicizing a pan-regional calendar of cultural events on a seasonal or annual basis.

Sangay Thinley

will have to enhanced and regional tourism encouraged for South Asian tourists. Regional publicity is as important as external publicity.

Tourism is Bhutan's highest revenue earner and therefore a crucial industry. It is important to recognize areas in which developments can be made towards improving tourism strategies, both nationally and regionally, and one way to do this is through publicizing a pan-regional calendar of cultural events on a seasonal or annual basis.

Developing Northeast India's Tourism Potential
Ruhee Neog
Research Officer, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi

There is a worrying gap between the conceptualization and actualization of the tourism policies of the Northeastern states....All the infrastructure developments that are currently underway must logically be the result of an overall strategy that factors in an understanding of the Northeastern tourist market.

Ruhee Neog

Sub-regional and internal domestic connectivity are essential elements of an integrated tourism policy. In this context, Southeast Asia holds great prospects for Northeast India as a tourist destination and vice versa within the ambits of the Indian Look East Policy (LEP) and the Vision 2020 document for the development of the Northeast, released in 2008. However, in practice, work on improving the product efficiency of tourism in the Northeast leaves a lot to be desired.

Perception management
Publicizing the tourism potential of the Northeast to tour operators at both the national and international levels is crucial because it is they who establish tourist routes and make these available through packages to visitors. This is especially pertinent in the case of the Northeast because of the visiting restrictions imposed on and security concerns in many areas.

Although all the Northeastern states have competent tourism websites, they could certainly be more user-friendly. As the first point of contact for a tourist, a government tourism website should have facilities for accommodation, transport arrangements and travel bookings within the state, or provide direct links to other websites that provide such services. Also, the visual promotion of Northeast tourism, through pictures, films, advertisements and slogans, such as Kerala's - 'God's own country' - ought to be vigorously implemented. The look of a website, its attractiveness and accessibility quotients, are of immense consequence as first impressions are essential. For this, models used in other parts of India could provide an excellent starting point. For instance, the Rajasthan tourism website is available in seven different languages and the Gujarat website in nine, which immediately amplify their reach. In the same manner, offering the Northeastern state tourism websites in Southeast Asian languages would be of assistance in establishing linkages with countries that are in the region's vicinity. This would also play on historical cross-border cultural associations that defy boundaries and bring in an element of nostalgia and personal identification, which is an important trend in heritage tourism.

Infrastructure
There is a worrying gap between the conceptualization and actualization of the tourism policies of the Northeastern states. A combined vision for tourism in

the region is arguably the most important element for its successful implementation. All the infrastructure developments that are currently underway must logically be the result of an overall strategy that factors in an understanding of the Northeastern tourist market.

The Northeast Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIPP), announced in 2007, is an impressive piece of legislation. It provides various fiscal incentives and subsidies for investments in the Northeast. However, it offers no incentives for small-scale businesses and therefore deters first time entrepreneurs, who should be encouraged.

Another major deficit is air connectivity. Currently, Druk Air is the only international airline that flies internationally between Guwahati and Paro and Bangkok. The basic complaint registered by airlines is that a paucity of in-bound international visitors makes the maintenance and operation of regular international flights a cumbersome and loss-making exercise. To remedy this, chartering flights during festival seasons and packaging and promoting them abundantly is an idea worth serious thought.

In addition, work on integrating tourism circuits should be supplemented by an emergence of community-based, nature tourism. All versions of the Northeastern states' tourism policies have an identifiable leitmotif: that of sustainable tourism that emphasizes and enhances community participation. While some strides are being made in this direction, there is still an understanding that more often than not local communities' inputs do not figure in the overall decision-making process.

Administrative and Security Restrictions:

Tour operators in the Northeast are keen on a review of the Restricted Area Permit (RAP), Protected Area Permit (PAP) and the Inner Line Permit (RAP/ PAP/ILP) to promote tourism, many of which escape revision because due to bureaucratic red-tapism and an unwillingness to periodically appraise the restrictions.

Educational and Economic Connectivity

A South Asian Vision on Education
Salma Malik
Professor, Quaid-I-Azam University and Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad

The kind of connectivity and network association that the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies has provided to most of us serves as an interesting starting point for discussing educational connectivity. Being part of a number of collaborative events and having taught for some time, my experience has surprisingly revealed that South Asian students of the region do not know what their region stands for. They have very stereotypical associations or notions about what they think of the countries that make up South Asia.

