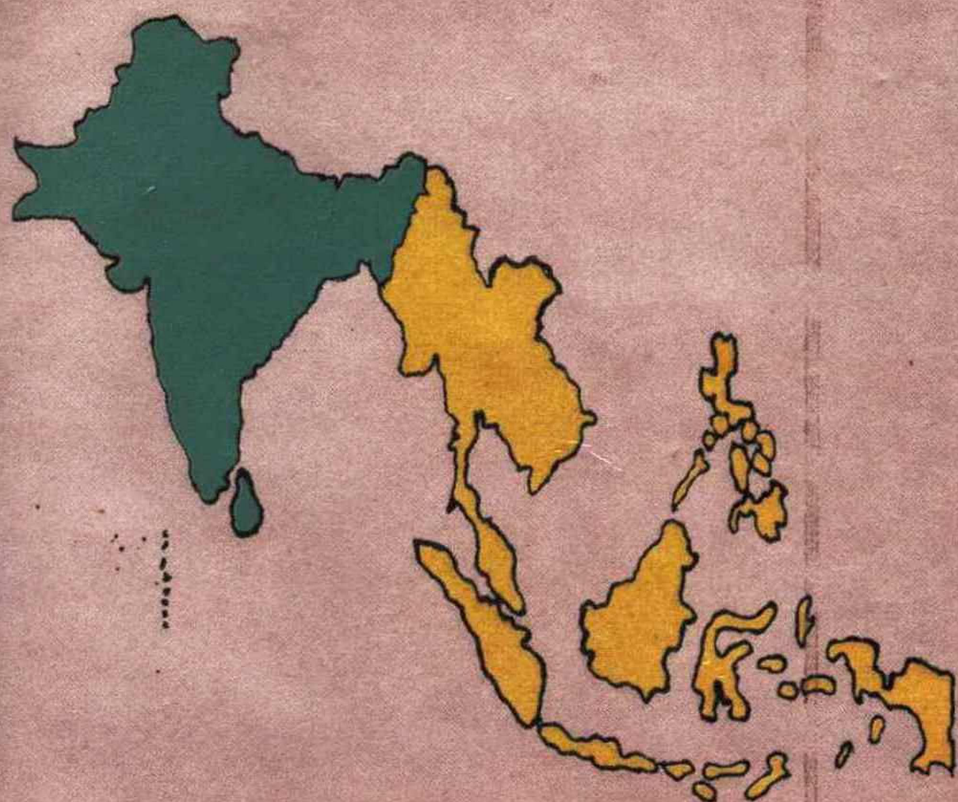


# **Conflict Management and Sub-Regional Co-operation in ASEAN: Relevance for SAARC**



**A.K.M. ABDUS SABUR  
MOHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR**

The book *Conflict Management and Sub-Regional Co-operation in ASEAN: Relevance for SAARC* deals with two distinct and yet inextricably linked realms in the experiences of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – managing intra-group conflicts and pursuing sub-regional co-operation – with a view to examining their relevance for the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). In Part I, the book deals with the intricacies of the mechanisms and politico-diplomatic processes for the management of intra-group conflicts developed by ASEAN countries over the years with a focus on understanding the mode of their functioning as well as their effectiveness. Bringing out the insights in the context of SAARC, attempts are made to examine the key question of the study: whether and to which extent the ASEAN experiences of the management of intra-group conflicts are relevant to SAARC? In Part II, the book deals with the concept of growth triangle, surveys the sub-regional economic zones in East and Southeast Asia and brings out the potentials for and the challenges to the proposed South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ). The focus in the second half of the book is on exploring the possibility of learning lessons from the ASEAN experiences in sub-regional co-operation for the similar mode of economic co-operation in South Asia.

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**Mohammad Humayun Kabir**, a gold medallist for securing the top position in both SSC and HSC Examinations and a recipient of several academic awards including the Commonwealth Scholarship, studied International Law at the Kiev State University, Ukraine, and International Relations at the University of Oxford, UK. He was a Research Scholar at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi, Research Fellow at the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS), Colombo, and Research Fellow at the Institute of South-east Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. Currently he is a Senior Research Fellow of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka. He has to his credit a good number of research works, including monographs and contributions to books published both in Bangladesh and abroad. His recent (edited) book is on *National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century*. Mr. Kabir's forthcoming research work is on *Politics of Harnessing the Common Rivers: The Case Study of the Mekong River and Lessons for the Eastern Himalayan Rivers*.

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*Dedicated*  
*to the loving memories of our respective parents*  
*who taught us the value and power of knowledge*



## PREFACE

Since the very onset of de-colonisation, South Asia has been beset with deep-rooted mistrust, and numerous interrelated domestic and inter-state conflicts. In this regard, fierce rivalry and perennial conflict between India and Pakistan – the major actors on the regional scene – have constantly remained the dominant factor. Bogged down in conflicts, South Asian countries had to spare scarce resources and energy for arms build-up, while the vital tasks of socio-economic development remained unfulfilled. More importantly, the region was deprived of the opportunity of mutually beneficial co-operation. Efforts at reducing tension and crafting an orderly structure of mutual relationship did not yield any tangible result. As a consequence, for about four decades South Asia remained out of any regional co-operative framework. More frustratingly, another four decades could have been spent without seeing any light in the tunnel.

It is in this backdrop that the South Asian leaders launched the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in December 1985. The principal objective was to initiate a process of regional co-operation amidst mistrust and conflicts in the hope that such efforts would generate a dynamism of its own, in the process of which mutual confidence could be built and conflicts resolved or, at least, properly managed, minimising their damaging effects.

