

The Role of Teacher Organisations in Promoting the Ideals of SAARC

by Dr Syed Anwar Husain

ANY human organisation represents unity in diversity. A social or cultural organisation comprising human members is a conglomerate of diverse personality types. Regional or international organisations, comprising either human elements or states as members, are of the same nature. All such types of organisations result from a conscious effort to achieve a common goal by overcoming the differences that divide the component elements. I would like here to consider two such organisations: the Education International (EI) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). I wish in particular, to consider how the members of the former organisation located in South Asia can promote the objective of the latter organisation. In fact, we have to consider three interrelated concepts: education, educator or teacher and SAARC. To establish the suggested interlinkage all these three concepts need to be explicated in the relevant context.

Education is about the way in which human beings live their lives. Its function is to improve the quality of life. But there are two views of human life, both valid and both the concern of the teacher. English poet and clergyman John Donne (1572-1631) once asserted that "No man is an island intire unto itself" (Devotions XVII). In reality, however, we live our lives on the separate islands of our own consciousness. No man can ever scale the cliffs of another's island. They are impenetrable except for the ability to communicate with other islands, but the isolation diminishes as this ability improves.

The loneliness and the transitoriness of man impels him to reach out to his fellows for companionship and security. The urge to do so is the oldest and deepest social need, and so he becomes part of a community bound together by a crisis-cross of relationships. He is a separate island but, because of his humanity, his island can never be quite entire unto itself. The task of education is concerned with

the individual and with society. Education therefore its organisation, method and content, can never be isolated from social change. Education must be robustly responsive to the winds of change but not over sensitive to every fashionable breeze.

The UNESCO Special Intergovernmental Conference on the Status of Teachers held on 5 October 1986 in Paris elaborated on the concept of education with the following penetrating words:

Education from the earliest school years should be directed to the all-round development of the human personality and to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and economic progress of the community, as well as to the incultation of deep respect for human rights and fundamental freedom; within the framework of these values the utmost importance should be attached to the contribution to be made by education to peace and to understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and among racial or religious groups.

Such a spirit of education is also captured in the derivation of the word education. In Latin, we find the word *educere* meaning 'to lead out', but we also find the word *educare* meaning 'to educate', 'to bring up', 'to raise'. And it is from the latter that our word 'education' is directly derived. Education thus means leading out the innate knowledge, virtues and powers of man, making the potential actual. To be more apt, education involves a modification of natural development which, as a result to education, is other than it would have been without it. John Stuart Mill makes the concept more categorical when he asserts that "whatever helps to shape the human being, to make the individual what he is, or hinder him from being what he is not — is part of his education".

There must, then, be two persons in education, one of whom, the teacher, is deliberately seeking to modify the development of the other. Like a magnet, education must have two poles, it is a bi-polar process. It is a teacher who acts

on a pupil. It thus appears that much in education depends on how and what a teacher can deliver. The UNESCO report quoted earlier emphasises this point by stressing the qualifications of teachers. "It should be recognised that advance in education depends largely on the qualifications and ability of the teaching staff in general and technical qualities of the individual teachers".

I deem it relevant her to ponder the question: what makes the role of teachers or their organisation so important to the advancement of the goals of SAARC? Perhaps it would be a rewarding exercise in this context if we flip a page of German history. After the humiliating defeat of Germany by Napoleon at Jena in 1806, Fichte, Professor of Philosophy at Jena, and afterwards Rector of the new university at Berlin, gave in the winter 1807-8 a remarkable series of Addresses to the German Nation, pleading that the state could regenerate itself only through education. "It is education alone," he said, "which can save us from all the evils by which we are oppressed". As home to a sizeable chunk of the world's poor, South Asia has to cope with evils that are more numerous and serious than those Fichte's Germany had to deal with. If education can save a nation it can save nations in a region, or all across the world. A message like this is conveyed when Mary Hatwood Futrell, President of Education International (EI) says, "We have the opportunity to transform eloquent words into dynamic action". While addressing a meeting to the organisation she headed in January 1993 she urge teachers to fully shoulder their responsibilities and to have the courage to show the world's government leaders that teachers mean business.

