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ASIAN COOPERATION AND VISIONS OF PANCHSHEEL AND BANDUNG

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Panchsheel Vision and the Age of Self

The Golden Jubilee of Panchsheel in 2004 and of the Bandung Conference in 2005 presented opportunities for the humankind to reaffirm the vision of creating a just and equitable world for which peoples of the colonies had waged tortuous anti-imperialist struggles for over a century. It is especially relevant as a perspective in the twenty first century when groups, nations and regions are showing increasing determination to realize their aspirations. The contemporary world is characterized by two simultaneous trends. One is the trend of integration of the world economy facilitated by communication explosion and the other is the trend of assertion of the self – the rising democratic consciousness of individuals, groups, regions and nations seeking to fulfill their potentiality by removing obstacles to their self-realisation. The concept of self-determination has evolved into a dynamic notion of self-realisation which has vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Vertically it seeks territorial self-rule or participative exercise of power from the lowest level of village, town and province to the regional, national, supra-national and global levels. Horizontally, unevenly structured relations among classes, castes, tribes, ethnic groups, races, regions, men and women are striving to alter their situation so that they can achieve their potentialities.^{viii} This is why twenty first century can be called the Age of Self or the age of self-realisation and the Panchsheel vision provides an appropriate framework to pursue these goals. All policies whether pursued by states or non-state organizations are bound to be measured by the yardsticks of the process of self-realisation. International cooperation in the age of self therefore has to respond not only to the forces of global economy but also the movements of people's rights.

When Panchsheel, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was proclaimed to the world in 1954 it had embodied a vision of a new world that was rooted both in the history of Asia and in the worldwide struggle against imperialism. The term Panchsheel was taken from the Buddhist legacy of five norms of human behaviour.^{ix} Asian civilization put high salience on the values of love, kindness, sacrifice and peace which were highlighted in the discourse on Panchsheel. At the same time the struggle against imperialism emphasised the value of equality of nations and cultures and their right to self-determination. So when the two most populous countries of the world, China and India began to outline a framework for developing their bilateral relations and envisage a new post-colonial world they formulated the Five Principles. They were joined by Burma and later these principles became the alternative set of ideas propounded by the Non-aligned and other developing countries that campaigned for a just and equitable world order. This was an alternative to the Cold War framework of competing alliance systems based on the concept of balance of power.^x

The Five Principles were essentially conceived as principles guiding state-to-state relations.^{xi} But the past fifty years' history of international relations and social transformation in the world has revealed the vast potential of these principles. They may have serious implications for people-to-people and region-to-region and culture-to-culture relationships as well. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression and non-interference in the internal affairs are extremely significant today when hegemonic forces invade countries and intervene in the name of building democracy or for humanitarian reasons.^{xii} But they are also relevant to federal structures and inter-ethnic relations. Equality and Mutual Benefit are the most significant of the five principles. Imperialism had been challenged by over a century's peoples' struggles both violent and peaceful to assert these principles. That no country can claim to have a right to rule over another in the name of superior culture and that no country had a right to exploit natural resources in another country in the name of possessing higher technology and capital were effectively countered in course of the liberation struggles in India, China and other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Ten Principles adopted in the Bandung conference of April 1955 had not only reiterated the Five Principles but had added a number of specific ones on decolonization, human rights and fighting racism. These were reaffirmed in the fiftieth anniversary conference in April 2005 in Djakarta where 89 Asian and African countries took part and adopted a crucial declaration on Asian African Strategic Partnership (AASP) . The new declaration of AASP restated the centrality of self-determination and chalked out a fresh agenda emphasizing the need to strengthen multi-lateralism. The nine point declaration also codified a commitment to diversity and building a “just, democratic, transparent, accountable and harmonious society”.^{xiii}

Keeping these principles in view the concept of peaceful coexistence of states with diverse social systems and diverse ideologies and diverse cultures was articulated so that people of the country concerned had the basic right to struggle for their socio-political transformation. Dignity and plurality of cultures of the world were embedded in the Panchsheel. So was the right of a people to pursue their own path of development. No doubt, in an interconnected world there are bound to be mutual assessment of each other's choices and experiences because that is how the human civilization has grown and that is how the knowledge discovered in one part of the world is shared by people elsewhere. But this process has to go on neither in the framework of imperialism and domination nor in the framework of hegemonic globalisation. The Panchsheel framework would promote equitable exchange of ideas and resources, technology and capital, fair trade in the true sense of the term – an exchange that is mutually beneficial to the parties or a win-win relationship among nations and peoples. All the institutions in the global and continental arena in the new century ranging from the United Nations to World Trade Organization (WTO) , from Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be judged according to the norms of Panchsheel.