The concrete achievements of SAARC, in terms of fostering either regional co-operation or friendly relations among the member-states, were, however, insignificant. SAARC could bring very little, if at all, change in the region with regard to the bilateral conflicts. Gradually it became more and more evident that a regional politico-security environment full of suspicion and mistrust, and a host of bilateral conflicts among the member states are serving as a stumbling block in the way of moving towards substantive areas of co-operation within the framework of SAARC. Thus, South Asian efforts aimed at initiating a departure from conflict to a course of co-operation did not yield tangible result.

In contrast to the dismal performance of SAARC, the experiences of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) formed in South Asia's neighbourhood in 1967 constitute a success story in terms of forging a regional identity, managing conflicts and achieving progress in co-operative endeavours. Like SAARC, ASEAN as well was launched amidst deep-seated mistrust and numerous conflicts among the member-states. Nonetheless, ASEAN countries, over the years, attained tremendous success in resolving intra-group conflicts or minimising their damaging impact on the process of regional co-operation through effective measures of conflict management. More importantly, ASEAN has already developed a set of mechanisms and processes for the management of intra-group conflicts. In the ultimate result, ASEAN made a decisive shift away from conflict to mutually beneficial co-operation.

By now, institutional development and functional areas of co-operation have expanded well beyond ASEAN to the Dialogue Partners, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the APEC, etc. ASEAN's success has encouraged the other regional countries to join the Association and, by now, all the ten countries of Southeast Asia have come to its fold. However, a significant and innovative expansion of regional co-operation under the framework of ASEAN has been in the launching of the sub-regional co-operation zones generically termed as "growth triangles". Again the success of ASEAN in developing the sub-regional co-operation zones has been remarkable that has encouraged several other regions, including South Asia, to imitate the ASEAN experiences.

It is in this backdrop that the ASEAN experiences in developing regional co-operation, managing intra-group conflicts and fostering sub-regional co-operation has transformed into an area of significant academic and practical interests, especially for scholars coming from newer and less successful groupings like SAARC.

The opportunities to conduct research on the subject came to the authors of this book when their employer, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka, concluded an Agreement with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore and the Ford Foundation in 1996. The Agreement envisaged that the ISEAS would host ten scholars from Bangladesh over a period of three years under a programme called **Research Fellowship**



*in Bangladesh-Southeast Asian Relations* with necessary funding provided by the Ford Foundation. Out of ten Fellowships, two were offered to BISS that were designed to contribute to its capacity building.

Under this Fellowship Programme, two studies were conducted in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, one on **Managing Intra-Group Conflicts in ASEAN: Relevance for SAARC** during December 1996 - February 1997 and the other on **Growth Triangles in ASEAN: Relevance for Sub-Regional Co-operation in South Asia** during October - December 1997. The basic objectives of these studies have been to examine and analyse the experiences of ASEAN in terms of managing intra-group conflicts and developing sub-regional co-operation with a view to examining their relevance for SAARC. The authors continued to work on their respective subjects after their return to Bangladesh and, in the process, decided to combine their research works in book form. The outcome is the present book, entitled **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND SUB-REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN ASEAN: RELEVANCE FOR SAARC**.

The authors are especially thankful to BISS for having undertaken the tripartite programme and let us avail the opportunity of conducting the studies and publishing the book. We are particularly indebted to Dr Abdur Rob Khan, Research Director of BISS, who was the architect of the Fellowship Programme and who took the trouble of having read through our manuscripts and offering valuable suggestions to improve upon them. We are profoundly grateful to Major General Mustafa Kamaluddin, ndu, psc, Chairman of the Board of Governors of BISS, and Brigadier Muhammad Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc, former Director General of BISS, for their inspiration to have our two separate studies published together in book form. The book would not have been published but for the encouragement of Major General Jamil D Ahsan, Bir Protik, psc, the new Director General of BISS. We record our deep appreciation to him. We also extend our thanks to all other colleagues at BISS for their co-operation in our efforts.

We wish to gratefully acknowledge the contribution of our host institution in Singapore, the Institute of Southeast Asian



Studies (ISEAS), to our academic work by way of having played an excellent host. It offered us abundant research facilities, an environment conducive to research, and generous hospitality. We wish to place on record our deep appreciation to all the researchers and staff of ISEAS for their help and co-operation. Particular mention must be made of Professor Chia Siow Yue, Director of ISEAS, Dr. Diana Wong, Deputy Director of ISEAS, Mrs Y. L. Lee, Head of Administration & Executive Secretary to ISEAS Board of Trustees, and Dr. Tin Maung Maung Than, Research Fellow of ISEAS and Associate Editor of *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, for their co-operation and warm friendship. The ISEAS Library deserves special mention for its enviable collection and the members of its staff deserve the highest appreciation for their excellent service to readers, particularly to those from overseas.

We also wish to thankfully acknowledge the generous sponsorship by the Ford Foundation of the Programme of **Research Fellowship in Bangladesh-Southeast Asian Relations**, under which it was possible for us to conduct research in Southeast Asia on subjects relevant to South Asia.

We express our deep appreciation to Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Dr. Habib Khandker and Dr. Abdur Razzaq of the National University of Singapore for their warm hospitality during our stay in Singapore.

We thank the Academic Press and Publishers Ltd, for having published this book.

Above all, we are beholden to our spouses and sons for their constant support to our beyond-office-hour academic pursuit.

Dhaka  
August 2000

A. K. M. Abdus Sabur  
Mohammad Humayun Kabir