

# SOUTH ASIA

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## Editorial Information

South Asia is a newsletter of the Institute of South Asian Studies. You may send your comments to:

The Editor, South Asia  
Institute of South Asian Studies  
469A Bukit Timah Road  
#07-01, Tower Block  
Singapore 259770  
Tel: (65) 6516 6166  
Fax: (65) 6776 7505  
Email: isashs@nus.edu.sg

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# A Word from the Director

In the past several months, the South Asian region, like the rest of the world, has had to come to terms with the fallout of the global economic crisis. India, for instance, has witnessed a sharp deceleration in its export growth resulting from declining demands for its products, a slowdown in industrial production and heavy job losses that have affected the vulnerable sections of the society. These ramifications have further complicated the complex challenges facing the South Asian region. Its history of bitter conflicts seems to have resulted in the resurfacing of theories of marginalisation, leading to protracted conflicts within the region. In this issue, we examine the different dimensions of insecurity in South Asia, focussing on the poverty and conflict trap.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan border remains a hotbed of violent conflicts. United States President Barack Obama's first 100 days in office seemed to have been greeted by escalating violence on this border. We look at President Obama's policy towards Afghanistan in his efforts to tackle the Taliban menace in the two countries and in South Asia.

In Bangladesh, the return to democracy poses a different set of problems for the newly-elected government. Several of the key challenges facing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed are discussed in this issue. The Bangladesh example is just one of a series of democratic transitions sweeping the South Asian region. An important democratic feature, a free media, is examined in this issue. We look specifically at the role of the media in presenting the real issues to the masses.

In the backdrop of the current global meltdown, as countries look for more effective bilateral and regional arrangements to harness economic gains, the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) between India and Singapore assumes significance. The second review of the CECA is due shortly and we evaluate the role played by the CECA in improving the trade in services between the two countries.

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) has been producing a steady stream of publications providing analyses and insights on the key issues in the region. In addition, we have organised several important events in this regard. Together with the Center for Asia Studies, Chennai, India, we organised a workshop on "Governance, the Military and Issues of Stability in Pakistan" in Chennai on 25 February 2009. We also compared the issues of politics and religion in South Asia and Southeast Asia during an international symposium held on 24 March 2009. A joint panel discussion with the East Asian Institute on the "Global Financial Crisis: The Impact on India and China, and the Responses" was held on 17 April 2009. Shortly after, ISAS and the Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada, organised a symposium on "The Impact of Global Economic Crisis and Challenges to Governance in Asia". ISAS also launched the seminar series on energy security in March 2009. The series shall end in December 2009 and the proceedings will be published thereafter.

Do enjoy this issue of the newsletter.

Professor Tan Tai Yong  
Director

# South Asia 'Shining' or a Poverty and Conflict Trap

*Dr Darini Rajasingham Senanayake  
Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS*



The global financial meltdown and billion-dollar bailouts have raised questions about the ethics and economics of some large actors in the international financial system and related governance institutions. Yet, poor women in South Asia have a 93 percent payback rate on loans they take and are creditworthy, according to Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus. Speaking at a conference on “Women of SAARC: Partners in Development” which was held at Jamila Millia Islamia University in New Delhi on 30 and 31 March 2009, the founder of Bangladesh’s foremost micro-credit bank, however, noted that large commercial and state banks avoid lending to poor women because they lack collateral. The Grameen Bank, hence, pioneered micro-credit for the urban and rural poor who have projects but lack the economic and social capital.

Economies of scale comparison notwithstanding, Yunus gestured towards an alternative and inclusive development programme for South Asia in a period of global crisis-talk and expert advice that often reproduce tired models and paradigms of and for growth and world development. The need for development alternatives and thinking outside the box was also highlighted recently by the

Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Noeleen Heyzer, when she observed that the Asia-Pacific region faces a “triple threat” that includes “economic crisis, continued food-fuel insecurity and climate change” at the annual commission sessions in Bangkok on 27 April 2009. She may well have added a fourth ‘security and terror’ threat in South Asia. Ms Heyzer also noted that “a strong regional platform or architecture was necessary to address development challenges and implement innovative solutions through regional cooperation.” Her comments seem highly relevant to the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation which has had muted success in the decades of its existence with regard to human and regional security.

A region of enormous diversity and complex problems, South Asia at this time promises higher growth than much of the rest of the world. It is hoped that India’s markets may lead global economic recovery in a region that is home to 39.2 percent of the world’s population. What seems less remarked is that South Asia is second only to sub-Saharan Africa in the global poverty count. About 540 million people or 45 percent of the population live below the poverty line, with daily incomes of less than US\$1. The subcontinent also boasts two nuclear powers and some of the world’s most violent, internationally and regionally networked armed conflicts – from Afghanistan and Pakistan in the north-west to a troubled peace and post-conflict reconstruction process in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and violence along the borders, internal and external, in India.

Significant swaths of the subcontinent appear to be plagued by a ‘poverty and conflict trap’ despite and, in some cases, due to recent economic successes. Indeed, expanding Gini coefficients and regional disparities in recent decades seem to signal combustible levels of inequality and poverty within and across national borders in South Asia (ADB: 2007). The solution may lie in rethinking regional security beyond the state-centric regional security approach, in terms of a comprehensive human security framework, that entails poverty reduction, inclusive development and peace building along troubled borders. Otherwise, the risk is that economic gains to the region in a time of global economic restructuring may be whittled away.

## **Terrorism and its Discontents**

There are few empirical studies that help us understand why young people, men and women, join social movements that may morph into terrorist organisations or networks. In South Asia, the United States-led ‘war on terror’ that President Barack Obama’s regime



recently disavowed in words, if not in deeds, has cast a long shadow and deflected nuanced analysis. A number of older, internal, irredentist and transborder conflicts have been assimilated to the 'war on terror' in the aftermath of 9/11. Some ethno-political conflicts such as in Sri Lanka were renamed wars on terror. An analysis and address of the root causes and the 'poverty and conflict trap' visible in border zones in South Asia has been obscured because a range of conflicts in South Asia have been read through the prism of Al-Qaeda's terrorism.

In the border zones, spaces and places of South Asia where the 'poverty and conflict trap' is visible, violence achieves suspended animation while the normal functions and institutions of society are diminished but not terminated. Rather, a highly militarised, violent peace, punctuated by even more violent events (assassinations, suicide bombings, massacres in remote villages and forced population displacements), may prevail alongside cycles of reconstruction and destruction, development, de-development and institutional decay. These escalate local dependency on international humanitarian, reconstruction and development aid and ethno-religious-sectarian conflicts. Elsewhere, this process has been termed the 'poverty and conflict trap' in the literature on civil wars, conflict and development. In parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, suicide bombings and recruitment of children for war primarily from poverty-stricken border communities and camps for the displaced, more often than not at the margins of the post-colonial developmental state, have increasingly become another "terrorist" subculture, as some call it.

The adage 'one man's terrorist is another man's liberation fighter' was common in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America during the era of post-colonial struggles for independence and self-determination from the European empires. The phrase often marked an 'ends-means' logic and suggested that violence may be acceptable when the cause was just. The cause was the adjudicator of whether an act of violence may or may not be deemed "terrorism"

or "legitimate violence" in the court of public opinion, given the fact that the state had a monopoly on violence in liberal political theory. The logic of this approach was that the root causes of violence, however complex, need to be recognised and addressed. However, in the age of the mass media, where the medium is the message and globalisation has entailed a post-modern flattening of words and things, the search for the root causes of conflict may have dissipated in the rhetoric on counter-terrorism.

At the same time, various experts have made (counter) terrorism studies an industry without a sufficient analysis of local, social and historical reason and conditions for conflict and violence. The World Bank funded a five-year project on civil wars, led by Oxford Economist, Paul Collier, which suggested that war is economically rational and it is "greed" rather than "grievance", inequality or poverty that fuels civil wars. Collier's analysis drew largely from African conflicts. A tradition of political analysis which suggested that violence, as a strategy and a tactic, may have worked against militarised and centralised developmental states controlled by majoritarian cultural groups and/or economic elites, supported and, sometimes, opposed, by a range of international actors was eclipsed in the counter-terrorism discourse and the notion that violence is economically rational.