The Cold War persisted till the end of the 1980s crippling the possibilities of transformation of the world towards an equitable one. Its end saw the emergence of a hegemonic world situation dominated by the Western capitalist powers led by the US. At the contemporary moment many countries of the world are seeking space to relate to one

another in a cooperative and peaceful way on the principles of peace , equality and mutual benefit. As democratic assertion of countries, nations and identities grows and oppressed groups become more conscious of their creative potentialities and the obstacles to their fulfillment the movements for self-realisation gathers new momentum. The momentum gathered by the initiatives in regional cooperation in Asia during the last decade is part of that unfolding process in the Twenty First Century.^{xiv}

This is evident in the discourses in the regional forums. For example, addressing the annual conference of the Boao Forum for Asia (24-25 April 2004) Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen called for three kinds of transformations in Asia : 1) from internal conflicts to a zone of peace and cooperation, 2) from imbalanced development to comprehensive and harmonious development ; 3) from poverty and under- development to epicentre of prosperity.^{xv} This by and large reflects the nature of the political and economic processes going on in contemporary Asia. They involve recognition of multiple levels of self-assertion by deprived or alienated groups within and across countries all of whom are reckoning with the forces of globalisation and going through various kinds of economic reforms. If the efforts at regional cooperation focus only on trade and economic growth without addressing these demands they may actually accentuate social tensions .

The internal conflicts within countries are mostly connected with the autonomy movements by cultural and regional groups seeking self-determination and various democratic rights movements , especially agrarian movements and tribal struggles. Until recently, these demands were seen by the leaders of the nation states as fissiparous and separatist campaigns to disintegrate the postcolonial states. In recent years however, there is increasing appreciation of the nature of the demands resulting in peace talks in various countries. In South Asia the talks with LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Naga peace talks leading to cease-fire in northeast India and the initial steps towards dialogue on Kashmir are some examples of the new trend. The peace talks with the Maoists in Nepal was on the cards so as to end the deadlock and arrest the escalating trend of violence. The government of President Arroyo in Philippines has been engaged in peace talks with the New People's army and the People's Democratic Front in Amsterdam and there is a ceasefire on the ground. While the military dictatorship in Burma persists in its manouvres to delay handing over power to the democratic leadership, the movement for the restoration of democracy goes on with initiatives for peace and dialogue. Many of these democratic and autonomy movements and social upsurges have international dimensions; therefore the solutions of internal problems require creating an international environment conducive to peace. Regional disparities within each country often lead to the alienation of the people of the underdeveloped regions. There are regions of poverty in every country, and more extensively in South Asia. Hence, tackling poverty and regional disparity have emerged as major goals in the current phase of economic reforms in many countries including China and India.

Thus, the contemporary Asian environment has three vertical levels of self-assertion – at the level of regions within the countries, at the level of countries/nations and at the trans-national level. Horizontally, the class, caste, race, ethnic and gender based domination are the basis of many social struggles. The current process of globalization has to recognize these multiple levels of self-assertion. The important task is how to reconcile these levels to mutual benefits. No level can be subdued by another level and each level has to prove its positive advantages for the lower as well as for

higher levels. A nation state or multi-national state values its sovereignty that it has achieved after long years of anti-colonial struggle. But today it is called upon to exercise it by granting autonomy to regions and groups within it. At the same time many layers of integration are now emerging above the nation states- at the levels of regions in Asia , at the continental level and the at the level of the third world or the South or the developing countries and also many issue -based regional and global formations. Thus the discourse on regional cooperation has to be located in a framework of multi-layered self-assertion and integration. That is the Panchsheel framework of cooperation.

It should be pointed out that most of the current initiatives at regional cooperation take the national governments as their units of cooperation. No doubt they are the most important agencies of cooperation but they often remain insensitive to the aspirations of autonomy struggles and people's movements. At the non-governmental level many organizations have come up particularly the NGO networks facilitated by regional institutions such as South Asian association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and ASEAN. Business groups have also evolved their own networks through the operational channels of the multinational corporations. But there is clear gap between the intergovernmental and the NGO networks. The gap has been relatively lessened because of the UN summits which usually have NGO forums in addition to the conferences of governmental representatives. Still the gap persists because people's organizations and social movement groups have very little networking on a sustained basis. As a result many intergovernmental initiatives do not reflect the concerns of people's movements and regional economic initiatives may even be insensitive to the people's rights. The problem is further confounded by the fact that collaboration among academics of the Asian countries as well as among different regions within a country remains minimal. Only when cooperative links are forged at all the four levels- government, NGO, people's organizations and academics – can regional cooperation advance smoothly. This is extremely significant in the context of the newly emerging economic strength as well as the growing democratic consciousness in Asia which is famously endowed with great civilisational legacies.

Resurgence of Asia and the Spirit of Panchsheel and Bandung

In the recent years we have seen a continental self-assertion in Asia. After two centuries of struggle people of Asia have begun to perceive themselves as Asians with historical, cultural and transformative identities.

For one and a half-century western colonialism had plundered Asia and it so divided Asian territories that a pan-Asian identity could not emerge. Some thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore and leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru did try to articulate the Asian visions. Tagore spoke of Asian civilization in his lectures in China and Japan. Nehru talked about Asian nationalism in *Glimpses of World History*. The Japanese militarists' concept of an Asian Co-prosperity Sphere had done considerable damage to the concept of Asia already.

