Law and Our Rights

Terrorism, US-style

by Chaiwat Satha-Anand

There were 304 acts of international terrorism in 1997, leaving 221 dead and 693 injured. Most of the casualties were from the Middle East and Asia. Among the victims of terrorism last year, seven who died and 21 who were injured were Americans. Approximately, one-third of the attacks, or 123 incidents, were against US targets. Of these attacks, 87 per cent involved bombs.

ON August 7, Bombs exploded at the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzana, killing 263 people and wounding approximately 4,000 others.

Two weeks later, on Aug 20, the US navy launched 75 to 80 Tomahawk cruise missiles from its ships in the Arabian and the Red seas at targets the American government believes to have been a chemical weapons plant somewhere northeast of Khartoum, Sudan and a training camp for terrorists 150 km southeast of Kabul, Afghanistan. Thirty people were reported killed by these missiles.

Soon after the attacks, US President Bill Clinton said they were not aimed against Islam, but at "fanatics killers who wrap murder in the cloak of righteousness".

Supporters of the attack include Newt Gingrich, the Republican house speaker, who said the US "did exactly the right thing", traditional allies such as Chancellor Kohl of Germany, and some 80 per cent of the American public surveyed by the ABC television network immediately after the news of the attacks became public.

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Perhaps as a result, the US formulated a three-part counter-terrorist policy: make no concessions to terrorists, bring terrorists to justice, and isolated and apply pressure on governments which are thought to sponsor terrorism.

In this sense, the US is both a target of terrorism and a kind of global police officer/judge who is expected by some to gather information and then judge and punish terrorists whose actions undermine world peace and jeopardise American interests, broadly defined.

But elsewhere, from Pakistan to Malaysia, especially in the Muslim world, these missiles attacks were condemned as a 'violation of territorial integrity' and "dangerous" to humankind. They were carried out because of American arrogance, its hegemonic position, its animosity towards Muslims and its possession of high destructive weapons.

It is my contention that terrorism in all forms cannot be condoned because it is an act designed to realise some political goal by sacrificing the lives of innocents. To justify terrorism is to accept that innocent lives are expendable for the sake of the terrorists' "higher cause".

There is always a reason for terrorism but the acts themselves are, without exception, wholly unreasonable.

Although, according to one analyst, there are as many as 109 different definitions of terrorism provided by various writers from 1939 to 1981, its most basic feature is the severing of links between the target of violence and the reason for violence.

Under the shadow of terrorism, no one is safe anywhere. Without warning and not knowing why, anyone, young or old, male or female, could lose his/her life simply because he/she, happens to be in a place at a time when a terrorist's bomb explodes.

It threatens the power of the state precisely because it replaces the sense of security with fear, and thereby undermines a most sacred duty states everywhere owe their citizens to provide safety to all.

But is it justifiable for the state to respond with violence such as these missile attacks?

I would argue that it is difficult to justify such attacks on the grounds that, similar to terrorism, it violates a sovereign state's territorial rights and the right to life of innocents.

To launch Tomahawk missiles 4,000 km from across the sea to attack another country certainly violates some states' airspace and other's territorial integrity. The only justification for such an attack is information that these states are sponsors of terrorism and so their rights can be ignored.

Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, has defined seven governments as state sponsors of terrorism: those of Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. With the Taleban coming to power in Afghanistan, the list can certainly be extended from the US government's perspective.

Despite their accuracy, the destructive power of, missiles is indiscriminate. Innocent lives are again sacrificed, no matter how small in number, for the sake of punishing the terrorists.

Viewing the event from the perspective of a Sudanese of an Afghan, his/her life is not safe because his/her sense of security is lost under the hitech shadow of missile attacks, from afar at the hands of the world's only remaining superpower.

In this sense, can these 30 people who were killed in the attacks be considered victims of another form of terrorism — state terrorism?

Attacking a factory in Sudan or a camp in Afghanistan is considered a "pre-emptive strike" by the US government. But it is important to ask if, as a result of these attacks, the lives of Americans and others are better protected.

