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CONFLICT IN SOUTH ASIA: A CULTURAL SOLUTION TO POLITICAL PROBLEM

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INTRODUCTION

South Asia is one of the most conflict prone region in the world. It is the only region in the world which has shared history, culture, value system, life style and psychological thinking, at the same time it is the most vulnerable region to the conventional and nuclear conflicts. The region is comprised of eight member states (on the basis of SAARC membership), these member countries of the region have worked for an institutional arrangement in the form of SAARC to enhance economic cooperation in the region, have initiated bilateral negotiations for better relationships, yet they find themselves embroiled in different forms of conflicts. They experience not only interstate conflicts but intra state conflicts as well.

Every country in the region with few exception has tense relations with the neighbouring country which often develop into interstate conflict. These interstate conflicts are strengthened by spillover effect of intrastate or domestic conflicts. The nature of such intrastate conflicts in South Asian countries vary from ethnic to religious intolerance. It is caused due to multiple socioeconomic problems too.
South Asian region is treated as hub of terrorism. It is well documented fact that global terrorism has taken its present form after developing a strong support base in Afghanistan, this terror phenomena has created much bitter relationships among the member states, distorted ideology of terrorism has created many problems between the countries and within the country. Terror born conflicts are accentuated by the prevailing socio, economic, political and cultural factors.

This region is nuclear flash point area where two core members India and Pakistan are nuclear weapon states. They don’t carry good relationship pattern with each other. They have fought three major wars with each other. Their interactive behavioural pattern is cause of deterioration of security environment in the region. It affects other neighbouring countries too with a potential to convert into regional conflict.

In this conflictful background, it is highly desirable that all forms of conflicts be contained or at least minimized in order to create a conducive atmosphere in the region so that economic progress and social stability could be obtained.

Several efforts have been made to reach the stated goal, member states have attempted for economic cooperation, have institutionalized SAARC for this purpose, have carried on bilateral negotiations to reduce the conflict, unfortunately none of these mechanisms have been successful to contain the conflict. These efforts have been initiated at the interstate level, along with it every country in the region have initiated many policy decisions to manage the intrastate conflict as well. These conflicts are potential form of nonadjustment of local population with the prevailing political-legal, constitutional, social and economic structure in the country, such dissatisfaction sometimes may find support from neighbouring state, leading to the emergence of interstate conflict.

As there are limited and unsatisfactory successes by these political mechanisms to bring resolution of interstate and intrastate conflicts in the region, it becomes necessary that non political mechanisms should be used to reduce conflict in the region.

The present paper is focused on the interstate conflicts, hence will be configurated in a regional framework. In the modern diplomatic studies People to People (P-P) contact has been visualized
as an effective tool to reduce the conflict between two countries and in the region. People to People contact may take many forms.

Tourism in this respect can be treated as a component of People to People contact. It is one of the most pragmatic mechanism which can be used to develop closer contacts between people of one country with the other one. This is a cultural tool as it is born from cultural spectrum, through it people of one cultural background come into contact with the other one, a new type of cultural negotiation takes place which may create emotional bonds and cultural empowerment that gradually may develop into a pressure group. It may create an invisible pressure on the ruling elites and governing structures of their own country, that they should initiate process for conflict reduction. This is a psychological–cultural tool to manage the interstate conflicts.

The present paper is divided in four parts. In the first section it will reveal nature of conflicts in South Asia, in second part it will try to explore effectiveness of tourism as a cultural tool in the reduction of conflict the third part status of tourism in South Asia will be assessed, in the fourth part major impediments for tourism development in South Asia will be identified in the fifth part how the tourism can be developed in South Asia will be analyzed, and for the same policy recommendations will be made.

