As suggested in the agenda for this Conference, South Asian security is to be discussed in two dimensions. First are the general and long term concerns of South Asian security and second are the more proximate concerns of security hinging on issues related to Jammu & Kashmir [J&K] and its ramifications for Indo-Pak relations.

I do not intend to elaborate on the transformation of international power equations and emerging trends in the international order over the last decade and a half, since the end of the Cold War. This distinguished audience is not only aware of these trends, but is also intellectually involved in observing the ongoing changes.

The security challenges for the South Asian region in the medium and long term can be listed as follows:

i) The requirement for countries in South Asia to structure new equations with the important power centers of the world, given the fading away of the leverages which all of them had for nearly 50 years, after the end of the 2nd World War.

ii) An important dimension of the above concern is the creation of a stable and calibrated relationship by South Asian countries with the USA, which in many ways has become the pre- eminent power. Managing the prospects of a pax-Americana is a major security exercise to be undertaken by South Asian countries.

iii) South Asia, constituting nearly one-fifth of the world's population, also happens to be one of the poorest areas of the world, barring perhaps sub-Saharan Africa. Meeting socio-economic developmental requirements through appropriate domestic and external policies is another challenge.

iv) Within the ambit of the above concerns, particular attention has to be given by all South Asian countries for ensuring energy security, particularly in terms of hydrocarbons and hydro power. A rational and practical management of energy resources in both these categories, moving away from narrow political considerations, is imperative.

Then, there are more fundamental security concerns affecting South Asia. These include consolidating the identities of different countries on the basis of pluralism and religious and ethnic diversities. The challenge is made more complex because there are several nation states in the region. The religious, ethnic and linguistic
characteristics of civil societies in these nation states overlap with each other. This overlapping results in apprehensions about respective national identities. The challenge is to resolve the contradiction between the nature of the civil societies and anxieties about consolidating individual national identities; i.e., promoting civic nationalism that is integrative rather than ethno-religious nationalism which is separative.

The complexes and apprehensions generated by the asymmetry between India on the one hand and other South Asian countries on the other, in terms of size, population, levels of development, technology and military power, has resulted in tensions in inter-state relations in the region. A purposeful effort is required to overcome these tensions. India has a special responsibility in this regard, while the other countries need to make an effort to overcome the burdens of the history of the last half century.

The migration of people due to socio-economic pressures borne of the land-to-people ratio promises to be a major problem. While South Asia is characterized politically by different nation states, the South Asian land mass is, normatively speaking, one economic region. Structuring cooperative and substantive regionalism is the only solution.

The establishment of SAARC was an attempt to promote such regionalism. It has been stalled primarily for political reasons. The solution is, therefore, to deal with the political problems in a pragmatic manner to move on to the more desirable and logical objectives of regional cooperation.

Adjusting to the ongoing process of globalisation remains an important challenge in terms of security for all South Asian countries. This challenge is made more complex due to the undercurrents of restrictive and acquisitive economic and technology regimes that form part of the policies of the major powers of the world.

Last but not least are the internal centrifugal forces affecting the unity of the nation states of the region. Coping with these forces will require not only the strengthening of democracy in each of the nation states, making them safe for diversities, but also the establishment of harmonious relations between the South Asian states.

Indo-Pak relations

The tense relations between India and Pakistan are the most important negative factor affecting South Asian security. I have no intention of going into the history of Indo-Pak relations or the rights and wrongs of the attitudes and issues involved.

The last six weeks have seen once again a revival of some positive initiatives by the leaders of India and Pakistan to recommence an effort at normalization of relations between the two countries. This initiative is both logical and necessary given the following factors:

i) The confrontation between India and Pakistan constitutes an unacceptable trend, draining away resources which can be devoted to the more important and urgent tasks of development and economic well being of the people of India and Pakistan.

ii) The confrontation contributes to centrifugal impulses disrupting the harmony and
cohesion of civil societies in both countries.

iii) The phenomena of terrorism and ethnic religious extremism has to be stemmed by cooperation between India and Pakistan, in such a manner that the latter is persuaded to not only stop whatever residual support is being provided by its agencies but also that it takes all other steps to discourage this. This poses a danger to the unity and territorial integrity of both countries.

iv) India and Pakistan having become nuclear weapons powers, continuing confrontation between the two countries has dangerous implications.

v) The international community in general and the major powers in particular, are more directly and incrementally concerned about hostile relations between India and Pakistan.

vi) This adversarial relationship constitutes a hurdle against India and Pakistan becoming full participants in the mainstream of economic and technological developments in the world, preventing them from achieving their undoubted respective potentialities.

