

South Asia Regional Convergence on Demilitarisation, Democratisation and Social Justice Held



Participants of the Regional Convergence

SAAPE Demilitarisation, Democratisation and Social Justice Campaign Group organised a regional convergence in Kathmandu, Nepal from 26th to 27th March 2014. The regional convergence was organised to discuss national issues and concerns of South Asian countries and demand for demilitarisation, democratisation and social justice in the region. Military expenditures are expanding in South Asia directly contradicting the aspirations of people towards improving their living conditions and promoting peaceful coexistence by way of exercising democracy. Poor and hungry people are compelled to pay for arms and ammunitions that are often used against them in the name of maintaining law and order, on the one hand, and to fellow citizens of neighbouring countries in the name of defending national sovereignty and territorial security. 90 participants representing civil societies from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka unanimously endorsed the theme of the campaign *Denouncing Militarisation and Promoting Peace in South Asia* and commit to work as peace campaigners in social movements for the cause of peace and prosperity

in South Asia. The convergence adopted the Kathmandu Declaration demanding a portable social security for all the citizens of South Asia; the non-resident Bhutanese rights be protected according to international laws; trade union rights be extended to all sectors including for agriculture workers and to resolve disputes on intra-region water sharing among others.

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Editorial

Civil society fronts in South Asia including SAAPE are committed to promoting peace and justice in all South Asian countries by fighting against militarisation and impunity with the aim to stop and prevent any violent conflicts in the region. As a vibrant peace movement, SAAPE's Demilitarisation, Democratisation and Social Justice Campaign strongly demands reduction in military expenditure (at least by 10%) in all South Asian countries. However, implementing our plans in the real world has been rather difficult due to feckless behaviour in the part of the state rulers who rarely ever attend to pleas made by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the general public.

Tensions growing in South Asia like that between India and Pakistan are often accredited to increasing nuclear capacity in both countries and are in need of proper intervention and cautious facilitation. Therefore, our priority in the days to come should be on creating a nuclear free South Asia by controlling illicit transfers of arms and ammunitions especially in the cross border areas in order to reduce military expenditure. This way the allocated military expenditure can be diverted towards the development of the social sector. Similarly, it is equally important to spread awareness against religious extremism and militarisation in the region.

What is more concerning about armed conflicts in South Asia is that they tend to have gender biased impact on people. Women often fall victims of sexual harassment or rape at a time of war, therefore, demanding adequate attention to disseminate information and raise awareness against gender-based armed violence both by security forces and by armed groups.

Despite challenges, as a start, South Asian civil society needs to substantially expand their campaign on incorporating peace and human right by incorporating the concept of peace in the education sector by inclusion in academic curriculums as a part of right based approach to peace. This will help increase awareness among the young generation, of the negative impacts of the arms race, nuclearisation and militarisation (both at government and group/community levels). For this mission, regional peace networks need to be strengthened in order to promote peace and social harmony in South Asia. Only a strong and effective group of peace workers can bring about changes that are needed to transform conflict zones into conflict free zones.

As a regional civil society network, we are ideally placed and amply adept to make the necessary changes in the region with the likes of initiatives such People's SAARC and SAAPE being involved in the overall process. Yet, the civil society groups involved in peace and demilitarisation campaign have not been able to establish a solid link with the military establishment because they are not keen on accepting democratic principles proposed by CSOs.

Nevertheless, we have various opportunities to work with the political parties that believe in people's sovereignty and democracy. Most of the south Asian countries have already ratified Human Rights treaties and followed the United Nation's Human Rights Charter. Similarly, there is a growing movement from different corners of the society to denounce violence. For instance, People's SAARC is itself a part of several peace initiatives and it is equally important to discuss about threats as well. Peace movements in South Asia have still remains inchoate. National chauvinism within the region coupled with increasing strength of fundamentalists can impede the peace movement.



Conflicts in South Asia:

What about People's Hope for Peace?

