

"This is going to be very interesting to me because I think this will be another test of a political and diplomatic coalition coming together, as we came together in the Gulf. The way of the future is collective security." He said that already the collective grouping of the United States, Japan, and South Korea "have come together trying to influence that behavior," but that the other possibility would be for the United Nations to intervene to influence North Korea.

North Korea signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, but the country has not yet agreed to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This summer, the government hinted that it would finally accept inspection, but in September backed away from this, saying the United States had to remove its nuclear weapons from South Korea first.

In late October and early November, the message that "North Korea is more dangerous than Iraq was prior to the Gulf war," has been played on several continents. In South Korea, a slate of high-level North Korean defectors has appeared during this same time-frame to give crucial data on North Korean "underground nuclear facilities," and to insist, in direct opposition to the earlier thinking of South Korean government officials, that "no reformers exist in North Korea," and no rapprochement is possible between North and South Korea. The *New York Times*, in an extensive front-page scare story Nov. 10, "Data Raise Fears of Nuclear Moves by North Koreans," finally acknowledged that "the recent flood of disclosures, especially those emanating from South Korea, raise the possibility that the North's capabilities are being deliberately exaggerated."

South Korean President Noh Tae Woo has worked tirelessly since 1988 "to transform the North-South Korean relationship . . . so as to go on to develop our common land, by combining our human, technological, and financial resources," as he explained his Northern Policy at the United Nations that same year. The South's economic and other overtures, however, seem to have been put on a backburner, and President Noh appeared to read from the U.S. script in an interview with *Newsweek* Nov. 11: "For North Korea to have nuclear weapons in its possession would be more destabilizing . . . than for the government of Iraq [to have them]. I believe the most urgent problem is the elimination of that threat."

The Seoul daily *Korea Times* wrote Oct. 23: "The North Korean authorities, of late, have gone so far as to threaten that if the South or the United States takes any military action against its nuclear sites, it will launch a massive retaliatory strike against vital targets in the South, action amounting to the start of an all-out war against Seoul." The North Korean press, meanwhile, writes of "large-scale military exercises" being conducted by South Korea and the U.S. which began Nov. 1. The North Koreans also allege that the U.S. has transferred a "special warfare unit" to South Korea from the closed-down Clark Air base in the Philippines.

## South Asia regional cooperation group on verge of collapse

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

The collapse of the heads of state meeting of the seven south Asian nations scheduled for early this month has given rise to accusations and counter-accusations. Sri Lanka, which was supposed to be the host of the aborted summit, and Pakistan have gone on record blaming India for the cancellation, and have resorted to making noises suggesting that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)—consisting of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives—is in deep trouble as a result of India's actions.

At a time when two new economic groupings in Asia—the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) and the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC)—are about to be launched, the quibbling of impoverished South Asian countries makes a poor spectacle. Despite making voluminous promises of regional cooperation and development, SAARC, formed in 1985 to replace its two-year-old predecessor, has delivered little in six years. Acrimony between India and Sri Lanka and between India and Pakistan has come to be the rule, not the exception. The forum's directionless foundering has resulted in cancellation of two summits already—Sri Lanka being the host on both occasions.

### No clear purpose

The SAARC charter, practically a rehash of the declaration of its predecessor, the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC), had assured its members of intra-regional collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical, and scientific areas. It also provided for cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest, and with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Other provisions were more thorny, such as the taboo on raising bilateral issues at the forum and the blanket promise of "non-use of force" and "peaceful settlement of all disputes" among the member nations.

On might well expect that in a forum which constitutes some of the poorest countries of Asia, economic cooperation

to implement large infrastructure projects and concessional trading to minimize imports from outside of the region and to strengthen domestic industry would hold center stage in discussions. Yet, every effort to make these issues the focal point met with resistance from one or another member nation.

