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Three Elections and Two State Actions – Has South Asia Finally Turned the Corner?

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There are two, perhaps three, nation-building ideas that have been in conflict in South Asia since the British left the subcontinent in the late 1940s. One was espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, who governed the country for the first 17 years after independence in 1947. According to this belief, even in a country with such diversity as India, it was possible to construct economic, political and social systems that would protect all citizens, not only those who constituted the majority. Sunil Khilnani, the Indian political theorist, has called this the “idea of India”.² There were, in fact, two ideas, both supported by Nehru and both with good historical justification. These two ideas were brought together in the Indian Constitution promulgated in January 1950. According to the historian, Ramachandra Guha, the Constitution brought together what he calls the “national” and “social” revolutions. “The national revolution focused on democracy and liberty – which the experience of colonial rule had denied to all Indians – whereas the social revolution focused on emancipation and equality, which tradition and scripture had withheld from women and low castes.”³ The idea of India, in other words, was a composite one.

This idea, however, was rejected with some vehemence by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. He maintained that the land over which the British ruled was not inhabited by one Indian nation but by two – one Hindu and the other Muslim. Jinnah believed that each nation deserved its own political space within which it could order the lives of its citizens according to their religious beliefs and social norms. This came to be called the “two-nation theory” which became the basis for the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of British India. The American political scientist, Stephen Cohen, has called this the “idea of Pakistan”.⁴

However, there were serious contradictions in Jinnah’s theory and in the idea of Pakistan. Two of these had significant consequences for the history of South Asia. First, the Muslim

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² Anil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

³ Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy*, New York, Harper Collins, 2007, p. 119.

⁴ Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2004. University Press, 2007.

population did not come concentrated in one place – Islam had been present in the subcontinent from almost the time of the birth of the religion. Muslims were to be found in all parts of India. Even if the two Muslim majority areas – one in British India’s northwest and the other in the northeast – could be separated to form the state of Pakistan, that state would be territorially unique. Its two parts would be separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory. Second, the Pakistan that Jinnah demanded could not accommodate the entire Indian Muslim community. No matter where the boundary was drawn, it would still leave a sizeable Muslim community in India. If rescuing the Muslims was the purpose of the idea of Pakistan, then it should have applied to all Muslims, not only to those who lived in the Muslim majority areas. In any event, the line the British drew left about the same number of Muslims in India as there are in Pakistan today.

Jinnah must have seen these contradictions. This is the reason why some revisionist historians, in particular Ayesha Jalal, have suggested that he was not entirely serious about the idea of Pakistan. His demand for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslim community of British India was meant to obtain protection for them from the Hindu majority once India became independent.⁵ However, the leaders of the Congress Party granted him his wish and, in Jinnah’s own words, a “moth-eaten” Pakistan was born on 14 August 1947, a day before India gained independence.

However, religion, as a glue for nation-building, turned out to be a weak device. The leaders of West Pakistan were reluctant to fully accommodate the wishes and aspirations of the citizens of East Pakistan. The result was a number of serious differences – on political, economic, cultural and linguistic grounds – between the leadership groups of the two halves of the country. They turned into bitterness and eventually resulted in a civil war fought over a period of nine months from March to December 1971. The result was the emergence of East Pakistan as an independent Bangladesh, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman whose “six-point” formula for granting considerable autonomy to the eastern wing was not acceptable to the West Pakistani leaders. The six points were, in fact, the third nation-building idea to take hold in the South Asian mainland. According to this, ethnicity and culture are powerful attributes of nationhood, even stronger than religion.⁶

This line of thought, in terms of nation-building, was also pursued by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka, a separatist group which fought for a couple of decades to establish an autonomous, perhaps even an independent, state in the northeast of the island. This group resorted first to militancy and then to open rebellion against the state in pursuit of its ends. The “Tigers” were the first group in modern times to use suicide bombers as weapons. It was a young Tamil woman on a suicide mission who assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 as he campaigned in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu as the head of the Congress Party and as the party’s candidate for the position of prime minister.