The foremost impediments have been the governmental problems and visa issues. The visa regime has become very restrictive, to the extent that one's visa is at the mercy of the visa officer's mood. Any move for visa denial in Pakistan soon gets reflected in India and vice versa. Such mirror imaging should be avoided.

A second hindrance has been a weak historical discourse in South Asia. Building museums or secularizing existing museums is certainly a good idea. But it is bound to fail when the narrative itself is flawed. Our historic narrative starts from the Mughal era or later during the British rule. In India, the 1971 episode has not been mentioned in its entirety. These cannot be attributed to nationalistic efforts but rather to lethargy and bad textbook writing. There is therefore a major need to revise textbooks.

Third, there is debate surrounding the grant of MFN status by Pakistan to India. While this move was widely appreciated, its translation and interpretation in the Urdu newspapers has created furore in Pakistani society.

Living together does not really endear us to each other. We have to build on the available synergies. If we are serious about building those synergies and networks, we have to sit together and think about a joint South Asian vision.

-Salma Malik

Collaborative cross-border studies is a good idea. A Jinnah Centre or Gandhi Centre in Indian and Pakistani universities respectively, or even a Centre for South Asian studies in each country could be established. Even then, the irony would be that in Pakistan, a majority of such a South Asian course would focus on India. A South Asian Centre will therefore require joint collaboration. Such Centres can have visiting scholars, guest lecturers or students on exchange.

Borrowing from available networks and resources would also be useful. The Higher Education Commission in Pakistan offered 2000 scholarships to students from Afghanistan to come and study in Pakistan. Until the ideal South Asian University is formed, use should therefore be made of the available resources. It must however be kept in mind that scholarships should be accorded not based on the size of the country but distributed amongst all countries equally.

South Asia could enter into joint study projects as put forward by the Social Sciences Research Council. The idea was to bring together scholars from different countries into collaborative study with one another. This would warrant a research-based visa which, as it stands now, would in all possibility be rejected.

The available trade routs must be tapped into. In the absence of this, these routes such as the open spaces on the Pakistan-Afghan border, begin to be exploited by non-state actors and traffickers. Traditional trade routes are now on the reverse owing to hurdles for normal passage of goods and trafficking.

Trade, Transport and Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
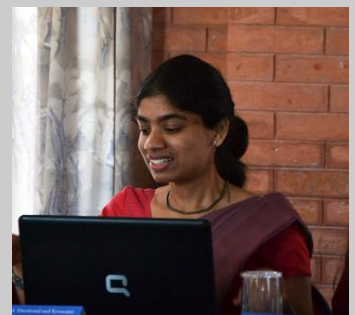
Ashani Abayasekara
Research Assistant, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Colombo

Economic connectivity refers to the degree to which the exchange of activities is precipitated. There are three key components of economic connectivity - intra-regional trade, trade and transport facilitation, and information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity.

Trade
Intra-regional trade is very low in South Asia, the main reason being low effectiveness of the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) which is the main instrument of intra-regional trade in the region. SAFTA's effectiveness is seriously constrained by the numerous bilateral FTA's between countries of the South Asian region (like the India-Nepal FTA) and between a country and a region (like with BIMSTEC). The many ideas being floated by the private sector within the SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry or in the academia seem to have limited influence on the official SAARC process.

One key recommendation would be to encourage more connectivity through bilateral trade mechanisms and natural marketing equations rather than SAFTA. Second, there is a lot of potential for intra-industry trade in South Asia, for instance in sectors such as processed food, power products, plastics,

There is also reluctance from the foreign ministers to over-load the SAARC agenda with another set of policy proposals, given that it is already overloaded with policy proposals.

Ashani Abayasekara

It is important to look at the genealogy of the Schengen visa to understand how it has evolved and its applicability to the South Asian scenario. Security will be a major concern.

Imtiaz Ahmed

pharmaceuticals, textiles and apparels and light engineering goods. Third, it is also important to look into growth in services, most importantly, mode 1 – IT related goods and mode 4, which is labour exports or migration.

Role that stakeholders can play:

•The governments need to reinforce political commitments, especially with regard to reducing non-tariff barriers, and also improve infrastructure in order to take advantage of recent developments. Creating a stable macro-economic environment with good governance is also important.

•The private sector could expand the current focus of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry business conclave - an annual get together aiming at broader participation. They could also organize trade fairs to enhance SAARC intra-regional trade and investments.