Education International appears to be inherently predisposed towards the goals of harmony and peace. In a sense, SAARC, the first ever regional body in South Asia is, by nature and spirit, an organisation not different from the Education International. Both are geared to the purpose of seeking common good for a large num-

ber of humans. A perusal of the objectives and projected activities of the Education International shows that its members possess certain values that enable them to play some role in the advancement of the goals of SAARC. This is, however, a role more pertinent to those members who are located in South Asia.

The critical relevance of the Education International becomes apparent when it is found that the constitution states the organisation "shall be independent of every government... self-governing and not subject to control by any political party or ideological or religious grouping". Working at the grass-root level in the seven countries the teachers belonging to this organisation can influence public opinion which will be independent of any political bias or government policy. It is expected that the opinions thus formed may be for the common good of the South Asian people. Governments and political parties have difficulty in rising above their own stated policies and views, most of which may

not serve the common purpose of all governments and parties in South Asia. Under such circumstance, Education International can play a role that a government or political party may find it difficult to play.

The best thing that can happen to the SAARC countries is a rise in literacy and a steady growth of skilled manpower. By deciding to promote education and training as public service the Education International has imposed a responsibility on its members that is certainly desirable and relevant in the South Asian context. As stated by the Education International this public service has five specific goals: the recognition and acceptance of public education as the cornerstone of development programmes; the demand for proper financing of education; the promotion of an Education Reform to adapt school systems to changing realities to achieve quality education and recognise teachers' professional status; the improvement of teachers' conditions of service; the imple-

mentation of specific education programme on pedagogical concerns and questions like AIDS prevention.

The Education International agenda for 1993-95 also addressed such specific issues as the status of women, the rise of racism and xenophobia, and education on health and environment. The stated goals and priorities of the Education International are mostly the same as those of SAARC.

Article 1 of the SAARC Charter has the following eight objectives:

- to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- to accelerate economic growth social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potentials;
- to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- to strength cooperation with other developing countries;
- to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
- to cooperate with international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes.

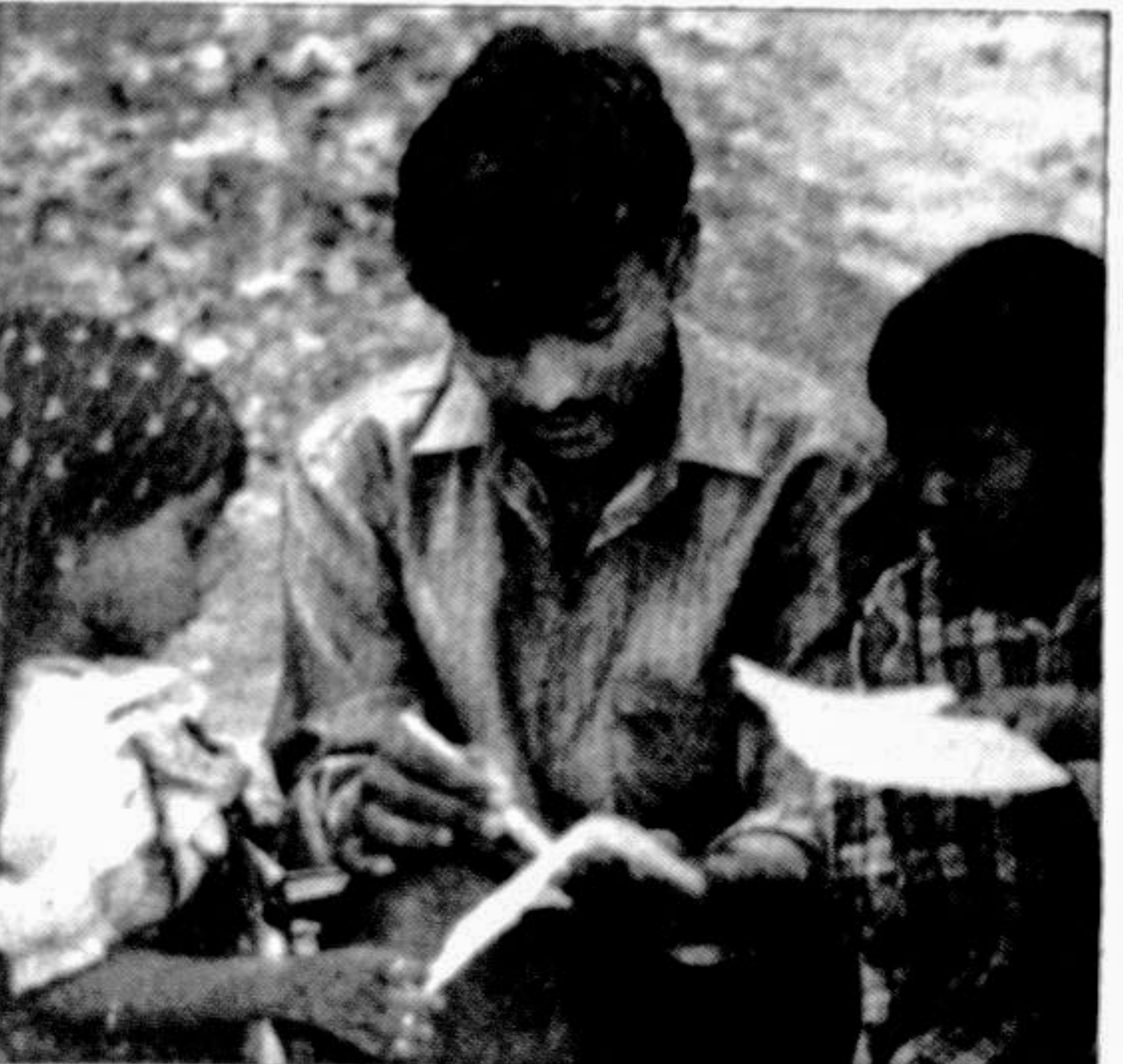
Moreover the Fourth Summit held in Islamabad in 1988 adopted a Basic Needs approach which included education as one of the priorities. None of the above objectives can be achieved without a satisfactory rise in literacy and education in the SAARC countries. It is here that the teachers of the Education International can serve the people in their respective countries. It is not merely the direct personal involvement in education that these teachers can contribute, they can also exert considerable pressure in their respective countries to

