

**Conference on Peace, Security
and Economic Cooperation:
India and South Asia
in the 21st Century**

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3 December, 1998



**Indian Council for Research on
International Economic Relations**

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Foreword

The Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) organized a South Asian regional conference on Peace, Security and Economic Cooperation: India and South Asia in the 21st Century, on 3 December, 1998. The conference as well as the studies prepared for the conference were funded by a grant from the government of Japan. I would like to place on record our thanks to our sponsors from Japan for their invaluable support in this effort to bring South Asian thinkers and leaders to discuss the issues of security and economic cooperation.

The conference was inaugurated by Shri Inder Kumar Gujral, former Prime Minister of India, who made opening remarks on the importance of the theme of the conference and the usefulness of this dialogue within the region in facilitating the policy process towards peace and prosperity. Shri K.C. Pant, former Defence Minister, Government of India, and Chairman, National Security Task Force, Professor A.M. Khusro, Chairman, Eleventh Finance commission, and many distinguished visitors from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated in the discussions.

The conference was convened to discuss the findings of three studies, two on security issues prepared by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies and the third on prospects of economic cooperation in the region prepared by ICRIER. While the studies were conducted by Indian researchers, the objective of the conference was to open the findings to a wider discussion, particularly with researchers and analysts from the other South Asian countries.

Especially valuable was the presence of Shri Gujral, during whose leadership many of us thought that we had turned a corner with respect to South Asian relations. Shri Pant's presence as chairman was also most opportune. As Chairman of the Task Force, National Security Council, his report to the Government of India had led to the setting up of a National Security Council. His reflections on security issues added an especially important perspective to the proceedings of the conference.

Indeed, a lot has transpired since the conference was held, in particular, the Kargil episode. The necessity to remain ever vigilant, beyond discussing the issues of security and economic cooperation in the region cannot, therefore, be minimized. There is no underestimating the need for a high level of preparedness in the context of national security. But equally, the only durable and sustainable route to peace and prosperity in the region must have at its base, not only discussion and consultation but also economic cooperation.

As the discussions at the conference have made it amply clear, the potential gains from economic integration and regional economic cooperation are clearly recognized today. The challenge before the policymakers in all countries of the region is how to rise above partisan politics and reorient their economic policies towards greater integration and better cooperation. This will make us all stakeholders in the prosperity of the entire region. Only then can we feel truly secure.

July 1999

Isher Judge Ahluwalia
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