**Nature of conflict in South Asia**

South Asia is the classical example of conflict zone where intra state and interstate conflict both are observed. Inter state conflicts have intertwined with the intrastate conflict. Intra state conflict in South Asia are primarily socio economic and political in nature these are group based conflicts demanding for more allocation of power in the present setup. These are of different nature as in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal ethnic conflict, in India religious and naxalites’ violent conflict with the state, in Pakistan social conflict among different intra religious and inter religious communities, in Bangladesh and Maldives socio-political-religious conflicts are in existence. Intra state conflicts in South Asia are sharpened by characteristic expression form of terror, every country is affected by terrorist problem in one or other way.
The intrastate conflicts in South Asia are usually in the form of group conflict. These conflicts exist not at the level of few individuals but function at group level which often dissolve national identity and nation building process which provides strength to the interstate conflict as one adversary may find in a dominant position with respect to the other one, beyond the issue of national identity and inter-state conflict, South Asia’s population is also divided into numerous, cross-cutting and overlapping group identities based on language, religion, religious sub-sect, region, ethnicity, caste, and class. Virtually all the countries of the region are subject to myriad inter-group conflicts, the majority of which are peacefully negotiated. But on many occasions they have also frequently spilled over into violent riots, insurgencies, and even civil war. Pakistan remains subject to serious Sunni-Shia violence and from the violent repercussions of the instability in Afghanistan since the late-1970s. Nepal has since 1996 been in the throes of a full-fledged civil war. Sri Lanka is in an unstable peace after 20 years of civil war. India has, in addition to major internal insurgencies in Kashmir, Punjab, and Assam during the 1980s, suffered serious incidences of caste-riots, and has experienced major anti-Muslim violence since the late-1980s.

These features make the region always in a state of violent state. The intrastate conflicts may find support from such a state of affairs, it is likely that many neighboring country in the region may provide outside support to such group conflicts in another country, as Pakistan has provided to terrorists in Kashmir and to Talibans in Afghanistan. Same way India was earlier accused for supporting Tamil cause in Sri Lanka. Afghanistan, the recent member of SAARC has emerged as a centre of conflict and involvement of other regional players, Pakistan sponsored the Taliban, and Pakistan’s Interior Ministry and Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), for example, lent potent assistance to the Taliban.

The interstate conflict in South Asia are quite impactful as their impact have global valuation, they express different set of forms, these may include from conventional conflict to nuclear conflict. Every country in the region has bilateral disputes particularly with India. It is treated as ‘big brother’ by its neighbours.

Behavioural pattern of India and Pakistan illustrates nature of interstate conflict in the region. The two countries were at war in 1947, 1965 and 1971, and have a major unresolved territorial dispute in Kashmir, which has been the site of a domestic militant insurgency inter-twined with an India-Pakistan proxy war since 1989. In 1998, both countries tested nuclear devices, and
subsequently tested and developed missile systems capable of delivering nuclear type weapons into each other’s territory. In December 2001, India and Pakistan appeared at the brink of nuclear war following an assault by allegedly Pakistan-supported militants on the Indian parliament.³

Tense bilateral relations due to illogical interpretation of position of India coupled with incomplete nation building process have affected the region in highly adverse manner, if nation building (would have) taken place, it is very much likely that conflict could be reduced but South Asia has presented another story where many virulent domestic conflicts in neighbouring countries are linked to the difficulties of nation-building, a process which in South Asian countries is closely linked to their relations with India. The hostility towards India has helped the military in Pakistan to strengthen its political and economic position. Buddhist nationalist groups in Sri Lanka strongly opposed India’s intervention in the 1980s. In Bangladesh relations with India are one of the most important aspects of the differing concepts of Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism.⁴

South Asia has emerged as a terrorist region with diffused and concentrated terrorism. Terrorism in concentrated form exists in Afghanistan. It has emerged as global terrorist hub where as every country in the region is more or less affected by this problem, terrorism has diffused not only in the region but has attained the extra regional dimension too, this fact helps the extra regional forces to involve in the region, turning the region more conflict prone.

In fact region exclusive multiple factors as historical, geographical, economical and territorial disputes have contributed to emergence of South Asia as a conflict zone.

In this background it is imperative that avenues be searched to reduce conflict at regional level. In South Asian region many mechanisms have been employed for this purpose which extend from institutional efforts to international organizations to bilateral effort.

South-East Asian countries which once had not so cordial relations among themselves attempted a regional effort for confidence building and conflict reduction by institutionalizing the ASEAN. They recognized the importance of economic growth and development. ASEAN increased their membership, extended their consensus and conflict avoidance practices from their border and emphasized the economic cooperation.⁵ Such mechanisms in the form of SAARC have been attempted in South Asia but these have not produced the positive results like ASEAN.
In South Asia, by bilateral cooperations, conflicts have rarely helped to reduce conflicts. India and Bhutan have discovered their interdependence. They cooperated with each other on the issue of terrorism. Bhutan, on Indian request, flushed out terrorists and their camps from its soil. It helped to cement their relationship otherwise it could have snowballed into a tense bilateral problem, but such examples are rarely found in the region as Pakistan, on India’s request, has not dealt effectively on the issue of terrorism.