These three ideas have contributed to the persistence of tensions in South Asia. These have been very strong in the case of Pakistan’s relations with India. Religion was at the centre of this conflict, at least from the perspective of Pakistan. This religion-based conflict between

⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁶ The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state after spending a quarter of a century as a part of Pakistan has attracted a fair amount of academic interest. Among the more notable contributions to this literature is Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure of National Integration*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1972,

the two nation-building ideas sharpened after Pakistan, starting from the late 1970s, became a more conservative society religiously. It is not clear from Jinnah's speeches and the few writings he left behind as to what his precise intentions were with respect to the role of religion in the state of Pakistan. He often spoke about the need to be guided by the teachings of Islam. This was inevitable since he had used the idiom of religion to make his case for a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. However, it appears that he was inclined to lead the country towards a secular democracy, not too different from the one Nehru and his colleagues were able to enshrine in their country's constitution. The Indian Constitution has proved to be a flexible instrument of governance. It has been amended scores of times to keep it current with the demands of a society that has seen rapid economic and social change. To take just one example, the political system embedded in the Constitution was unitary in form with a strong centre and only limited rights granted to the states. This was to change through the amendments to the Constitution as well as the practice of governance.

For Pakistan, the case for keeping religion out of politics was weakened by the unanticipated transfer of the population that occurred around the time India and Pakistan obtained independence. Using the censuses conducted by the two countries in 1951, I have estimated in an earlier work that some 14 million people moved across the border in the span of a few months in the summer and autumn of 1947. This was the largest movement of people in recorded human history. Eight million Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan while six million Hindus and Sikhs moved in the opposite direction.⁷ By 1951, Pakistan had been thoroughly "ethnically cleansed" – a term that was not used but later gained currency when Yugoslavia fell apart in the early 1990s. Pakistan's first census in 1951 highlighted the trauma of this event – 25 percent of its population of 32 million was made up of refugees. This was perhaps the largest concentration of displaced people ever in a country as large as Pakistan.

What was not realised then but proved to be a political trauma in the long run was the "Muslimisation" of Pakistan. In the late 1940s, non-Muslims in the areas that make up today's Pakistan constituted about a third of the population. Today, the religious minorities account for less than five percent. It was inevitable that, with Muslims constituting such an overwhelming share of the population, religion would become a force in politics and in social discourse. Islamic parties fought hard for the inclusion of religious clauses in the Constitution, one reason why constitution-making became such an arduous exercise in the country. A preamble which promised that no laws considered to be "repugnant" to the tenets of Islam would be made was incorporated in the short-lived Constitution of 1956. The Constitution was abrogated in 1958 by the first military ruler, General Ayub Khan, who went on to give his own Constitution in 1962. The only thing common between the two Constitutions was the preamble's "repugnancy clause". However, to appease the Islamic forces, Ayub Khan changed the name of the country to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He also decided to name the new capital he had decided to build close to the garrison town of Rawalpindi, Islamabad. The third Constitution was promulgated in 1973 after Pakistan broke into two halves. It represented a broad consensus among the remaining four provinces and provided for a federal state with a considerable devolution of power to the provinces. The "repugnancy clause" remained as did the name of the country. When Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came under pressure from the Islamic parties, he made some more concessions, including banning the sale and consumption of alcohol.

⁷ Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan Under Bhutto, 1971-77*, London, Macmillan, 1980.

