

## Narmada

## Dam and Be Damned

By Dr M. Monirul Q. Mirza



THE Supreme Court of India (SCI) recently gave a landmark verdict on the highly controversial Narmada Dam Project. In a divided judgement, the SCI paved the way for the project to go ahead. The verdict created huge jubilation among the pro-Narmada people. On the other hand, a shadow of despair was observed in the camp of the anti-Narmada supporters. While the first waves of reactions are being propagated to the press, the verdict has laid the foundation of far reaching implications for high dams in South Asia. First, despite controversy and adverse environmental aspects of dams/reservoirs, the verdict may lead to the floodgate of dams in the region. Second, the SCI has put the judiciary and anti-dam lobbies on a collision course. Third, the verdict has by and large shut the possibilities of alternatives to high dams to satisfy similar objectives. Fourth, the verdict has undermined the policy shifts towards dams that are being taken place in other parts of the world.

## Narmada, the Controversial Project

From very beginning, the Narmada project ran into trouble and created controversy. Over the last 50 years, it has been the subject media headlines for many times. The project is on the Narmada, the largest flowing westward river, rises near Amarkantak range of mountains in Madhya Pradesh. It is the fifth largest river in India and the largest one in Gujarat. It traverses three states - Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat - and meets the Gulf of Cambay. Trouble started in early '60s when Madhya Pradesh wanted more water from Gujarat. The dispute was on the negotiation table for about 20 years and finally resolved by the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (NWDT) in 1979.

Like other dam/reservoir projects in India, the crux of controversy of the Narmada Project was submergence of land, forest and habitation as well as population displacement. Note that submergence generally depend on the height of a dam. The designers and policy makers were never consistent on the height of the dam. For example, in April 1961 when Pundit Nehru laid the foundation stone of the project, the dam height at full reservoir level (FRL) was 161 ft (49.80m). In 1965, an expert committee recommended to increase the FRL at 500 ft (152.44 m). In the final design, the dam height at FRL was fixed at 455 ft (138.68 m). With the increase of the dam height,

public anger and frustrations also grew.

Therefore, from the initial design proposal, the dam height has been increased by 294 ft (88.88 m), so as the area of submergence and displaced population. According to official statistics, the submergence at FRL is 37,690 ha which comprises 11,279 ha agricultural land, 13,542 ha forests and 12,869 ha riverbed and waste land. In all 245 villages of the three states viz. 193 Villages of Madhya Pradesh, 33 villages of Maharashtra and 19 villages of Gujarat are affected. Note that the NGOs like the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) differ with the submergence and displacement figures.

## The Divided Judiciary: Divided Future of High Dams?

The three-member bench of the SCI could not deliver a unanimous verdict on the Narmada case. One of the judges put forward a note of dissent mainly on the environmental assessment and clearance of the project by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF). The MoEF cleared the project in the mid-'80s and gave a green signal to go ahead. The NGOs and even the independent commission appointed by the World Bank in 1991 expressed its dissatisfaction at the inadequate environmental assessment of the project. The Commission also criticised the Bank's own environmental and social records on the Narmada project.

In his note of dissent, Hon'ble Justice S.P. Bharucha observed: "Notes prepared by the Ministry of Water Resources and Environment and Forests leave no manner of doubt that the requisite data for assessment of environmental impact of the project was not available when the environmental clearance thereof was granted". However, the other two judges disagreed with the fundamental environmental concerns raised by NGOs, professionals and the independent commission of the World Bank. The divided judgement demonstrates that controversy over the high dams in India is far from over and their future may also be divided.

## Floodgate of Dams/Reservoirs?

Despite division among the judges, the judgement itself will continue to propagate various implications for high dams in South Asia. Specifically, in India many high dam projects are on the drawing boards and on process. Over the years, due to public outcry, the Ministry of Water Resources of India was in hesitation about the future course of action for these projects. They now found a light at the end of

the tunnel. The judgement will certainly act as a bible of legal encouragement to proceed with the projects of which many were found to be controversial.

## Who will Oversee the Future?

In the judgement, the SC asked the Narmada authority to submit a plan on relief and rehabilitation with regard to submergence and population displacement. Note that the authority concerned and three state governments have failed to draw up rehabilitation plan satisfactory to the stakeholders in the last 20 years.