There has been tremendous growth in inter-South Asian trade over time. It has sustained an average growth of 8 per cent in the past five years. South Asian governments are taking significant actions to boost trade, for instance, India has substantially reduced the number of items in the sensitive list in SAFTA for low-developing countries. The time appears ideal for the liberalization of services and investments mainly through the South Asian trading services agreement that came into being in 2010.

Transport

Equally important along with physical connectivity is transport facilitation. According to one study, the trade procedures in South Asia still take 50 per cent more time than compared to Southeast Asia. The impediments to smooth transport facilitation vary from border costs to the absence of advanced facilitation measures such as modern ICT. Implementation of already existing mechanisms is hindered owing to the level of infrastructure and business regulatory environment which is quite poor in South Asia.

Stakeholders could work towards streamlining trade documents to facilitate a system of electronic data interchange with a long-term goal of setting up of national electronic one windows. They could also help to facilitate secure border crossing by harmonizing legal regimes and to improve logistics and flight forwarding. Most importantly, close coordination is required between the

stakeholders, not just the government and the private sector but also policy think-tanks and civil society.

In terms of recommendations, at the national level, it is important to strengthen institutional mechanisms to remove bottlenecks based on political support. As proposed, signing of single national-led agencies for trade and transport facilitation will also help. At the regional level, it is important to have a coordinated framework for electronic exchange of trade data and documents. In this regard, South Asia can consider a coordination mechanism that brings together national representatives from all SAARC members.

Information and Communications Technology
Despite a rapid diffusion of mobile networks, significant inequality among the countries remain owing to the cost of deploying land-based submarine fibre optic cables. SAARC initiatives in this regard have not been effective.

Some possible stakeholders are the telecom regulatory commission, the ICT agency in Sri Lanka, and various ICT policy and regulation think-tanks. Schools and universities could also play a vital role.

Recommendations can be made at the national and the regional level. At the national level:
•Setting up of regulatory frameworks to promote fair and competitive markets that would protect consumers. It is also important to establish independent regulators which would serve the interests of both the state and the end users and encourage investment and innovation
•In the effort towards network-sharing and avoiding wastage of capital expenditure, it is important to address the concerns of affordability and access. Service providers could be asked to create universal obligation funds for the development of infrastructure specifically in rural areas
•Appropriate level of import tariffs on ICT equipment and services could ensure availability of competitive prices. Apart from infrastructure, it is important to equip people with adequate skills so that they are able to take full benefit of ICT. This would range from government officials and private entrepreneurs to school teachers.

At the regional level:
•Potential synergies between ICT infrastructure and other physical infrastructure should be considered. For instance, road and railway projects under the SAARC inter-regional multi-modal transport study (initiated in 2005) could be extended further to include telecommunications and cabling of stations.
•All countries need to work together to share resources, maximize existing investments and also improve their bargaining power with commercial service providers. For this purpose, a functional and effective regional centre for ICT sector development under SAARC could be formed. Finally, it is always useful to examine and learn from other successful initiatives. South Asia can particularly learn from ASEAN's master plan on connectivity adopted in 2010. This strategy

…It has been historically known as the râh-e abrišam – the Silk Route. For us, changing the name, which has been at the heart of Afghan literature and history, will be a little tricky.

Mariam Safi

looks at enhancing connectivity from a three pronged strategy – physical connectivity, institutional connectivity and people-to-people connectivity.

Networking through Institutions

Building Bridges: Interface between Think-Tanks and Research Institutions
ANM Muniruzzaman
President, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), Dhaka

A think-tank serves as an informal and independent voice of policy debates. It identifies, articulates and evaluates current policy issues, proposals and programmes, and provides a constructive forum for the exchange of ideas and information between key stakeholders, maintaining a balance between research, analysis and outreach.

The first South Asian think-tank was the United Services Institution of India (USI) situated in New Delhi. Think-tanks in South Asia can be categorized under the following heads – independent civil society think-tanks working toward both research and policy inputs like the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), policy research institutes with universities who work on a particular aspect like the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RUMRU) in Dhaka, government-created or state-sponsored institutions and think-tanks like the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) in Bangladesh, corporate or business-created think-tanks like Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in India, and specialized think-tanks like the Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI). Nevertheless, the capacity and quality of South Asian think-tanks do not match the aspirations of the positions they wish to reach globally.

The effectiveness of a think-tank has to be measured using yardsticks like resource indicators monitoring the level, quality and stability of the financial support to the think-tank, and proximity to decision makers in a society. Demand indicators which include media coverage, number of hits on a website, consultations and briefings with the government and the demand for publications of the institute are also essential. In addition are impact indicators

Analysis of oversees development in institutes suggest that the initial state led growth of think-tanks in South Asia has constrained much of the independent space that should have been available to think-tanks in South Asia. The performance of think-tanks in South Asia for this reason has been constrained and episodic.