The move towards Islamisation began in real earnest under General Zia ul Haq, Pakistan's third military ruler. He brought in both cosmetic and real changes into the way the country was governed. Not only were the political and legal systems brought closer to what he thought were the dictates of Islam, he also moved to incorporate such Islamic practices as the banning of interest rate in economic transactions. Since the impracticality of such a move was soon demonstrated, his government decided to set up a separate Islamic banking system to co-exist with modern banking. However, all these moves need not have bred religious extremism but for the way the United States, under President Ronald Reagan, decided to fight the Soviet Union's advance into Afghanistan. Since it was not practical to send American troops to counter the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Washington decided to use surrogates to do the fighting. These were the *Mujahideen* who were trained and motivated in a string of *madrassas* set up in the dozens of refugee camps that were established on the Pakistani side of the border to accommodate three to four million refugees who left Afghanistan to escape the Soviet invasion. These *Mujahideen* eventually morphed into the Taliban.⁸

While the idea of India worked in India, it did not keep religion entirely out of politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), one of the two national political parties in the country, traces its origin to the Rashtriya Swaynamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS was founded in 1925 to protect what were perceived to be the rights of the Hindu population in British India. The BJP gained ground in the 1990s by drawing upon the grievances of those who believed that the Indian state had given too much ground to the lower castes and the Muslim minority. The party drew support, in particular, from the Hindus who had migrated from what was now Pakistan. L. K. Advani, the party's leader in the 2009 elections and its declared candidate for prime ministership, was born in Karachi and left for India at the age of 20. The party's overt pursuit of Hindu interests led to the demolition of the Babri mosque on 16 December 1992. The mosque's destruction occurred at the culmination of a long march led by Advani. The mosque was located at Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. It was supposed to have been built on the ground where Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and the ruler of Ayodhya, was said to have been born. The assault on the mosque led to riots, in particular, in the always restive city of Bombay, now called Mumbai. Thousands of people were killed, many of them Muslims.

Three elections in South Asia and two firm state actions against insurrections against the established authority may make the 2008-09 period the turning point in the subcontinent's history. First, in Pakistan in February 2008, then in Bangladesh in January 2009, and then in April-May 2009 in India, the people seem to have spoken out against the expression of radicalism in religion and extreme nationalism. The parties that have come to power in the three countries have openly expressed their disdain for the use of religion in politics. The firm action by the state in Sri Lanka and in Pakistan against the forces of extremism and politics of exclusion may have set the stage for the further reduction in the force of religious politics.

There is also change afoot in Pakistan. The elections of February 2008 were decisively in favour of rejecting the past in which the military dominated the political stage by claiming to be the custodian of national security, and by suggesting that it could govern more efficiently

⁸ There are several accounts of the emergence of the Taliban as a potent force first in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan. See the two books by Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2000 and *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, New York, Penguin Books, 2008. See also Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, New York, Penguin Books, 2004.

and effectively compared to any grouping of civilian politicians. The voters were not impressed by its economic record. In the five-year period between 2002 and 2007, Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by an average rate of seven percent a year but that did not win the hearts and minds of the ordinary citizens. This was the "Shining India" moment for Pakistan. Much as the BJP-led coalition in India in 2004 had failed to translate good economic performance into electoral success, President Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan failed similarly and for the same reason in 2008. The two regimes had followed similar economic models; they produced high level of GDP growths which were exclusive rather than inclusive in their orientation. The rich and the well-to-do benefitted, some large cities saw booms and prosperity; the levels of consumption improved significantly for a small number of people, and many shiny and imported goods appeared in the market place. On other hand, the incidence of poverty did not decline much, interpersonal and inter-regional income distribution disparities worsened, and for the less advantaged people and regions in India and Pakistan, there was not a great deal of faith in the future.

The difficult transfer of power from military to civilian rule in Pakistan also produced hope once the process was complete. What was also important was the fact that the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) were not at each other's throats but willing to work together to produce a grand coalition. However, that lasted for only a few weeks. President Asif Ali Zardari attempted to use the old tactics to force Nawaz Sharif's party, PML-N, out of the government in Punjab, the country's largest and richest province. He succeeded only for a short time. The PML-N's Chief Minister, Mian Shahbaz Sharif, was restored to his office by the courts soon after the officers of the courts themselves were restored by a movement initially started by lawyers and later joined by several political parties.

