



# **SOUTH ASIAN NETWORK FOR SOCIAL & AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Turning Point, September 2009 Issue, Vol. V, No. 8

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## **Foreword**

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SANSAD wishes all its readers a very happy and prosperous journey towards realizing aspirations of prosperous, equitable and just society. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our readers to the August edition of the SANSAD Newsletter. In this issue, the focus of the month is to give an overview of the 'Functioning of Democracies in South Asia'.

Great effort has been made to avoid or at least limit any political inferences, if any and all political views that appear in this publication are solely the opinion of the author only. It is the intention of the author that issues highlighted in this and subsequent newsletters will spur the reader to greater action and become part of the global community for change.

Kind regards,

Anil K Singh  
Secretary-General,  
SANSAD, New Delhi

## Analysis

Focus of the Month:

### Functioning of democracies in South Asia

The UN General Assembly pronounced 15th September as the International Day of Democracy. Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) encourages all parliaments to implement projects, campaigns and dialogues with their citizens on 15th September 2009 to highlight the topic of Democracy and political tolerance. IPU tries to achieve the public attention to the importance of building a culture of tolerance in society, and political life as well.

Democracy represents both a **model** and a **system of establishments and methods**. As an ideal, it indicates two basic pillars:

- all the members should be able to regulate all the rules of their group *and*
- all the members should treat each other, and should be treated, as equals.

These two pillars are in democracies managed by a constantly developing complex of establishments and methods:

- a legal and legitimate model insuring all the basic human rights and freedoms,
- a representative and responsible governing authorities,
- an active citizens' society,
- a plural system of political parties expressing the citizens' opinions and attempts,
- independent and dual media system that brings veracious and verified information about all the public affairs and social events.

### POLITICAL TOLERANCE

The essential basis of democracy is to accept and respect of the other. Democratic life is connected both with the right to diverge as well as the admission of such divergence by all. Democracy entails respecting the plurality of views and highlights the dialogue as an only way **of solving conflicts**.

Political tolerance includes understanding and following the basic rights and civil liberties with different viewpoints and believes. This statement denotes an explicit refusing of boundless executive power, a **key principle of democracy**.

## **THREATS TO THE DEMOCRACIES**

Deficiency of political tolerance incurs widespread challenges all over the world. Political intolerance is caused mostly by an attempt to limit the rights of a individual or unity set up on their unlike perspectives and attitudes. This fact represent a threat to democracy since it discriminates against or even silence particular society segments or social views. **Intolerance sets up a closed society**, which narrows the peoples vigilance and shapes their expectant behaviour.

In their constitutions, the countries of South Asia declare a democracy willingness. Despite, they might fail at the implementing this rule in the real life.

**Several ideas frequently go wrong with democracy.**

In a democracy, **human rights** should be protected so that everybody, no matter our race, gender, personal belief or style of life, can participate in formulating the laws and policies to which we are subject. These human rights include the right to express ourselves freely, to associate freely with others, and to choose our representatives in free and fair elections.

According to the Amnesty International, in North East Sri Lanka, hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the recent warrant living in camps are being denied basic human rights including freedom of movement. The organization's Secretary General, Irene Khan, launched the Unlock the Camps campaign. While some progress had been made on providing basic needs, much still needs to be done on the right to health, food, water, family reunion and access to relatives.

**Legal ill will of the authorities** largely result in abuses of the human rights in large scale ways, such as in the arbitrary exploit of deformed legal acts.

On 25th February 2009 a mutiny broke out in Bangladesh. Mutinous border guards who seized their headquarters in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, have surrendered after a two-day revolt. The guards agreed to lay down their weapons after the government promised them an amnesty and to look into their demands. Officials said nearly 100 people were killed in the mutiny.

Recently rights groups have urged the government to ensure that border guards accused of involvement in a mutiny receive a fair trial. The country's supreme court is deciding if the prisoners should be tried under military or civil law.

Few in Bangladesh have any sympathy for the plight of the detained border guards, but rights groups, and their relatives are increasingly concerned about the treatment these men are receiving in detention, says the BBC's Mark Dummett in Dhaka. Some 40 border guards are reported to have died since the mutiny, and there are claims of torture. The government denies the charges and says that the men either committed suicide, had heart attacks or died from other natural causes.

