

FROM EDITOR'S DESK

Peace and Development

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The report of Pakistan based Human Development Council (HDC) which was released by the resident UN coordinator in Nepal, Ms. Carroll Long and HDC President, Mr. Mahbub ul Haq, in the last week of April in Nepal, has projected the abysmal contours of underdevelopment in South Asian countries. The report has cautioned that these conditions could get compounded if unstable conditions in South Asian countries continued. The report claims that 'if the disintegration of the South Asia continued, the human tragedy would be far more extensive than anything witnessed in Somalia, Rwanda or Burundi.'

HDC, which was set up in 1995 to examine the regional development affairs, has covered India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The report provides that nearly 50% of the illiterate people in the World and 40% of the World's poor live in South Asian region. The 500 million people out of the region's 1.2 billion population are in the category of 'absolute poor' surviving on less than a dollar a day. The region has half of the world's malnourished children. While presenting the report, HDC President, Mahbub ul Haq said that it has been finally recognised that gross national product growth is only a means not the real end of development. He said that South Asian governments were doing little to provide basic education and health services to their people. The purpose of development was to enlarge not only incomes but also choice of human well being, including health, political freedom, cultural identity and personal security. The development policies must deal with the entire society and not only with the economy. In conclusion, he said that 'the basic message of our report is profoundly disturbing. South Asia has emerged by now as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished and the least gender-sensitive region in the world.'

The HDC report is indeed alarming. It is equally important that the stability of South Asian countries has been recognised as a significant factor in dealing with this human problem of gigantic proportions. It is axiomatic that peace and development are concomitant to each other. Thus, it is imperative for the countries in the region to ensure peace and stability in dealing with problems as highlighted by the report. These countries can ill afford to generate conflicts and turmoils and push their people into the abyss of poverty and degradation. It is sad to note that many country in this region has been witnessing a great deal of turmoil during the last about one decade. These turmoils, generated through the mechanisms of insurgencies and by raising the temperature of religious extremism, are *per se*, aimed at disintegration of the existing states. In the process, although the states have managed to maintain their territorial integrity and national cohesion, the people have suffered enormously in economic, personal and social terms. First, the Punjab and now Kashmir provide an illustration to the point. This is not to suggest that these upheavals do not have internal dimensions. The internal social, political and economic contradictions have equally

contributed in flaring up the conflicts. The trouble in Sindh in Pakistan provides an illustration to the point. Such situations call for a serious attention and evolving the necessary mechanisms for the grievance redressal.

Be that as it is, in case the South Asian states are keen to remove the stigma, as highlighted by HDC report, they have to desist from destabilising their neighbours. A joint, cohesive and an integrated approach to the problems of human development holds the key for a prosperous future of South Asia.