It seems obvious that these attacks will not put an end to terrorism since it is not only material capability that is important to an act of terror but also a strong sense of determination, believing in the justice of the cause, that makes terrorism possible. As a matter of fact, it is this willingness to die for a cause that makes modern terrorism so very dangerous.

It is highly doubtful if these missile attacks could ever undermine the terrorists' determination to carry out their actions. If anything, the lives of ordinary Americans and other nationalities are even more threatened given the heightened anger and hatred of the terrorists and those related to them who were punished by the attacks.

With tightened security measures, a remarkable loss of trust in other human beings, and a life lived in fear, any sense of security among Americans and others is severely compromised. The world seems acutely more dangerous to most of us all of a sudden.

Terrorism and violent responses to it are normally dangerous because the logic of terror that governs the pattern of behaviour resulting from the two sides' actions dictates an escalation of violence which, in turn, endangers the normality of life.

To weaken the logic of terror it is perhaps wise to heed Gandhi's admonition against retribution.

Gandhi once commented on the use of violence and violent response that, an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind.

The notion of blindness here is both physical and metaphorical. At the metaphorical level, the acceptance of the logic of terror leads to at least three kinds of blindness.

First, violence prevents most parties from seeing the genuine causes of grievance which gave rise to the use of terrorism in the first place as a means to achieve some political goal. The escalation of violence robs the ability of conflicting parties to appreciate the causes and chain of events that result in terrorism and its responses.

Second, users of violence are blind to the rights of innocents to life and freedom from fear. They become pawns in the chess game of violence governed by the logic of terror. Pawns are always dispensable.

Third, caught in the logic of terror, the parties involved are blind to non-violent alternatives are at times informed by age-old wisdom that teaches humanity to respect the right to life, as evident in the first precept of Buddhism, the Christian commandment not to kill and the following verse from the *Koran*:

And if anyone saved a life,
It would be as if he saved
The life of the whole people
(V: 32)

The writer is Director of the faculty of Political Science's Peace Information Centre at Thammasat University, Thailand. **Courtesy : International Movement for a Just World**

Amnesty V. USA

Amnesty Campaigns Against Abuses in USA

by Jim Lobe

"The United States was founded in the name of democracy, political and legal equality, and individual freedom," Amnesty noted in a 153-page report. "However, despite its claims to international leadership in the field of human rights, and its many institutions to protect individual civil liberties, the USA is failing to deliver the fundamental promise of rights for all."

AMNESTY International launched a worldwide campaign against human rights abuses in the United States, charging that the rights of thousands of people were being violated across the country.

Abuses ranged from police and prison brutality to the death penalty, which Amnesty said had been used in "an arbitrary, unfair and racist" manner against scores of people, including children, since executions were resumed in 1977.

The Amnesty campaign will involve some one million Amnesty members around the world joining the 300,000 members of Amnesty-USA to press federal, state and local officials to take action. The United States has never been the target of such a global effort.

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The London-based human rights organisation, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977, is most concerned about the plight of prisoners or criminal suspects in the United States, according to the report, 'United States of America: Rights for All.'

They are not only subject to arbitrary, racist, and sometimes brutal behaviour by police or prison officials, but they may also become victims of weapons and restraints that can inflict great pain and worse, the report said.

'Law enforcement officials in the USA have a huge array of equipment at their disposal which at times contributes to human rights violations," according to Pierre Sane, amnesty International's secretary-general.

Although banned by most West European countries, Canada, and some US states and cities, electro-shock stun guns and similar weapons are still authorised for use in many police departments, jails and prisons across the United States, according to the report.

These devices have killed, according to the report, which cited the death of two men in Pomona, California, who died after being jolted by police with stun guns on separate occasions.

In addition, some jurisdiction use stun belts, an electro-shock device often used to subdue prisoners, most recently during a criminal trial in California. According to the manufacturer's literature, the belt will knock prisoners to the ground and may cause them to defecate or urinate involuntarily.

That kind of brutality continues in prison where physical and sexual violence, including rape — a form of torture — against inmates, both by guards and fellow-prisoners, was "endemic." The United States currently has one of the largest prison populations in the world. Worse, as of last June, more than 3,500 minors were housed with adult inmates in US prisons and are thus subject to the same kind of abuses.