There are less examples of institutional efforts to act as a key player in conflict avoidance in the region. Mediation of World Bank worked in the resolution of Indus river water conflict between India and Pakistan. Such role in this respect even at global level have remained highly limited as Inter Governmental organizations (IGOs) are not uniformly suited to promote cooperation and manage interstate conflicts. Hence, it is very difficult and not of much avail to engage such organizations for conflict reduction in the South Asia.

These efforts have serious limitation in South Asia, their success ratio is sufficiently low as most of the conflicts in South Asia are rooted in history and mindset of governing structure which has hindered nation state building process, consequently diplomatic maturity has been of lower order in the region. This state of affairs necessitates the search for alternative models for conflict reduction.

**Tourism an important mechanism to reduce the conflict**

Different models have been applied so far to reduce conflict in South Asia have exhibited serious limitations. As regional environment is full of conflict and extra regional forces are at work in the region, hence there has arisen a greater need to apply non-political methods in this sphere. Tourism as a whole and as a cultural tool possess a strong capacity to generate not only economic benefits but also link the people of the region in emotional bonds thereby creating a regional public opinion which may be helpful in the reduction of conflict in the region.

Tourism is a leisure activity, it involves movement of individual from his/her place of residence to any other place at least for one or few days in order to gain pleasure, recreation and relaxation during temporary movement and stay. UNO has defined that tourism is a social, cultural and
economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation.

The activities carried out by a visitor may or may not involve a market transaction, and may be different from or similar to those normally carried out in his/her regular routine of life. If they are similar, their frequency or intensity is different when the person is travelling. These activities represent the actions and behaviours of people in preparation for and during a trip in their capacity as consumers. Tourism has an impact on the economy, the natural and built environment, the local population at the places visited and the visitors themselves. 7

In present age tourism being a collective function has emerged as one of the most important human action. It is people specific, destination specific activity. It involves a desire of individual to move temporarily to obtain a status of free life, in this respect tourism is a gainful activity which satisfies individual’s objectives for movement, and earns money for the operators.

Tourism has a psychological edifice, being an abstract concept, it provides the pleasure only to the person who has carried on tourism activity and this experience of pleasure cannot be transformed to the other person. It brings a state of relaxation to the tourists, heals mind, promotes the feeling of the brotherhood and develops emotional bond among the individuals who interacts with each other, in this respect Wearing and Wearing (2001) claim that resident and tourist are linked through emotional connections and interactions that exist and that they are not separate 8, besides tourist individuals are connected to the destination emotionally where the tourist is destined for travel purposes. Many studies have been carried in the discipline of cultural tourism which have analysed the role of tourism in creating shared identities by examining how tourism can elicit special meanings in cultural spaces. 9 These activities definitely create shared memories between the place, its inhabitants and tourist.

Lee, Backman, and Backman (1997) have argued that psychological attachment to a destination might explain repeat visitation (and that) there is an increased recognition that tourism attractions portray the host community in ways that are compatible with wider political contexts (Light 2001; Richter 1989), these contexts are moulded by the tourists interactions with locals and destinations. 10 That is to say that tourism links tourists’s attachment to a place not only in social cultural terms but also in political terms as well, which is helpful in developing a kind of emotional
relationship, psychological studies have discovered that place attachment is an affective bond or link between people and specific places based on cognition and affect. This term has been defined as a positive emotional bond with a particular place.\textsuperscript{11} South Asia is in acrimonious state, tourism as a cultural, emotional binding tool can be utilized in this respect to manage the present situation. Tourism with its potential emotional binding value takes a regional form if it is studied in the framework of South Asia, regional tourism is considered as movement of tourist for short distances usually within a particular region which in our study is South Asian region. Regional tourism is effected when national boundaries of country in a region are crossed by tourists for several days, it is a collaborative tourist effort in which tourist has to interface a different systems of governance but the same government facilitates tourists movement by providing different types of facilities.