All these fast-paced developments suggest the birth of a new Pakistan. It will become really new if it sheds some of the India-centric approach it has followed in its view of the world and in the way it had conducted international relations.⁹ That may also happen as there is a growing recognition in the country, particularly by the large middle class and now by the military, that the rise of Islamic militancy and radicalism has to be checked even if it means the use of a great deal of force.

The next epoch-making elections in South Asia were held in Bangladesh in January 2009 after two years of rule by a caretaker administration that took office following a period of political chaos in which the mainstream parties fought each other mostly by using unconstitutional means. The army forced a cooling period and placed the country in the hands of a group of technocrats led by Fakhruddin Ahmed who had served for a number of years as an economist at the World Bank. The caretakers achieved their objective. They cooled the political temperature, stabilised the economy and prepared the country for another general election. The election, held in January 2009, brought the Awami League back to power and Sheikh Hasina Wazed returned as the Prime Minister. Under the Awami League, Bangladesh may be able to resolve some of its outstanding differences with India.

According to Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury who served as the caretaker administration's Foreign Minister, while "Pakistan is a category by itself", other somewhat smaller neighbours of India are prepared "to live in concord (with India) but distinct from it...The government,

⁹ See Ishtiaq Ahmed, "Pakistan's India fixation can bring the Taliban into power", Institute of South Asian Studies, ISAS Brief No. 104, 28 April 2009.

as well as the very vibrant civil society in Bangladesh, tend to be secularistic, which sits in very nicely with the Congress” Party in India. “Yet, there seems to persist in Bangladesh a deep suspicion of India, justifiably or otherwise, as a result of several issues. These involve the sharing of the water of the common rivers; the questions of transit and connectivity, in which each side suspects the other of wishing to secure undue advantages; the complaints of non-trade barriers in India by Bangladeshis impeding their exports; and the allegations by India that Indian insurgents secure safe haven in Bangladesh even if unaided, (something) which Dhaka forcefully refutes. Then there is the question of maritime boundaries yet to be settled, which is important as the Bay of Bengal is said to be energy rich. There are no easy solutions to the issues and many are very complex by nature.”¹⁰ Whenever there are deep suspicions on the part of those involved in a dispute, nations do better by using a multinational forum to make an advance. Such a forum exists in South Asia. The South Asia Free Trade Area is the by-product of the endeavours of Bangladesh. It grew out of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation founded in 1986 at the urging of then President of the country, General Zia ur Rahman.

The last of the three elections in South Asia that may change the area’s political and economic landscape was held in India in April-May 2009. The elections attracted worldwide attention for a number of reasons. They were an impressive exercise in the management of the largest electorate to ever vote in human history. The large size of the electorate meant that the elections had to be staggered over a period of more than a month. A record number of candidates took part in the elections. The electorate was basically asked to address three issues. Should India turn away from its secular tradition and adopt a stern approach towards the religious minorities? This question was put on the front burner by a statement by Varun Gandhi, the grandson of Indira Gandhi and the estranged cousin of Rahul Gandhi. Varun Gandhi’s threat to the Muslim community landed him in jail but won him a large victory as a candidate for the BJP. The second issue concerned the degree of inclusiveness in India’s economic development model. The Congress Party had launched a couple of programmes to directly help the less advantaged segment of the population. Its promise to pursue those programmes and its campaign suggesting that the BJP’s record in office had demonstrated that it stood for economic growth without regard for the poor won the party a significant amount of support, in particular in the countryside where the vast majority of the Indian population still resides. The fact that the BJP won decisively in one state, Karnataka, one of the richest in the country and also the one in which the Hindu extremists had run a vicious campaign aimed against modernisation, underscored the image the general population had formed of the BJP. The third issue concerned the Congress Party’s record of dealing with terrorism sponsored by some of the Pakistan-based Islamic extremists. The BJP maintained in the campaign that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his party had shown weakness in not punishing Pakistan for the attack on Mumbai in November 2008 that was carried out by Islamic extremists who had travelled by boat from Karachi. The Congress Party suggested that it had shown maturity in dealing with India’s neighbour that too had been hit hard by the same terrorist groups. The fact that the Pakistan government launched a military assault against the Islamic dissidents in Swat district underscored the validity of the Congress Party’s position.