raise allocation in the education sector. South Asian governments are known for their discriminatory allocation between defence and education; and in the process defence gets the lion's share of scant resources. As one of the top-ranking executives of the organisation has put it unequivocally, "Getting governments to subsidize education decently, just like the public services, is always the result of pressures, claims and actions. In such confrontation, the union has a decisive role to play". Education International is a new tool the world teachers have just given themselves.

As an institution SAARC is a concept turned into reality; but insofar as achievement of objectives is concerned it leaves much to be desired. Much remains to be done. Considering the constraints and obstacles SAARC has had to face its achievements are, however, not as insignificant as its detractors would have us believe. Perhaps SAARC has yet a long struggle ahead. But one of the ways to prepare for such a struggle is to put this still fledgling body on a solid footing. Structurally, SAARC remains dominated by bureaucrats. An astute observer of the South Asian scenario Kuldip Nayyar has the following to say on the negative impact of bureaucrats on Indo-Pakistan relations, "If one were to single out persons responsible for not even allowing decency to reflect in differences [between India and Pakistan] the bureaucrats are most to blame. They are the ones who give shape to politicians' populist perception; they invariably mix with it their prejudice and megalomaniac notion of their nation's grandeur". What these words appear to suggest is that a betterment of Indo-Pakistan relations is predicated on a widespread people to people contact between these two countries. The same is true for SAARC. It is heartening to know that from the very beginning this imperative has been endorsed in the SAARC documents. The seventh summit held in Dhaka on 10-11 April 1993 stressed that the formulation of guidelines and procedures for extending

recognition to regional apex bodies would facilitate participation of these bodies in promoting regional cooperation at the 'people-to-people level'. There are already some such apex bodies operating in South Asia; these are, for example, the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, South Asian Festival for cultural events; and the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians. Unfortunately, however, there is no such forum for teachers, who I believe, are the ones most relevant in building people-to-people contact from the grass-root level. In this context my humble suggestion would be to form a South Asian Teachers Forum out of the members of the Education International. The members of the proposed South Asian Teachers Forum would, in reality, advance the common goals of the Education International and SAARC. If the teachers belonging to this international body can deliver goods as envisaged I find the words of Federico Mayor, Director-General, UNESCO most relevant when he says "If [Education International] has the know-how and the talent to implement innovation and sharing far beyond what is normally found in government circles".