Proceedings against **freedom of speech** represents a common threat to democracies. Freedom of speech is the freedom to speak freely without censorship or limitation. The right to freedom of speech is recognized as a human right under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ICCPR recognizes the right to freedom of speech as "the right to hold opinions without interference." The key requirement for the communication media in a democracy is pluralism: multiple sources of information and diversity of views and opinions. This diversity can be threatened from government, through control over public media or more subtle forms of pressure and censorship, and from the private sector, when there is undue concentration of ownership of different forms of media.

In 2005, the king Gyanendra issued an "Ordinance Amending some of the Nepal Act Related to Media", which revised six of Nepal's key pieces of media-related legislation. These amendments establish restrictions and limitations to media that undermine freedom of expression, press freedom and the right to receive information and indicate a significant lack of democracy practices in the country.

In a democracy, where all citizens are respected as equals, **women** have as important a role to play as men. Societies are more equitable and democracy is stronger when women participate in all aspects of political life. Often it is evident the **male domination of public life**. For most of history, and in most countries, government has been a male preserve. This is still true, and it is rare for women to be represented in public office in proportion to their numbers in the population.

Referred to the Inter-Parliamentary Union research results 18.2% of political members are women in Asia. The largest number of women sitting in the parliamentary seats in South Asia reaches Nepal with 33.2% since the last elections in April 2008 and the lowest ranks appears to have Sri Lanka with 5.8% since April 2004. The research measured 187 countries of the world.

## **DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND HAPPINESS INDEX**

To measure the development of countries there are many theories and conceptions. The Human Development Index (HDI), prepared by United Nations Development Program's, which is a composite index, based on longevity, education and income of the countries is the most efficient and recognised way of measuring the developmental status of countries.

It is a standard means of measuring well-being. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, a developing or an under-developed country, and also to measure the impact of economic policies on quality of life.

The index was developed in 1990 by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and his associates at UNDP. According to the latest evaluation (2008 HDR Report) Iceland got the highest development ranks and Sierra Leone the lowest.

Recently 'The Economist' magazine has in a study examined the state of democracy in 167 countries and attempted to quantify this with an Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy which focused on five general categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. According to Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2008 Sweden scored a total of 9.88 on a scale from zero to ten, which was the highest result, while North Korea scored the lowest with 0.86. The countries are categorized into "Full Democracies", "Flawed Democracies", "Hybrid Regimes" and "Authoritarian Regimes".

Meanwhile, another measurement recognized by a certain number of countries, the Happy Planet Index (HPI) is an index of human well-being and environmental impact that was introduced by the New Economics Foundation in July 2006. The index is designed to challenge well-established indices of countries' development, such as GDP and HDI, which are seen as not taking sustainability into account. In particular, GDP is seen as inappropriate, as the usual ultimate aim of most people is not to be rich, but to be happy and healthy. According to the HPI to most "satisfied with their life" are the citizens of Vanuatu and the "least happy" people live in Zimbabwe.

## **A PARLIAMENT DOES NOT GUARANTEE DEMOCRACY, BUT THERE CAN BE NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A PARLIAMENT**

The ultimate goal of democracy is to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, to achieve social justice, foster the economic and social development of the community, strengthen the cohesion of society and build a propitious environment for international peace. Democracy, development and human rights are therefore interdependent.

Just because the institutions of democracy developed over centuries in the West, it does not mean that the idea of democracy is of exclusively Western origin. The principle that ordinary people should have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, and that rulers should be accountable to them, is one that has emerged at different times and places across the world. Democracy is now a universal aspiration, even if it is not realized everywhere in practice.

However, democracy cannot simply be imported from abroad. Its establishment and preservation are dependent on popular struggles inside each country. The idea of imposing democracy on a country from outside by force promoting a people's self-determination through a systematic violation of it is particularly problematic. The final statement of the 2005 World Summit explicitly links the value of democracy with "due respect for sovereignty and the right of self-determination."

In the recent time more increasingly proves the words of Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre, one of the best-known and most influential figures of the French Revolution, when the first statements about democracy came up: "The liberty of one citizen ends where the liberty of another citizen begins."