"The stun belt is, by its very nature, an instrument designed to instill fear and pain," said Sane. "Even if the button is never pressed, the constant threat of such a jolt is inhumane."

Pepper spray, used by 3,000 US police departments, is another weapon which should be urgently reviewed or banned, according to the report. More than 60 prisoners have died after being sprayed, said Sane who noted that it has also been dabbed into the eyes and sprayed on the genitals of protesters — "which is tantamount to torture."

Aside from the use of hi-tech weapons, more conventional police abuse — including potentially lethal choke holds or "hog-tying" — remains widespread across the United States and is often deployed against racial and ethnic minorities who are "particularly liable to suffer police brutality," according to the report.

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The death penalty, which is permitted by law in 38 of the 50 states, remains a major human rights concern in the United States. Amnesty said more than 350 people have been executed since 1990, 74 of them just last year, more than 3,300 others currently in prison have been sentenced to die.

The report noted that, while a similar number of black and white people are victims of violent crime, 82 percent of people executed since over the last 20 years have been convicted of killing white victims. "Factors like aggravating circumstances cannot explain this disparity," the report concludes.

Worse, some 24 states permit the execution of people who were under 18 at the time of the crime, and, since 1990, the US has been only one of six countries in the world known to have executed juveniles. The others are Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Since 1989, more than 30 mentally impaired people have also been executed.

Amnesty also cited Washington's selective observance of other international human rights instruments, such as the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its use of dozens of reservations, such as its right to execute juveniles, to undermine such treaties.

Finally, Amnesty accused the United States of contribution to rights abuses in other countries as the world's largest producer and exporter of arms, including weapons that have been used for torture and to carry out political killings.

"The USA should adopt and rigorously enforce a Code of Conduct to regulate all military, security and police sales and assistance to other countries, in order to ensure that US transfers of such equipment or expertise do not contribute to serious human rights abuses elsewhere," the report concludes.

Eviction of Slum Dwellers in Bangladesh: Whither Adequate Rehabilitation?

by Dr Faustina Pereira

NEWSPAPER reports published at the end of August carried reports of the eviction of *basti* (slum) dwellers by the government from behind the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel and areas surrounding the Panthapath Road, Dhaka. These *basti* dwellers had been residents of the *basti* for several years. Their existence had inevitably become linked to the existence of the *basti* which, due to the centrality of its location, had provided them a source of livelihood and shelter. Newspaper reports state that the process of eviction began early in the morning and continued late into the night and that over seven hundred families were evicted. The reports go on to state that these families were first sent to a place near the *Buddhijibi mazar* in the Mirpur area, but after the residents bitterly protested the move, the *basti* people were forced out of the area. They then went to their *basti* and raised a barricade along the Sonargaon Road for about two hours. They were later taken to a place at Mirpur Section 12, near a ceramic factory.

Soon after reading these reports, *Ain O Salish Kendra* (ASK), a legal aid and human rights organisation, sent its Investigation Unit to monitor and investigate the process of eviction and observe the rehabilitation of the evicted people. The team made on-site investigations and monitored the evictions and interviewed the evicted slum dwellers. The report submitted by the team states that despite public assurances by RAJUK that measures had been taken to rehabilitate the *basti* dwellers in Mirpur, including building of houses and provision of water, sanitary and electric facilities, the *basti* dwellers on arriving at Mirpur Section 12 found a virtually vacant land, which had upon it about 20 completed bamboo structures, while the rest (about 650 houses) were not complete, having only standing bamboos, without any roof or covering. Moreover, the Report continues, each family in this open land had been allocated merely 3 feet by 5 feet space, whereas each family has an average of 7 members. Again, for over 700 families, there have been constructed only 8 latrines which are located at the lower/sloping end of the area, making it very difficult for old and sick people and children to use them. Three tubewells had been provided, of which two are still in the process of being installed. The *basti* dwellers are also without electricity and do not have access to the market or work places. More alarming still is the reported fact that of the money provided (Tk 1000 per family) to the slum dwellers as compensation, they could retain only a fraction, as they were bullied by local *mastaans* into paying up large sums of their compensation.