The 'poverty and conflict trap' where a 'terrorist' subculture may flourish and is visible in significant border regions in South Asia has a different historical reason than in Africa where the presence of lootable primary commodities and natural resources (diamonds, gold, oil and rents) has given rise to war economies, "Dutch disease", de-development and state and institution decay. The 'poverty and conflict trap' in African conflicts is related to resource wealth, Cold War proxy wars, rent-seeking behaviour and poor governance. South Asia lacks Africa's resource wealth and the 'poverty and conflict trap' in South Asia has a more recent history.

The emergent 'poverty and conflict trap' in swaths of South Asia has roots in de-colonisation and the partition of the subcontinent that consolidated tensions between India and Pakistan. During the



Cold War period when the export of terrorism was practiced by the superpowers, both Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies promoted cross-border terrorism at various points while exploiting identity conflicts. At the same time, India, with pretensions to be the regional superpower, saw the Research and Analysis Wing promote strategic destabilisation along some borders with some smaller neighbouring states and to enforce 'non-alignment'. In the context, blowback was inevitable. Thus, today, Pakistan wrestles with groups it fostered to destabilise India at its Kashmir border and India lost former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a rebel outfit it funded and helped trained.

More recently, South Asia's proximity to a Cold War frontier and embroilment in the 'war on terror' has resulted in escalating military and defence spending, and militarisation. Expanding military and defence expenditure for counter-terrorism has meant less funding for social safety nets and spending on health and literacy for the poor. State and non-state terrorism has been boosted since the global 'war on terror' and rewired ethno-religious identity politics, fragile inter- and intra-state power balances, and 'internal' conflicts and peace processes, sometimes in non-obvious ways. It is, however, increasingly clear that since 9/11, violence has achieved a steady state of suspended animation in significant swaths of the subcontinent. It has also curtailed the international war, peace and reconstruction industry in countries where the local war economies and peace and reconstruction processes are globally networked or internationalised.

### Human Security

The need to move beyond state-centric security discourses and address the root causes of conflicts in South Asia from a post-war on terror paradigm is apparent. Since 9/11, instead of measured and targeted responses to terrorist acts, militarisation and advocacy for military solutions have, sometimes, exacerbated and aggravated the root causes of conflicts that require social and political-economic solutions. Social sector and welfare state spending has been reduced with the claim that development cannot occur without defence even though the 'poverty and conflict trap' is a consequence of the transfer of resources that accompany ballooning defence expenditure, socio-economic decline, increased regional and economic inequality and structural violence.

On the other hand, policies arising from the failure to adequately grasp and address the 'poverty and conflict trap' in South Asia by influential knowledge brokers in the international development, security, peace and reconstruction industry may have contributed to a number of troubled peace-building exercises – from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Sri Lanka. Indeed, non-inclusive peace processes have become blueprints for renewed violence due to state-centric and militarised approach to security in the region. Women and civil society actors have rarely been involved in Track-One peace negotiations or their monitoring. Increasingly, it is obvious that inclusive development and peace building is necessary for regional security in South Asia, and you cannot have one without the others. ■

## Second India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue

A group of 30 eminent Singaporeans and Indians met in New Delhi for the 2<sup>nd</sup> India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue (ISSD) from 9 to 10 February 2009. They included representatives from the fields of politics, economics, defence, business, media, research and civil society. The event was coordinated by the Institute of South Asian Studies and the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Announced by Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr George Yeo, and India's Minister of External Affairs, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, in June 2007, the ISSD is for both countries to arrive at a better understanding of each other's views and positions on global politics, security and economic landscapes, and regional security issues. It also enables both countries to be engaged in exchanges on other areas in which India and Singapore have convergent and divergent interests and cooperation in multilateral fora.

The candid and substantive dialogue between both sides during the 2<sup>nd</sup> ISSD allowed for rigorous and in-depth discussions on issues such as global political, security and economic landscapes, regional security issues, and bilateral relations between India and Singapore. Both sides benefitted from the candid sharing of perspectives as well as the thinking behind these perspectives during the event.

The Singapore delegation also met with Mr Kamal Nath, Minister of Commerce and Industry; Mr Kapil Sibal, Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences; Mr Shiv Shankar Menon, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs; Mr N. Ravi, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs; and Mr M. K. Narayanan, National Security Adviser.



# The South Asian Media: Changes in the Last Decade

*Mr Tridivesh Singh Maini  
Research Associate, ISAS*

The media is an important tool in any democratic society. Apart from providing important coverage of daily events, this fourth wall of democracy also acts as a watchdog on the state, allowing for dissenting views and public debates on important issues. In addition to entertainment, its duty is to inform and educate the people and provide an important voice to the masses.

South Asia has been in the news in the last few years for a number of reasons. These include terrorist attacks, the advent of democracy in some countries and the region's economic rise. In this scenario, the South Asian media has emerged to become an extremely important fourth estate.

This paper attempts to highlight some of the important changes witnessed by the South Asian media in the last few years. These include a more independent coverage of events such as riots and corruption cases, and the mushrooming of more vernacular sources, both in the print and electronic media.

## **Independent Media**

In the last few years, the media in South Asia (especially in India and Pakistan), has played an active role in covering important events of the subcontinent. On many occasions, the governments have, in fact, alleged that the media (both print and electronic) has a tendency to misuse its freedom and go against the national interest.

If one were to look at some of the recent events which the Indian media has covered independently and, in the process, did a great service to the viewers, these events would certainly include:

- i) The post-Godhra communal riots (2002) in Gujarat in which a large number of Muslims were allegedly killed with state support;
- ii) Corruption cases in the National Democratic Alliance and the United Progressive Alliance governments;
- iii) The Malegaon blast case, in which a hardline Hindu group is supposed to have been involved; and



- iv) The Bharatiya Janata Party's election candidate, Varun Gandhi's recent hate speech against the minority communities.

In fact, it would not be out of place to say that, in the case of Mr Gandhi, a continuous coverage of his remarks, especially by major television channels such as *NDTV* and *CNN-IBN* in India, was one of the key reasons for the public's and the Election Commission's attention being drawn to it.

In neighbouring Pakistan, one of the key recent events covered prominently by the media is the lawyer's movement. In fact, at one stage, then-President, General Pervez Musharraf, who was considered more liberal towards the media than earlier leaders, banned certain television channels which he thought were causing discord in Pakistan.

Another example highlighting the independent coverage of events in the Pakistani media relates to the Mumbai attacks of November 2008. Two Pakistani channels, *Geo TV* and *Jang*, reported that Ajmal Qassab, the only accused caught alive by the Indian police for the Mumbai carnage, belonged to Pakistan. This reportage was important because the electronic and print media in India and Pakistan had upped the ante in the post-26/11 scenario and jingoism seemed to be the flavour of the season.



If one were to analyse the reasons for this change in the media, it cannot be attributed to any one single factor. In fact, a combination of several key factors explains the increasing independence and openness of the media in the subcontinent.

Firstly, as a result of globalisation, there is greater exposure to international media standards and techniques of coverage. Furthermore, an increasing number of television channels in India such as *CNN-IBN* have begun to tie up with foreign channels. Such collaborations have resulted in the import of international modes of coverage of local events.

Secondly, there is competition within both the print and electronic media, with the number of newspapers and television channels increasing by the day. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Indians had little options, with the state-run *Doordarshan* being the main television channel. In Pakistan too, right until a few years back, the main option for television viewers was the state-run *Pakistan Television*. In the last few years, numerous other channels such as *Geo TV*, *ARY* and *Dawn* have sprung up in the country. While it would not be incorrect to say that changes in the South Asian media have been for the positive, its rise has not been without any lacunae.

#### Faltering of South Asian Media

Like any other institution, the South Asian media is not above board. It falters and compromises on rationality at times. A case in point is the recent coverage of the post-Mumbai tensions.

