



## **Call for Papers**

# **International Conference on Greater Connectivity and Regional Integration in South Asia**

***February 14-16, 2013***

**UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of  
South Asia Regional Cooperation (UMISARC)  
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India**

**Venue: UMISARC Auditorium  
Pondicherry University**

## **Pondicherry University**

Pondicherry, now Puducherry, is a Union Territory with one of the highest levels of quality of life in the country with excellent physical infrastructure and almost a hundred per cent literacy level. The Pondicherry University was established at this beautiful town in 1985 by the Government of India through an Act of Parliament. The University is located in the serene surroundings on Coromandal coast and 10 km north of Puducherry. The campus is spread over 780 acres of land some of which is rolling down to the sea beach. The University is a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and has signed Memorandum of Understanding with several foreign universities / institutes. A recent survey reported by the UGC (University Grants Commission) and the NAAC (National Accreditation and Assessment Council) ranked this university as one of the best in the country.

## **UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of South Asia Regional Cooperation (UMISARC)**

The Pondicherry University signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with South Asia Foundation (SAF) on June 20, 2009 for establishment of the Madanjeet Singh Institute of South Asia Regional Cooperation (MISARC), with financial support from South Asia Foundation. In the year 2010, the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) agreed to associate with all institutions of excellence established by SAF including MISARC of Pondicherry University. Hence, it has been now renamed as UMISARC (U standing for UNESCO). The institute has thus now become truly global.

The Institute is currently offering M A programme in South Asia Studies. Though this is the first and the only institution in the country, which is offering this highly innovative course, it has bright career prospects in diverse fields such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, media, think tanks, international organizations and corporate sector. The course is uniquely designed to provide cutting edge knowledge of South Asian history, society, culture, economy, governance and politics, etc., from an interdisciplinary perspective. Students are expected not only to develop broad knowledge base to critically understand contentious issues concerning South Asia, but also offer a holistic perspective to address them and contribute towards promoting peace and cooperation in the region. The institute also offers PhD in South Asian Studies.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh inaugurated and dedicated UMISARC on 29 June, 2012 for promotion of peace and co-operation among SAARC countries.

## **Publication**

The Institute publishes an International Journal of South Asian Studies to provide a forum for academic research in areas relating to political, social, economic, cultural cooperation and development in South Asia. Besides the faculty of the Institute has been publishing books, monographs and papers in journals and edited volumes regularly.

Also, the Institute offers a broad research platform for refined academic debates with regular guest lectures by eminent scholars, bureaucrats and policy makers etc. Organizing cultural meets and exchanges for promotion of cooperation and harmony in South Asia is another added feather of the Institute.

## **Theme of the Conference**

South Asia represents one fourth of world population with low gross domestic product, low per capita and low literacy rate coupled with high birth and high death rates. It contains the largest number of the world's hungry about 350 million people. The region is afflicted by a number of problems-social, political and economic. Further, disparity between the rural and urban, poor and rich and violence (extremism, insurgency) have led to instability and insecurity. Disputes, mutual distrust, misunderstanding and suspicion still prevail in the region. No common external threat was perceived by the region. Also, South Asian states are plagued by inter-state conflicts over boundaries. India shares border with all South Asian countries except with Afghanistan and no country shares its border with more than two neighbours in South Asia. In other words, the region was divided by a larger country. India has disputes with Pakistan on Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, maritime boundary in the Arabian Sea; with Bangladesh on New Moore island and demarcation of maritime boundary, whereas the dispute between India and Nepal involves Kalapani. Since, the boundaries are the manifestations of national identity in the region, the states are rigid in their stand and disputes continue to remain between India and its neighbours. The political differences and disputes have stalled the prospects of economic cooperation in the region. Since, India is the larger country in the region, the neighbours feel that the former dominates the region and poses threat to their security. It is clear evident that absence of collective identity and lack of sense of belonging do still exist in the region and thus hinder South Asia from achieving the momentum to grow at its full potential.

Following factors can be viewed as obstacles for regional cooperation: trust deficiency, bilateral relations, mainly between India and its neighbours, are being

dominated; rivalry between two major countries (India and Pakistan); meager regional trade; unable to demarcate the (porous) borders. Conflicts and disputes converted the region backward. There are hardly any pair of states in South Asia, which are not affected by trans-border spilling of ethno-nationalist, communal and militant activity. Though geographical continuity remains the greatest asset for SAARC, this potential is not harnessed because boundaries have been the manifestation of national identity in the region. It is time for South Asia to concentrate on sustainable growth; otherwise it would be difficult to reduce violence, instability and insecurity. Though a number of steps have been initiated, a lot of work still remains towards human development/security. South Asia's rise cannot be translated into tangible benefits unless the internal problems are addressed.

On the other hand, South Asia is seen as important region in the world and it is gaining global identity. The SAARC has enlarged its membership from seven to eight (Afghanistan was joined in 2007 as the eighth member) and nine external and major states joined as observers. South Asia was seen as an important region by the rest of the world. It is one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world (six per cent growth per year). Nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 and the steady economic performance of the region as a whole have changed not only how the region perceives itself but the world's perception of the importance of the region. Also some non-state actors' activities emerge from the region, which was seen as a security concern for them. Though there was no significant development towards regional cooperation, the SAARC is the only platform where the member states can debate and discuss various issues related to the region. South Asia is trying to integrate itself with Asia, which is expected to play a vital role in the global arena. And it may be said that there is a convergence of interests among the countries in the region for regional cooperation.