The Congress Party won a decisive victory not anticipated by most analysts in the pre-election period. The elections confirmed the longevity of the “idea of India”. The Congress

¹⁰ Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, “Post-election India: How the Neighbours view the Elephant”, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore, ISAS Insights No. 68, 22 May 2009.

Party won handily against the BJP-led alliance as well as an alliance of regional parties that would have liked to see further a weakening of the central authority. Although it is difficult to impose a national narrative on the individual choices made by 420 million Indian voters, the electorate appears to have given its collective voice against Hindu extremism and against the further weakening of the Indian state. The BJP's national decline seems to indicate that most Indians want economic development rather than an attachment to some romantic religious past.

The 2004 Indian elections were a negative moment in the sense that the voters rejected the past and challenged the leadership group to produce a better future for them, their children and grandchildren. The five years that followed seemed to have vindicated their choice. The rates of growth produced by the Congress Party-led government were even more impressive than those achieved by the BJP in the previous period. The government's employment guarantee scheme in the countryside and the write-off of the debt of small farmers persuaded the ordinary voter in the villages that Prime Minister Singh has both his heart and mind in the right place. Exceptionally good monsoons also helped in the Congress Party's victory. By voting Dr Singh back into office, the Indian electorate seems to have broken the long tradition of throwing out the incumbents.

There was some worry that the final drive by the Sri Lankan military against the Tamil Tigers may influence the Indian elections. The fear did not materialise. On 19 May 2009, three days after the results of the Indian elections were announced, Mahinda Rajapakasa, the Sri Lankan President, went on television to declare that the military had won the final victory against the LTTE. Its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed. However, the victory was not without controversy. The President faced severe international criticism over "the more than 20,000 civilians that the leaked United Nations estimates indicated have been killed or injured in the conflict."¹¹ However, the move by Islamabad against the Islamic militants that had terrorised the people in the country's northeast was well received by the international community.

The decision by the elected government in Pakistan to send the military to chase out the Islamic militants from Malakand in northeastern part of the country may have ushered in a process that would bring the country back towards religious moderation and political modernisation. The operation is proceeding at the time of this writing (late May 2009) and it is taking a heavy human toll. The United Nations' official responsible for looking after internally displaced persons has suggested that the displacement of people by the military's action in the Valley of Swat and in the districts surrounding it has reached the proportions last seen in the Rwanda conflict in 1994. Relief agencies have warned that the number of refugees is not likely to stabilise while the fighting continues. The number could swell to three million. Soon after the exodus of refugees began from Swat, the United Nations estimated that the country will require US\$0.5 billion to provide relief to the displaced people. A donors' conference pledged about half of that amount. On 19 May 2009, the United States announced an emergency assistance package for US\$110 million. "President Obama is determined to match our words with our actions because Pakistan's government is leading the fight against extremists that threaten their country and our collective security", said Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton in a statement issued to accompany the announcement for the aid package.¹²

¹¹ Joe Leahy, "Sri Lankan leader savours high point after rout of rebels", Financial Times, 20 May 2009, p. 6.

¹² Based on the report by Farhan Bokhari, James Lamont and Daniel Dombey, "US pledges aid as Swat threatens to rival Rwanda" Financial Times, 20 May 2009, p. 6.

This help from the United States, along with that to be provided by other donors, will certainly help Pakistan deal with this extraordinary situation. That said, three things need to be underscored in this context. One, Pakistan has experienced large displacement of people in the past. As noted above, it received eight million refugees from India soon after the partition of British India and the birth of Pakistan. It hosted three to four million refugees that left Afghanistan and sought refuge in the areas on the Pakistani side of the border. An earthquake in October 2006 in the northern areas and in Pakistan-held Kashmir produced another flow of two to two-and-a-half million refugees. All these were near catastrophic situations but the government was able to deal with all of them and from all of them flowed political, social and economic consequences that were not anticipated when these displacements occurred.