While the atmosphere was charged up, one would have expected responsible individuals within the media on both sides to lead the way and ensure that the coverage was rational and did not necessary waver towards the official interpretation of events. Sections of the Indian and Pakistani media adopted a thoroughly nationalist line and indulged in rabble-rousing. Television channels

such as *Times Now* (India) were party to biased coverage and upping the ante against Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistani channels missed no opportunity in indulging in anti-Indian propaganda.

There is no doubt that the media must act as a watchdog and raise issues which are threats to law and order in a society. However, the media, sometimes, overplays an issue and gives too much coverage to certain personalities. For example, it has been argued that the extensive media coverage to Mr Gandhi and Gujarat's Chief Minister, Mr Narendra Modi's role in the Gujarat riots only resulted in giving them more publicity and even increasing their popularity in certain quarters.

#### Rise of Vernacular Media

A key development in the last few years in South Asian media, especially in India and Pakistan is the increasing strength of the vernacular media. Apart from the emergence of more Hindi (India) and Urdu (Pakistan) newspapers, quite a few Hindi and Urdu television channels have also started operations. Some of the important Hindi television channels are *Aaj Tak*, *Zee TV*, *NDTV* and *India IBN Hindi*. As for the Urdu channels, *ARY* and *Geo TV* are some of the important channels.

The rise of the vernacular media has allowed a large section of the non-English speaking populace gain access to developments and issues, not only in their country, but also in other parts of the world. However, like the television channels, the vernacular media tends to over-sensationalise events and give too much importance to personalities and issues which do not deserve much coverage.

#### Conclusion

If one were to make a holistic analysis of the media, the overall contribution has been positive as an independent media keeps the government on its toes and television viewers are provided with an independent perspective. The vernacular media has been especially handy for the non-English speaking populace who get access to extensive news coverage and on a diverse range of views. This is important for making them active participants in democracy. ■



# The India-Singapore CECA: Gains in Services Trade

*Dr Suparna Karmakar  
Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS*

India and Singapore signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) on 29 June 2005, after 26 long months of negotiations. The agreement came into force on 1 August 2005 and has already undergone one review, as per agreed schedule in the agreement. The official launch of the second review of CECA is targeted for the second half of 2009 and it is likely to be one of the first trade policy initiatives of the new Indian government. The proposed move is aimed at broadening the scope of the CECA so that the trade relations of the two countries can be further deepened.

The India-Singapore CECA covers agreements relating to trade in goods, services and investments, and also enshrines cooperation in areas such as science, technology, air services and intellectual property. It also has a renewed double taxation avoidance agreement. The significance of the agreement also lies in the fact that it was the first such bilateral arrangement that Singapore entered into with a South Asian country and India's first such agreement with a high-income, affluent country.

## **Broad Contours of the Agreement in Services**

With the Indian tariff walls crumbling on the account of continuous unilateral liberalisation, and given that Singapore already maintains very low tariffs, the *raison d'être* of the agreement was clearly prospective gains and concessions in relation to services trade and investment. The Services Chapter in the CECA ensures that service suppliers in India and Singapore are guaranteed access into each other's markets. In practice, most of the World Trade Organization (WTO)-plus unilateral market access initiatives of the trade partners in use at the time of the CECA negotiations were included in the agreement. Furthermore, both countries agreed not to restrict access into their services market by imposing quantitative restrictions.

Both countries liberalised various services sectors beyond their WTO commitments. The sectors which Singapore received preferential access include business services; construction and related engineering services; financial services; telecommunication services; tourism and travel-related services; and transport services. India, on the other hand, obtained preferential treatment for sectors such as business services; distribution services; education services; environmental services; and transportation services. In



addition to the above, there were special negotiations on financial services; telecommunication services; and the movement of professionals and business persons.

Singapore's greatest gains would appear to have come from the preferences in the financial services sector, by which the Singapore-owned or -controlled financial institutions have obtained greater privileges to access the Indian market. In banking, Development Bank of Singapore, United Overseas Bank and OCBC Bank have each been allowed to set up a wholly-owned subsidiary in India to enjoy treatment on par with Indian banks in branching, places of operations and prudential requirements. Alternatively, should they choose to set up as branches, they have been allocated a separate quota of 15 branches (for all three banks) over four years, over and above the quota for all foreign banks (which at the present moment is 20 branches per year, as opposed to India's WTO commitment of 12 branches per year). In return, India has been allowed a qualified full banking (QFB) licence for three of its banks. A QFB licence allows the approved banks to operate up to 25 service locations in Singapore, of which 10 can be branches.

Finally, under the CECA, professionals in 127 specific occupations are allowed to apply for a visa period of up to one year in both countries while short-term service suppliers who are going to provide a specific service (without a commercial presence) are allowed to stay for up to 90 days in single visa with a possible



extension for a further 90 days. All these provisions serve to increase the convenience of businesses and professionals of the two trade partners without the hassle of going through the process of regular visa applications.

### Review of Trade in Services

Singapore's bilateral (merchandise) trade with India grew from about S\$5.9 billion in 2005 to S\$28.8 billion in 2008, a very healthy near five-fold increase in the three years of post-CECA trade. In the case of commercial services, however, the gains have not been as significant as in the case of goods, with less than a twofold increase in total bilateral trade values. Singapore's service exports to India grew from S\$2.4 billion in 2005 to an estimated S\$4.6 billion in 2008 while bilateral imports grew from S\$1.3 billion in 2005 to an estimated S\$2.3 billion in 2008 (all data sourced from the Department of Statistics, Government of Singapore, accessed in March 2009).

The four largest categories of bilateral commercial services trade were transportation; trade-related and travel services; communication and other services; and financial services (including insurance). Also notable is the fact that, in all these sub-sectors, Singapore's exports to India have grown at significantly stronger rates than its imports from India.

The disaggregated trend rates of growth paint a slightly better picture from Singapore's perspective, though not an overtly encouraging one. Figure 1 shows that, since 2002, Singapore's exports of commercial services to India have grown at a faster rate than its exports to the rest of the world. In fact, in 2008, Singapore's exports of commercial services to the rest of the world declined while the exports to India grew by a healthy 24 percent (estimated average trend).

The trend rate of growth of Singapore's imports from the rest of the world vis-à-vis that of India is almost similar, with imports from India growing at rates marginally lower than that from the rest of the world. A detailed analysis of the trade data (by breaking up the data series into pre-CECA and post-CECA groups with the year 2005 as the point of inflection) indicates that after the CECA was implemented, the trend rates of growth of bilateral trade moderated. However, this may be a reflection of the weakening global economic trends since 2007, compared to the higher base effects of the past five years of rather strong pre-CECA bilateral trade.

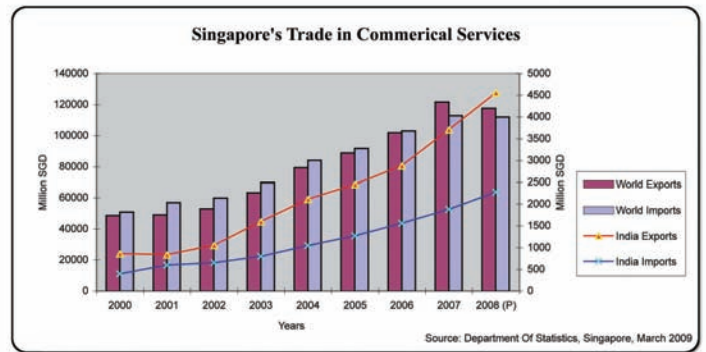


Figure 1: Singapore's Trade in Commercial Services

### The Way Forward

Since the implementation of the CECA so far, clearly, Singapore's gains have superseded those of India. From an Indian perspective, the initial years have seen several teething problems unforeseen by the negotiators, in particular, vis-à-vis the grant of QFB licences and the inability to conclude the mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) on the professional services of interest to India.

It is presumed that now that these procedural glitches are starting to be sorted out, bilateral trade flows in commercial services will grow at a comparable pace as the merchandise trade growth.