The SC decision on the relief and rehabilitation plan raises many questions, which need to be resolved. First, who will be the decisionmaking authority on the rehabilitation plan? So far the Narmada authority is the decisionmaking authority. On the other hand, there are sharp differences among the state governments on the rehabilitation programme. For example, the Madhya Pradesh recently said that it did not have any land to resettle the 30,000 families to be displaced by the dam. Second, what will be the criteria to draw up a satisfactory plan and how? The Narmada authority set some guidelines for rehabilitation, which received serious criticisms from the NGOs and the displaced. Third, who will oversee the progress in the field and carry out the assessment? Note that the Supreme Court is not going to the affected areas to hear the grievances of the people or to measure the depth of the problem. If the responsibility goes to the bureaucracy, then the rehabilitation plan is back to square one.

## Impact of Judgement on Future Investment

The Narmada authority is hopeful to convince foreign investors to invest in the project. As initial reactions go, the authority believes that the judgement of the SC has laid a solid moral foundation for high dams in India. Therefore, the judgement may encourage foreign investors to invest in this lucrative (?) sector. The question is whether the foreign investors will come forward to invest in the Narmada project in particular and in other high dam projects in India and South Asia.

In the past, the World Bank was a major financial partner in the Narmada project. In 1985, the Bank approved \$450 million. It approved the loan without any comprehensive resettlement plan or an environmental impact assessment. At the growing public outcry in India and elsewhere, it set up an independent commission to take the

stock of the situation. In 1992, the Commission's Chairman in his report wrote, "I personally doubt that a satisfactory Resettlement and Rehabilitation programme can be implemented. For that reason I recommend...either permanent or temporary termination of the World Bank disbursements." The Bank walked out of the project in March 1993. Now in the wake of the Supreme Court verdict, will the World Bank make a move to come back? If so, probably the Narmada project will be able to woo the foreign investors for crucial funding. Note that at the current prices, the project authority needs to mobilise \$5,000 million from domestic and external sources.

## Non-violence to Violent Protest

So far the supporters of the affected population in the Narmada project have followed a non-violent Gandhian style movement. In the past, the ousted people had faced human rights violations such as arrests, beatings and detentions. After the SC verdict, they have nowhere to go. The verdict has received a sharp reaction from the affected population, non-violent demonstrations have been staged in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The leadership of the oustees is determined to continue to their movement, which may eventually lead to a violent confrontation. In 1992, the independent commission of the WB smelled something and wrote, "Progress will be impossible except as result of unacceptable means."

## Conclusions

In the last few decades, a string of dams and reservoirs were constructed and commissioned in India. These dams generated agricultural benefits, increased power supply and to some extent helped attaining economic progress. On the other hand, they have generated many bad and ugly impacts. The drought prone Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh may be benefited from the Narmada project. Hope that the expected success of the project will not be overshadowed by the tears of the oustees. The SC may set precedence by taking care of these helpless people when they are repeatedly ignored by the government. The verdict will certainly put the high dam politics and economics on a new course in the coming years in South Asia.

The writer is a Bangladeshi water resources and environmental engineer currently with the Adaptation and Impacts Research Group (AIRG), University of Toronto, Canada. Views are of writer's own.



## The Region This Week

## Warrant for Benazir

AN anti-corruption court in Rawalpindi has issued a non-bailable warrant for the arrest of the former Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, who failed to appear before it. The court has ordered that Mrs. Bhutto, living in London in self-exile, be arrested and brought before it on November 14. A similar warrant in the past could not be executed.

## Musharraf's waning popularity

THE military leader of Pakistan, General Musharraf, has admitted that his government's popularity has fallen in the past year and that there is an atmosphere of despondency in the country. However, Musharraf told a meeting of Pakistan American physicians in Islamabad he did not believe it was a doomsday scenario. Musharraf took power in a coup a year ago which was welcomed by many, but he is seen as having failed to live up to the expectations raised then.

## Kuwait lifts ban

KUWAIT has agreed to lift its ban on the recruitment of labour from Bangladesh. The decision was taken during the three-day visit to Kuwait by Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which ended on Wednesday. Sheikh Hasina said Kuwait had imposed a "freeze" on Bangladeshi labour, which would be removed following the signing of a technical agreement between the two countries.