For example, the Indian proposal to "bring hard-core sectors of development" like trade, industry, energy, and environment within the realm of the SAARC was given a go-by because Pakistan had strong reservations. The Nepali concept that the harnessing of its vast water resources for development is properly a regional project was perceived by India as an attempt by Nepal to make a bilateral issue into a multilateral one. Instead, such issues as a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests, resumption of the North-South dialogue, worldwide disarmament of nuclear weapons, and the diminishing capacity of international financial and technical institutions were discussed freely and found ready agreement—but with little effect on the world outside.

### Conflicting views

In 1990, when then-Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu visited South Asia and offered to help SAARC should the grouping as a whole wish to have relations with countries or organizations outside the region, a new issue was joined. While the more impoverished nations such as Bangladesh pushed to avail members of outside funds by extending the SAARC charter to include inter-regional cooperation, India staunchly opposed the idea. Soon, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, committed to oppose whatever India suggests, joined the fight in favor of Bangladesh's proposal, but the requirement of absolute concurrence among member states meant that the proposal had eventually to be shelved.

Meanwhile, in recent days, Pakistan's raising of the Kashmir issue and Sri Lanka's tantrums over the presence of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in the island-nation turned the forum's charter into a farce, and projected an image particularly to the West of the "big bad" India ready to swallow up the little lambs.

If the whole thing looked like a well-rehearsed drama, the supreme *dramatis persona*, no doubt, was the habitually anti-India Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa. President Premadasa is apparently convinced that any mishap or difficulty encountered by Sri Lanka has its origin in India. At one point, when he was still prime minister, Premadasa had approached Singapore, requesting Sri Lankan membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

At SAARC's first summit in 1985 at Thimpu, Bhutan, Sri Lanka sprang a surprise when it stayed away from the foreign secretaries' as well as foreign ministers' meetings and threatened to boycott the summit itself. Its beef was against India, over a statement in the Indian Parliament concerning the bloody ethnic violence there. Bhutan's King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk had to massage the Sri Lankan govern-

ment's hurt feelings to prevent the summit from falling apart.

In 1989, when it was the turn of Sri Lanka to host the summit, President Premadasa refused to hold it because the IPKF, which had been stationed in Sri Lanka following an agreement between India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lanka's then-President Junius Jayewardene, was still there. At the Male, Maldives summit, the last one to take place, President Premadasa refused to attend and instead sent his prime minister.

The most recent fiasco began with the King of Bhutan begging off from the summit because of internal disturbances in his country. Although King Wangchuk was willing to send a representative, India seized upon the opportunity to give Sri Lanka a bloody nose—in strict compliance with the association's charter, of course. Meanwhile, the heads of state of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Maldives, ostensibly to show their solidarity with Sri Lanka, attended what India has disdainfully termed a "mini-summit." While Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Sri Lankan President openly charged India with sabotaging the summit, their counterparts in Bangladesh and Maldives showed some greater degree of restraint.

### Poor economic showing

Now people are asking just what the SAARC has achieved and what it possibly could achieve in the future, if allowed to continue along the same lines. Most have come to the conclusion that the association has not only failed to help the region and accomplish even a fraction of the cooperation it stands for, but also that the forum itself is fast turning into a new source of friction. Trade within SAARC, a measure of the economic cooperation that exists among member nations and which involves more than 1,100 million people of the region, remains less than \$1 billion annually and accounts for less than 3% of the total export of the member countries.

Moreover, while the smaller nations in the region suffer from an acute anti-India syndrome and would like to attach themselves to any "big brother" from outside the region, India, on the other hand, is not only disproportionately large, but also is the only country which has a common border with with almost all six other members. The issues which dominate in India are Pakistan's nuclear bomb; the Pakistani involvement in Kashmir and Punjab; the issue of harnessing the waters of the Ganga and Kosi between Nepal and India; the Nepalese in India participating in the Greater Nepal movement; the Bangladeshis illegally infiltrating in large numbers into Assam; and the Sri Lankan government arming the Tamil terrorists to fight the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, which was brought in by agreement between India and the Sri Lankan government.

It is unrealistic, as one well-informed Indian analyst points out, to talk of regional cooperation under these circumstances.