With such potentially significant gains, what direction should the future negotiations take? The most important initiative seems to lie in clinching the MRAs envisaged in the CECA. This will help the integration of the services markets in the two countries and generate the necessary efficiency gains needed to boost the services growth engine of the two trade partners. ■





# President Barack Obama and Afghanistan

*Mr Shakti Sinha*  
Research Fellow, ISAS



While most observers believe that United States President Barack Obama's approach to the Muslim world and his policy on Afghanistan represents a major change from those of his predecessor President George W. Bush, the Al-Qaeda is clearly unimpressed. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second-ranking leader of the network, said in his recent video that these statements and announcements 'did not change anything' in (Al-Qaeda's) perception of the United States. According to him, it 'is America that is still killing Muslims in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan...and supports the thieving, corrupt, and traitor rulers in their countries.' On Afghanistan, Zawahiri asserted that President Obama's new policies would only lead to defeat, 'as was the case with the Soviets and the British before.'

Most observers of Afghanistan and Pakistan, including the leadership and elite of these countries, see three clear differences in how President Obama is dealing with the situation in Afghanistan. Firstly, he sees the problem as located in Pakistan and, hence, the need to address the two countries jointly. Secondly, the military effort must be well resourced to achieve success. Thirdly, there is a need to involve the regional countries.

From his early days in the United States' presidential campaign, Mr Obama had attacked then-President Bush's Afghanistan policy, holding that the Iraq war had prevented the United States from tackling its most serious threat – the 'resurgent Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan' – arguing that the central war on terror was 'in Afghanistan and Pakistan.' Therefore, he said that, as President, he would send at least two additional combat brigades to Afghanistan, focus on training Afghanistan security forces and support an Afghanistan judiciary, and that he would 'dismantle

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.' He also recognised that the solution in Afghanistan was not just military, but also political and economic (emphasis added).

He also made two other points which, on hindsight, should have indicated his future policy direction. Candidate Obama said that the United States demands better performance from the Afghanistan government through tough anti-corruption safeguards on aid. Further, Mr Obama called for a stronger partnership between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to secure the border, take out terrorist camps and crack down on cross-border insurgents. He also wanted the United States to condition some of its aid to Pakistan on the latter's action to take the fight to the terrorists within its borders.

The then-President-elect kept up the impression that changes in the Afghanistan policy were his priority, indicating that, in addition to the points already made, the incoming administration was keen to explore a more regional strategy, including talking to Iran, and was favourably inclined to 'the nascent dialogue' between the Afghanistan government and 'reconcilable' elements of the Taliban. The incoming administration also dropped hints that the goals of the Afghanistan mission would be scaled down and the 'unrealistic' aim of building a modern democracy would be dropped in favour of 'a stable nation that rejects Al-Qaeda and Islamic extremism and does not threaten the United States' interests.' These statements and leaks did send mixed messages, as they implied both a greater military focus with indications of an early exit strategy.

On assuming office, President Obama took three important steps towards re-orienting the United States' policy. One, Mr Bruce

Reidel, an ex-Clinton administration staffer, was tasked to lead an inter-agency policy review of the United States' policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, now christened 'AfPak'. Two, Mr Richard Holbrooke, known for his bulldozer diplomacy that succeeded in the Balkans, was appointed Special Envoy to these two countries. Three, even as Mr Reidel's policy review got underway and it was breathtaking in the wide spectrum of opinions it canvassed, President Obama agreed to the deployment of an additional 17,000 troops which would raise the strength of United States forces to 55,000. Meanwhile, Mr Holbrooke set off for the two countries and India to assess the situation and consult different stakeholders.

The policy that emerged on 27 March 2009 was no surprise to people who were following these developments. Adequate efforts through briefing and press events ensured that the surprises were minimal. The core goal was 'to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.' It identified with the key concern of the Afghans, namely, that extremists in Pakistan had the ability to undermine Afghanistan and, therefore, without 'more effective actions against these groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan will face continuing instability.'

However, while Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai could find comfort that he finally stood vindicated in this belief on the centrality of Pakistan, he was also put on notice that the United States was looking for a 'more capable, accountable, and effective government in Afghanistan that serves the Afghan people.' The policy made it clear that the Afghanistan government's overall legitimacy was undermined by rampant corruption and a failure to provide basic services to the population. Even as it accepted that, while the war could not be won without winning over the non-ideologically committed insurgents, the United States warned that the 'practical integration must not become a mechanism for instituting medieval social policies that give up the quest for gender equality and human rights'. That precisely almost happened with the adoption of the *Shi'ia* personal law that bartered



away many rights of the women. The law is on hold but the dangers that such compromises would happen should not be underestimated.

President Obama also committed another 4,000 United States troops to provide the Afghanistan security forces with the mentoring needed to expand rapidly and take a lead in counter-insurgency operations. By late 2010, the Afghanistan National Army and the police are set to have a total strength of 134,000 and 82,000 respectively, though there are calls to increase the total strength of the national security forces to 400,000.

The AfPak policy is far more focused on Pakistan and what its government must do, especially on enhancing civilian control over its army by putting in place stable constitutional arrangements. The Pakistan establishment is to be convinced that shutting down safe havens for extremists is in its own interests. Pakistan is to receive assistance to bolster its ability to fight extremists and promote good governance and economic growth. Pakistan and Afghanistan would need stronger mechanisms for bilateral and trilateral (with the United States) cooperation. Even the Afghanistan elements of the AfPak policy have considerable Pakistan focus, for example, the United States' forces deployment in Afghanistan was meant to secure its south and east against infiltration so as to provide space for the government to establish effective control.

Going forward, the implementation of the AfPak policy is problematic. The policy itself recognises that there are no quick fixes in achieving the United States' national security interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that there is a real danger of failure. The policy to succeed will require 'immediate action, sustained commitment, and substantial resources.'

There are three key challenges that would need consistent resolution and reiteration. Firstly, as the policy is very comprehensive, different players see



it differently. This may affect their behaviour accordingly. Specifically, it risks long-term failure by focusing too much on the short term. External influences apart, security and stability would flow from good governance which would imply a move away from patronage politics to a more inclusive and accountable form of governance.



Secondly, reconstruction and development efforts need to be well-resourced and rolled out more effectively. Despite all the rhetoric, the back-of-the-envelope calculations indicate that the United States would only be channelling US\$170 million to the agriculture sector this year. The contractor mode of delivery of aid also needs to be changed.

Lastly, the United States' ability to reduce the 'trust deficit' with the Pakistan establishment seems to be limited. The denial mode still seems dominant in the Pakistan establishment and the Taliban are still seen as a long-term strategic asset, and the Pakistan

establishment is prepared to pay a high price to retain this asset.

The previous United States administration's cultivation of Ms Benazir Bhutto was a mistake which led to Mr Nawaz Sharif's mistrust of Pakistan's President Ali Asif Zardari. The latter has not helped by his unreliability, frequent flip-flops and tendency to centralise power. To be fair, the United States has now reached out to Mr Sharif and others but the situation in Pakistan is now even more precarious than ever before. As Holbrooke said, 'Even if you have the best government in Afghanistan, you cannot have peace and stability till the situation in Pakistan is sorted out.' ■

## ISAS Symposium

# Politics of Religion in South Asia and Southeast Asia

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) organised a symposium on "The Politics of Religion in South Asia and Southeast Asia" on 24 March 2009 at Orchard Hotel Singapore. The event aimed to highlight the consequences of mixing religion and politics for democracy in general, and the rights and freedom of individuals and minorities, in particular.



Religious tensions and conflicts abound in many parts of the world, including South Asia and Southeast Asia. Religion is a formidable and powerful moral force for nations with strong religious influence, especially in South Asia. Professor Ali Riaz from Illinois State University, United States, who spoke in the first plenary session, said that religion, as a political ideology, should be 'seen as a modernist response particularly to globalisation and not as an anti-modernist movement with a return to the glorious past.' In comparison, in Southeast Asia, religion is important but it does not enjoy as significant a role as political ideology.