There has been a rise in religious and ethnic discord, animosity and conflicts in South Asia. After 25 years of war, ethnic conflict between Tamil insurgence and the Sri Lankan Government, Sri Lanka is the most militarised zone in South Asia. Ethnic violence in North East India and in Kashmir has taken a heavy toll on life and property in the region. Apart from daily killings, bomb blasts, targeted assassinations and blowing up of land mines, the dimensions of the unfolding disasters are alarming. Conflicts in South Asia, especially between Pakistan and India create ideal conditions for war hysteria, paranoia, militarisation and dominance of armed forces, creating a wall of suspicion, hostility and intolerance.¹ After a decade long armed conflict, Nepal's quest for a constitutional settlement is still undecided although the peace process initiated in 2006 has a ray of hope for developing the long awaited constitution. Afghanistan seems to be moving towards anarchy and chaos with the regrouping of the Taliban and the different ethnic warlords directly challenging the Kabul regime set up by the US and its allies. With growing religious fundamentalism, the future of democracy in Pakistan is bleak. In Bangladesh, domination of the *Chakma* ethnic group is welcoming tension in the country. People's struggle for democracy in Bhutan has been nullified by monarchy's self-declared democratic constitution and cleansing of more than 100 thousands Nepali ethnic people who are now trapped in the so-called resettlement in developed countries. Maldives has witnessed challenges to political stability when series of events including protests occurred in recent days as a result of displacing elected government by police force.

Conflict of North-East India

The North-eastern region of India comprises of eight states – Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. The region surrounded by many countries such as Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and China, is the setting for a multitude of conflicts that undermine the idea of India as a prosperous and functioning democracy.

For instance, the Naga insurgency which started in the 1950s, known as the mother of the Northeast insurgencies, is one of the oldest unresolved armed conflicts in the world. The conflict witnessed by Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Tripura between 1990 and 2000 can be characterised as low intensity conflicts. However, it must be noted that internal conflicts have been a permanent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945, of which post-colonial India is no exception. Currently, most of the states in the region are affected by some form of conflict, except for Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim where the situation is relatively stable at the moment. The reasons for the respective conflicts are wide ranging from separatist movements, to inter-community, to communal and inter-ethnic conflicts.

The Maoist Movement in India

The Maoist movement initiated by the Naxalites in 1967 has affected many parts of India with violent uprisings. The movement escalated with violent



conflicts after 2010. On April 6, 2010 Naxalites launched the most deadly assault in the history of the Naxalite movement by killing 76 security personnel. The attack was launched by about 1,000 Naxalites. Despite the government's effort to contain and reduce the militants, Naxalites were expanding in number in the later days. As a result, incidences of cross-fire, arbitrary killings, abduction and arrest have taken place in which many civilians have been victimised.

India is comprised of more ethnic and religious groups than most other countries of the world. Aside from the much noted 2000- castes, there are eight "major" religions, 15- languages spoken in various dialects in 28 states and seven union territories, and a substantial number of tribes and sects. In the recent years, three of the many ethnic and religious conflicts have been known the most: two occurred in the states of "Assam and Punjab; another is the one more widely known as the Hindu-Muslim conflict which continues to persist. While the problem in Assam is primarily ethnic, the issue in Punjab is based on both religious and regional conflicts, while the Hindu-Muslim conflict is predominantly religious. The conflict in Assam has garnered most attention from around the world as it accounts for a conflict that killed and uprooted most number of people since the partition of India in 1947. In Assam, three culturally disparate groups have been in collision: the Assamese, the Bengalis (both of which have segments of Hindus and Muslims) and the tribes, which are localised communities.² According to available reports, mob violence has claimed four thousand lives, rendered about 200,000 people homeless, and forced a large number to leave the state for protection elsewhere.

Pakistan: Growing Religious Fundamentalism and Military Extremism

Although election was held in Pakistan successfully, peace in Pakistan remains to be a distant reality as the society continues to be ruled by the religious fundamentalists and military extremists. The existence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Pakistan acts as a major hindrance in achieving peace and demilitarisation in South Asia as a whole. Neo-liberal economic policies, along with war economy have exacerbated incidence of poverty and marginalisation in Pakistan.