The second half of the twentieth century saw post- colonial Asian countries pitted against one another as a result of the cold war policies of the super powers. It is in this environment Panchsheel was conceived in Asia to chart an alternative path of world politics on the aftermath of the World War II and the end of colonialism. The Bandung

Conference of the Asian and African countries in 1955 was an important initiative to counter cold war politics. The Ten Principles contained in the Bandung Declaration absorbed the Five Principles.^{xvi} But the Afro-Asian movement did not succeed in consolidating anti-imperialist forces. Asia remained divided because of the cold war with continuous tensions in the Korean Peninsula, the war in Vietnam, India-Pakistan relations, invasions and civil war in Afghanistan and the Arab-Israeli conflict to name a few. Throughout the past half twentieth century Asia has suffered from external intervention and internal war. It is only in the recent years, despite the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Asian countries and people are coming together in regional and continental forums to build structures of cooperation and strengthen the already existing structures.

Western social science writings including the area studies scholars emphasized the diversity and disparateness of Asian countries and regions so much that the concept of Asia remained almost an illusion.^{xvii} Only after the end of the cold war and the rise of a new wave of self – assertion throughout the continent of Asia a new climate of regional identity began to develop.^{xviii}

Asia was now seen as a civilisational zone extending from Egypt to Japan and Mongolia to Sri Lanka or beyond where great religions and cultural systems such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism flourished and interacted with each other together with large varieties of local religions and cultures for at least two millennia. The Himalayas and the rivers flowing from them on all sides and the large stretches of dryland and pastures constitute the geo- cultural region of Asia . South Asia has a special location like a peacock with its open feathers extending to all the other four regions of Asia. That happy status has made it a region of confluence of Indo-Sinic, Indo-Persian, Aryan and Dravidian civilizations over two millennia and more. The spirit of Panchsheel imbining mutual respect and coexistence of cultures is the gift of the people's history of Asia resulting from prolonged struggles.

Besides the civilisational inheritance, the anti -colonial history of Asian countries had enduring legacies of agrarian revolution and multi-faceted liberation. During the past half century the economic development experience of Asian countries especially the experiments with various models of Gandhi and Nehru and his successors in India, those of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and his successors in China , the East Asian tigers and dragons and the rise of the oil economies in the Gulf and West Asia , the practice of planning and market reforms and their many mixes – all this presented unique experiences.

As many Asian countries exhibited their self-confidence by their economic successes and raised their political voice highlighting their cultural and natural resources at the dawn of the twenty-first century there was the talk of an Asian century. No doubt, China's economic success, the performance of ASEAN and Japan and other East Asian countries have made a major contribution to this new image of Asia. But equally important has been the rise of democratic movements of people of Asia. The cumulative force of the new middle class, the entrepreneurs, the awakened peasants and workers, the women's movement has made a significant impact on this new situation. This Asian environment has also within it persistence of poverty and regional disparity, environmental decay and ethnic violence among many other problems. If the economic

rise of Asia is projected in exclusion of the this comprehensive picture we would have only a partial picture of the evolving reality in the contemporary world.

There are similar trends of resurgence in Africa and South America as well. The founding of the African Union in 2002 is a landmark in this process. But for historical reasons the forces of economic, social and political transformation are relatively more active today in Asia though the other two continents are fast catching up. What is significant is that the three continents are coming together on global economic issues. In this effort the initiative taken by Brazil, South Africa, India and China has been crucial as was evident in Cancun, Geneva and elsewhere in the WTO negotiations.

Growing Asian Initiatives

Though the new Asian consciousness has not translated itself into many continental level organizations still some of the regional associations have made remarkable progress. In Asia the most successful experience in regional cooperation is that of ASEAN which had already set up the initial structure of an ASEAN Free Trade Area in 1992. It aims at becoming an ASEAN Community by 2020. The Bali Summit in October 2003 agreed on what it called the ‘Three Pillars on ASEAN community’ viz. Political and security cooperation; economic cooperation and socio-cultural cooperation. ASEAN had already agreed to have a free trade area with China by 2010 and with India by 2011 and with Japan in the following year.

In South Asia, the process of regional cooperation has been much slower. However, the twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad on 4-6 January 2004 turned out to be a landmark. Besides the India – Pakistan peace initiative taken by Vajpayee and Musharraf the SAARC Summit adopted the SAFTA Framework Treaty. The SAARC leaders agreed to reduce tariffs in the region in two phases to 0-5% partly by 1 January 2006 and fully by 31 December 2015. The leaders also agreed to set up a South Asian Economic Union and explored the possibility of the establishment of the South Asian Development Bank. The adoption of the SAARC social charter was another successful event of this Summit. 2004 was designated as the SAARC Awareness Year. Vajpayee also floated the idea of a South Asian currency. SAARC’s progress had been thwarted all these years by India-Pakistan conflicts. But the public opinion in both the countries had been pressurizing their governments to open channels of communication and build up people-to-people contacts. The consensus on this line of thought was evident in the fact that the Manmohan Singh Government of the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) that came to power in May 2004 defeating the NDA has continued the initiative. The SAARC Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Islamabad in August 2004 carried forward the SAARC agenda. But much ground needs to be covered before SAARC meets the common aspirations of people of South Asia.^{xix}