In highlighting the key issues on the politics of religion, the speakers emphasised the need to address the concerns of the minorities and marginalised groups in the society. Professor Shail Mayaram, a Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, India, stated that, in India, efforts are undertaken to reach out to the Muslim community. These include liberal Islamic scholars taking the initiative to bridge the gap between Islam and the other faiths.

The speakers at the symposium also included Professor Merle Ricklefs and Dr Rajesh Rai from the National University of Singapore; Dr Maznah Mohamad from the Asia Research Institute; Dr Tahmina Rashid from the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, RMIT University, Australia; and Dr Darini Rajasingham, Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed and Mr Tridivesh Singh Maini from ISAS.

The speakers at the symposium also included Professor Merle Ricklefs and Dr Rajesh Rai from the National University of Singapore; Dr Maznah Mohamad from the Asia Research Institute; Dr Tahmina Rashid from the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, RMIT University, Australia; and Dr Darini Rajasingham, Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed and Mr Tridivesh Singh Maini from ISAS.

ISAS will publish the proceedings of the symposium in due time.

# The New Bangladesh Government: The Road Ahead

*Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury*  
*Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS*

Bangladesh, a country of 149 million people, one of the largest in the world in terms of population, exemplifies many contrasts. While it is poor, it is cited as an example of how indigenously-grown ideas and concepts such as microcredit and non-formal education for women have rendered it a classic case of owner-driven and self-driven development, with resultant successes in poverty alleviation and women empowerment.

Its intellectual heritage is long. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bengali literary renaissance was led by the *bhadralok* (gentle-folk), a Weberian status group rather than a Marxian class, who were very Socratic in their mindset and never unquestionably accepted as truth what they may have heard at the feet of the guru. The contemporary 'argumentative' Bangladeshi middle class, which prides itself for having one of the world's most vibrant civil societies (with such non-government organisations as the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), is largely heir to that tradition and this is something all governments in the country must contend with.

A major societal feature is Bangladesh's deep 'politicism' that dichotomises it into the Awami League (AL) and its partners, led by Sheikh Hasina Wazed, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its supporters, led by Begum Khaleda Zia. The parties and their leaders have had a history of turbulent relationship. It is mainly this that resulted in the concept of a caretaker government being written into the Constitution, as no party trusted another of its ilk to render free, fair and credible polls. Eventually, it was one such caretaker government, headed by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, a former Central Bank Governor (which had extended its own tenure of office from the traditional three months to two years to make for better electoral preparations) that delivered the historic elections on 29 December 2008 which resulted in a landslide victory for Ms Hasina and the AL-led Mohajote or the Grand Alliance. Ms Hasina was sworn in as Prime Minister on 6 January 2009.



The road ahead for the new government, which is generally seen as secularistic and modernising, is fraught with multiple challenges. Some key ones are discussed here. These are not placed in any taxonomic pecking order of priorities, implying linkages, and a need to simultaneously address them.

## **Institution Building**

Largely an egalitarian society, feudalism in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) was legislated away over five decades ago. However, socio-political institutions have not matured sufficiently to contain the pluralist predilections of the people. Several military interventions have not helped. In the parliamentary system that has evolved, there is a 'winner-takes-all' culture where the opposition has no space. This needs to be changed, perhaps beginning with the government sharing some key committee chairs with the opposition. Ultimately, the goal should be to reduce the cost of electoral defeat. Institutions that buttress democracy such as the Election Commission should be strengthened. The Public Service Commission should be made more autonomous and the public

services should be depoliticised, which will improve delivery. On 1 November 2007, the caretaker government separated the judicial and executive magistracies. The Executive has resisted this on professional grounds. A golden mean will have to be found.

### Corruption

Since an election victory can deliver much, there exists a tremendous propensity to want to win. This renders corruption, combined with political muscle-power, pervasive. Obviously, the systemic corruption will need to be addressed. The caretaker government has made considerable headway by setting up a powerful Anti-Corruption Commission. However, raising awareness and a change of mindset are necessary. Ultimately, honest behaviour must flow from the dictates of conscience rather than from fear of the police.



### Economy

Bangladesh has, so far, remained largely unscathed by the global recession, though for how long remains a question. Indeed, the recession may have slightly benefited the export of ready-made garments, which earns 75 percent of trade income because it specialises in the lower end of the market. In FY2008/09, it earned US\$11 billion. The government will need to strive for greater market access, mainly in the United States where Bangladesh faces discriminatory trade barriers.

The other great source of national income is expatriate Bangladeshis. Over 1.7 million found employment abroad in the past two years. Overseas Bangladeshis remitted US\$7.9 billion in the last financial year. This made up 10 percent of the gross domestic product and it was among the highest in the world. However, the manpower export market is drying up, due to the global economic downturn, as evidenced in the recent cancellation of 55,000 work visas by Malaysia. New markets have to be

identified and skills upgraded. And to satisfy public opinion at home, efforts must be made to ensure that the workers are better treated in the host countries.

The energy sector will require a huge investment of up to US\$8 billion by 2025. The 13.54 trillion cubic feet gas reserves are now said to be insufficient. As such, new finds are essential. As offshore drilling will be called for, it will also require the resolution of maritime boundaries with India and Myanmar. The decision to go nuclear will need to be taken. The requirement to produce at least 30 million tons of food grains annually will need a constant and steady supply of inputs, including external procurement of fertiliser.



### Law and Order

Unfortunately, very early into its term, the government was confronted by a bloody armed mutiny among its border guards, known as the Bangladesh Rifles, which were staffed by army officers, of whom over 74 were brutally killed. The government was hard pressed to justify its negotiating tactics vis-à-vis the survivors and other army officers. Investigations are in progress. However, for now, the government must calm passions. Accusations of fundamentalist involvement have already been made. If these are found to be true, there will be reasons to worry. The day-to-day law and order situation will need to be improved. Rewarding the efficient and reprimanding the deficient is a principle more honoured in breach than in observance. This will need to be corrected.



### Foreign Policy

Bangladesh's foreign-policy aspirations have largely focused on the protection of its sovereignty and obtaining resources for its

development. The fact that the country is almost entirely 'India-locked' has led it to a policy of trying to live 'in concord with' but 'distinct from' its powerful neighbour.

Under different Bangladesh governments, the objectives of the foreign policy have not changed much but the nuances have. The AL has a reputation of a more harmonious relationship with India. The foreign-policy aspirations have tended to necessitate a high level of international interaction with Southeast Asia and the Far East, Europe, the United States and the Muslim countries. Relations with the United Nations will be key and the new government will need continued active participation in peace-keeping missions to satisfy the armed forces and the general public. As the Chair of the 50 Least Developed Countries, the government will have to keep trying to acquire better preferential trading terms for them, particularly within the World Trade Organization.

### Good Governance

This cannot be compartmentalised separately as it runs like a thread through all other issues. The new National Human Rights Commission, established on 1 December 2008, must ensure that no one is above the law. The local government chairmen must be more empowered and, to the extent possible, national lawmakers should be kept away from dealing with development funds. The practice of holding cabinet meetings away from

Dhaka must be enhanced to take the government to the 'doorsteps' of the people. The media must function unrestrained. There is much truth to Amartya Sen's dictum that a free press and famine are incompatible. High goals must not distract the government from the provision of basic amenities for a decent life, clean air, safe drinking water, easing traffic congestions, sewage and garbage removals and the prevention of epidemics. Free debates on topics of national importance must be encouraged.

Above all, the government, as all governments everywhere, must learn that the essence of democracy is its capacity to live with an idea that is uncomfortable than to try to suppress it.

There is often talk of the 'Bangladesh Paradox' – the ability of the country to forge ahead at a six-percent growth rate despite its many and varied constraints. The great challenge of the new government would be to convert this 'paradox' into a 'paradigm', to identify and collate Bangladesh's 'best practices' into a model that could be worthy of emulation in societies of comparable milieu.