Afghanistan: People Are Trapped in Irrelevant War

Afghanistan, which has been at war since 1978—thirty-four years, a period longer than the two world wars combined— will finally experience some kind of peace after American forces leave this year. The United States has failed as a diplomatic entity to help create a cease-fire and secure a political deal between Kabul, Islamabad, and the Taliban. This war in Afghanistan has rendered huge losses to the economy. A decade after the so-called war on terror, the future looks grim. Afghanistan seems to be moving towards anarchy and chaos with the regrouping of Taliban, and different ethnic war lords directly challenging the Kabul regime set up by the US and their allies. In fact terrorism is spreading far and wide without any centralised command system. With new

technologies, small groups can execute terror strikes at will and the State will not be able to disarm them. The State, in turn, will probably respond by acquiring draconian powers and crushing civil liberties, brand all dissent as terrorism, institute new curbs on freedom of expression, breeding xenophobia that urges elimination of the 'others'. All these tendencies will entail denial of justice and growing violations of democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination.

Sri Lanka: Extreme Militarisation

For over 27 years, the civil war in Sri Lanka caused significant hardships for the population, environment and the economy of the country as a whole. An estimated 80,000–100,000 people were killed during the course of the war. During the early part of the conflict, Sri Lankan forces attempted to regain the areas captured by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The tactics employed by the LTTE against the actions of Government forces resulted in their listing as a terrorist organisation in 32 countries, including the United States, India, Canada and the European Union. Likewise the Sri Lankan government army have also been accused of human rights abuses, systematic impunity for serious human rights violations, lack of respect for habeas corpus in arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances. At present, the ethnic conflict has resulted in extreme violation of human rights.

Maldives: Displacement of Elected Government by Police Force

The Republic of Maldives, multi-party constitutional democracy in 2008 ratified a new constitution that provided for the first multi-party presidential elections. In a contentious series of events that included protests in January and February 2013, some of which were violent, and charges on the president for abusing his powers, President Mohamed Nasheed stepped down from his position on 7th February. Vice President Mohamed Waheed then became head of the state. A Commission of National Inquiry (CONI), which conducted an inquiry into events between January 14 and February 8, concluded that no coup had occurred, but called for the strengthening of democratic institutions to prevent similar crises in the future. The CONI also cited credible cases of police misconduct and recommended that they be investigated. Security forces respected the chain of command and reported to civilian authorities. The most significant human rights problems include excessive use of force by security forces during the events surrounding the February 7 transfer of power, restrictions on religious freedoms, and corruption of officials in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government³. Other human rights problems included flogging, arbitrary arrests, harassment of journalists, abuse and unequal treatment of women, restrictions on religious freedom, and discrimination against foreign labourers. Migrant labourers were subjected to labour abuses and were the primary victims of human trafficking. Many labourers migrated illegally into the country, making them particularly vulnerable to forced labour and debt bondage. Although the government took steps to prosecute and punish some police and military officials who committed abuses, however several judges allegedly enjoyed impunity.

Bangladesh: Domination of the *Chakma* Ethnic Community

Soon after the independence of Bangladesh, chauvinism took a heavy toll on lives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). This region is inhabited by 14 small non-Muslim ethnic communities. Their legitimate demand for constitutional guarantee of their ethnic identity and heritage has been suppressed which has further paved the way for armed insurgency by the local youth. Thousands of

Bangalee Muslims were brought from other districts and were settled in the CHT through state patronage. This has seriously affected the demography of the region by distorting the ethnic balance. Though the government signed a peace accord with the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* (PCJSS) in December 1997, peace has not yet been restored. There are now several armed groups engaged in political activities that provide some logic to continued military presence in that area.

The *Chakma*, also known as the *Changma*, an indigenous Tibeto-Burman population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh have been victimised by the government on several grounds. Successive governments have dealt forcefully with *Chakma* uprisings, and finally ended the conflict with the 1997 Peace Treaty⁴. This forceful dealing and the construction of Kaptai Dam by Pakistani government of the time in *Chakma* areas submerged cultivable lands and displaced thousands, resulted in the migration of a large population of *Chakmas* into Dibrugarh state of Arunachal Pradesh of the present Indian Union. The *Chakmas* now have representatives in the Mizoram General Assembly, Tripura Legislative Assembly and Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council. The only seat of political power and identity is the *Chakma* Autonomous District Council in India, though it covers only 35% of the *Chakmas* living in Mizoram State in India. There are about 80,000 more *Chakmas* in Rakhine state of Myanmar. The *Chakmas* in Myanmar are known as Daingnet people.