India’s Look East Policy launched by the PV Narasimha Rao regime in the early 1990s has not only led to closer cooperation with ASEAN but also to participation in another regional initiative called BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand- Economic Cooperation). Its Sixth Ministerial meeting in Phuket in Thailand on 8 January 2004 adopted the Framework Agreement of BIMST-EC Free Trade Area. Nepal and Bhutan had joined the organization in the meantime. It chalked out a programme of cooperation in developing hydropower projects, air links, shipping and

highway linkages. The first BIMST-EC Summit was held on 30-31 July 2004 in Bangkok. Indicating the importance that India attached to this initiative India's new Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh attended this Summit and affirmed India's commitment to multilateral cooperation in Asia.^{xx} The BIMST-EC Summit Declaration of 31 July took a number of significant decisions. It renamed the organization as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation thus retaining the acronym while admitting more countries into it. The leaders signed the Framework Agreement BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and launched a schemes on tourism, transport and forging cooperation in a variety of fields ranging from agriculture and biodiversity to communication, energy and infrastructure development.^{xxi}

Another initiative in which India played a major role was the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) which was declared in a Declaration in Vientiane, Laos in November 2000. It was signed by six countries five of whom were from Southeast Asia. They were : Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and India. The aim was to promote tourism, transport and cultural links. When the exclusion of china was noticed the answer was that it was the region from Mekong river to Ganga river. There were steps taken to prepare project reports for transport networks such as an East West corridor and Trans-Asian Highway. Joint research on scientific, technological and cultural issues were also proposed. The second Ministerial meeting took place alongside the ASEAN meeting in Hanoi in July 2001 which drew up an Action Plan and the third after a gap of two years in June 2003 in Phnom Penh.^{xxii} In the evolving climate of multilateralism in Asia, India, Vietnam , Thailand and the other members of GMS are not likely to give up the advantages of this grouping though they are yet to invest adequate attention to finding out the vast potentiality of this initiative. This is however not as well-funded as the other Mekong project aided by the Asian Development Bank namely, Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation which is known as ADB's GMS. China's Yunnan Province is a major beneficiary of this latter international project.

Whereas ASEAN, SAARC and BIMST-EC were either South East Asian or South Asian initiatives the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was mainly a Chinese initiative. In 1996 the Shanghai Five consisted of three central Asian republics-Kazakhstan, Kirgystan, Turkmenistan - the republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union and Russia and China. Uzbekistan became a member a few years later when the group formally constituted itself as the Sanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2001. Even though the Charter of the SCO does not exactly reproduce the Five Principles, its principles very much embody the Panchsheel vision.^{xxiii} Its original tasks focused on handling boundary issues, tackling separatism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. Gradually the functions acquired significant economic and strategic dimensions. The profitable utilisation of natural resources of Central Asia, which attracted the western corporate interests to the region became important items in the agenda of the SCO framework. In 2004 the SCO set up two important structures – a permanent secretariat in Beijing in January and a Regional Counter-terrorism Centre in Tashkent. The SCO Summit in Tashkent in June 2004 unfolded several initiatives which showed how the organization was based on “security and economic cooperation as two wheels of development.” Mongolia was admitted as an Observer to SCO.^{xxiv} The fifth summit at Astana in Kazakhstan in July 2005 was yet another landmark in its evolution. India, Pakistan and Iran were also made Observers at the SCO which led to much speculation

about operation of interest groups. Strengthening solidarity among the members and cooperation in fighting terrorism remained the focus. But the highlight was the SCO's claim to have special responsibility to maintaining peace and stability in the region of Central Asia and calling for a time table for withdrawal of foreign troops in the region . The US promptly reacted by saying that it had no plans yet until the threat of terrorism persisted. But the assertion of autonomy was a significant development at a time when US was still embroiled in counter-insurgency operations and the military occupation in Iraq.^{xxv}

Two pan-Asian initiatives are slowly emerging on the continental scene, one focusing on security and another on economic development. The former is the CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia) which took a formal shape with the adoption of the Almaty Act on 4 June 2002. The summit meeting of 22 October 2004 brought heads of states and governments of Asian countries to the capital of Kazakhstan which was a significant step forward. The focus of this initiative was on threat of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking and handling regional conflicts. Currently it is essentially a forum to exchange ideas and create a climate of collective commitment to peace. The other initiative which had its beginnings in discussions in Thailand during the past decade has crystallized as the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). It has had four meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers thus far – the latest being the one in Islamabad in April 2005 which was addressed by the visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Attended by 26 foreign ministers of Asian countries this can be regarded as the only official dialogue forum on issues of development in Asia. India was represented in the CICA summit by the Prime minister in Almaty but by the Minister of Science and Technology in Islamabad at the ACD. But neither them have emerged as effective structures mainly because the collective consciousness has not been translated into a stable structure as yet in Asia. This is in stark contrast to the rapid structuration of the African Union which was launched only in 2001.