A number of fundamental issues of human rights arise from this situation of eviction. To begin with, does not the government have a duty of care towards its citizens, in this case, did the Government fulfill its Constitutional duty to ensure provision of basic necessities? If there does exist such a duty of care, does to waver depending upon the solvency of its recipients? What constitutes adequacy of rehabilitation? What is the position of the Government *vis-a-vis* evicted citizens? If the government had taken all necessary measures to ensure the smooth functioning of the eviction and made necessary arrangements for rehabilitation, as publicly claimed by RAJUK, then why treat the slum dwellers like disposable objects, being unmethodically moved from one place to the other?

For our discussion on adequate rehabilitation of slum dwellers, one of the most pertinent provisions of the Constitution is Article 15, which elaborates on the State's responsibility to provide basic necessities to citizens. This Article states:

It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain, through planned economic growth a constant increase of productive forces and a steady improvement in the material and cultural standard of living of the people, with a view to securing to its citizens :

a. the provision of the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care;

b. the right to work, that is the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage, having regard to the quantity and quality of work;

c. the right to reasonable rest, recreation and leisure; and

d. the right to social security, that is to say to public assistance in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age, or in other such cases.

This Article, read in conjunction with Article 32, which guarantees the fundamental right to life, points out that the right to life is not limited to mere existence but includes the right to livelihood and its resulting necessities. Thus, there is a clear and positive duty upon the Government by the Constitution to provide for the people basic necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care, the right to work and the right to social security.

The positive duty of the Government to provide adequate housing and rehabilitation to its citizens, in this case, evicted slum dwellers, is clear from the National Housing Policy of Bangladesh, adopted in 1993. This Policy reflects the provisions enunciated in the Constitution and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the need for adequate housing and prevention of forcible eviction. Moreover, the government of Bangladesh has consistently affirmed its support for the provision of measures for the adequate housing and shelter and for the alleviation of poverty among the urban poor. Bangladesh had voted in favour of the Recommendations issued by the UN Conference on Human Settlements in 1976. Bangladesh is also bound to take into consideration Resolution 1993/77 of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and Resolution 1991/12 of the United Nations Sub Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities which affirm that "forced eviction constitute a gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing."

It is truly astonishing that under the cover of protection and rehabilitation of the poor slum dwellers, the government has gone ahead and acted contrary not only to Constitutional provisions and international standards of human rights, but also to its own policy. It is very disheartening to see the discrepancy in avowed governmental policy and its materialisation. Sustaining consistency between its words and deeds is a must for the government to hope to have credibility before its people.

The writer is Coordinator, Advocacy, Ain O Salish Kendra.

The Reform of Legal Procedure

by M Harunur Rashid

NOR, even in matters which may be said to fall decisively within the sphere of the legal profession itself namely, such questions as the form which various types of trial may take; simplifying the Procedure in order to expedite trial; dispensation of justice at the door step of litigant public by reformation of existing procedure; does it necessarily follow that the lawyers are justified in regarding these as matters to be determined solely by lawyers in the light of their experience and insight. There seems no reason at all why such matters should not lend themselves to a good deal of informed fact-finding, in the shape of inquiries conducted by legally educated people and sociologists or possibly combined terms of sociologists and lawyers. It is therefore to be hoped that no part of the legal system will be regarded as so sacrosanct that it is treated as closed territory, beyond the range of outside investigation, and lawyers should not resent entirely proper investigation of this sort as a form of prying into their private concerns.

Role of the Universities

It is one thing, of course, to say that the law should endeavour increasingly to forms links with other disciplines; it is quite another to indicate how this may be effected in practice.