In this last decade of the millennium we are witnessing changes that may be either auspicious or ominous for the days ahead. But we have the ability and skill to shape change for our benefit. For this we need to harness the energy and wisdom that has so often come out of humans in service of such an exalted goal. The critical relevance of the Education International in seeking a goal like this becomes evident when we are reminded of the fact that this is a time of exploding role of NGOs around the world. We need to nurture these forces as we seek to weld larger structures that cross familiar borders and power centres. Thus the esteemed teachers of the Education International can and should exert themselves in advancing SAARC as an institution capable of delivering the desired goals.



At the grass root level teachers can help form opinions which will be independent of any political bias or government policy — which can only be for the common good of the South Asian people.

Reading, Writing, Herding

By Bharat Dogra

THE truck sped away after running over and killing Zahir's goat its driver sure that the ignorant cattle herders who saw the accident in the forests near the North Indian town of Dehradun, could not read his license plate.

But unlike in the past, when they helplessly watched rash highway drivers knock down their livestock, the nomadic forest dwellers were ready this time.

Whipping out their smudgy notebooks and pencil stubs, they scribbled down the truck's number. Luck was with them when they spotted the same vehicle a few days later. Faced with recorded proof of his crime, the driver agreed to pay Zahir for his goat.

This sequence would have been unimaginable a year ago when none of the migrant tribal cattle herders could read or write.

Thanks to a remarkable literacy scheme, the Gujjars have now picked up these skills even while migrating every season from their winter forest homes near the Himalayan foothills.

Taking literacy to the 8,000 nomadic Gujjars households inhabiting the forests spread across Dehradun and its adjoining districts, has been no easy task for the Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK), a non-governmental organisation based in Dehradun.

There are no classrooms and RLEK instructors have to walk or ride a bicycle several kilometres in the forest every day to reach their 'learners'. Then there is the seasonal

advantage of their ignorance. RLEK is trying to arrange bulk milk buyers for the Gujjars here so that they do not have to deal with middlemen. The herders are also being trained to use fat testing machines so that they can get the right price for their produce.

Literacy may also eventually lead to the Gujjars being given voting rights. The Gujjars occupy a small part of a proposed 820 sq km elephant sanctuary which will stretch across the forests of Dehradun and its adjoining districts.

The herders are resisting the government's plans to resettle them and deny accusations that they are poaching wildlife and their livestock destroying the forests.

Authorities recognise only 512 families as bonafide settlers in the forest on the basis of forest residence and livestock permits given four decades ago.

The RLEK has now asked India's poll commission to consider the case of the Gujjars and regularise their right to a vote which was not allowed them because of their uncertain residential status.

The literacy scheme has given new confidence to learners like the young mother Bano who lives in the remote Gujjars settlement of Pikhansot.

Her three-month-old child in her lap, Bano writes with painstaking care in her notebook before her instructor.

"I was reluctant to join because I was afraid of the written word," she says shyly, speaking in her local tongue. "No more."

— IPS

Education for Cultural Democracy — A Global Perspective

by Mr Hedayat Ahmed

IN the social transformations observed today, one of the most visible processes is the resurgence of identities and violence linked to questions of ethnicity and nationalism. This contrasts with the increasing globalization of markets, technology and telecommunications which are erasing traditional frontiers and national boundaries. This trend, in its extreme form, leads to tragic conflicts such as that in the former Yugoslavia, and also brings forth haunting echoes from the past of fascism and of xenophobia, which the world, reeling from the horrific effects of the second world war, vowed in 1946 never again to witness.

There is a renewed quest to establish the identity and find out the reasons for living. The search has to be made not in shattered hopes devastated societies, ashes of burned villages or in the bloated corpses in the rivers of Rwanda. We must seek to find the answers in lofty ideals universal in their acceptance which have provided the beacon to human societies in times of crisis. No doubt we are living in an era which portends of catastrophe on the one hand and offers immense possibilities on the other. The option is clear. We should promote a culture of peace to build a more humane society — a society based on tolerance, dignity and respect for all human beings.

In this respect, education is not neutral. It has its goal, it is conceived and sustained in its humanistic dimension as an essential driving force of international peace and understanding. In other words, education is conceived to "construct the defenses of peace in the minds of men".