There is no doubt that the Swat displacement will also have similar consequences but that is a subject for a later analysis.¹³ What is important is that there is a consensus in the country that this is a price worth paying for dealing with an existential threat to Pakistan posed by the rise of Islamic extremism.

The second area of concern is the nature of the United States' deeper involvement in what the current set of American policymakers have begun to call the AfPak area. From the six-year long engagement in Iraq, the Americans are developing a new counterinsurgency approach for this part of the world. That involves a considerable focus on winning the hearts and minds of the people who are economically and socially very backward. They need to focus on human and physical development, work which will involve not only the provision of funds but also the technical know-how and institution building. The Obama administration seems keen to move in that direction but by using unmanned aircrafts – the drones – to hunt and eliminate suspected terrorists, it is producing a great deal of collateral damage. Colonel David Kilkullen, who has written on the subject of counterinsurgency after having experienced it first hand in Southeast Asia while working for the Australian military,¹⁴ sees serious problems with the use of the drones as a weapon of choice. On a recent visit to Pakistan, he was told that 17 militants had been killed by the drone attacks while 700 civilians also died. He called a two-percent hit ratio “not moral”. Also, the use of air muscle reminds the people of this area of the atrocities committed during the colonial times. According to the historian, Priya Satia, “Only a permanent end to the strategy will win the Pakistani hearts and minds back to their government and to its United States' ally. They, like Afghans and Iraqis, are less struck by the strategy's futuristic qualities than by its uncanny echo to the past: aerial counterinsurgency was invented in precisely these two regions – Iraq and the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland in the 1920s by the British. In the memory of that colonial and political dynamics of any aerial strategy in the region, Pakistanis sees the drones as ‘post-colonial’.”¹⁵

The third concern is even trickier than the first one but is germane to the main thesis presented in this short work. It is my belief that the rise of Islamic extremism and militancy is one of those areas that call for a regional solution. However, calling the region “AfPak” does not do full justice to the regional aspect of the problem. The Obama administration's instincts were correct when the terms of reference it issued for the appointment of Richard Holbrooke

¹³ For a brief but highly informative account of the Swat situation see Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury, “The Sorrows of Swat and the Mayhem in Malakand: What Now?” Institute of South Asian Studies, ISAS Insights No. 66, 19 May 2009.

¹⁴ David Kilkullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Small Wars in the Midst of Large Ones*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹⁵ Priya Satia, “The shadow of history passes over Pakistan” *Financial Times*, 21 May 2009, p. 11.

as a special representative to the region implicitly included India. This led to protests from New Delhi and the expression of considerable satisfaction by the Indian officialdom and think-tank community when that reference was removed. However, the Indian involvement in dealing with the matter is critical because it has also suffered from several acts of terrorism, most recently, in Mumbai in November 2008, which can be traced to some terrorist groups operating on the Pakistani soil. India also needs to ensure that the countries on its periphery are economically, politically and socially stable. Only then would the rise of extremism in the area be checked.

It would not be too great an exaggeration to suggest that the Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indian elections – all in the 18-month period between February 2008 and May 2009 – and state actions against the Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka and Islamic dissidents in Pakistan would begin to cleanse the political systems in South Asia of religious influences. In that respect South Asia may indeed have turned the corner in 2009. These events and developments should also create a respect for the authority of the state and give a strong message to those who are disaffected in the population that it is only through institutional means that groups of people should seek to address their grievances.

The South Asian tables may have been cleared for making moves in the direction of greater understanding and cooperation of the countries in the region on economic, social and even political matters. I happen to believe that without better cooperation among the countries of the region, South Asia will not be able to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the ongoing reconstruction of the global economic order. It will require the leaders from both sides – India and the states on its periphery – of the South Asian divide to take advantage of these events.

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