The Universities seem to present the most hopeful prospect for cooperation between these different disciplines. The social sciences have enjoyed an established position in the universities in America for some considerable time, and their prestige and importance are beginning to grow and be recognised in England as well as in other European countries. Although in some American universities, such as Yale and Chicago, this type of cross-fertilisation has already made considerable headway, there still remains room for a great deal of development on these lines in English and Asian Universities. Such studies can and already are in some instances, being aided by the setting up of special institutions for certain particular fields of study such as criminology, where legal and social investigations can go hand-in-hand. With increasing emphasis in legal education upon the wider aspects and implications of the legal system, and its impact upon social institutions, it seems not improbable that the idea of law which will prevail among the legally educated people in general and lawyers in particular in the near future will be one which emphasises not so much the self-contained character of law but rather its function as an instrument of social cohesion and social progress.

Role of Law Commission

It is a matter of great hope that a permanent law commission has already been set up in the country. It is the duty of the law commission to examine all obsolete laws and make recommendations for bringing about necessary changes. Laws in many field needs to be drastically brushed up to keep pace with the changing needs of people. If we deny this, we will be denying a truth that a healthy number of people in the country have already lost their confidence in the working of existing legal system. Foreign national willing to invest here in Bangladesh do think that we have a weak legal system and that has already been projected in many country reports published from the embassy of foreign countries. The delay prone legal system, I believe, is one of the main reason why expatriate Bangladeshis are reluctant to make investment back home.

These are the things need to be seriously looked at by the law commission and legal fraternity as well in order to simplify the existing archaic legal system. People at large are not really aware of what the law commission is doing but all they want is the change in order to ensure speedy disposal of cases and justice at the end of the day. I hope the law commission would comeforward with specific recommendations in order that a pragmatic change can be brought about. Failing which it may sound like popular French proverb which says 'more thing change, more thing stay the same.'

Participatory Legislative System

Law making process in our part of the world is rather confined within the law makers in legislative body. No attempts until recently were made in the past to make law making process a participatory one. In Participatory legislative system the opinion of professional groups can be well taken care of and their collective wisdom and opinion can be reflected and best use of these can be made.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Law, Justice and parliamentary Affairs very recently has created an exception of participatory legislative system where leaders of the professional bodies of lawyers were consulted in respect of an amendment bill. This is for the first time in the history of this country and the history of this sub-continent perhaps that the professional groups were asked to raise their concern and voice in the law making process which ensures people's participation in legislation. About two months ago a bill seeking amendment of section 115 of the Code of Civil Procedure was introduced by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in the parliament and that bill was referred to concerned Parliamentary committee mentioned earlier. The chairman of the said committee who is a veteran parliamentarian and a leading lawyer as well by using his prudence obtained opinion from the leaders of the District Bar Association, Association of Judges and leading jurists of the country which includes retired Chief Justice, Attorney General, former Law Ministers, President of both Bar Council and Supreme Court Bar Association and senior lawyers of the country.

The chairman and members of the committee most of whom are leading lawyers of the country are, I am sure, the fore-runner of introducing participatory legislation which is the first of its kind and the joint efforts they have put into it and their sagacity will, no doubt, make the whole exercise meaningful and the piece of legislation a pro-people one.

Parliament is a place where collective will of the people is always supposed and expected to be well represented by the respective members of parliament and the role of the parliament in the reform of legal procedure needs to be always welfare oriented for obvious reasons and that is how the Parliament can reflect people's power.

Coming back to the main subject-matter of this article which is the importance of reform of legal procedure I would urge that law and its reform is one of the institutions which are central to the social nature of man and without which it would be a very different creature. A glance at the human civilisation should be enough to indicate to my valuable reader the great areas of thought and action in which the law has played and continues to play a major role in human affairs.

Leading philosophers, from Plato to Marx, may have urged that law is an evil thing of which man kind would do well to rid itself. Yet for all the philosophic doubts, experience has shown that law is one of the great civilising forces in human society, and that the growth of civilisation has generally been linked with the gradual development of a system of legal rules, together with machinery for their regular and effective enforcement.

The author is a judicial officer now working as Law Officer to Parliament

LAW WATCH

Israeli Murderer Shortlisted For Top Position

EHUD Yatom, who confessed to killing two Palestinian Prisoners of War in 1984, has been shortlisted for the position Head of Knesset Security. In April 1984, Israel announced the killing of four Palestinians on board the Egged Bus Line No. 300. However, photographs taken just after the operation showed two of the Palestinians captured alive. Yatom was implicated in the murders but the Israeli Government decided not to prosecute and President Herzog later granted him a pardon. Subsequently, Yatom publicly confessed that, pursuant to orders, he personally killed the two survivors.