Whereas the above aforesaid initiatives are intergovernmental there are some non-governmental or semi-governmental forums for regional cooperation. The BCIM is one such example.

BCIM on Track II

An initiative was taken by the scholars, business groups and officials in China's Yunnan province through the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences to promote sub-regional cooperation among the neighboring regions and countries of China's Yunnan Province. The first conference of scholars and business interests from Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) was convened in Kuming in August 1999. The participants agreed on exploring the ways to improve cooperation in tourism, transport , connectivity and border trade. The first round of meetings had been completed in New Delhi (2001), Dacca (2002) and Yangoon (2003). The Government of India had not yet shown adequate interest in this effort though it had not shown any hostility to the idea. As Sino-Indian relations improved and their trade developed steadily, security sensitivity in disputed the border area which was also a region of insurgency began to give place to confident policy making. So far only academic institutions had been involved in organising the conferences. The governmental involvement in China and Myanmar was fairly conspicuous from the beginning. The Chinese are keen to raise this initiative from

track II to track I so that this effort graduates to the level of the SCO governments carry on the business of cooperation.. In the changing Asian environment it is not unlikely to see this grow into a n intergovernmental organisation for regional cooperation.

While the above initiatives were confined to regions of Asia two other initiatives have emerged as a pan-Asian efforts though still in their elementary stages. One is the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) and the other the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA). The ACD which had started as the Chiangmai initiative in Thailand had its third Foreign Ministers' meeting in Qingdao in June 2004. India's Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan participated in the deliberations there and had their first bilateral meetings as well. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao addressed the Conference and spelt out a five point outline for Asian cooperation the first being the Five principles as the guiding framework for ACD. He also called for developing economic cooperation and trade, agricultural cooperation and building a Green Asia, building up mechanism for cooperation by strengthening existing channels of multilateral cooperation such as ASEAN, SAARC , Arab League and SCO, expanding people-to-people cooperation and commitment to the principles of openness and tolerance to take Asian cooperation to a higher level.^{xxvi}

During the first three years of its existence the BFA has emerged an important fulcrum of Asian initiatives which deserve a detailed examination because it has established itself as a functioning structure of development dialogue promising to serve the continent of Asia as a whole.

Boao Forum for Asia since 2001

An initiative taken by former Philippines President Fidel Ramos, former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, and the former Japanese Prime Minister M Hoshokawa and others including former Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis got enthusiastic response from China in 2000 leading to the creation of a forum for Asia. The idea was to bring together business leaders, political figures and academicians from Asian countries to have an annual conference at a permanent venue to discuss Asian economic problems and world development issues from Asian perspective. Boao in China's Hainan Province was chosen as a convenient venue in terms of distances from various parts of Asia.. The World Economic Forum at Davos is an inspiration for this effort though the BFA may have a wider functions as well to take up economic, social as well as environmental issues. Boao which was a tiny fishing village until four years ago is now a fast growing metropolis and a tourist attraction.^{xxvii}

Inaugurated by the Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 2001, the BFA held its third annual conference in April 2004 where the distinguished guests included the Prime Minister Jamali of Pakistan, the Cambodian Premier and the President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus. The President of Tajikstan Romanov who was the key note speaker last year was also present . Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed who has been an important champion of third world interests returned to the Forum after two years. President Hu Jintao made an important speech in which he summed up the experiences of the past 25 years of reforms and assured that the 'peaceful

rise of China' presented a great opportunity for peace and development in Asia and the world. Last year newly appointed Chinese premier Wen Jiabao had addressed the gathering. Over 1000 business representatives, political figures and scholars from 35 countries of Asia and the world including delegates from France, Sweden, UK and US participated in the conference.

Two visions of Asia have gently crisscrossed at the annual conferences of the Boao Forum for Asia . One perspective was clearly laid out by the Secretariat led by BFA Secretary-General Long Yongtu, PRC's former Trade Negotiator with WTO who took charge in early 2003 after a short tenure by Malaysia's Ajit Singh. The organisers of BFA wished to assure the Western captains of globalisation that this Forum was not intended as a challenge to the World Economic Forum of Davos and that it was indeed a complementary initiative in Asia to help the Asian economies and entrepreneurs to cope with the challenges of international economic integration.

The other vision emerged from the speeches of some of the political leaders and a few academics and business executives which stressed the role of Asia in the movement for a just, fair and equitable world economic and political order. They too welcomed the idea of global economic integration, but that should reduce the gap between the north and the south and enable the countries to cope with their domestic economic and social problems. Asia had large poverty-stricken populations who demanded urgent attention. Economic globalisation had to address itself to the problems of farmers, workers and people of backward regions.