There are many examples of regional tourism in the world. Tourism in intraregional manner in Nordic countries, Caribbean countries and central American countries are regional in nature, where it has played an integrating role. In Caribbean countries it has produced dividends by linking the people at psychological level as in this area current trajectory of regional integration means that for the time being tourism is likely to continue to be a driver of Central American integration\textsuperscript{12}, contemporary Central America has created the conditions in which tourism development and regional integration can be seen as mutually reinforcing processes, South Asian regional tourism culture lacks this feature in present time, it still stays at an immatured stage. Regional tourism in this perspective is an interstate
activity in a particular region where some cultural, social, economical features exhibit similarity and a tourism culture exists at regional level.

Carribean countries suggest that ,regional tourism may help to build regional identity. People at global level may understand and interpret a particular area as a cohesive entity with conflict less environment. Associated with it is the concept of bilateral tourism where two conflictful states have engaged in terms of tourism interaction and have been benefited, a case in point is of China and Taiwan tourism as a low-politics activity has helped to ameliorate the tension and hostility between the two peoples in initial reconciliation. Travel between Taiwan and the mainland is greatly influenced by the changing political relations of the two governments. Many obstacles remain in the development of tourism and political relations between the two politically divided states. However, the increased tide of the travel across the Taiwan Straits would be difficult to reverse, this trend demonstrates that tourism can play an important role in the conflict reduction.

**STATUS OF TOURISM IN SOUTH ASIA**

South Asia is one of the poorest region in the world, at the same time it is much diversified tourist destination. Inspite of many shortcomings tourism and travel industry exist in the region. The industry as a whole does not produce or supply a homogeneous product or service like traditional industries (agriculture, electronics, steel etc) yet South Asia's T&T (travel and tourism) direct industry is expected to contribute 2.9% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2010 (US$49.1bn). South Asia's 20,946,000 T&T Direct Industry jobs account for 3.3% of total employment in 2010.

It suggests that the sectorial economic contribution is not significant in comparison to other region of the world. Even the most advanced tourist destinations in South Asia, India and Sri Lanka do not derive much benefits from the tourism, Sri Lanka has been an attractive destination for tourism for many years. Tourism receipts form 1.5 per cent of the country’s GDP compared to 0.1 per cent for Bangladesh and 1.1 per cent for India as of 2006. The ratio of tourism to the GDP was 50 per cent in 2007. Tourism receipts as a percentage of total exports amounted to 63 per cent in the same year.
There has been observed some improvement in the international tourist arrivals in the region, particularly after the last phase of recession. The table shows that attraction of South Asia as the tourist destination has gained some importance among the international tourists.

### Changed status of international tourists to South Asia and individual country (2005-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YTD</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
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<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
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<td>10256</td>
<td>9972</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-28</td>
<td>15.2</td>
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<td>-12</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>467</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>-32</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<td>41.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>-32</td>
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<td>4.1</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3919</td>
<td>5283</td>
<td>5109</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>9.7</td>
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<td>-11</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>VF(2)</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>TF</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. foreign arrivals through thirteen selected Ports of Entry
2. Air arrivals only

there has been marked change in the tourist arrival particularly in the Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and Maldives. These countries constitute the core of tourist destinations in South Asia. There is increase in the tourist arrival in South Asia as whole when regional perspective is taken into account but this growth will sustain to which extent, is highly difficult to explain at the present time, according to UNWTO the projected growth in South Asia positive and may take following course by the end of next decade.
Region wise tourist arrival in South Asia is better projected than the other regions, by the start of next decade it is likely to climb new heights. The analysis suggests that this region since last few years have started showing positive changes but two major questions remain unanswered, first the tourist potential of the major countries of the region India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives is tremendous due to diversified tourist destinations and activities but it is yet to be realized, growth in international tourist arrival in the region is not commensurate with their tourism potential, related to it is the matter of such tourists intraregional movement, i.e. whether they are localized to only one country, few countries or all the countries. This issue requires further investigation.

Second unanswered question relates to status of intraregional tourism where this region exhibits a low level of activity, as the present paper targets the intraregional tourism its status with the analysis of following table bring out certain points.
In intra regional tourism India leads as the most desired tourist destination, followed by Sri Lanka, Nepal. Pakistan attracts maximum numbers from the Afghanistan but clear understanding suggests that this number is not meant exclusively for the tourism purposes.