ANM Muniruzzaman

which review the impact of policy recommendations of a think-tank on the policy -makers of a country.

Think-tanks in South Asian face impediments in reaching their aspired position. They fail to gain an independent voice due to their direct or indirect links to sponsorship from the government. Most think-tanks in the region have been observed to be young, hampering the ability to create manpower for specialized studies. The nationalistic tendencies of some of the think-tanks influence their objectivity and rational thinking. It is viewed that think-tanks in the region are often unable to cooperate with their fellow think-tanks and have been at times suspected to have been involved in unethical manipulation of facts and statistics.

South Asian think-tanks must open up for fresh thinking and to encourage joint study and research, not only between countries, but within countries as well. Think-tanks need to build an interface with political leaderships to be able to come out of the unending loop of confrontation and animosity. There is a need to adopt marketing strategies for the ideas and policy inputs to be made available publicly so they can impact the process of policy-making and formulation. Today, South Asian think-tanks do not get involved in broadcasting or live webcasting of seminars and lectures, reflecting their inability to completely utilize digital technology. There is a need to promote cross-placement of researchers amongst think-tanks of South Asia and network far more effectively. Think-tanks in the region must support dialogues at all levels, especially at track II and track 1.5. Creation of projects such as 'Eminent Citizens for South Asia' or a 'South Asia Elders Council' by the South Asian think-tanks would prove beneficial.

Role for Think-Tanks and Research Institutions: Mapping Initiatives
Shaheen Akhtar
Research Fellow, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad

Research institutions in South Asia are young, often funded by governments and lack the capacity required to influence public policy. The basic role of research institutions is to provide an informed and independent voice to policy debates. The churning out of publications and the organization of seminars, roundtable discussions and the like ensure the emergence of pressing issues and various actors into the public domain. A think-tank is also considered a catalyst in bringing forth new ideas and alternate perspectives. They identify and articulate policy issues. They also play a mediating role between the government and the public, thereby providing an interface, and help in building trust. Since there are various challenges waiting to confront South Asia, there is a need for strategic thinking to emanate from the countries of the region.

Think-tanks provide public policy research, analysis, advice, and help governments to make informed choices. At the basic level, think-tanks can contribute to the process of policy-making by providing literature on a particular subject to the policy-maker. They also contribute towards the articulation of current policy issues and create an understanding of these issues.

Research needs to be conducted to develop the regionalism, community feeling, in short, 'South Asian-ness' in the region.

Shaheen Akhtar

Research institutes are very effective players at the track II level. They function between the grassroots stakeholders and policy officials. Their role is therefore critical in bringing both together.

Hindrances for research institutes vary in the form of major policy research gaps between government officials and researchers, who are either indifferent to the work done by research institutions or attempt to exercise control through funding that the institute receives to limit the scope of the research. The visa regime acts as a major hindrance in networking between institutes. Also, the economic and the resource constraints are well documented.
 A recommendation would be to have a research-based network in order to identify and involve institutes for joint research projects that can initiate informed public policy debates about regional connectivity. It is essential to enhance sharing of knowledge through digital data banks, meaning 'what we produce, we share', in an institutionalized way.

Collaborative mechanisms can utilize technology for the purpose of e-conferencing, e-dialoguing, web blogs, and the like. There is a need for sustained track II dialogues. At the same time, it is crucial to identify the entry points.

Finally, there is a need to expand the mandate and participation of COSATT. There could possibly be a separate meeting of heads of selective research institutions. COSATT could also take an initiative to provide a meeting for the vice -chancellors of universities. Institutionalizing educational linkages would facilitate the process of building networks. It would also be beneficial to create a virtual network of South Asian data banks.

Constructively Engaging the Media
Zihnath Hassan
Journalist, Maldives National Broadcasting Corporation (MNBC)

The media has a crucial role to play in improving linkages in South Asia. Without media cooperation, it will not be easy for SAARC countries to achieve connectivity. While bridging and addressing these cultural gaps and overlaps, professional ethics and impartiality must take centre stage.
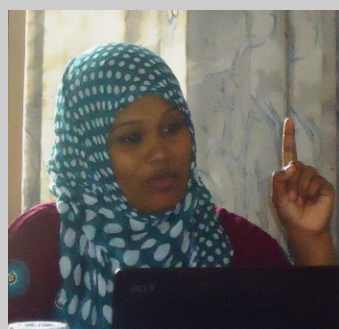
SAARC is not a media-friendly organization; most media people not informed about SAARC and its activities. SAARC has been considered by other regional groupings as lagging behind due to its inability to meet project deadlines, and this should be brought to light by the media.