## Separatists kill 14 in north-east

POLICE in India say that at least 14 people have been killed in separatist rebel attacks in the north-eastern states of Assam and Tripura. According to police in Assam nine people were shot dead by heavily armed rebels near a temple in the central town of Nalbari. Assam's police chief, P V Samant, said the attack was carried out by rebels of the United Liberation Front of Assam.

## Tigers' breach of truce

THE Sri Lankan army has accused Tamil Tiger rebels of violating a temporary ceasefire brokered to allow children in the war-affected north and east to be vaccinated against polio. "The LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] fired mortars at troops in Nagarkovil and Eluthumadduval, wounding eight soldiers," military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne told the Reuters. The Tigers and the United Unicef, which requested the weekend truce, have not commented on the allegations.

## Landmark talks in Nepal

LANDMARK peace talks between the Nepalese Government and Maoist rebels appear to have made some progress. It is the first ever face-to-face meeting between the two sides and is aimed at ending a four-year insurgency that has claimed 1,500 lives. Home Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, who represented the government, said the meeting described as informal - had gone well. The talks would help in finding a resolution to the insurgency.

## Anura's bodyguard shot dead

INSPECTOR of Police, Ajith Jayasinghe and security officer of Speaker Anura Bandaranaike was shot on October 26 night close to his house at Kandiyavde Paluwa, Ragama by an unidentified person. He died on admittance to Ragama hospital. Kelaniya SSP, Upali Ranasinghe said, "Two police constables from Ragama police had gone on patrol duty to Kandiyavde Paluwa last Thursday night. They had noticed that Inspector Jayasinghe was questioning certain persons regarding a traffic jam near his house. At that moment OIC, Ragama police A. Wimalasena arrived at the scene and brought about a settlement. When they were about to return somebody in the crowd shot at Inspector Jayasinghe and fled."

## Annan urges probe

THE UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has called on Sri Lanka to conduct an impartial inquiry into the massacre of 26 Tamil inmates at an open prison. Annan said he was "profoundly distressed" at the slaughter which occurred on Wednesday at the Bandarawela rehabilitation centre for former rebels, 225km east of Colombo.

## Bengal rebels kill Marxist

A senior Marxist leader in the Indian state of West Bengal, Dipankar Ghosh, has been killed by suspected separatist rebels. Police say the incident occurred near the town of Siliguri when the rebels, believed to be members of the Kantapuri Liberation Organisation, shot Ghosh as he was entering his house. The KLO is fighting for a separate tribal state in the northern parts of West Bengal, a demand which has consistently been resisted by the state's governing Marxist party.

## Signing CTBT

THE Pakistan Foreign Minister, Abdus Sattar, on October 28 said signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) would be in the interests of the country. Addressing a news conference in Karachi, Mr. Sattar said the Government had studied the CTBT in detail and the decision was that Pakistan would benefit, both economically and diplomatically, by signing it. The CTBT provided strong safeguards to Pakistan, he said.

## Renewing the invitation

SRI LANKAN Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has renewed President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's invitation to the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to visit Sri Lanka at an early date, when he met the Japanese Head of Government recently in Tokyo. In his response, Prime Minister Mori conveyed his appreciation for the invitation and expressed a desire to visit Sri Lanka. Minister Kadirgamar was on a three-day official visit to Japan during which he also had discussions with the Japanese Foreign Minister Yohel Kono and met members of the Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentarians league.

## Kinihira 111

The security forces in Sri Lanka launched a fresh offensive on October 29 morning code-named "Kinihira 111" to capture terrorist defences and bunker lines south of Madurol North. Military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said that government troops had moved nearly one and a half square kilometers west of Chavakachcheri by 12.30 p.m. on October 29.

-- Compiled by Ekram Kabir

## Corruption

## The Hydra-headed Monster

By Mansoor Mamoon



THE ruling elite of today, whether they be civil-military oligarchs or party political demigods are the new Brahmins of South Asia. National resources are at the disposal of their privilege and authority, synonymous with the sanctity of the state.