Democracy is dependent on the expression of ideas and a culture of tolerance. Political tolerance implies freedom of expression, open dialogue and a diversity of views. It is the role of democratic institutions to mediate tensions between diverging opinions and to accommodate the participation of all sectors of society. Although there are many threats and they might fail at proceeding the democracy, there is no better humane approach of governing than democracy.

## **News from South Asian Countries:**

### **South Asia hit by sugar shortages**

**A MASSIVE SHORTAGE IN SUGAR STOCKS HAS LED TO SOARING PRICES. THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT SET UP STRICT LIMITS ON COMPANIES TRYING TO CHECK RISING PRICES. SHORTAGES LED PAKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT TO NEARLY DOUBLE SUGAR PRICES.**

India is the largest consumer of sugar in the world and the second largest producer, but poor monsoon rains have slashed output, forcing it to rely on imports. India's sugar stocks have decline to 4.5 million tonnes to meet two months of domestic demand. The Indian government said bulk sugar buyers, such as biscuit manufacturers, would be allowed to store only 15 days supply.

In Pakistan, a production shortfall has sent sugar prices up by more than 15% over the last couple of months. Consumers have expressed unease about the price rises. Factory owners in Pakistan have been told by the interior ministry they must release sugar stocks or risk punitive action.

Global sugar prices have been pushed up by growing demand in Brazil for sugar to be turned into vehicle fuel, and a sharp fall in production in India.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8219769.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8219769.stm)

### **Journalists, environmentalists on climate change**

**JOURNALISTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE EXPERTS HAVE JOINTLY EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE.**

Nearly one hundred participants from South Asian nations gathered in Delhi for a two-day long media briefing workshop. Their discussion focused on the effects of climate change in South Asia and how to draw attention to the concerns of developing countries at the upcoming United Nations Conference on climate change to be held in Copenhagen, December, 2009.

Indian State Minister for Environment and Forest, Jairam Ramesh, explained that climate change is directly related to the emission of Carbon dioxide and other gasses, which cause greenhouse warming in the ozone layer.

<http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/-featurearchive/1183-south-asian-journalists-environmentalists-vow-united-voice-on-climate-change.html>

## **Gender and violence in South Asia**

**SID-SAN COMBINED SERIES OF CASE STUDIES ON *WOMEN AND POLITICAL CONFLICT AND WELL-BEING IN SOUTH ASIA* EXPLORES THE POLITICAL DISRUPTIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN. IT HIGHLIGHTS THE WOMEN'S WELL-BEING AND CALL THEM UP TO ADVANCE THEIR RIGHTS AND CONCERNS.**

The Society for International Development – South Asia Network's (SID-SAN) has worked on political conflict, women and well-being in South Asia for years. The initiative aimed to link the picture of the conflict to the responses and perceptions of the women involved in the conflict.

Conflict is understood to mean not only political conflict such as the insurgency in Nepal or border conflicts, or state conflict such as in Kashmir or communal conflicts in Gujarat but also place based conflict over natural resources – land, water, forests and development projects like dams, mines, etc., which lead to displacement and a clearly dissembled impact on women.

While women are the central subject of the book, because of the deep interest of the authors to women's equal rights and empowerment, the book looks at the connections between the women's movement and the respective struggles only to the extent that it has occurred in specific contexts.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/resources/gender-and-violence-in-south-asia>

## **Oil firms win Bangladesh rights**

**BANGLADESH HAS GRANTED CONOCO PHILLIPS OF THE US AND IRELAND'S TULLOW OIL THREE OFFSHORE EXPLORATION BLOCKS IN DISPUTED WATERS IN THE BAY OF BENGAL.**

The firms have been given the right to explore for gas, despite ownership claims on some of the territory by neighbouring India and Burma. The offshore bidding round was proposed last year by the army-backed interim government.

"The government approved the leasing out of two deep-water offshore gas blocks to Conoco Phillips and one shallow water block to Tullow for oil and gas exploration in the untapped areas of the Bay of Bengal," said Mohammad Muqtadir Ali, of state-run Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation. The results of the exploration by the two firms should come within five years.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8219861.stm>



## **Hope for neglected children in Bhutan**

**A LARGE NUMBER OF HOMELESS CHILDREN ARE BEING FORCED INTO BEGGING IN BHUTAN. A NEW GOVERNMENT SHELTER AIMS TO PROTECT THEM THROUGH RESETTLEMENT AND EDUCATION.**

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), supported by Save The Children fund (SCF) will set up Bhutan's first transitional shelter for children, who are homeless, abused, neglected, emotionally disturbed or face other difficult conditions.