Philippines' former President Ramos who is the President of the BFA Board spelt out his vision unambiguously of building a prosperous Asia as a united family which will contribute towards creating a stable and equitable international order. This echoed the sentiments expressed by Jiang Zemin in his inaugural speech in and by Mahathir Mohamed in his key note speech on the occasion of the opening of the Forum in 2001. In the first conference in 2002 the Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi stressed the importance of Asian cooperation and the then Chinese Premier Zhu Rongzhi had outlined a grand vision for a Win-Win path for Asia which has become a permanent theme note for BFA. The theme 2003 was : *Asia searching for Win-Win: Development through Cooperation*. i.e. how to ensure that all parties benefit out of the development process. For 2004 it was : *Asian Development Path: A Win-Win Modality and Commitment*

The Secretary-General of the Forum, Long Yongtu was China's Vice-Minister for Trade who had led the thirteen year long Chinese negotiations for entry into the WTO that fruited in December 2001. He was also a member of the Chinese Mission at UN and later a UN official. His vast experience was in action in the congregation of the top functionaries of WEF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the UNDP who have been prominent speakers at the various sessions of the BFA conferences . As an important representative of the Chinese government Long secured the full participation and support of the top Chinese leadership in BFA while at the same time bringing in the international institutions. It is believed that the first Sec-Gen Tano Sri Ajit Singh had faced problems of coordination with the Chinese government.

The programmes at Boao reflected much care taken by the Chinese about the Forum's character and diplomacy. In 2003 for example, the Inaugural session had one political leader, President Emomali Rakhmonov of Tajikistan and one business leader from Japan, Jiro Nemoto. Rakhmonov not only brought a Central Asian perspective into the conference, he called for united efforts for reducing poverty and regional disparity to advance peace and sustainable development in Asia. Nemoto referred to Asian values and declared that economic development and human development are two wheels of a cart; if one is weak the cart will be stuck.

At the 2003 conference, a cautious affirmation of Asian solidarity was the thread running through the key note speeches of President Musharraf of Pakistan, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore and the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Musharraf who began his state visit to China from Boao urged the Conference to find out ways to integrate South Asia and Central Asia with the dynamic economic region of East and Southeast Asia so that Asian prosperity was not limited to pockets of growth in the Continent. Goh Chok Tong gave a celebratory account of ASEAN's steady progress and charted out possibilities of further cooperation among the ten member states together with their dialogue partners. Formation of a Free Trade Area of ASEAN with China in 2010, with India in 2011 and Japan in 2012, the ASEAN Economic Community by 2020 and the emerging trends in the economic cooperation between them figured prominently throughout the Conference. ASEAN's experience in regional integration, China's economic success, Japan's trend of recovery and India's IT industry were some of the strengths on which Asian cooperation can be designed.

The highlight of the third conference in April 2004 was Hu Jintao's speech in which he spoke of Asia's rejuvenation and spelt out how China's development could contribute to it. "A developing China generates important opportunities for Asia", said Hu, referring to the growth of China as the third largest importer in the world, with \$272 billion imports from the rest of Asia and Chinese investment expanding fast in Asia. Hu Jintao presented a much wider vision of Asian cooperation than trade and investment by presenting a five point approach: i) Enhancing political trust and good-neighbourliness based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, ii) expanding and deepening bilateral economic cooperation, iii) accelerating regional economic integration, iv) promoting cultural interaction and personnel exchanges and v) facilitating security dialogue and military-to-military exchanges and setting up a military security dialogue in Asia. The fourth Conference in April 2005 was somewhat in a low key as it was too close to the Golden jubilee of the Bandung Conference. Yet China's third ranking leader Jia Qinglin addressed the meeting. India's official participation remained limited to its Ambassador though the Deputy National Security Advisor too attended. While the industry was represented by the FICCI delegation the business circles as a whole were still not familiar with this emerging Asian forum.

The BFA was still in a preliminary stage of Asian economic dialogue. As Sec-Gen Long Yongtu put it, though it was developing in the right direction it had a long distance to traverse before it became an influential forum in world economic affairs. Governments of Asian countries had not taken enough interest in it. The organisers still depended more on the retired leaders and a few other leaders from countries friendly to

China. Government of India sent its Ambassador from Beijing to Boao only in 2003. Many governments treat it as a Chinese initiative rather than a multilateral initiative. However, BFA is slowly growing into an active forum for exchange of ideas and launching of new initiatives at the Asian level.

The effort to set up an Asian Development Fund has made steady progress. China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN have contributed \$1 billion to set up a fund for Asian Bonds. Discussion on creating an Asian currency - an Asian Dollar invited considerable attention in the last conference at Boao. It was argued that such a currency zone will protect the Asian economies from the fluctuation of the US Dollar or the Euro, stabilise the prices of Asian bonds and facilitate the coming of a zero tariff zone.