This was stated by a noted expert on South Asia while describing about the mindset of the leaders in South Asian countries. The region presents and embodies a disproportionately high degree of tolerance of corruption, irregularities, embezzlement of state funds and malpractices by its top leaders. Two such recent cases involving former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto have come to the fore. Rao who came from his retirement to take up the leadership of the Congress Party as a compromise candidate in the aftermath of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. When he was heading a minority government and to overcome a no-confidence motion tabled in the Lok Sabha in 1993, he was alleged to have bribed four MPs of Jharkhand Movement. The CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) investigated into the case and a special CBI court sentenced Rao and his former Cabinet colleague Bhuta Singh to three years of imprisonment. Pending the settlement of their appeal to the higher court, both of them have been set at large on bail. This is for the first time that a former Indian Prime Minister has been convicted of corruption charges. However, Rajiv Gandhi died with the stigma of Bofors scandal.

In Pakistan, a court has recently issued warrant for the arrest of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, now living in self-exile, mostly in London, to answer corruption charges against her. Earlier a court sentenced Benazir and her husband Asif Zardari to five years imprisonment in another case. Zardari has been in jail since 1996. The military administration of Gen-

eral Pervez Musharraf claimed that it has at its disposal 22,000 pages of documentary evidences against Benazir's amassing of state properties worth about \$1.5 billion.

Corruption charges have also been brought against former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and a host of other leaders. Sharif is already serving long jail sentence in a different case. Meanwhile, the government in Pakistan has passed laws, banning participation of the leaders of political parties who are convicted on corruption charges. Benazir and Nawaz blame the military government for bringing the charges of corruption for what they term as politically victimising them for maintaining their sway in power by disqualifying them from participating in politics.

In India, the Hawala scandal involving a number top politicians like L K Advani, Arjun Singh, Sharad Yadav, Ram Bilas Paswan etc., created quite a stir. They were alleged to have received bribes from the Jain Brothers, CBI, which investigated into the cases, however, could not

top ranking leaders charged with corruption. A lower court has already convicted Jaya Lalita. She has preferred appeal against the lower court verdict.

In Bangladesh, deposed President H M Ershad has been convicted by the High Court in a corruption case and over a dozen of such cases are still pending against him. He is reported to have minted money through siphoning out huge state funds. Former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has also been charged with two separate corruption cases. A court in Bangladesh on a corruption case convicted a former PM Kazi Zafar Ahmed and to avoid jail is now living in self-exile in Australia.

What however puzzles an observer is that despite the corruption charges against them these leaders continue to enjoy wide popular support as in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Their supporters are prone to believe that their political rivals and opponents have resorted to frame up charges of corruption to belittle their leaders before the public eye. Jayalalita reported to have

deal. But so strong is Laloo's hold in the state that he has been able to put up his wife Rabri Devi in his place.

On the other hand, Benazir has been advised by her party stalwarts not to return home to face the charges. It has been found that whenever a corruption case against a political leader is framed, his supporters and the party to which he belongs immediately make it an issue, take to streets and castigate their opponents for what they term as political victimisation. They try to obstruct the law from taking its natural course. This trend is particularly marked in Pakistan and Bangladesh. This trend breeds more corruption and pollutes and vitiates the atmosphere.

Corruption is a hydra-headed monster. It has many accompanying vices like patronisation of violence and terrorism, amassing of huge black money which remain unaccounted for, tax evasion etc. It also corrupts the investigating authority with the lure of palm greasing. It has been estimated that due to grand corruption and toleration of corruption on a wider scale, national exchequer is being drained out and vital development activities are being stunted. The World Bank estimated that if corruption could have been effectively contained, Bangladesh could have very well expected a two per cent more growth rate over the years. Practices of corruption at different tiers came up for discussion at the Paris Consortium meeting recently.