For the new government, the road ahead may appear steep at times. However, it must not be deterred. It will do well to note that if there is a hill to climb, waiting will not make it any smaller. ■

## ISAS-CAS Workshop

# Governance, the Military and Issues of Stability in Pakistan

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) and the Center for Asia Studies (CAS), Chennai, India, jointly organised a one-day workshop on "Governance, the Military and Issues of Stability in Pakistan" in Chennai on 25 February 2009. More than 150 participants from the government, research and academic institutes, media and the civil society attended the workshop.

In his keynote address, Ambassador M. K. Bhadrakumar IFS (Retd) highlighted the crucial role Pakistan plays in regional security. He said that Pakistan's "unique geographical location implies that there are many surrounding regions which tend to be affected by the issues of stability in that country." Amongst other things, he believes that the issues of governance in Pakistan are similar to those in other South Asian countries, including India. He mentioned that issues such as poverty and development, and equity and justice are also common themes for the region as well. He concluded that "the real sources of Pakistan's instability lie elsewhere..." and that "...so long as the country remains a Praetorian state, it remains at a disadvantage. It is only through uninterrupted, unintermittible democratic rule that Pakistan can ultimately stabilise itself."

In the first plenary session, ISAS researchers shared their views on Pakistan as a garrison state (Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed, Visiting Research Professor); current issues and challenges facing Pakistan (Dr Rajshree Jetly, Research Fellow); and prospects for Pakistan-Afghanistan relations (Mr Shakti Sinha, Research Fellow).

The second plenary session discussed the United States' role in Pakistan and the implications for the trilateral relations (Mr K. J. M. Verma, Correspondent, Press Trust of India); India's responses to the situation in Pakistan (Mr R. Swaminathan IPS); issues of terrorism in South Asia (Mr B. Raman IPS); and Pakistan coping with the economic crisis (Dr S. Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS).

## ISAS-CIGI Symposium The Global Economic Crisis and Challenges to Governance in Asia



The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Canada, jointly organised a symposium on the “Impact of Global Economic Crisis and Challenges to Governance in Asia” on 20 and 21 April 2009.

In delivering the keynote address, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director of the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, outlined ASEAN’s response to the current downturn. He emphasised ASEAN’s commitment to the ongoing reforms in the global financial architecture, liberalising trade and opening markets. He highlighted that the crisis provided a rare opportunity to the region to carefully assess vulnerabilities and address them in a strategic manner.

The first plenary session focused on the economic impact of the crisis. Professor Manmohan Agarwal from CIGI drew attention to the changing macroeconomic fundamentals of the major regions of the world and examined Asia’s performance in relation to those in Latin America and Africa. Dr Pradumna B. Rana, Senior Fellow, Nanyang Technological University, outlined the key issues dominating the discourse on reforming the international financial architecture and

argued for a multipronged approach in managing financial globalisation. Dr Amitendu Palit, Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS, emphasised the need for Asian regionalism to become more ‘pan-Asian’ and extend to South and West Asia through the development of regional production networks.

In the second plenary session on strategic and political impact, Professor Sanjaya Baru, Visiting Professor at ISAS, drew attention to the emerging shifts taking place between and within key international grouping such as G7 and G20 as a result of the crisis. Professor S. D. Muni, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS, enumerated a diverse array of political challenges likely to be faced by the South Asian region, including critical ones such as insurgency and internal disruptions. Dr Lim Tai Wei and Mr Lim Chee Kia, Research Fellow and Research Assistant respectively at the East Asian Institute, Singapore, argued that the crisis can be a catalyst for integration by paving the way for closer cooperation between East Asia and India.

In the third and final plenary session on development impact, Dr Jorge Heine, Distinguished Fellow at CIGI, outlined the multiple governance challenges facing India, both in terms of its emerging role in global forums as well as in the internal sphere. Professor Bibek Debroy, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS, discussed the constraints likely to be faced by the developing countries in achieving the millennium development goals. Associate Professor Victor Savage from the National University of Singapore highlighted the alarming impact of global climatic change and the urgent collaboration needed amongst developing countries to mitigate the concerns.



ISAS and CIGI will bring out the proceedings of the symposium in a volume. The publication is expected to contribute significantly to the emerging literature on the global financial crisis.

# Snippets on South Asia

*Mr M. Shahidul Islam*  
*Research Associate, ISAS*

## Sri Lanka: A New Dawn?

Sri Lanka's nearly three decade-long civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has apparently come to an end, following the defeat of the LTTE and the killing of its key leaders, including Velupillai Prabhakaran, on 18 May 2009.

The human and economic costs of the war have been staggering. An estimated 300,000 people have been displaced by the fighting in the north, a one-time stronghold of the LTTE. The United Nations (UN) has dubbed the situation a humanitarian crisis. Together with the Sri Lankan government, it has announced the launch of a US\$50 million appeal to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the rising number of affected civilians.

The key question is what next for Sri Lanka. The challenge of stabilising post-war Sri Lanka is a formidable one. If the government genuinely focuses on addressing the key concerns of the Tamil minorities, then the longstanding conflict would

lose its purpose. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, has pointed out that the Sri Lankan government should concentrate on three critical areas – immediate humanitarian relief, reintegration and reconstruction, and a sustainable and equitable political solution in the country. The Sri Lankan government is working on a plan to resettle most of the internally displaced persons within 180 days.

If peace finally prevails, the country stands to win significantly from what is known as the economic dividends of peace. The government expects foreign direct investment to more than quadruple to US\$4 billion by 2012. Sri Lanka, however, faces severe short-term economic challenges. Its export and tourism sectors are under severe strain as a result of the global economic crisis. Its gross domestic product growth rate could slip to below three percent in 2009, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. The good news though is that its agricultural sector could witness a strong growth, depending largely on the weather.

## Nepal: Sliding back into the Abyss?

The Himalayan state of Nepal faces the gravest threat to its peace process since 2006, following a dispute over its Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal's (also known as Prachanda) bid to sack the country's army chief on charges of defying the government's orders. Prachanda subsequently resigned on 4 May 2009 after his Maoist government's decision to discharge the army chief was scuttled by the Nepalese President, leading to fresh uncertainties at a time when the country is in the process of adjusting to a new political order. The issue of the recruitment of the Maoists cadres into the army, which has been opposed by the Nepalese army, was seen to be the tipping point for the crisis. Analysts believe that Nepal's most important neighbour, India, also backed the President's opposition to the dismissal of the army chief. There have been some misunderstandings between New Delhi and the Maoist government on the latter's relations with Beijing.

Following Prachanda's resignation, the President has asked the members of parliament to choose a new prime minister

through a majority vote. However, the opposition will not be able to form a stable government as the Maoists and its allies have 237 seats in the 601-member Constituent Assembly. The Maoists have clearly dispelled any attempts to form the next government from outside the parliament. There is also a view that the threat of a political vacuum could convince the Nepalese President to reconsider the Maoists position on the army chief. If the parties other than the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) are unable to form a new government, then a fresh election may be needed to resolve the political deadlock. Any attempt that seeks alternative solutions through undemocratic means could bring the country back into chaos.

The Nepalese economy is expected to do well despite the political impasse. The Economist Intelligence Unit projects that Nepal could witness a four to five percent gross domestic product growth rate in fiscal year 2008/09, largely due to its agricultural sector.



## Maldives: Faces Twin Warming?

The people of Maldives exercised their rights in the country's first multi-party legislative elections on 9 May 2009. The historic poll, to a large extent, went on peacefully, with the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) seats, supported by the sitting government, securing the most seats. It was followed closely by the main opposition Dhivehi Rahyithunge Party (DRP) and the independents.

The available results show that, of the 77 legislative seats, the MDP won 33 seats, the DRP 19 seats and the People's Alliance six seats. As the results indicate no outright majority for the MDP, the party could seek support from the smaller parties and independent winners to form the government.

Maldives' President, Mohamed Nasheed, unveiled a plan on 15 March 2009 to make his country carbon-neutral within a decade. Hardly a few metres above sea-level, the country could possibly be one of the earliest victims of global warming.