Called '*Project Hope – putting children first*', the need for such a shelter, NCWC officials said was felt after seeing increasing numbers of children begging in Thimphu and boys and girls being exploited as cheap labour. NCWC officials also claims that about 15 boys, some as young as five years, beg daily at the Thimphu crematorium or dive into the river to pick up money thrown with cremation ashes.

According to the NCWC director, Dr Rinchen Chopel, the shelter will be provided a safe haven for children, who face difficult and dangerous situations. The shelter will look after these children, find them foster homes or send them to boarding schools. The shelter, which will be funded by a Norwegian philanthropist through SCF, will be located in Thimphu. Officials also said the shelter will not just extend a helping hand but also act as a bridge to an easier transition into the Bhutanese society.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/todayshadlines/hope-for-neglected-children-in-bhutan>

## **New Afghan 'poll frauds' emerge**

**ONE TRIBAL ELDER HAS ADMITTED THAT HE TAMPERED WITH HUNDREDS OF BALLOTS IN FAVOUR OF INCUMBENT PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI.**

More than 600 serious complaints are being investigated, but the deadline for new complaints has now passed. With 60% of polling stations having already declared, Mr. Karzai has a clear lead. In the latest case, a tribal elder from district Zaziaryoub said he had helped to fill in about 900 ballots for President Karzai.

More allegations of fraud have been made against all the prime candidates, but the election process seems to have been working overwhelmingly in favour of Mr Karzai, says the BBC's Chris Morris in Kabul. However, some of these complaints will not get heard by the Electoral Complaints Commission, as the time to file an official complaint has passed. Figures obtained from the campaign leading opponent, Dr Abdullah, suggest that in four provinces alone results have been declared from 28 polling stations which observers had reported were closed.

Because of time needed to investigate the fraud allegations, the final results of the election may not be known until the end of September. There are concerns of fraud could undermine the legitimacy of the election, which Afghanistan's Western allies see as crucial in their campaign against the Taliban.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8239500.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8239500.stm)

## **Millions in Nepal on the brink of starvation**

**FARMERS IN NEPAL ARE BATTLING AGAINST ERRATIC WEATHER PATTERNS. EXTREME CLIMATIC CONDITIONS, POOR CROP PRODUCTION, MELTING OF GLACIERS EXACERBATE EXISTING VULNERABILITIES AND INEQUALITIES.**

According to a new report launched by the international aid agency Oxfam, changing weather patterns had dramatically affected crop production, leaving farmers unable to properly feed themselves and getting into debt. Currently, more than 3.4 million people in Nepal are estimated to require food assistance, due to a combination of natural disasters.

Nepal is one of the world's poorest nations, with 31% of its 28 million population living below the poverty line. Most of Nepal's poor live in rural areas that are most at risk to disasters such as floods and landslides.

Oxfam says more work needs to be done in Nepal by the government and international organisations to create greater awareness about climate change to prioritise and institutionalise actions at national level; and help communities in their initiatives to reduce their vulnerability.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/todaysheadlines/millions-in-nepal-on-the-brink-of-starvation>

## **Where kids decide**

**CHINH INDIA PRESENTS THE 2009 KIDS FILM FESTIVAL THAT AIMS TO PROMOTE CAUSE OF CHILDREN AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES THROUGH HARNESSING TRADITIONAL WISDOM, ART AND CULTURE.**

Initiated in the backdrop of 60th year of India's Independence, Chinh India kids festival and forum is an initiative to celebrate knowledge, ideas and perspectives on culture, development and education of children programming.