Positive trends in operational terms which could contribute to a process of Indo-Pak dialogue, and some preparatory steps which would help the initiative, include:

i) India should accept that issues related to J&K constitute a core issue in Indo-Pak relations. There can be agreement that this is a core issue but from different points of view, for Pakistan and India.

ii) There should not be too much focus on procedural details about the agenda for bilateral talks. The previous discussions about having a "composite approach" and priorities of one item or the other, has proven to be an empty and detrimental factor against meaningful discussions.

iii) The agenda should cover all issues affecting Indo-Pak relations which have been part of the discussions since 1983.

iv) The priority given to different items on the agenda should be worked out at official level discussions, but these priorities should not inhibit either side from having parallel discussions on various items.

v) The framework for the discussions need not be based on one specific agreement or specific series of meetings of the past. The framework should be extracted from the positive elements of previous agreements, meetings and summits, on which there is a general consensus between India and Pakistan. In fact, both sides should undertake a specific exercise for this purpose and work out such a consensus.

The process of reviving the dialogue should be gradual, spread over perhaps a period of one year or 18 months. The engagement should be devoid of hype and should display perseverance by both sides. Senior middle level officers should commence the process, then moving on to Foreign Secretary level talks, other Secretary level talks and finally graduating to the highest political levels. A summit meeting should take place only when prospects for agreements are clearly on the anvil. The process leading to the Summit should be demystified. It should be acknowledged by both India and Pakistan that J&K is more than a territorial dispute for both countries and, therefore, a profound political approach transcending the attitudes and advocacies of
the past has to be adopted.

Some points of detail are suggested:

A) India should not hesitate to acknowledge that, to some extent, the disturbances inside J&K are a result of alienation of the people from the Government of India and the Government of Jammu & Kashmir.

B) Pakistan should acknowledge that there has been not just political and diplomatic but material support to the separatist agitation from Pakistan. There is no point in insisting that this is not so.

C) In fact, I would venture the opinion that the credibility of the indigenous separatist movement in J&K since 1989-90 has been eroded by active participation from Pakistan in that violent agitation. This kind of acknowledgement of objective realities would clear the air for meaningful discussions.

D) As far as the issue of trans-border terrorism across the Line of Control, it is a major concern of India. There are technological means which can be put in place to monitor this phenomena and be preventive, if they are put in place by mutual agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan. This may not require the presence of external personnel physically on the Line of Control.

E) India should take note of assurance given by Pakistan about not supporting militant groups. India need not insist on a complete stoppage of all violent activities which may not be possible. If there is sufficient evidence on the ground substantiating Pakistani assurances, India should be responsive in conducting a dialogue.

F) Pakistan should take note of the fact that the new Government of the state of J&K has been elected in a free and fair election in the presence of foreign observers. There was 65 to 75 per cent voting in the elections. The Government of Mr. Mufti Mohd Sayeed is taking serious steps to gain the trust and confidence of people of J&K. This process should not be questioned or disrupted. The political stabilization of J&K can become the basis for a reconciliation between India and Pakistan.

G) Apart from issues of J&K and separatist violence, India and Pakistan should give particular attention to stabilizing nuclear weapons related to the security environment in the sub-continent. The agreements embodied in the Lahore Memorandum of February 1999 should be followed up as early as is feasible.

H) As far as the basic issue of J&K goes, suggestions put forward by Mr. Pervez Hoodbhoy are worth examining at the Track II level of Indo-Pak interaction.

I) There should be conscious and assiduous attempts by the Governments of India and Pakistan to educate public opinion on the imperative need for the normalization of Indo-Pak relations.

I would like to make two points in conclusion on the basis of having been a witness to the ups and downs in Indo-Pak relations over the last 45 years:

First, it occurs to me that assertive nationalism based on purely historical memories militates against the genuine national interests of the countries concerned.

Second, that it is wrong to hold the well being and future of nearly 1.3 billion people hostage to a single problem like J&K which is not insurmountable.