The President approached British climate change experts to help develop the radical carbon-neutrality plan that could virtually eliminate fossil fuel use on the Maldives archipelago by 2020. According to the *Guardian*, the plan includes a new renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure with 155 large wind turbines, half a square kilometre of rooftop solar panels and a biomass plant. The cost for the package of low-carbon measures is estimated to be about US\$110m a year for 10 years.

Mohamed Nasheed's initiative to address the climate change and his struggle for democracy convinced the authorities in Stockholm to select him for this year's Anna Lindh prize.

With Maldives being extremely vulnerable to external shocks, its economic growth, according to the Asian Development Bank, is projected to decelerate to one percent in 2009, depending on the depth of the tourism tumble.

## Bhutan: Not Ready for the WTO?

Bhutan's Prime Minister, Lyonchen Jigme Yoser Thinley, has deferred the date of the country's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) with the view that a proper and a serious analysis needs to be done on the cost and implications of obtaining a WTO membership.

With inflation reaching 9.3 percent in the last quarter of 2008 and the increase in civil service salaries, food and commodities

are becoming dearer for the general workers. The proposed wage raise for Bhutan's 4,000 national workforce labourers awaits the cabinet's approval.

According to the Asian Development Bank, the country's gross domestic product growth is projected to be 5.5 percent in the fiscal year 2009, driven largely by the hydro-power projects, the mainstay of the economy.

## ISAS Honorary Senior Fellow



Professor Bibek Debroy  
(May 2009 – May 2011)

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) is pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Bibek Debroy as Honorary Senior Fellow. His appointment is from 16 May 2009 to 15 May 2011. He recently completed a year as Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS.

As an Honorary Senior Fellow, Professor Debroy will assist ISAS to conduct in-depth studies on social, political and economic trends and developments in South Asia, and their impact on Singapore and Southeast Asia. He will also provide valuable and time-sensitive industry information on, as well as linkages within, South Asia.

Professor Debroy is the fourth Honorary Senior Fellow to be appointed by ISAS. ISAS also has two Honorary Fellows in its ranks.

## ISAS New Management Board Member



Mr S. Chandra Das

Mr S. Chandra Das served as a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Singapore from 1980 to 1996. During this period, he served as the Chairman on two Government Parliamentary Committees relating to Defence and Foreign Affairs as well as Finance and Trade and Industry. Mr Das served as the Singapore Trade Representative to the USSR from 1970 to 1971 and Chairman of the Trade Development Board from 1983 to 1986. He was Chairman of NTUC Fairprice Co-operative Ltd from August 1993 to September 2005. He is currently the Managing Director of NUR Investment & Trading Pte Ltd.

Mr Das has been conferred numerous awards, including the President's Medal by the Singapore Australian Business Council in 2000 and Distinguished Service Award (STAR) by the National Trades Union Congress in 2001 and 2005. He is currently Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to Turkey and serves as Pro-Chancellor in Nanyang Technological University. Mr Das graduated with an Honours degree in Economics from the University of Singapore in 1965 and holds a Certificate of Education from the former Singapore Teachers' Training College.

## ISAS New Research Staff



Mr Shakti Sinha  
Research Fellow  
(February 2009 – July 2009)

Mr Shakti Sinha is a public policy specialist with extensive work experience within India and internationally. These basically relate to governance (broadly defined) as well as economic development issues and how they interact with, and influence, each other. Lately, Mr Sinha was at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, where he led international coordination efforts in the development of the sub-national governance policy and public administration reform.

Mr Sinha was the Senior Advisor to the Executive Director on the Board of the World Bank, representing India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, and looked at the Board's proposals relating to bank strategy and budget, trade, private sector development and infrastructure. In the civil service in India, Mr Sinha worked with the Indian Prime Minister as his private secretary. At the field levels, Mr Sinha has worked in the national capital territory of Delhi, Goa and the Andaman Islands, including being the Secretary to the state government.

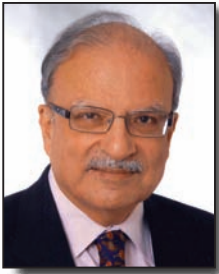


Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury  
Visiting Senior Research Fellow  
(April 2009 – September 2009)

Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury was Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh from 2007 to 2009. Throughout an official career in public service that spanned across four decades, he had also been Ambassador and Permanent Representative to New York (2001-2007) and Geneva (1996-2001). At the United Nations (UN), he was also Chairman of a number of committees, including the Social Commission, the Population and Development Commission, the Second (Economic) Committee, the Information Committee, and the President of the Conference on Disarmament. At the World Trade Organization, he chaired the Trade Policy Review Body and the Committee on Trade and Development. He had been closely associated with the UN Reforms Process and, as a 'Facilitator' helped shape the principle of 'Responsibility to Protect' adopted by World Leaders at the UN Summit of 2005.

He has a PhD and MA in International Relations from the Australian National University, Canberra. Earlier, he obtained a First Class in BA (Honours) from the Dhaka University. He has addressed seminars in many universities and think-tanks around the world and contributed articles to learned journals and newspapers. He was knighted by the Pope in 1999. In 2004, the New York City Council issued a Proclamation naming him as 'one of the world's leading diplomats', acknowledging his global contribution to advancing welfare, alleviating poverty and combating terrorism.

## ISAS New Research Staff (cont'd)



**Mr Shahid Javed Burki**  
Visiting Senior Research Fellow  
(May – August 2009)

Mr Shahid Javed Burki was educated at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and at Harvard University as a Mason Fellow. He spent most of his professional life at the World Bank where he held a number of senior positions, including Director of China and Mongolia Department (1987-1994) as well as Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean (1994-1999).

Mr Burki took leave of absence from the Bank to take up the position of Pakistan's Finance Minister (1996-1997). He is currently Chairman of The Institute of Public Policy, a Lahore-based Pakistan think-tank. Mr Burki resides in Washington.



**Associate Professor Ramkishan S. Rajan**  
Visiting Senior Research Fellow  
(May – August 2009)

Associate Professor Ramkishan S. Rajan is an International Economist with expertise in the areas of international macroeconomic, finance and trade with particular emphasis on Asia. He is an Associate Professor at the School of Public Policy, George Mason University (GMU), a position he has held since January 2006. Prior to that, he was on the faculty of the School of Economics, University of Adelaide for five years. He is also currently an Associate Faculty at the Center for Global Studies, GMU and an Adjunct Fellow at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (Delhi based think-tank). He has held one-year visiting positions at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (NUS) and at the Department of Economics, Claremont McKenna College in California, and shorter visiting positions at the Hong Kong Institute of Monetary Research, NUS, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Institute of Policy Studies in Singapore, and other institutes in Asia.

He has published extensively on various aspects of international economics. He is on the Editorial Board of various academic journals, including *Development Policy Review*, *North American Journal of Economics and Finance*, *International Journal of Business, Management and Economics*, and *e-social science journal*. He holds Economics degrees from the NUS (B.Soc., Sci., Hons), Michigan (MA) and Claremont (MA, PhD). He has been a consultant with the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Development Bank of Singapore, and other places.



**Ms Syeda Sana Rahman**  
Research Associate  
(April 2009 – March 2010)

Ms Syeda Sana Rahman graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in December 2008 with a First Class Honours degree in Political Science. In partial fulfillment of her Honours Degree, Sana wrote her thesis on terrorism and counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia, with a focus on Indonesia. During her time at NUS, Sana also received the NTUC Gold Medal for Most Outstanding Performance in her third year examinations and the Special Book Prize for most outstanding performance in Political Science in her second year. She had also been consistently placed on the Dean's list for meritorious academic performance.

Prior to joining ISAS, Sana worked as a journalist for such organisations as CNN-IBN (India), MediaCorp Pvt Ltd and Singapore Press Holdings (Singapore). By the age of 19, Sana had co-authored *Doing A Little Good* (Singapore: Riding for the Disabled Association of Singapore, 2003), a coffee table book for fund raising purposes. She has also contributed to the creative anthologies *Don't Judge a Book by its Cover* (Singapore: Beaumont Publishing & Ngee Ann Polytechnic, 2003) and *For the Love of God* (Singapore: Beaumont Publishing, 2004).