An enlightened society conscious of its rights and obligations is a pre-condition for peace, progress and international understanding. This awareness can only come through education in all forms to meet varied needs. It must be geared to promote better understanding, fortify democratic values and ideas, and strengthen respect and tolerance for each other. Thus, education plays a central role in reinforcing the interactive forces forming the social fabric for the ultimate good of all human beings. Any denial of this opportunity causes social upheaval thereby undermining the very foundation of a stable society. It future generations do not know and understand the world much better than the present generation and its leaders and opinion makers, their survival chances will be

in grave jeopardy. The locus of human cooperation for mutual enrichment as well as survival is moving from national to the world level.

A democratic culture which enables people to take informed decision about them-



seives cannot flourish in ignorance and darkness. Education is a precondition for building a democratic culture. Ignorance strengthens totalitarianism, enfeebls expression of free will. Education lies at the heart of humankind's ceaseless endeavour to forge a culture embedded on universal values yet safeguarding the distinctive characteristics.

In order to promote international understanding and peace, education systems have to take account of the diversity of cultures which makes the richness of humankind. There is on the one hand a system which encloses itself in the culture specific to its geographical area, bearing the imprint of its history, and ignores other cultures and their diversity. But there is also a system which adopts curricula and learning/teaching activities stimulating pupils' understanding about culture other than their own. Such a system supports an intercultural approach to education.

It is necessary to promote the kind of education system that recognizes other culture and is responsive to contemporary cultural and artistic life which provides a forum for intercultural dialogue and consequently opens the way to international understanding and peace.

The international school correspondence, inter-school travel exchanges and sister-school system should be promoted as appropriate means of fostering intercultural education. The experience of the Associated Schools Project promoted by UNESCO shows how intercultural and international education can be promoted in the school system.

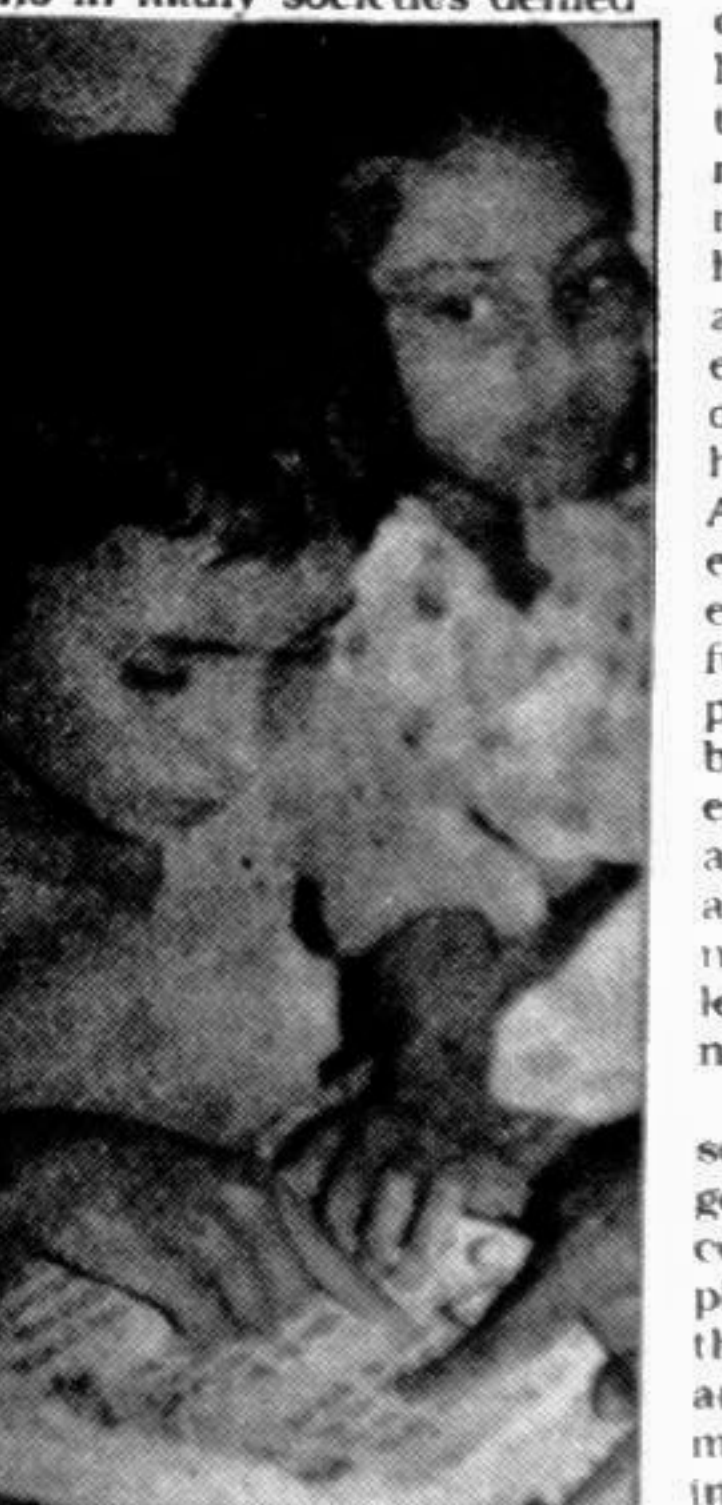
The promotion of a new approach to culture calls for increased consultation and cooperation on the part of the international community. The interdependence between culture and education is well established. The understanding of various culture and their own cultural heritage will foster awareness in the students of the need for their safeguarding. Moreover, teaching of genuine cultural democracy will provide for the development and flowering of the creative abilities of the young generation. Education is undeniably the most appropriate vehicle for the dissemination of new ideas and constitutes a system through which such ideas can be more directly integrated into day-to-day life of a community.