At the foreign policy level, countries have been expanding their reach to form close relations with extra-regional powers. India is seeking to build strategic, political and economic alliances at the bilateral, regional and global level. It has also been trying to enhance its capabilities and capacities to ensure its strategic autonomy which will in turn to achieve great power status. Relationship between Pakistan and China has been cordial. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal are moving closer to China. Pakistan is closer to the US. Such relations are also being tried by other countries to ensure a sense of independence from India's dominating presence in the region. However, India also realizes the fact that unless it improves its relations with its neighbours, and slowly there are steps

being taken among the countries to improve bi-lateral and multilateral relations in the region. Though the smaller countries in the region have concern over India's dominance, there was no coordination among them to work against the latter. The rise of India and decline of Pakistan made the region to shift from bipolarity to unipolarity in the context of a South Asian regional security complex. On the other hand, India transcends from South Asia to the rest of the world without having resolved its conflicts with its neighbours. Though India was trying to integrate into world economy, it could not integrate the region. In other words, the region has failed to cultivate economic interdependence as a tool to counter political and military tensions. The region is the least integrated region in the world.

South Asia inherited an integrated transport system from the British, but this was fractured not only by the partition but by its political aftermath. It needs to be integrated again in order to make the countries to be closer. Due to lack of integration of the transport system in South Asia, the logistic costs are very high and ranges between thirteen to fourteen per cent of GDP compared to eight per cent in the US. Nepal, Bhutan and northeast of India can be linked to end their land locked, which would lead to economic development and could work towards poverty reduction. Connectivity plays a significant role in combating poverty. One element of poverty is the lack of information/communication. Thanks to transformation of the communications by penetrating new technology, many poor people are being benefitted. If people are connected, they are more productive. People are not dependent on aid but on connectivity and market. According to the World Bank, if countries in South Asia continue growing at a 7 per cent rate, the incidence of poverty would be reduced from 50 per cent to 20 per cent. In 2006, regional trade was \$10.4 billion i.e. five per cent of total trade. If transport network is improved, there may be \$40 billion trade (twenty per cent of trade).

The twelfth summit, held in Islamabad in 2004, called for strengthening in transport, transit and communication links across South Asia. For instance, a container takes thirty five days more for New Delhi-Dhaka, as the maritime route is via Bangladesh and Singapore/Colombo to Chittagong port and then by rail to Dhaka. It can reach within five days if direct rail connectivity was there between New Delhi and Dhaka. Similarly between Dhaka-Islamabad, it would take 7,162 km by sea instead of 2,300 km through overland across India. New Delhi and Tehran are jointly planned to develop a transport corridor between India-Iran-Afghanistan, but Pakistan did not agree to the proposal. India can access to Central Asia through Iranian port-Chanbahar-Afghanistan. Shipment of Assam

tea to the West required it to be transported 1,400 km to reach Kolkata port along the Chicken neck. There is no agreement exists for India to use the traditional route through Chittagong port which would be shorter by sixty per cent. Southern border of Tripura state is only 75 km from Chittagong port, but goods from Agartala are required to travel 1645 km to reach Kolkata port through the Chicken neck. If transport cooperation were there, goods would have travelled around 400 km across Bangladesh to reach Kolkata.

Greater people to people contact, improving infrastructure facility, making soft borders, access to technology, connecting maritime, air and road ways and unrestricted trade are some of the issues to be focused by the South Asian countries. Unless these are met, it would be difficult to improve regional cooperation in the region. In the twenty first century, South Asia has both challenges and opportunities. States need to be pro-active in their foreign policy and take pragmatic steps to achieve their national interests. It may be extrapolates that South Asia could emerge as a major economic region in the near future.

In view of the above, the UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of South Asia Regional Cooperation, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, is organizing a three day international conference on ***Greater Connectivity and Regional Integration in South Asia*** during 14-16 February 2013. Experts–policymakers, scholars, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs of India and a few from South Asian neighbours would participate to debate on how greater connectivity could play a role in integrating the South Asian region and could play a significant role in Asia in the twenty first century. The conference proposes to invite scholars/policy planners from abroad to elicit their (respective countries) perceptions on envisioning a new South Asia free from conflicts.

### **Sub themes**

1. Discuss the intra and inter-state conflicts, which are seen as obstacles for South Asian regional cooperation.
2. Focus on Non-traditional security issues in South Asia.
3. Focus on neighbours perceptions of India as a peaceful rise or hegemonic power and India's perception of neighbours.
4. Focus on strategic capabilities/security concerns of countries in the region and how cooperation and other methods could lead to a secure and stable South Asian region.

5. Focus South Asia's economic growth/trade vis-à-vis other Asian countries and the advantages/disadvantages of conducting economic activity in South Asia
6. Discuss connectivity and regional integration in South Asia.

### **Paper Submission**

Participants, who wish to participate and present their paper, are requested to follow the schedule and guidelines given below:

- ❖ Abstract (about 250-300 words) to be submitted on or before **December 25, 2012** with the name of the author(s), affiliation and address (postal and e-mail)
- ❖ Full paper (soft copy) not exceeding 5000-6000 words should be submitted through email on ***[misarc.pu@gmail.com](mailto:misarc.pu@gmail.com)***, on or before **February 01, 2013**.
- ❖ Paper must not be previously published or currently under review for publication elsewhere.



## ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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**Dates to Remember**

**Conference : February 14-16, 2013**

**Submission of Abstract : December 25, 2012**

**Submission of Full Paper : February 01, 2013**