# ISAS Research Interns



## Navjote Singh Sachdev (March – June 2009)

Navjote Singh Sachdev recently completed his national service and will head to Corpus Christi College, Oxford University, later this year to read Philosophy, Politics and Economics. He has been awarded a government scholarship to pursue his undergraduate studies and will work in the Singapore civil service upon his return.

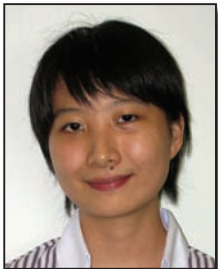
He has a strong interest in social sciences and the South Asian region. He hopes to further his knowledge in these areas during his undergraduate studies. While at ISAS, Navjote worked on the issue of employment generation in Punjab, India.



## Priya Christie (May – August 2009)

Priya Christie is a Psychology major student at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research interests include social behaviour and interactions, global religion and languages, and contemporary issues in South Asia. Besides her profound keenness in Psychology, she has also pursued a wide array of other modules such as World Religion, Geopolitics and Philosophy which have given her valuable insights into contemporary global issues. Of particular mention is Priya's passion and talent for languages. Apart from English and Tamil, she has been learning Hindi for almost a year now, which she can read and write well.

Priya also organises and hosts both school and public media events (Singapore Street Festival), under her co-curricular activity, NUS RadioPulse. She also practices freelance journalism and has researched and written articles for school magazines and *The Straits Times* on a broad range of topics. She is also currently working on another research project on the psychological effects of cigarettes on smokers. During her internship at ISAS, Priya will focus on the issues of child labour and education in the less developed regions of north India.



## Sarah Yan (May – August 2009)

Sarah Yan recently completed her second year of undergraduate studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She is reading Political Science as her major.

Sarah has developed diverse research interests in the course of her study at NUS. These include democratic transitions and separatist movements/insurgencies. As a result of the wave of democratic transitions and ethnic conflicts in South Asia, Sarah believes that she will have ample opportunities during her internship at ISAS to gain a deeper understanding of these issues. These will also provide her with good case studies to further her interests. In particular, she will explore the democratic transition in Nepal during her internship.



## Shareen Anil Pathak (May – August 2009)

Shareen Anil Pathak recently completed her final year at the University of Toronto and will graduate with a B.A. (Honours) in Political Science in June 2009. She will pursue her M.Sc. in Journalism in Columbia University in New York City in August this year.

Her research interests include developmental politics, religious mobilisation and the politics of language and media. She has interned as a reporter with *The Straits Times* and as a management consultant with the Boston Consulting Group. She enjoys writing both fiction and non-fiction. Her long term career goal is to establish her own alternative news organisation in India.

While at ISAS, Shareen will examine the regional and national media landscapes of Maharashtra, India, and the impact of citizen journalism on democracy in the region.

# ISAS Latest Books



## **Indo-US Engagement: An Emerging Partnership and its Implications**

Dr Kripa Sridharan  
Published by Macmillan, India  
February 2009

This monograph charts the course and content of Indo-US engagement, with a view to providing a perspective on the latest turn in the relationship. The focus is on bilateral interactions after the George Bush administration announced its objective to establish a strategic partnership with India, and particularly, the implications of the Indo-US engagement for Asia's international relations.

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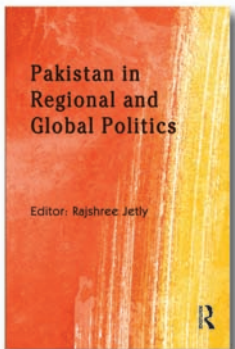


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Ambassador See Chak Mun  
Published by Macmillan, India  
February 2009

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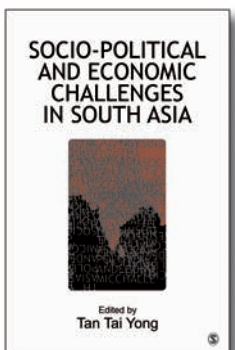


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Edited by Dr Rajshree Jetly  
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April 2009

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Published by SAGE, India  
May 2009

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“India’s Strategic Interests in Southeast Asia and Singapore”, Ambassador See Chak Mun, Senior Fellow, ISAS, February 2009.

“Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics”, edited by Dr Rajshree Jetly, Research Fellow, ISAS, May 2009.

“Socio-Political and Economic Challenges in South Asia”, edited by Professor Tan Yai Yong, ISAS, May 2009.

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“Indian General Elections 2009 – Key Issues That Could Influence Voting Behaviour”, Mr Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, Journalist and Founder, “School of Convergence”, India; and Consultant, ISAS, 9 March 2009.

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Seminar by Dr Ronojoy Sen, Senior Assistant Editor, The Times of India, New Delhi, India, “In The Name of God: Regulating Religion in Indian Elections”, 5 February 2009.

Second India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue, New Delhi, India, 9 – 10 February 2009.

Book Launch on “India’s Strategic Interests in Southeast Asia and Singapore” by Ambassador See Chak Mun, Senior Fellow, ISAS, 10 February 2009.

SAARC Seminar Series – Seminar by Dr S. Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, “SAARC & South Asian Economic Integration”, 19 February 2009.

Joint Workshop with Center for Asia Studies, Chennai, India, “Governance, the Military and Issues of Stability in Pakistan”, 25 February 2009.

SAARC Seminar Series – Seminar by Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, “SAARC: Social Charter and Human Security”, 5 March 2009.

SAARC Seminar Series – Seminar by Mr Robert Hathaway, Director, Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D. C., United States; and Professor Hu Shisheng, Deputy Director and Senior Researcher, Institute of Asian and African Studies, China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations, Beijing, China, “Role of SAARC Observers (Session 2)”, 11 March 2009.

Seminar by Professor Rama Baru, Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, “Health Inequalities in India: Challenges for Policy”, 13 March 2009.

Seminar by General Mahmud Ali Durrani, Former Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on National Security, “Pakistan’s War on Terror”, 19 March 2009.

ISAS-Centre on Asia and Globalisation (Singapore) Seminar by Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, Founder and Secretary, SHUJAN – Citizens for Good Governance, “Bangladesh: Civil Society and Rebirth of Democracy”, 20 March 2009.

Symposium on “The Politics of Religion in South Asia and Southeast Asia”, 24 March 2009.

Seminar by Professor Robin Jeffrey, Emeritus Professor, Australian National University and La Trobe University on “Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers and Politics: Kerala, 1800-2009”, 25 March 2009.

SAARC Seminar Series - Seminar by Professor Sridhar K. Khatri, Executive Director, South Asia Centre for Policy Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal, “Fighting Terrorism Through SAARC”, 27 March 2009.

Seminar by Dr Ayesha Siddiqi, Writer and Independent Military and Political Analyst, “The Rising Tide of Militancy in South Asia”, 14 April 2009.

ISAS-East Asian Institute (Singapore) Panel Discussion on “Global Financial Crisis: The Impact on India and China, and the Responses”, 17 April 2009.

ISAS-CIGI Symposium on “The Impact of Global Economic Crisis and Challenges to Governance in Asia”, 20-21 April 2009. Keynote speaker: Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director, Institute Of Policy Studies, Singapore.

Energy Security Seminar Series - Seminar by Dr Prodipto Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, The Energy & Resources Institute, India, on “South Asia: The Energy Perspective”, 23 April 2009.

ISAS-European Union Centre (Singapore) Seminar by Mr Iftikhar A. Lodhi, Research Associate, ISAS, on “The EU and Southwest Asia: Implications for Southeast Asia”, 24 April 2009.

ISAS-Asian Development Bank Seminar and Book Launch on “Pan-Asian Integration: Linking East and South Asia”, 15 May 2009.

ISAS Panel Discussion on “Indian Elections 2009 – The Results”, 21 May 2009.

ISAS-Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies Roundtable on “Singapore-Bangladesh Relations”, 25 May 2009.

ISAS Book Launch-cum-Panel Discussion on “Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy”, 27 May 2009.