Bhutan: Ceasing of Nepali language speaking ethnic groups

In the late 1980s, Bhutanese elites considered a growing ethnic Nepali population as a demographic and cultural threat. This threat led the government to enact discriminatory citizenship laws against ethnic Nepalese which stripped about one-sixth of the population of their citizenship and paved the way for their expulsion. After a campaign of harassment that escalated in the early 1990s, Bhutanese security forces began expelling people, first by making them sign forms renouncing claims to their homes and homeland. With a series of law reforms and draconian policies like 'One nation, One people', their citizenships were effectively nullified. These measures were introduced with retrospective effects. Their unique cultural identity and language were made illegal and there was backlash against those who protested. Having been declared anti-nationals, thousands were expelled from the country. The conditions for those desiring citizenship were almost impossible to meet. As a result, a mass exodus broke out with thousands of people moving to neighbouring countries like Nepal to escape the wrath of the State. There were 110,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal out of a population of 700,000 in Bhutan. As of now, the third-country resettlement intervention by nations like the USA and Canada has resulted in over 75,000 camp refugees being relocated within their borders. While such relocation has been welcomed by some sections of refugees, other sections subscribe to the idea that they must return to their homeland.

Even if the Bhutanese government were to respect their right to repatriate under international law, its treatment of the ethnic Nepalese who still live in Bhutan suggests that the basic rights of returnees cannot be guaranteed. A Bhutanese government census of 2005 classified 13 per cent of Bhutan's current population as 'non-nationals', meaning that they are not only ineligible to vote, but are also denied a wide range of other rights.

If Bhutan aspires to be democratic, it should choose a path of reconciliation with the disenfranchised ethnic Nepalese inside and outside its borders. If instead it deliberately excludes many of its people, it may strengthen the hand

of the militants and discover that simply holding elections will bring neither real democracy nor peace.

Peace Process in Nepal: Does it exist anymore?

Nepal's Peace Process formally launched as Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) signed between the government of Nepal and the CPN Maoist on 22nd November 2006 has been a milestone for sustainable peace in Nepal. A historic document, CPA, consists of processes that are vital in peace building. On the basis of the CPA, several reforms have taken place at political, policy and operational levels, including establishing a republican nation that is secular and committed for a federal state.

However, in reality, Nepali people are yet to experience a truly peaceful Nepal. They have not been able to form their genuine representatives who exercise for the political, social, economic and cultural changes adopting principles, values of norms of inclusive democracy. They have not received a platform to participate in state's policies and programmes. They have felt challenged and threatened to some extent by the state, its operators as well as apparatuses.

The beneficiaries of state investments have not been the people; but the elite ones, particularly the leaders of political parties, merchants, industrialists, those assuming political posts in different levels, and high-ranked personnel in the government. Tax revenues generated from high tax rates imposed on peasants and labourers have been invested on the security of those who do not need it. Policies and plans often only cater to the needs of the elite. One such example is the budget of fiscal year 2013/2014 that tried to please only the government employees and industrialists.

The government has neglected people's right to basic services such as health, education, employment, etc. People do not have easy access to treatment although they have to pay excessive service charges. Likewise, right to employment has been equally ignored by the government. Despite earning huge amount of tax revenue, the government of Nepal has not been able to ensure basic rights to its people. Prominent stakeholders of the CPA, consisting of people affected by the war such as the injured, families of killed, displaces ones continue to be neglected. Government of Nepal has developed several national plans of actions, policies and programmes for providing peace dividend and reparation package to these armed conflict survivors and the families of the conflict victims. Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) in February 2007 started to implement the provisions of the CPA. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) is responsible for overall operation of the NPTF.

