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EDITORIAL

The integrated development of the South Asian region is one of the greatest challenges we face today. The 30th anniversary of the establishment of SAARC we felt was an appropriate opportunity to bring out this issue on *Thirty Years of SAARC: Society, Culture and Development*.

People and areas comprising the South Asian region have had deep linkages and coexisted for a long time. Religious, cultural and linguistic bonds have brought people and nations together in the past. The large and expanding number of centres for South Asian studies in universities around the world that study historical, sociological and cultural issues, in addition to the economic and political scenarios, is testimony to the significance of the region. Common sense—and serious analyses—suggest that economic cooperation between the countries that comprise this region is more important now than ever before.

According to its Charter, SAARC was set up to 'promote peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation', but the hope generated by this development has largely been belied. Nations in other parts of the world have faced and overcome challenges to cooperation to create workable and meaningful associations of nations. It should be possible to make this happen in South Asia too.

Articles in this volume endeavour to trace SAARC's journey so far and provide pointers for the future. Several papers discuss economic and political issues. Economic cooperation is the core around which prospects for regional cooperation depend. This is even more important in the light of globalisation and the increasing role other countries wish to play in the region. While there is a long way to go, there has been some progress through trade agreements, infrastructure projects, pooling of energy resources, and other