The objective of the Chinh India kids festival 2009 is to inculcate taste for quality children programme and to generate awareness about new genre, innovations, and formats linking education with culture and development issues among children. The highlight of Chinh India kids festival 2009 is intelligence exchange sessions of children with experts to share voice and express their views.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/event/where-kids-decide>

### **Bangladesh guards in trial plea**

**HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS IN BANGLADESH HAVE URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT BORDER GUARDS ACCUSED OF INVOLVEMENT IN A MUTINY RECEIVE A FAIR TRIAL.**

Some 40 border guards are reported to have died since the mutiny, and there are claims of torture. The government denies the charges and says that the men either committed suicide, had heart attacks or died from other natural causes. Rights groups are afraid that an army court may not give them a fair trial.

About 3,000 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) members were detained following the two-day mutiny at the regiment's headquarters in Dhaka, nearly 100 people were killed in the mutiny in February. The country's supreme court is debating whether or not the prisoners should be tried under military or civil law.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8223751.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8223751.stm)

### **Nepal seeks greater Indian investments**

**NEPAL INVITED INDIAN INVESTMENTS IN HYDROPOWER, ROADS, BRIDGES, TOURISM INDUSTRY, AGRO PROCESSING, EDUCATION, IT, LIGHT MANUFACTURING, HEALTH AND FINANCIAL SERVICES.**

The Nepalese Prime Minister declared that the full potential of bilateral trade and investment still remained untapped. Nepal urged the Indian industry to take advantage of the situation and invest in his country and that investment climate in Nepal was likely to improve with the adoption of the new Constitution.

He also called upon the Indian government and the industry to set up Special Economic Zone near the southern border in Nepal, designate and set up special 'trade corridors' that would link Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Pakistan, allowing Indian companies to be listed in Nepal Stock Exchange and allowing Nepalese companies to be listed in the Indian stock exchanges .

[http://anypursuit.com/news/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=580ñ](http://anypursuit.com/news/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=580ñ)

## **Past SANSAD Events in 10<sup>th</sup> August and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

### **MEETING ABOUT THE DROUGHT IN INDIA**

**31st August 2009:** In August, Ekta Parishad had called a meeting in Delhi to discuss the situation arising out of drought in several parts of the country. Participants were convinced that people should be mobilized to work at all levels- National, State, district and local. Mr. Anil K. Singh also participated on the meeting.

### **STRATEGY MEETING ON UPCOMING WTO MINISTERIAL**

**2nd September 2009:** A strategy meeting on upcoming WTO ministerial was organized by La Via Campesina (South Asia), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), and others in New Delhi. On the meeting some updates on State of Play about agriculture, the third world network, and services came up. SANSAD also took part on the meeting.

### **PROTEST RALLY TO MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**3rd September 2009:** In response to ministerial meeting taking place in New Delhi a Protest rally was organized at JANTER MANTER. The protest was held in order to show disapproval to a Ministerial meeting WTO. SANSAD respectfully attended the protest rally.

### **PLANNING MEETING FOR ORGANIZING AN OPEN HEARING FOR DROUGHT PRONE REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY**

**3rd September 2009:** Another preparatory meeting SANSAD participated was held in OXFAM, New Delhi in the office to plan a public hearing on climate change and draught in India. Similar public hearing will be organized on **10th October** in Patna, **4-6th October** in Himachal Pradesh, **23-24th October** in Mumbai and National Public Hearing on **11-13th November 2009**.

## **Sansad Diary for September 2009**

### **PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE WOMEN'S TRIBUNAL ON CLIMATE JUSTICE**

**10th September 2009:** On a preparatory meeting for the Women's Tribunal on Climate Justice will be present SANSAD Secretary General, Mr. Anil K. Singh. The preparatory meeting will specifically focus on Women's Tribunal on Climate Justice and especially the details of roles responsibilities of different entities.

### **NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF UPA'S 100 DAYS AGENDA**

**15-16th September 2009:** A national Consultation will be held in India International Center, New Delhi. The consultation will take place to assess the 100 Days Agenda of the UPA Government and to review the performance of the UPA government for the last five years. SANSAD Secretary General, Mr. Anil K. Singh is going to take part on the consultation.

### **CONSULTATION ON INLAND MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS RIGHTS**

**18th September 2009:** SDS-IPAC is organizing a one day consultation on Inland Migration and Migrants Rights in Indian Social Institute, Delhi. The objective of the Consultation is to share the view of various organisations and groups working on the issue of migrants' rights. Mr. Anil K. Singh, the Secretary General of SANSAD is kindly invited to the consultation.