Government of Nepal in cooperation with the international community started providing peace dividend to conflict victims and also started the process of social re-integration at the local level with the help of various stakeholders such as peace builders and mediators. There is uncertainty whether the agreements and the policies, plan of actions and proposed reparation package have actually reached families and individuals in need of help. Furthermore, there is lack of comprehensive system to monitor the compliance of such an agreement, policies and plans of action. Although various programmes have been implemented to rehabilitate people affected by the conflict, there is an urgent need to monitor how effective these programmes have been and to what extent these dividends have been fruitful.

Conclusion

South Asia is among the world's most conflict-prone region because of its legacy of a colonial past and subsequent war on terror. Protracted ethno-political conflicts produce a vicious cycle of civil war with long lasting

consequences such as violence, death, displacement of the civilian population and violation of civil and human rights on the population. Therefore, instead of using massive army forces for war and violence, each country can use them for safeguarding and protecting each other. This further implies that governments can reallocate defence budget towards social welfare and poverty eradication.

Religious hatred and intolerance of "others" goes against the very core belief of religion itself. The underlying message of all religious founders is that of integral liberation of person. In today's world recapturing the foundational values of all religion is vital and this is only possible through liberating religion from the culture of hatred and intolerance along with depoliticising religion of its political agenda.

Nuclearisation of South Asia poses a major threat throughout the region. Nuclearisation manifests blatant disregard for human rights and environment as it also grievously undermines the current global regime of nuclear non-proliferation, thereby gravely weakening the prospects of global nuclear disarmament. It also aggravates tension and acceleration of the arms race in the region. The Indo-US nuclear deal has had serious negative impact on regional peace and security in this region.

The livelihoods of millions of people has been severely affected social relationships between people and communities impaired by wars. Conflicts, violence and wars bring about insurmountable suffering particularly for women and children. Because conflicts tend to have gender biased impacts, physical or sexual violence against women is common during wars. It has not only endangered women, both directly and indirectly, but also increased their sexual, physical and psychological vulnerability. To worsen the situation of women, wars have class as well as community specific impacts on them. The experience of communal violence, displacement, and adaptation to new environment is in many ways a function of gendered power relation.

The lack of continued and sustained effort to stem communal violence has not only failed, but has exacerbated the situation of the victims. Moreover, the intervention of civil society groups in post conflict eras has been sporadic, without coherence, and the approach as a whole has been ad hoc and piecemeal. This has resulted in the victims becoming absolutely helpless.

Nevertheless, people continue to survive and try to rebuild the fabric of their social relations and their lives as individuals, families and communities. This is due to the resilience of the ordinary people and their indomitable courage in the face of adversity. This provides the most crucial sign of hope that these deeply anti-human, anti-communitarian forces can ultimately, be defeated.

End Notes

1 Concept Note for the 2nd Peace Conference Organised by SAAPE Peace and Demilitarisation Campaign Group in Kathmandu on 26-27 March 2014.

2 www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/ethnic-and-religious-conflicts-india#sthash.OnzSMNtq.dpuf.

3 United States Department of State, 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Maldives, 19 April 2013, available at: www.refworld.org/docid/517e6e0bc5.html [accessed 7 August 2013]

4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong_Hill_Tracts#History

SAAPE Core Committee meeting held



The SAAPE Core-Committee (CC) meeting was organised in Nepal from 31st January, 2014 to 1st February, 2014. CC members from all South Asian countries attended the meeting. Mr. Herman Kumara and Mr. Prem Dangal, CC member from Sri Lanka and Nepal respectively were unable to join the meeting.