Corruption is also more or less endemic Nepal. One of the charges of the Maoist insurgents in the Himalayan Kingdom is the preponderance and plethora of grand corruption. Corruption among bureaucrats in all these countries is proverbial. Lack of transparency and absence of effective foolproof mechanism of accountability are the root causes of rampant corruption in South Asia. Democracy and active people's participation in the running of the state with an extra-noisy opposition which will pinpoint all irregularities and a free press are the only answer to the present toleration of grand corruption in the region.



present sufficient ground for substantiating the allegations of taking money from the Jain brothers against the BJP leaders and hence the courts set them free. Former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Jay Lalita and former Chief Minister of Bihar Laloo Prasad Yadav are the two other

leading a fabulous lifestyle and her malpractices were quite well known but when a court convicted her, her supporters went on rampage in protest, burning and damaging state properties. Laloo Prasad had to vacate the office of the Chief Minister when the CBI unearthed his corrupt

## Nepal

## Rise of the Lal Sena

By Harun ur Rashid

IN recent times, Lal Sena (Red Army) rebels in



Nepal who are also known as 'Maoist' appear to escape international media attention although it has claimed more than 2,000 lives and has rocked the stability of the Himalayan Kingdom.

It is reported that the rebels are well organised and select their targets carefully to instil fear among the public and pose a threat to the authorities in the country. Amid gunfire and exploding bombs the armed members of Lal Sena - some in combat fatigues with red stars on their caps, others in woollen gars and thongs - appear on the targets and create havoc in the locality.

Who are Lal Senas and why is their emergence?

Everybody has the right to clean water, healthcare, education and food. Chronic and hopeless poverty means not only low income but low nutrition and lack of good health and education. Poverty breeds social tension and instability. Many developing countries are being marginalised by globalisation of the economy and they are being left by the wayside while the developed nations have marched on vigorously.

It is clear that equity is the issue when 80 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accrues to only 1.2 billion (20 per cent people out of 6 billion) of the developed world. World Bank's President James Wolfensohn warned that the situation would only worsen when more 2 billion people would be added in

the next 25 years, most of them in the developing world.

There is a view that about 70 per cent of 24 million people in Nepal live below the poverty line and life expectancy struggles to rise above mid-'50s. It is the poverty, some analysts argue, that gives rise to this kind of extremist people with the aim to restructure the society and redistribute the wealth of the nation among the people of all classes.

It is argued that emergence of Lal Senas are nothing but a manifestation of the illness of the society. There is a view that they may be inspired by the advice and training from Peru's Shining Path rebels and Indian militant communist groups. The present strength of Lal Senas is believed to have grown to 2000-5000. The guerrillas are reportedly funded primarily from theft and extortion from businesses.

It is reported that half of the 75 districts of Nepal have been affected to some degree by the rebel activities. In the mid-western hills six districts are reported to be under virtual control of the guerrillas. They reportedly attacked a police station at Duna in recent times and 14 policemen were killed and 40 lay injured before the guerrillas went into hiding in the mountain tracks in the Himalayas. Lal Senas were reported to have looted the Nepal Bank of the equivalent of \$160,000. They also started robbing travellers, endangering the vital tourist industry of Nepal. On the other hand, it is argued that the authorities have not helped their cause by retaliating brutally in places, carrying out extra-judicial killings

of suspected Maoists.

A few analysts believe that the rise of Lal Sena in Nepal is a new threat to the stability in the region. Already the seven states in eastern India have been simmering with serious unrest and insurgency. If Lal Sena and the armed insurgents of these eastern states join hands in attacking the security and police forces in both Nepal and India, the whole region would be in a serious turmoil. Bangladesh cannot ignore such menacing trends at the neighbouring lands. It might affect Bangladesh in two ways - influx of in-coming refugees and hiding of armed insurgents in the country leading to its instability.

Unless poverty is addressed on equitable basis, many believe that strong-arm tactics will be of no avail to suppress the guerrillas. In the Philippines the Red Army (National People's Army - NPA) had been a threat to the government establishments in the rural areas for more than two decades. With their popular slogans and by helping the farmers the rebels became at one stage 'Nice People Around NPA' to most of the rural people.

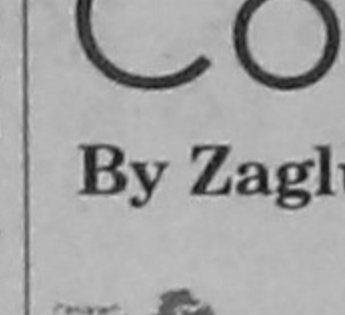
It seems that the insurgency has to be met by introducing anti-poverty strategies aimed at revitalising the local and community institutions in the rural areas. Income distribution has to be fair and just. Policies are to be adopted which are brave, innovative and morally sound. Ethics and economics go hand in hand.

