

Syed Iftekhar, Masud, Mr, Political Science, Bangladesh and **Muktadir, Shamsul**, Mr, Acad, Political Science, Bangladesh, “*Supporting Good Governance in South Asia for a Peaceful World*” - B

South Asia includes eight nations along with 7 SAARC states and Afghanistan. It comprises roughly 1.5 billion people that is nearly one fourth of the globe. It is more than 3 times the total population of EU (25 states) living in half of China’s land area. Here is the largest concentration of the world’s poor numbering 500 million, or South Asia’s one third. There are contrasting estimates of income also. South Asia’s 5% enjoy high middle class living which, as per purchasing power parity, vie with the EU average. However, income inequality is not the main problem of South Asia. It is only one symptom of the greatest disease that this region has been suffering from since 1947 when the British colonial rule was formally over; **Poor Governance**.

Events after 9/11 have brought South Asia once again into the limelight. Even before the war against terrorism started in Afghanistan, South Asia was endowed with a disheartening picture in almost every social, economic and political context. This region is fast emerging as the poorest, most illiterate, most malnourished, and the most deprived segment of the world. While the region contain one fourth of humanity, just the increase in its population each year exceeds the total population of fifty smallest UN member states.

Human deprivation in South Asia is colossal in scale in the global context, that in turn, hinder the participation to a peaceful open world in this part of the world. Nearly half of the world’s illiterate and forty percent of the world’s poor live here. It produces only 1.3 percent of the world’s income. Widespread human deprivation contrasts with the large armies, modern weapons, and expanding military budgets present in the region. Two of the largest armies in the world are in South Asia. The region spends twice as much each year on the purchase of hi-tech arms as does Saudi Arabia. South Asia is the only region where military spending as a portion of GNP has gone up since 1987, although it has declined substantially in all other parts of the world after the cold war.

Crisis in Governance

South Asia has a fairly good track record of democratic institutions, but history reveals that the democracy nurtured by people in their respective countries has not contributed much to change, and is not at all conducive to the welfare of the people. The international donor community has become stunned to observe that hundreds of billions of dollars provided as aid to the poor failed to reach the target population except in trickle and had created instead, a wrong group of beneficiaries. South Asia is facing a crisis in governance that, if left unchecked, could halt the region’s democratic progress and the economic social wellbeing of its teeming millions. Almost all South Asian countries face endemic corruption, social exclusion and inefficient/non pro-people bureaucracies, which hinder all programs of development including efforts for a healthy and beneficial open world. For example, Bangladesh’s state-owned telephone company for a decade is preventing the laying of optical fiber network to create a global Internet gateway for the country fearing loss of income. This in turn deterred Bangladesh to become a major software exporting country. According to the Human Development Commission (HDC) Report South Asia is one of the most poorly governed regions of the world, with the exclusion of a voiceless majority, unstable political regimes and poor economic management. The system of governance has become unresponsive and irrelevant to the needs and concerns of the people.

Global interest in South Asia

The recent global interest in South Asia is not temporary or based solely on the threat of terrorism and nuclearization. It rather reflects a realization that the world community cannot be safe or happy unless it involves the 1.5 billion people of South Asia in the critical decisions regarding peace, security and development. The most serious current challenge facing South Asia is terrorism. But the fight against terror cannot be won by force alone. There is an urgent need to address the root causes of terrorism, such as lack of good governance, low levels of human development and poor openness to the rest of the world. The international community has not brought the region into the mainstream of global development. But the

international community needs a peaceful, cooperative and dynamic South Asia; it is in its interest to facilitate this.

One of the millenium development goals (MDG) is halving world's poverty by 2015. It would not be possible to achieve unless the issue of poor governance in South Asia is adequately addressed. The global community should do it with concerted action policy as soon as possible. Poor governance and poverty are the main hindrances to a peaceful open world. South Asia becoming a healthy partner to the current process of making a more open world, is in the interest of the global community. It is essential for ensuring global development, prosperity, harmony and peace. Minus South Asia, global development shall remain illusive. Let us then call for a global initiative for a concerted action to ensure good governance in South Asia and halve its poverty by 2015.

Understanding South Asia

South Asia is the most misunderstood region in the world. We should first find out why international donor community failed miserably during the last three decades to reduce poverty and globalize South Asia. One of the obvious answers is that the global community failed to understand or properly appreciate the real internal political dynamics of South Asia that was necessary for any effective development intervention. If it were so it is probable that the governing elite in South Asian countries, who are prone to misrule and corruption, have misled the donors. South Asian governments also allege that foreign aid bureaucracies are corrupt and attempt to build an evil nexus with their counterparts. In both cases the respective bureaucracy violates the mandate given to them by their electorate. The donor officials must try its best to ensure that aid reaches its target beneficiary and meets the objective. Dealing effectively with a South Asian official/ politician is a difficult task for a foreign national. It requires knowledge, training, skill and experience to become effective in South Asia. With regard to pressure for policy reforms, South Asians frequently complain about infringement of sovereignty that works well with sensitive western officials. They are also capable to manipulate the press and civil society organizations through underhand payments to stage a backlash. Recently a World Bank Country Representative in a South Asian country alleged to the press that she had received death threats for asking immunity for World Bank officials. Another government adopted strategy of alleging its citizens of anti-state activity who criticize poor governance at home.

All of the above activities and numerous others are repressive acts that create fertile grounds for extremism to flourish. Continued deprivation and alienation helps extremism to graduate into fanaticism or terrorism. Due to global negligence on the impact of South Asian repressive governance, there are emerging threats of terrorism in some parts of South Asia now that may at one point be aimed to destabilize the western society including the European Union.

Deception, Deprivation and Disillusionment

South Asian misgovernance could be defined in a three-stage process: (1) Corrupt governments exploit the majority through deceptive measures like distorted electoral process, misinformation, manipulation and blackmail. (2) Majority is deprived of political power and fundamental rights through denial of adequate access to resources. (3) Disillusionment of the majority after falling into a state of helplessness.

Good Governance as pre-requisite for A peaceful open world

Good governance should be considered as a priority and essential pre-requisite for inclusion of South Asia in a peaceful open world. A world embracing communications infrastructure, global market, universal models, global science, global jurisdiction processes, the consolidation of international regimes and transnational actor groups are all contributing to the process of building global structures. Without governance at home that is at par with internationally accepted standards, global structures would not be able to find any firm ground on which to stand and flourish. It is in this sense that poor governance is not compatible with the unfolding process of making a peaceful open world.

Measures recommended for the global community to help establish good governance in South Asia

1. Increase the level of surveillance on South Asian states on the issues of governance through human intelligence network, research cooperation and interaction with civil society think tanks, academics and scholars.
2. Initiate to become active policy dialogue partners of South Asian governments, NGOs, local government institutions, press and political parties.
3. Reforms rather than projects should be the development priority for South Asia.
4. Donors need adopt people-centric, empowerment approach to development and remain aware of the deception and diversion tactics of governments.
5. Trade, aid, transaction and immigration- all should be tied to compliance requirement.
6. Research to be intensified that is primarily based on local knowledge.