Major decisions of the CC meeting are as follows:

- The meeting endorsed Ms. Rakhi Seghal and Mr. Sushovan Dhar as SAAPE CC members representing India.
- Respective country process under the leadership of CC members will be completed by 1st week of March 2014 in order to streamline and strengthen overall co-ordination of campaigns as well as to revisit/update/expand membership.
- CC members in respective countries will explore new actors - campaign groups, networks, and social movements, individuals – to broaden and expand SAAPE.
- The Secretariat will ensure the sharing of all campaign-related communications, irrespective of focal themes, to the entire CC members in order to enhance the holistic nature/approach of our campaigns. All CC meetings will be announced in advance in general list of members and agenda circulated in advance. CC members, advisors when participating in international and national meetings should inform CC members in order to strengthen engagement with SAAPE. A short paragraph regarding the meeting attended would be ideal for common circulation. SAAPE should be actively promoted in all interventions by members. When SAAPE network is invited, it is useful to share the invitation in advance and see if involved campaign members can also represent SAAPE. Information sharing is vital for democratisation of SAAPE's structure and participation will be enhanced when there is a bottom-up process.
- SAAPE's various alliances and network partners – in the global South and North – developed by CC members, advisors and the Secretariat will be communicated regularly and updated on the SAAPE website accordingly. A strategy paper on alliance-building & networking will be shared to the CC within a month by the Secretariat.
- CC members - especially representing food sovereignty and demilitarisation campaign groups - will inform the Secretariat about campaign activities that would be conducted within March 2014 given the unutilised budget and ending of the on-going project phase. Groups working on social protection may work with the demilitarisation campaign on jointly conceived campaign activities.
- 2013 SAAPE Poverty & Vulnerability Report will be launched in Lahore, Karachi and Delhi.
- Rakhi and Netra will approach the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) and Himal South Asia respectively, for review of the 2013 poverty report.
- The regional steering committee of the People's SAARC will meet at least six months prior to the official SAARC Summit which is tentatively scheduled in November 2014 in Nepal. Respective country processes should begin now in order for us to present a solid charter of demands to the official SAARC.
- SAAPE will be legally hosted by LDC Watch effective from April 2014 after the on-going project phase ends in March 2014. LDC Watch, network ally of SAAPE, is an international organisation registered in Brussels, Belgium with its international headquarters in Kathmandu, Nepal by virtue of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Nepal.

SAAPE Poverty & Vulnerability Report 2013 launched in Pakistan

SAAPE has been publishing the South Asia Poverty & Vulnerability Report since 2003. The current report is the fourth in the series of SAAPE's publication on poverty analysis and alternative development paradigms. SAAPE launched its 2013 report with broader analysis of the dominant development paradigm in the South Asian region, highlighting its market centric nature and growth (not equity) - led development, guided by the harmful principles enshrined in the texts of the Washington Consensus and World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Financial Institution (IFIs) and other instruments created for the suppression of the toiling masses in our part of the world.

Lahore, Pakistan

The launching programme was organised in Lahore, Pakistan on 21st February 2014 at Lahore Press Club. Around 30 journalists attended the press conference; along with Farooq Tariq (SAAPE Core Committee Member), Khalid Malik and Shahnaz Iqbal of Labour Education Foundation (LEF); Mehmood Butt, General Secretary of Bhatta Mazdoor Union and several members of Awami Workers Party. Three pages summary (in Urdu language) was presented and distributed among the journalists. Today, Daily Jang, Daily Express, Daily Dunia and several other Urdu papers have published the story.



Karachi, Pakistan

The SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report 2013 'Crises, Vulnerability and Poverty in South Asia: People's Struggles for Justice and Dignity' was launched in Karachi, Pakistan on 5 March 2014 at Karachi Press Club. The launch event was organized by South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) at Karachi Press Club.

The key speakers of the programme were (RET) Justice Majida Razvi, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission, Sindh; Dr. Riaz Shaikh of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) and Zulfiqar Shah, Joint Director of PILER.

Speaking at the event, Majida Razvi appreciated the contents of the report and said it is a reference material. Dr. Riaz Shaikh of SZABIST pointed out that it is pity that the people of South Asia are suffering from hunger despite the fact



this area was once famous for provision of food to the entire world. Zulfiqar Shah of PILER said that women and children are the main sufferers of the poverty in South Asia. He mentioned that despite half of the population of poor are living in South Asia, very fewer amounts is spent on development. The major budgets of these countries are spent on purchasing of defence related weapons. These countries are poor, but their military spending is much higher than that of developed countries.