Another startling fact is that Maldives which is considered as attractive tourist destination does not have any impact on the outbound tourists of the region. Its intraregional potential remains untapped.

Bangladesh may have received maximum tourists from India but research is required whether these were exclusive tourists in nature.

One important fact which comes out from this analysis is that only a fraction of total population of South Asia decide for intraregional tourism. It appears that most of the outbound South Asian tourists prefer South East Asian and European countries. In this background there are ample chances for growth of intraregional tourism in the region.

### IMPEDIMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN TOURISM

South Asia as a region with much potential for tourist attraction has shown progress in the sphere of international tourism. Major destinations like India, Sri Lanka have started to generate economic benefits as a comparative study of outbound and inbound tourists in one decade difference with respect to India suggests, as against Rs 703 crores in 1990-91 on foreign travel,
Indians are spending an impressive sum of Rs 37,173 crores, all in foreign exchange. Similarly the foreigners too are responding enthusiastically to incredible India. Now the foreign exchange earnings from tourism come to a tidy sum of Rs 45,524 crores. This is better reflection of tourism industry growth in India.

Although in comparative global terms this growth was not very much impressive as in comparison to 2000 when number of international tourist arrivals rose a record 7.4 per cent to 699 mn. India’s share of this tally was a meagre 0.41 per cent, at 2.65 mn, and earnings were less than $1 bn. but after recession there is marked improvement in the inbound tourist arrival. Though truth stands that benefits of Indian experience have not percolated uniformly to whole of the region far, there is no significant contribution of intraregional tourism in it.

If better policy framework is created then development of tourism development will have impact on neighbouring countries too and in due course it will improve status of intraregional tourism too.

There are many impediments in development of tourism in the region. Intense political conflicts are present in the region. It has taken different form, many reasons have helped to intensify the conflict between India and Pakistan, core members of the region. This has held up intraregional movement of the people as the maximum number of the tourists may emerge from these two countries due to huge population and buoyant middle class, but poor bilateral relations have placed both the members at the diagrammatically opposite pole, consequently whole region has been adversely affected. The trust deficit between the two governments may not have percolated to masses but has definitely acted as a barrier to mass movement as restricted visa policies have adversely affected bilateral tourism.

South Asian countries are economically backward, the per capita income in the region is quiet low, people are in the grip of poverty due to lackness of proper employment and income generation, as a result inter country and even intracountry movement in the region is restricted. Tourism requires economic empowered population which is in deficiency in the region. This behavior is highly in contrast to the behavior observed in the 27 countries of European union where people are frequent flier in the territory of European union. This acts as very important reason for non development of intraregional tourism.
Another impediment in the development of South Asian tourism is psychological in nature, most of the people of member states do not pay more attention to travelling, they lack interests in travel and tourism. They have genetic reasons for it, even economically empowered South Asian people do not show much inclination towards tourism, even if they travel for tourism purpose, they exhibit myopic vision their thinking is not to prefer travelling in the neighboring countries. They wish to concentrate more to South Eastern nations and European nations, this psychological orientation is a potent barrier to the development of tourism in the region. There are many tourist attractive places in the region where international travellers can be seen but not the tourists from South Asia.

South Asian countries have evolved their individual national tourism policy but they have not coordinated it among themselves in effective manner. Due to such non coordination, it becomes highly difficult task to attract not only the regional tourists but also the global tourists. South Asia is yet to be recognized as a collective tourist spot, as South East Asian, European nations or Carribean nations have emerged.

South Asian tourism is poorly recognized at global and regional level, even member states at their individual level have failed to advertise and circulate their country specific tourist spots to the major centers in the world and in region in effective manner.