The author, a Barrister, is former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Military

## The Build-up Continues

By Zaglul A. Chowdhury



South Asia, the home of more than one billion people, is the most densely populated region in the world. It is also the home of most poor people on earth. While overwhelming majority of the hapless men, women and children are mired in abject poverty, the region is spending huge amount of money in military sector. South Asia has recently been characterised as the most dangerous international flash points by London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). It is no wonder that expenditure in military build up, its expansion, and maintenance of the war machine is also pretty high.

Paucity of funds for development in key social and economic sectors is common in all the countries of South Asia in varying degrees. But some countries are spending colossal amounts for their defence that takes many quarters by surprise although the nations concerned say they need such expenditure for security reasons. Undoubtedly, every country has the right to develop its own armed forces for security reasons, but it is equally true that this kind of expense at the cost of basic requirement of a vast populace is also not always talked about within the countries, let alone in the international arena, whether the expenditure is justified, given the economic and social conditions of these nations.

An international conference on South Asia in Dhaka recently took note of this situation in the region and recommended that governments in the area should spend more on development sectors instead of the military. The participants, nearly 100 from the seven South Asian and several other countries including Indonesia, Germany, France and Belgium, noted with grave concern that the defence expenditure is on the rise in the region and deplored the situation. The conference jointly organised by the Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and German Embassy in Dhaka, was on 'Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Interfacing New Dimensions and Perspectives'. It dealt with various aspects of the current situation in the region including the present stalemate of the Saarc summitry cycle and other relevant issues including the security environment.

Indeed, it was a very timely exercise by the organisers of the conference and the issues involved was extremely useful although some of them are complex and sensitive. But once again this is the real scenario of the region and one cannot wish away this dimensions howsoever unpalatable they are. A number of substantive issues confronting the process of regional cooperation in South Asia were deliberated upon and the experiences of successful regional blocs like the EU and the Asean were brought to the fore.

The participants agreed that the essence of the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (Saarc) is the well-being of the people of the area and the forum must spare no effort in

that direction. But shortage of fund is afflicting the expected development of the Saarc while political divide in the region is adding woes and problems to collective developmental endeavours. Political paranoia is rendering a body-blow to the ongoing development programmes under the Saarc. The conference took into account the prevalent poverty in the region, elimination of which is the key to all development programmes, and recommended to reduce military expenses. It said civil society and citizens groups should put pressure on the South Asian governments to reduce in promoting regional cooperation.

In this context, a beginning may be made by cutting down defence spending by a symbolic 1 per cent and contribute the same amount to social development activities within the framework of Saarc. No doubt, the call is remarkable even though there is little likelihood that the governments concerned would implement it.

Arguably, this is quite difficult to reduce the defence spending for the countries which find enough justification in the expenditures. India and Pakistan - two principal nations in the region - are at loggerheads almost from the beginning of their independence. Their enmity and belligerence are well known as they have fought several wars and occasionally look to be on the brink of bilateral conflicts. Both New Delhi and Islamabad have their own points of view on military spending. Their acrimony and the defence expenses seem to have further increased following the acquisition by both of the atomic power. But it is not only India and Pakistan, regrettably, most other nations of the Saarc are spending more in the defence although the spending by two main countries are really alarming when viewed from their allocations in other important sectors. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka fall in the category.

Here, two celebrated figures of the region come into picture. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has always been espousing for greater spending in social sectors. Mr. Sen, who is an Indian and hails originally from today's Bangladesh, is known for his monumental research on poverty and famine. Noted economist from Pakistan late Mahbub-ul-Haq will particularly be remembered for his excellent work on human resources development-related subjects across the world. In this context, he drew parallels between other nations and South Asian ones and concluded that defence spending is much higher here in comparison to their income. He had made strong pleas for lessening the military expenditure.

While the calls for reducing defence spending are likely to fall in deaf ears. The nations in the region engaged in arms race are expected to be unmoved by such appeals. True, they have their own reasons but poverty alleviation represents far more bounded duty. The civil society, citizens' group and the media can bring about a change in this regard - albeit this may take time and the countries concerned may only slowly veer towards such an idea which could go a long way in transforming the miserable plight of the people in South Asia.