.Asian Regional Cooperation – Issues of People’s Rights

At Boao Hu Jintao spoke of the need for bringing about "five balances" in China's development strategy - a theme frequently touched by him during the first year of his leadership of China. In course of economic growth China must aim at achieving a balance between i) urban and rural development, ii) different regions of China (the prosperous coastal area and the backward Western area), iii) social and economic development (reducing social inequality and promoting human development), iv) man and nature (economy and ecology) and domestic development and open door foreign policy.^{xxviii} This should be read together with the recent amendments to the Chinese Constitution which has added a provision guaranteeing Human Rights and also adding the building of ' political civilisation' along with material and spiritual civilisation. In other words, democratic rights are beginning to be recognized as important goals together with economic development.

In India too the new government of the United Progressive Alliance led by Manmohan Singh has adopted a Common Minimum Programme in May 2004 which focuses on the human and social dimensions of economic reforms. It was widely recognized that the National Democratic Government led by Vajpayee lost in the elections because its reform agenda did not meet the demands of the farmers and the vast masses of the poor. “Reforms with a human face” seems to have arrived as a new mantra of the new generation of the reform leaders in Asian countries. Resistance to anti-people reforms was the theme of the World Social Forum and the Mumbai Resistance in January 2004 in Mumbai where social movement groups had gathered to register their protest against imperialist globalisation.

But Asian regional forums have yet to show adequate commitment to these issues. The SAARC Summit in Islamabad adopted the Social Charter which gave a positive signal to the people of South Asia. ASEAN – EU Dialogue periodically takes up human rights issues as well. If NGOs and people's democratic organizations take the initiative and increase their pressure on the governments to pursue the goals of alleviating poverty, promoting rights of women and other oppressed groups and conceding autonomy to the regions then there can be substantive progress in the region. Economic growth with equity and justice for regions and groups is what the Panchsheel vision implies.

The spatial perception of Asia remains partial if not conflicting. Because of the economic successes East and Southeast Asia currently dominate the perception of Asia. South Asia is the region of poverty and conflict and therefore is often not given prominence. Central Asia still does not figure prominently in the consciousness of the policy-makers in many countries despite its rich natural resources. The oil rich West Asia is the hot bed of war of aggression, and resistance. It has been poorly represented even in Boao Forum. Actually all these regions have legitimate space in the historical notion of Asia. The literature and culture of each of these regions reflects all the others. It should be recalled that Nehru's vision of Asia encompassed all these regions. In the new context the old idea that each region would have a leader country has lost its relevance. Even though countries like India, China and Japan and others may play key role in providing the impetus for Asian cooperation their economic, technological and professional resources have to be used so as to create mutual confidence among the smaller countries. Or else countries would be once again divided into cold war like formations. This is where the Panchsheel framework of "equality and mutual benefit" has become crucial to regional cooperation.^{xxix}

Asian regional cooperation has sometimes been hostage to bilateral disputes among countries. Recent developments show that people's initiatives create strong popular pressures forcing regimes to take peace initiatives as in South Asia. Larger regional and continental formations would facilitate confidence-building measures. Cold war approach is fast giving in to new multilateral multi-track initiatives because of the rising democratic consciousness in all countries.

Multilateralism is a democratic idea among nations just as federalism is within a nation when each unit respects other units, levels and forms of multilateralism. Any attempt to counterpose multilateralism against globalism on the one hand and national sovereignty on the other takes a narrow view of multilateralism. Today all forms of cooperation reinforce each other. Bilateralism contributes to multilateralism and multilateralism creates conditions for fair and just global formations.^{xxx} The globalisers' claim that all regional formations are discriminatory and inefficient does not carry much force any longer as the initiatives for multilateral cooperation in various parts of the world continue to grow. Conventional state theory as well as international relations based on the theory of balance of power viewed multilateralism only in terms of power formations to counter one another. In the emerging world of self-determination international formations have to be based on "equality and mutual benefit". Imposition of a regime by a dominant power is bound to meet with resistance. That is the trend in the twenty first century that reflects the Panchsheel vision.

Accordingly an alternative concept of security is slowly emerging that focuses on people's security or human security that combines economic, political and social conditions of self-realisation of individuals and groups. More and more arenas of collective and cooperative efforts aimed at promoting peace and democracy in world scale will respond to the multiple urges for self-assertion in the contemporary world. In this process the role of governments, civil society organisations, social movement groups and academics is equally important. The Panchsheel vision no doubt is an important framework for developing bilateral relations between any two countries. But its origin and development have made it much more than that. It is an alternative perspective on international relations and global political and economic order. It is at the same time a

vision that entails external as well as internal policies aiming at creating a just and equitable world. If Panchsheel is perceived not only as a framework for bilateral relations but as a “code of global conduct” as K R Narayanan put it^{xxxii} or an idea that should pave the way for “ a federation of friendly interdependent nations” as Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said at the golden Jubilee celebration of Panchsheel^{xxxii}, then the efforts for regional cooperation and in fact all initiatives for multilateral cooperation have to address issues of people’s rights as much as achieving economic gains for all.*

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^{viii} Manoranjan Mohanty, “Social Movements in Creative Society”, in M.Mohanty and Partha Mukherji with Olle Tornquist (eds), *People’s rights* (New Delhi: Sage,1998)

^{ix} **Pancha Shila : Its Meaning and History – a documentary study** (New Delhi : Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1955) The five fundamental precepts of morality mentioned in early Buddhist scriptures are: I) refraining from injury to living beings, ii) not taking what is not given, iii) refraining from sexual immorality, iv) refraining from falsehood and v) refraining from liquor that engender slothfulness. P.2 President Soekarno Five Principles underlying the foundation of a free Indonesian republic were: nationalism, internationalism, conferring (Consultation) , prosperity (Development) and belief in God (Morality).