Tourist advertisement is not properly dealt by member states, which taken half hearted effort in this respect. Target groups have been partially addressed at global and least at regional level. An illustration can be made of India, the major tourist destination in South Asia, it has targeted major countries in its advertisement campaign but no regional country has been given any prominence. In its Cultural Festivals Programme, including the “Namaste India” Festival in Tokyo, Festivals of India in Argentina, Indonesia and Ireland, “India Week” in Reykjavik, Iceland, the “Shared Histories” Cultural Festival in South Africa and a “Discover Incredible India” Cultural Festival in Los Angeles have been organized and for greater visibility of “Incredible India”, outdoor advertising campaigns including advertising on taxis / buses / trams, hoardings and billboards have been undertaken in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Kunming, Tokyo, Seoul, Osaka, Sydney, Singapore, Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, Doha, Riyadh, Ras-al-Khaimah, Johannesburg, Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Belfast, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Frankfurt, Munich, Dusseldorf,

The Government of India has announced a scheme of granting Tourist Visa on Arrival (T-VoA) Scheme. The scheme is valid for citizens of the countries Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Singapore who plans to visit India on single entry strictly for the purpose of tourism (recreation, sight-seeing, visiting friends and relatives) and for a short period of upto a maximum of 30 days.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to grant Long Term Tourist Visa of 5 years duration with Multi-entry facilities carrying a stipulation of 90 days on each visit, to the nationals of the 18 select countries: France, Iceland, Germany, New Zealand, Luxembourg, Japan, Netherlands, South Korea, Belgium, Argentina, Finland, Brazil, Spain, Chile, Switzerland, Mexico, Norway, Vietnam no such facility is granted to any of the South Asian country, albeit Sri Lanka, the other major tourist destination in the region has extended such relaxed scheme to all the citizens of South Asia.

South Asian countries have vast tourism potential yet they restrict a flexible visa system for intraregional movement. This has emerged as one of the most important cause of almost non development of intraregional tourism. One factor may be attributed to non-reliance of most of the countries except Maldives, Nepal on the tourist revenue to push the economy. Flexible visa granting system depends much upon the particular country potential for tourist attraction, Eric Neumayer (2005) states that a country very heavily reliant on income from tourism will impose less visa restriction than a country with no tourism.

Institutional effort as by the SARRC too are also ineffective in this respect. SAARC has attempted to promote the tourism in South Asia, it has initiated visa exemption scheme to a certain class of people, with an objective to facilitate closer and frequent interaction and cooperation among the people of the region, the SAARC visa exemption scheme was initiated in 1988 and became operational on 1st March 1992.

Under the scheme, visa requirements are waived for specified categories of persons to travel with in the SAARC region. The scheme was extended in 1999 following consideration of the
recommendations of an Expert Group. At present, eligible for visa free travel under the scheme include supreme Court judges, Members of National Parliaments, Government Ministers, other high level officials of governments, official of the SAARC Secretariat and its affiliated bodies, and leading businessmen in the region.24

This scheme has added newer class of people but tourism in the region can be enhanced only if tourists are given relaxation in grant of the visa, visa exemption scheme is yet to target the common people, only then it can produce substantial gains.

South Asian tourism has not grown at higher level due to one another reason that relates to lackness of proper transport connectivity. Transportation links the various destinations and ferries people, goods, and services. Tourism is all about travel; and the role of transportation in its operation is vital. It is largely due to the improvement of transportation that tourism has expanded.25

Transport infra structure in the region is of poor quality, tourists find it hard to move from one place to another due to this reason. It has been accepted at policy planning level that the most important problem of tourism is connectivity. SAARC Secretay General has underlined this fact that SAARC has looked at land, sea, air connectivity which will enhance of transport and connectivity, finally helping the tourism sector as these are the mainstay of tourism.26

In order to reduce negative impact of connectivity problem, India has offered open skies policy to its neighbours, but no regional effort in adequate measure exists. If airfares are reduced and better air connectivity between the major cities of the region is created, it may help in substantial manner the flow (inflow and outflow both) of people in the region.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism in South Asia as a cultural tool and emotional binding force has potential to reduce tension in the region by bringing the people in closer contacts thereby developing a collective force which could impress upon the political structure to move towards tourism promotion in the region and allowing free flow of individuals.

There are several mechanisms which needs to be implemented at policy level. This region possess different types of tourist spots which include historical, cultural, natural and religious
etc. For this purpose it is necessary to identify the most likable tourist spots in every country which can be advertised thereafter in a very effective manner, targeting the regional tourists as recently Nepal has done in certain cities of India by putting hoardings etc.

