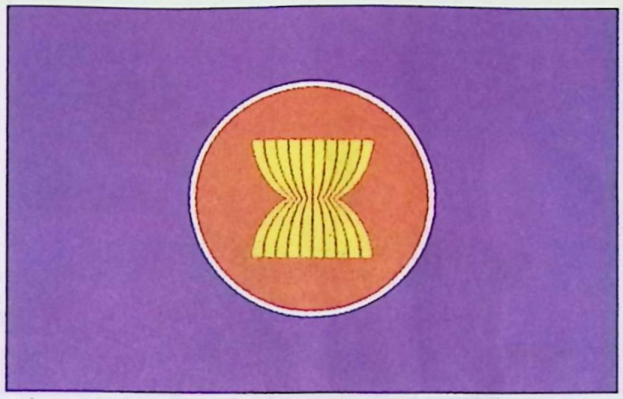




and trust. Saarc too, should adopt this approach.

How Can This be Applied to Saarc?

The entire greater Saarc region can be viewed as comprising three sub-regions:

BBIN: Its eastern flank composed of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the north-eastern states of India, and Nepal

ISM: The middle zone consisting of southern India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

IPA: The western sub-region comprising western and north-west India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

What interests one sub-region may not interest the others initially; but if the co-operative process is perceptibly significant, it will attract the attention of other sub-regions who will then want to link up with each other.

This would enable Saarc as a whole to embrace a dual-track approach. A sub-region could embark on a fast track approach -- fostering sub-regional cooperation and development at the "micro level" -- while the "macro level" process, i.e. the entire region's progress in regional co-operation could continue at more measured pace, until a satisfactory resolution is mutually arrived at between the larger powers. This approach need not be at the expense of the existing Sapta/ Safta and other arrange-ments already effectively in place.



Harmonising Domestic Priorities with Larger Concerns

The entire Saarc region is environmentally vulnerable. This paper is concerned largely with the eastern BBIN sub-region, Saarc's poorest region, as a pilot area for embarking on the sub-regional approach.

Environmental and ecological phenomena transcend political borders, and can only be addressed through cooperative interlocution and accommodating action by the several parties affected. Continuing environmental degradation and neglect in the BBIN sub-region will surely have adverse fall-outs for the greater South Asian region as well.

Substantially large populations, widespread poverty, underdevelop-ment, frequent natural disasters, festering insurgencies and extremist militant movements, and food crisis could well trigger larger regional instability and insecurity, with people in large numbers voting with their feet that would certainly have wider implications.

Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, a Canadian political scientist, had posited in 2002 that environmental degradation in combination with scarcity lead to violent conflict. One may well query here: Is the BBIN/SAGQ region a likely scenario for the above prognosis to play out?

Environmental Problems of BBIN Sub-region

Of grave concern immediately is incontrovertible evidence revealed by Nasa satellite imagery of serious recession in the glacial size and flow of the Gangotri in Nepal and glaciers everywhere in the Himalayas, which could transform the major rivers, like the Ganges and the Brahmaputra into seasonal rivers in the near future, by 2040 according to some estimates, when the glaciers may have lost most of their existing critical mass at the present rate of melting and depletion.

The looming water crises ahead facing India and China are additional factors of grave concern, particularly for Bangladesh. Reports of China's plan to dam the Brahmaputra -- Yarlung upstream within China -- and divert waters to the Yellow River will exacerbate the situation and have already raised alarms in India and Bangladesh.

Massive deforestation in this sub-region has also contributed to loss of bio-diversity, exacerbating global warming, by reducing areas of carbon sequestration and increasing soil erosion and loss of