^x Jasjit Singh (ed) , **India, China and Panchsheel** (New Delhi: Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, 1995)

^{xi} Mira Sinha-Bhattacharjea, **China World and India** (New Delhi: Sanskriti, 2001)

^{xii} Manoranjan Mohanty, ”Humanitarian Intervention in an Unequal World : A View from Below ”, **Social Science Probings** (Winter 2003)

^{xiii} Declaration on the new Asian African Strategic Partnership, Bandung , 23 April 2005, Djakarta

^{xiv} Manoranjan Mohanty, Self as Centre in the Twenty First Century, **China Report** Vol 38 No 1 (January 2002), see also “Creative Self and its Enemies”, **Perople’s Resistance** (December 2002)

^{xv} Hun Sen, Speech at the Boao Forum for Asia, **People’s Daily on line** (24 April 2004)

^{xvi} Bandung Declaration, 1955

^{xvii} Popular perceptions as to what constitutes Asia vary. For the Californians in US Asia is basically East Asia. For the Japanese it is East and Southeast Asia. In postIndependence India when the founders of the Indian School of International Studies designed Asian Studies under the inspiration of Prime Minister Nehru in 1955 there was perhaps the first comprehensive post-colonial grasp of Asian continental space

consisting of South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. This replaced the colonial nomenclature of Far East, Middle East and Near East – as seen from the West European capitals.

^{xviii} On the various perspectives on Asian identity see Philip Yuen-sang Leung, “In Search of an Asian Identity” in N N Vohra (ed.) **India and East Asia : Culture and Society** (New Delhi : Shipra and IIC,2002)

^{xix} **South Asia Development and Cooperation Report 2004** (New Delhi : Research and Information system on Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries – RIS, 2004) It presents valuable data and concludes that the region may find it difficult to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals. P.100.

^{xx} **The Hindu** (New Delhi,31 July 2004) The meeting was given wide publicity in India unlike in earlier occasions.

^{xxi} **The Nation** (Bangkok, 1 August 2004)

^{xxii} Amit Baruah,, “Mekong-Ganga Cooperation- An Assessment”, paper presented at the CENESEAS Forum in Guwahat (10-12 September 2004)

^{xxiii} The SCO abides by the following principles: adherence to the UN Charter, respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, mutual non-use or threat of use of force, equality among all member states , settlement of all questions through consultation, non-alignment and no directing against any other country or organization, opening to the outside world and willingness to carry out all forms of dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with other countries and relevant international and regional organizations. **Beijing Review**, vol. 47 no.30 (29 July 2004) p.16

^{xxiv} *ibid.* It was believed that the organization decided not to admit new members for the time being though it is known that both India and Pakistan had indicated their interest in joining SCO. There was a view that Afghanistan had a special relevance, but the situation there did not warrant it at the moment.

^{xxv} **Eurasia Daily Monitor**, vol 2. No. 130 (6 July 2005) India’s joining SCO as an Observer was interpreted as the result of the political breakthrough during the visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to India in april 2005. It was speculated that this was in return for a similar possible status for China at the SAARC. That Russia was strongly supporting India’s case while Pakistan was the favourite of China for the SCO linkage was not the whole story.

^{xxvi} Chinese Premier’s Address to Asian Cooperation Dialogue, Sina/English/22June2004

^{xxvii} This discussion is partly based on my personal observations since I represented the Institute of Chinese Studies which is an initial member of BFA at its preparatory meeting in 2000 and at the second annual conference in 2003.

^{xxviii} Hu Jintao’s address to the opening session of the BFA on 24 April 2004 in peopledaily.com.cn/200404/24

^{xxix} One of the most active Asian leaders for Asian integration Fidel Ramos seems to reflect this perspective though he does not directly refer to Panchsheel . See his address to the conference in Tokyo on 3 June 2004 on “The future of Asia” in **Manila Bulletin** 9 June 2004

^{xxx} China was one of the early initiators of multilateral cooperation as part of its reforms and opening up. India slowly realized the significance and began to take active interest in the late 1990s. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reflected this outlook when he said at the BIMST-EC Summit in July 2004: “I would like to reaffirm India’s firm political commitment to regional cooperation for mutual benefit...”meaindia.nic.in/speech/2004/07/31

^{xxx1} Revitalising Panchsheel, **The Hindu** (New Delhi ,20 July 2004)

^{xxxii} meaindia.nic.in/speech/2004/06/29

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