Every country in the region has many wonderful places which can be highlighted by coordinated advertising to such an extent that these could modulate and influence psychological desires of the people of different countries of the region to travel.

It may require development of a preliminary list of tourist spots available in the region. These can be classified in a scientific manner as beeches, historical monuments or world heritage sites etc, generalized tourist spots as nature endowed places as hill stations, religious places etc, for specific groups a world heritage list containing major places may be presented as the tourist spots. Religious tourist places list may also be developed. There are many religious places which involve two or more countries as Sikhs travel to Pakistan for the same purpose. These places can be properly connected.

Countries of region can develop a regional framework for the development of tourism. They can collaborate with each other in a collective manner to find out the means to develop a regional outlook and a pragmatic policy framework. It can be initiated under the SAARC or a separate institutional body, in this respect the policy decisions visualized by conference organized by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SAARC CCI) on Tourism Potential in South Asia on 8th July 2010 at Colombo, Sri Lanka are noteworthy, these include flexible Visa regime, exchange of socio-cultural and educational delegations within the region, physical connectivity by improving rail, road, sea and Air, Infrastructure Development & Transportation, Signing and implementation of Motor Vehicle Agreement, adoption of open sky policy- flight operations between capital cities and two major cities of each South Asian countries.

These findings can be used as start point for the development of regional tourism plan.

There is a greater need to develop a tourist grid in the region, tourist grid means identification of the important tourist spots in particular country and to link these through smooth travel path which the tourists may find useful during their travel programmes in the region.
It can be developed after assigning a particular country in the role of hub, India with its better connectivity and transport infrastructure than any other country in the region and with its central position may perform this role successfully, under this concept if a tourist wants to travel several countries in the region, may first travel to India from his/her home country and treat it as its base location, from here to Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives in easy manner, from hub/base location can travel to Pakistan, then to Afghanistan, returning to hub and finally to native county. This can be a highly flexible plan and different hub models can be deduced after brainstorming.

It may appear a difficult task which can not be managed exclusively by the different governments, there is a greater need not only to coordinate with each other at governmental level but to engage private sector too in this programme, private sector’s role can prove quite effective as it can help the government sector in tourist management, image building and branding, marketing, commercialization and promotion, and so on. Even certain NGOs may be involved in providing the help to tourists, in assisting the dissemination of required information etc.

The greatest hurdle in the promotion of intraregional tourism in South Asia has been restrictive visa granting regime. This is due to tense bilateral relationship among the member nations. Still a relaxed visa system can be planned on the pattern of Countries of Europe which have adopted the Schenzen visa scheme, which permits 15 European countries to allow single visa, this has facilitated burdenless tourism for leisure and business trips, of people in the region, one most important feature is that the Schenzen Visa scheme has been adopted by some of the European counties which are not member of European Union, Switzerland is one such example. Though such visa system adoption appeared initially but this system has helped to abolish internal border controls, has regulated controls at external frontiers by adopting common visa regime (and) implementation of Schengen system has occurred at two stages, first accession to the Schengen accord, in second stage frontier controls were removed when confidence emerged among the member states that their neighbours were in position to control frontiers effectively. Though it is not an easy task to implement similar patterned complete visa free system in South Asia, at least tourist visa free scheme with emergence of confidence in external border control and with some modification on the pattern of Schengen visa system can be conceptualized.
In the same manner visa scheme on the pattern of APEC system can be given thought. APEC members have adopted a successful multi entry visa system. APEC members have attempted new avenues in tourism, they have adopted NARA declaration in September 2010 for inclusive and sustainable tourism, they have decided to expand newer and emerging types of tourism such as medical and wellness, religious events tourism, sports tourism, cruise tourism, ecotourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentive travel, Conventions and Exhibitions/Events). SAARC too can find out new fields in tourism which are untapped till now.

Realpolitick and security concerns and national interests often come into conflict with such policy recommendations. Their implementation requires strong political will power which is lacking in the region, hence primary requirement is of political will power to be exhibited by ruling elite of different member country in the region, as long it does not emerge, at least this idea can be accepted that instead of concentrating the development of political trust immediately and exclusively, the reverse path for it can be adopted, that tourism connectivity be given extra importance which in due course will help to develop political trust, political will thereafter will push the development of tourism in faster way. Hence both will push each other in due course.

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