Zihnath Hassan

Strengthening Physical, Emotional and Economic Linkages

For success, SAARC must be able create a sense of belonging among member states. Individual governments should be responsible for information sharing and creating a sense of identity and understanding about SAARC itself. There may be problems encountered because of differences in cultural perception, but a shared historical past will present advantages that ought to be made use of. To enhance the media's role, SAARC should be promoted as a brand and information about SAARC should be disseminated periodically and in a systematic manner.

However, SAARC is not a media-friendly organization; most media people not informed about SAARC and its activities. SAARC has been considered by other regional groupings as lagging behind due to its inability to meet project deadlines, and this should be brought to light by the media.

There are also many financial restraints. Although SAARC gives financial assistance to SAFMA (South Asian Free Media Association), the resources are not enough money for a fully functional, vibrant media.

For greater connectivity within South Asia, there must also be greater collaboration between South Asian media houses. In addition, the resources available to media persons should be utilized to maximize pressure on policy-makers towards implementing people-oriented policies.

Addressing the Stakeholders

Developing People-to-People Contacts
Dipankar Banerjee
Mentor, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)

A significant element of building bridges within South Asia is to develop the SAARC regional framework for cooperation and address the issues that confront the region today. To this effect the objective is to ensure that SAARC remains a peacefully cohesive structure. This would allow substantial cooperation across borders, leading the process of integration over a period of time and fundamentally address the question of poverty and deprivation today.

In order to realize this objective, it is essential to have substantive economic cooperation across the region and develop cooperative arrangements within South Asia. To develop and ensure the enhancement of regional prosperity, the successful operation of the regional structure of SAARC is needed. SAARC remains the only effective structure to facilitate regional cooperation, and retains the potential for furthering regional cooperation. Along with bilateral and multilateral cooperation, sub-regional structures are also important.

Furthermore, along with the regional structure, it is essential to identify the fundamental issues on which cooperation ought to be based. In this context the principle objective towards regional cooperation should be intra-regional trade. Regional trade can materialize in an effective and smooth manner by building confidence among South Asian countries through sub-regional structures.

A fundamental requirement is identifying and addressing the three principle stakeholders, bureaucracy, political leadership and civil society. This will help towards confidence building between the nations in the region.

Dipankar Banerjee

"Speaking about tourism, religious tourism along with heritage tourism should also be touched upon. Efforts could be made to develop the Buddhist circuit further, to include sites in Pakistan and Afghanistan as well.

-Prof. PR Chari

People-to-people contact should be a major facilitator for building confidence among SAARC countries and develop cooperation in the region. In order to boost regional trade, building confidence and cooperation among the people of the region should be a priority. It is also important to remove hurdles to create situations and infrastructure that will facilitate easy of movement of goods and people. Channelling trade through official mechanisms and building confidence between countries through people-to-people contact is therefore integral.

People-to-people contact is a sensitive issue and a fundamental requirement whose benefits must be accepted by all principle stakeholders.

The next principle objective is identifying and addressing the three principle stakeholders: the bureaucracy, political leadership and civil society. This will help towards confidence-building between the countries in the region. The bureaucracy can further be divided into two - civil and security bureaucracy. The security bureaucracies in South Asia are very powerful and this has previously overruled civil and even political leaderships. Towards this end, regional think-tank organizations should look for policy alternative ensure that their concerns are addressed.

Conclusions

D Suba Chandran
Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi

With regard to the next COSATT conference, there is need to discuss three Ws- when, where and what. Keeping in mind that the final product should reach SAARC before the next SAARC summit, deliberations should involve two things - a set of recommendations and a report of our proceedings in the form of a book. It has been proposed that the next COSATT conference should take place in Bhutan in September 2012.

The following issues should be worked upon as part of COSATT 2012

- Reviving and revisioning the silk and the spice routes of South Asia. Attempts should be made to change the names to shed the Chinese and the British terminology. This study should be based on perspectives from five areas – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Northeast India.
- Two issues within tourism should be discussed - tourism circuits of South Asia – religious, adventure and medical, and details for the proposed SAARC festival and SAARC festival calendar.
- The South Asian visa regime should be reviewed. Efforts should be made to prepare a blue print for the SAARC countries. Such a proposal could be modelled on the Schengen visa.
- A study must be undertaken on digital connectivity and an online data consolidation for the region.
- COSATT could project the way the borders ought to be - hard, porous or soft and permeable? There is also a need to consider education as a common denominator for all of South Asia. There is also the possibility of putting forward the idea of a South Asian communications satellite as a practical recommendation to SAARC.