Yatom is now a strong candidate for the position of Head of Knesset (Israeli Parliament) Security. His appointment is supported by ultra right-wing MK Rehavam Ze'evi, Head of the racist Moledet Party which calls for the expulsion, in contravention to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, and international customary law, of Palestinians from their homeland.

We regard the very consideration of Yatom, a war criminal according to all conceivable legal and ethical definitions, as a serious flaunting of international law and a serious affront to Palestinians' rights and dignity. Yatom, instead of being honoured by such candidacy should be serving a life sentence.

This, in the view of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), is further proof of the unwillingness of the Israeli Government to genuinely prosecute and investigate war criminals.

PICCR therefore, reiterates its call for the establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal to try Israeli war criminals whose government is literally allowing to get away with murder. Moreover, and without prejudice to the first demand, PICCR calls for all measures to be taken to block the appointment of Ehud Yatom, and by extension other war criminals, for such senior positions.

Lawscape

October 23 to 25, 1998

7th SAARCLAW Conference

THE 7th SAARCLAW Conference and the 4th Meeting of Chief Justices of the SAARC countries will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from October 23rd to 25th, 1998.

SAARCLAW is a regional organization of judges, lawyers, legal academics and all those who have demonstrated an interest in the development of law and justice in this region.

SAARCLAW was established in 1991 in Colombo. It is one of the two regional organizations (other one is SAARC Chambers) recognized by the SAARC as an accredited body having consultative status. The SAARCLAW Charter emphasizes that law and the legal community have a role to play in developing and furthering people to people cooperation in the region. Its objectives, in the words of its charter are —

(a) To bring together the legal communities within the region for closer cooperation, developing understanding, promoting exchange of ideas and dissemination of information.

(b) To use and develop law as a source and instrument towards social charge for development as well as for building cooperation among the peoples of the region.

SAARCLAW has five affiliate country chapters in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Six regional conferences and several workshops and seminars on relevant issues have thus far been held in these countries. Meetings of the Chief Justices of the SAARC countries are also being held each year. It has become a regular feature during the past three conferences.

In the coming 7th SAARCLAW Conference in Colombo a Bangladesh delegation, comprising eminent legal personalities and professionals, will participate.

The conference will be inaugurated by Her Excellency Chandrika Kumaratunga, President of Sri Lanka at 10:30 am on October 23rd, 1998 at the Bandarnaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo. The working sessions will be held on October 24th and 25th at the Hotel Lanka Oberoi. The working sessions will include two plenary sessions and thirteen simultaneous sessions worked out in terms of two formats. One will take the form of a presentation by one or two keynote speakers followed by a discussion. At the discussion, the Keynote Speaker(s) will be joined by a panel which will be representative of all countries to respond to questions posed by the participants. The other format provides for the presentation of country papers by each country followed by a discussion.

Barrister Amir-Ul Islam, the President of SAARCLAW, besides delivering his speech in the inaugural session will chair the first plenary session on judiciary. The keynote speakers for that plenary session will be Hon. Dr Nasim Hasan Shah, the former Chief Justice of Pakistan and Mr S M Zafar, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Dr Kamal Hossain will present a paper on 'Corruption as an Impediment to Development' as a keynote speaker on the 25th. Also, on the 24th, as a keynote speaker, a paper on "The Concept of Power Sharing in Countries in the SAARC Region" will be presented by Barrister Amir-Ul Islam.

Other keynote speakers in the conference will be Hon. Ram Jethmalani, Union Minister for Urban Development, Government of India, Mr H L De Silva, P.C., Former Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, Prof Dr Madhava Menon, Member, Law Commission of India, Hon. Soli Sorabjee, Attorney General for India, Mr Ganesh Raj Sharma, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Nepal and others.

The eminent lawyers and legal professionals of other SAARC countries will also attend the conference.