Standing at the threshold of the 21st century, and third millennium of human civilization, one looks back specially at the last half of this century with awe and admiration at the immense power which society has acquired to control its destiny. Let me quote Mr Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission and Chairman of the International Commission on Education of the Twenty-first Century. Thus, at the end of the twentieth century our future appears at once promising and full of anxiety, as if suspended in a fragile balance between two contrary poles. The main question, more than ever before, is to know how humanity can retain control over its destiny and muster at least partially the course of history.

This century witnessed two catastrophic global wars causing immense human suffering. There have been more than 100 major conflicts in the past four decades taking the lives of tens of thousands of people. On the other hand, the world has experienced significant material progress; but regrettably the benefits have not reached all communities equitably. For example, 85 per cent of the world's income goes to 23 per cent of the people while one billion people survive below US\$1 a day. The United States with 5 per cent of the world's

population consumes 25 per cent of world's available energy. By the year 2000, two billion people out of an estimated global population of 6.25 billion will be living below the poverty line. This glaring inequity if not addressed with determination will render all efforts towards progress and development an exercise in futility. The gap can only be reduced by the establishment of a global partnership for development. Such a development, if it is to be meaningful, must be genuinely human development — indigenous, equitable, sustainable and incorporating the essential dimensions of culture. Its worldwide promotion will require a renewed solidarity and a sense of urgency on the part of the industrialized countries to respond to the rising expectation of the developing world.

Over the last few years humanity has traversed a long path towards achieving its noble goals. The retreat of totalitarian ideologies, the dismantling of the odious doctrine of apartheid, initiatives on disarmament, global consensus on preserving and safeguarding the environment, establishment of democratic institutions in many societies denied