Tomislav Delinic
Director, Regional Programme SAARC, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), New Delhi

It is remarkable that COSATT has moved away from the country perspectives approach to topics of common interest. The whole project started with connectivity issues four years ago. The COSATT has been constantly evolving and growing. Its gradual growth had led to the development of a exclusive project under the theme of regional cooperation and integration in South Asia. As such, there has been a steady growth in both the staff working within it and budget agreed upon for its conduct.

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) believes that COSATT requires to be developed as a brand, making constructive use of the internet with a webpage dedicated to the project. But since that is an ambitious move to make, the first step would be to link all participating think-tank website with the existing COSATT webpage on the IPCS website.
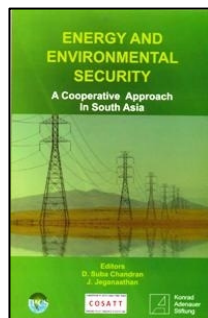
It is also a noteworthy achievement to have received participants from all countries of South Asia for the COSATT conference.
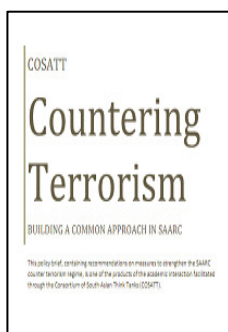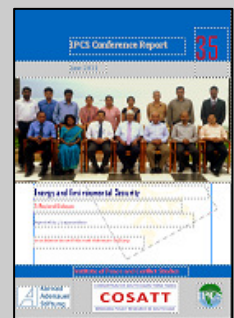
Previous COSATT Publications
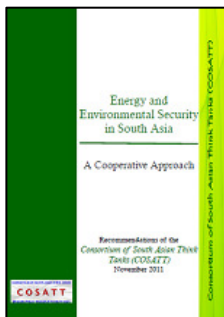
Energy & Environ-mental Security in South Asia: Recommendations November 2011

Energy & Environmental Security: A Cooperative Approach in South Asia, IPCS, 2011
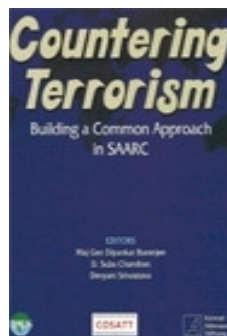
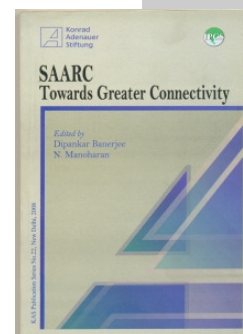Energy & Environmental Security: A Regional Dialogue (Male), IPCS Conference Report

Energy & Environ-mental Security: A Regional Dialogue (Colombo), IPCS Conference Report

Countering Terrorism: Building a Common Approach in SAARC: Recommendations

Countering Terrorism: Building a Common Approach in SAARC

SAARC: Towards Greater Connectivity

COSATT 2012 Participants with the SAARC Secretary General H.E. Ahmed Saleem

About COSATT

South Asia continues to be the most volatile region in the world, involved in issues relating to Insurgency, Terrorism, Border Disputes and the Environment. These issues are transnational in nature and no country can address it alone. A regional approach therefore is best suited to address such issues.

In recognition of the above, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) set up the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT) in January 2008 with the objective of bringing together some of the leading think tanks in South Asia to foster cooperation in the region. COSATT is supported by the Regional Programme SAARC of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

As part of the effort, annual meetings are planned based on a theme to address topical issues of the region. These meetings comprise of a planning conference of participating think-tank heads, an expanded meeting with authors and experts, followed by the final study release before the SAARC Summit.

The theme for COSATT 2012 is "Building Bridges: Strengthening Physical, Emotional and Economic Linkages in South Asia." The first conference of 2012 took place between 6 and 7 April 2012 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The previous COSATT dialogues have focused on "Energy & Environmental Security: A Cooperative Approach in South Asia" (2011), "Countering Terrorism-Building a Common Approach in SAARC" (2009-2010) and "SAARC: Towards Greater Connectivity" (2008).