Review article of SAAPE Poverty & Vulnerability Report 2013 published in SID online Journal

The fourth SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability report of 2013, *Crises, Vulnerability and Poverty in South Asia: People's Struggles for Justice and Dignity*, was published in September. The review article of this report 'Furthering the Struggle against the Social Injustice of Poverty in the South Asia Region' has been published online in Society for International Development (SID). The review article was prepared by Dr. Shobha Raghuram, Dr. Netra Timsina and Mr. Praman Adhikari. It can be accessed through this link http://www.sidint.net/content/saape_report.

Participation of SAAPE members in 5th National Convention on Right to Food Campaign India and launching of Fourth SAAPE Poverty Report

During the 5th National Convention of Right to Food Campaign India, SAAPE Poverty & Vulnerability Report was launched. The convention was held at Sanand, Ahmedabad, India from 1st to 3rd March 2014. The theme for this convention was "National Food Security Act (NFSA) and Beyond: Right to Food, Democracy and Social Justice". The convention was attended by delegates from 17 states of India and participants from other South Asian countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Various grassroots movements involved in the Right to Food Campaign took an active part in the convention with some delegates travelling for 4-5 days to reach the convention. The convention was animated with diverse representation of activists, trade-unionists, scholars, academicians, environmentalists, workers, peasants and others representing various strata and sections of the society.



The conference discussed and debated beyond the Right to Food Act which was passed by the Indian parliament in the last year. There were efforts to look into the issues of Food Sovereignty and a sustainable basis for food security beyond the food distribution. It dealt with approaches in eliminating hunger and inequalities and about building alliances to strengthen democracy. Apart from the plenaries dealing with the focal issues, a number of parallel workshops discussed enhanced production and decentralized procurement in agriculture including GM, Seed Bill, etc.; forest rights and commons; seasonal migrant workers' issues; women's unpaid work in the context of poverty and human rights; changing land use for industrialization and non-agricultural issues and its impacts on livelihood, food security and food safety; right to work; role of media, wage subsidy; construction workers acts; fisher folk, nomadic tribes, *adivasis* and other marginalised groups and the right to food; exclusion; global trade rules, WTO treaties and its implication to right to food; tribal issues; water policy; disability and right to food; minimum wages, work conditions, identity and food security of domestic workers; right to food in conflict areas; pension and social security, etc. A number of action points were chalked out in each of these areas for the next 2-3 years.

The conference ended enthusiastically with a public meeting on 'Gujarat's Development – Claims and Reality' and the 'Ahmedabad declaration on the Right to Food, Democracy and Social Justice'.

SAAPE members were present in the convention and the fourth SAAPE Poverty & Vulnerability Report was also launched on 2nd March at the convention. SAAPE contributed in pushing the agenda forward at a South Asian level and explaining the need to create a network across the South Asian region. SAAPE was introduced to various organisations, alliances and networks present at the convention. They also appreciated the SAAPE Poverty Report.

South Asian Consultation on the Rule of Law, Democracy and Independence of the Judiciary held

The two day judicial colloquium entitled, 'South Asian Consultation on the Rule of Law, Democracy and Independence of the Judiciary' was held from 1st to 2nd April, 2014 in Kathmandu. The programme was organised jointly by Rural Construction Nepal (RRN), South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), LDC Watch and Human Rights Law Network (HRLN). The programme was organised with the view to look at the basic and common issues of South Asia, mainly the rule of law, the state of democracy and importance of judiciary and ultimately to have a kind of alliance in South Asia in order to strengthen the rule of law, democracy, independent of Judiciary and Human Rights. More



importantly it was to build a network of judges, Lawyers, paralegal from South Asia in order to learn from each other, develop best practices and to provide guidelines to the rest of the world. The programme dealt with different emerging issues relating to Public Interest Litigation (PIL), Economic, Social and Cultural rights, Torture, Extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, prisoners' rights and human rights defenders, violence and discrimination against women and the use of law in South Asian level, and finally agreed upon forming a south Asian level alliance or network.

SAAPE Bulletin

Half-yearly publication of SAAPE (No. 16, June 2014)

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