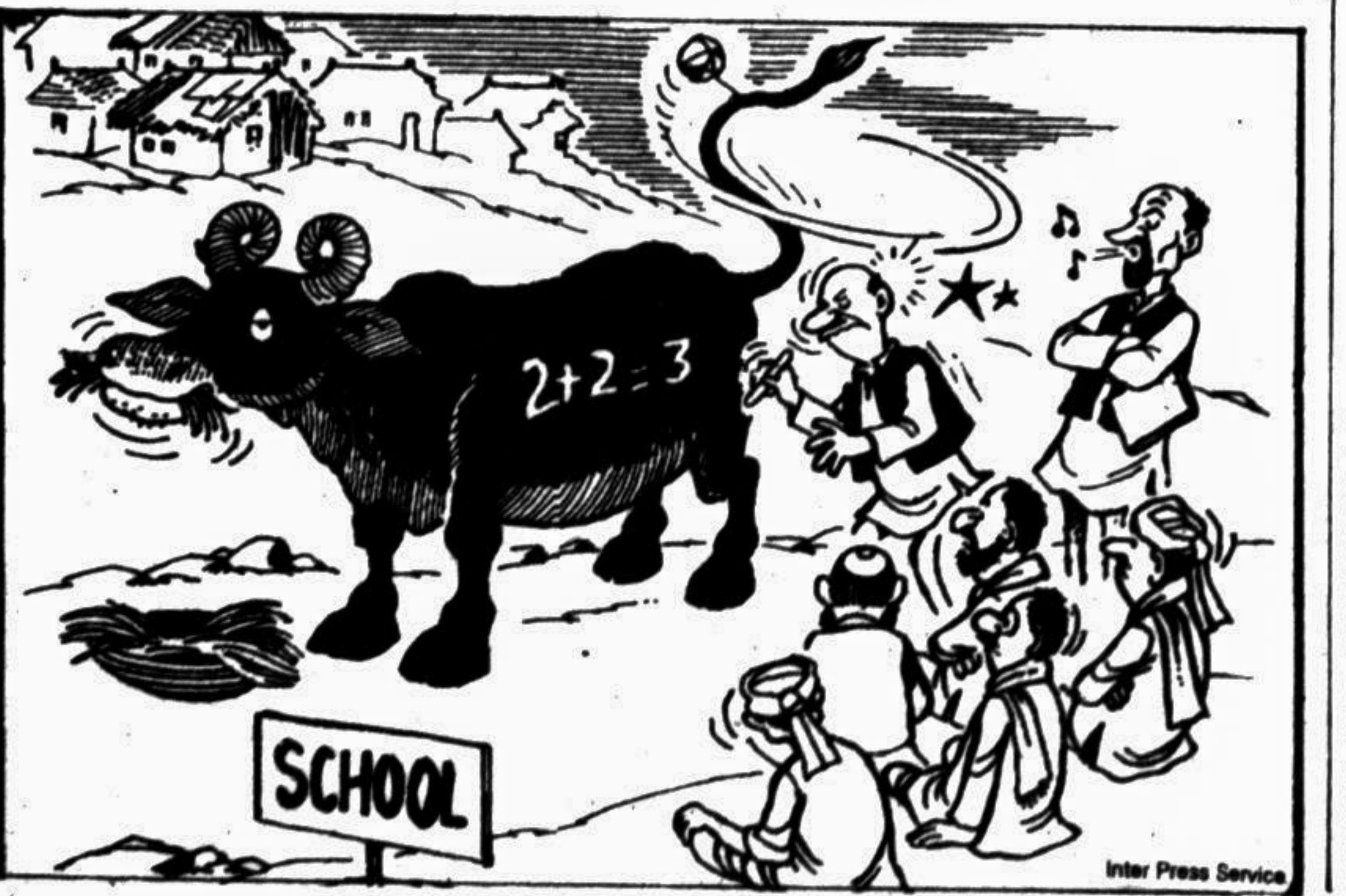
of free will and plurality of expression global coalition among the developed and developing countries for tackling the problems of illiteracy, poverty and environmental degradation are no mean achievements. Yet, at the same time we are witnessing a resurgence of nationalism, xenophobia, growth of religious fundamentalism and reli-

gious and ethnic intolerance which if not contained will et al. at nought all efforts to build a sharing and caring society. UNESCO has for many years sought to promote the teaching of tolerance in schools on the basis of its 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In recent years, it has come to be recognized that time has come to review and if necessary revise the 1974 Recommendations to give it greater impact and attune it to the new realities.

Environment with its unique diversity is a legacy we have inherited from our forebears which we are morally bound to bequeath to the posterity. Human being in its quest for growth had in the past paid scant regard to the imperatives of preserving and safeguarding the environment for the well-being of future generations. The World Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in June, 1992 sharpened the global concern on this vital issue. The conference has not only stimulated greater awareness but led to concrete programmes, both nationally and globally. The need for mobilization of enhanced resources — financial and technical — to promote environment-friendly development and growth strategy has been underscored. Awareness-building is a vital educational function since the establishment of a sustainable future will depend to an important extent on the contribution of active and knowledgeable citizens to the achievement of a delicate balance between competing needs and interests. We must learn to live in harmony with nature — not in conflict.

In the light of the current social transformations, it is urgent to facilitate international comparative and interdisciplinary scientific research in the area of multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity; to promote intellectual co-operation in this field, and to encourage dialogue between those social scientists in the area and those policy makers faced with the major challenge of inventing "governance models" for which there are no precedents and no examples. It is a challenge which must be faced with foresight and vision.

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