

# **Politics and Security in South Asia**

**SALIENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE**

Edited by

**A.K.M. ABDUS SABUR**

The book **POLITICS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: SALIENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE** deals with Politics and Security in South Asia with a focus on the religious and cultural dimensions. Suggested approach has been a focus on the region as a whole but individual presentations also reflected country perspectives. Attempts have also been made to explore and synthesise the inter-linkage among the issues as well as the experiences at the domestic and regional levels. A host of authors from South Asia and Germany representing a variety of academic disciplines, professional background and socio-political orientation analyses religious and cultural dimensions of Politics and Security in South Asia with a focus on issues, like domestic political dynamics, politicisation of religion, inter-cultural dialogue, media and security, role of civil society in security, governance and accountability and related issues. The book presents a critical account of ground reality and explores a variety of outlooks on the subject. Thoughtful and innovative ideas contained in the book may be of significant importance to the scholars, policymakers, practitioners and other concerned professionals



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## FOREWORD

South Asia has been undergoing difficult, at times, even painful processes of socio-economic and politico-cultural development. The end of Cold War ushered in a new era of democratisation in the region, as in many parts of the world. However, in Nepal and Pakistan, democracy is facing severe tests. Sri Lanka is undergoing a painful process of nation-building that impinges upon its democracy. Indian democracy is faced with multiple challenges. Institutionalisation of democracy in Bangladesh as well is undergoing difficult processes.

Meanwhile, domestic political processes in the region are characterised by considerable intolerance and social violence, while the process of governance is characterised by corruption and lack of accountability. Religious and cultural identities have always played a powerful and profound role in politics in South Asia. However, the instrumentalisation of religious and cultural identities for political purposes, by now, has assumed an unprecedented magnitude resulting in severe divisions within the society and polity. As a consequence, most of the regional countries came to witness, in varying degrees, violent intra-state conflicts along parochial ethno-linguistic and religious lines with cross-border implications. While these constitute the most severe challenge to the security of South Asian states, security endeavours in the region continue to remain concentrated on more traditional spheres.

It is in this backdrop that the **Regional Conference on POLITICS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: SALIENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE** organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) in collaboration with the German Embassy in Dhaka during October 8-10, 2002 constitutes a timely response to a significant issue of contemporary importance. The conference has been the fourth of a series of such events organised by BIISS in collaboration with the German Embassy in Dhaka. It has been designed to:



- Provide a forum for deliberation on the Politics and Security in South Asia with a focus on the religious and cultural dimensions with a view to exchanging information, views and outlook on the subject; and
- Promote constructive dialogue on the subject as well as related issues involving a wide array of relevant professionals from the region and abroad, Germany in particular.

The Conference drew keen interest of a wide range of representatives from academia, media and concerned professionals from South Asia and beyond. The participants in the conference included resource persons from all the SAARC countries barring Bhutan as well as from Germany and the US. Significant contributions were made to the academic content of the Conference by the participating policy makers, government officials, representatives from academia, media, civil society, NGOs as well as diplomatic corps and international agencies in Dhaka.

The Conference generated immense interest among academia, media, and professional and policymaking circles. The profound success of the Conference encouraged BISS to publish its proceedings in a book form entitled **POLITICS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: SALIENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE**. I hope that the book would receive considerable attention on the part of concerned professionals, including the policymakers.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to Ambassador Mufleh R. Osmany, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, for his guidance and the former Director General, BISS and the members of his team at this Institute for undertaking the initiative and organising the Conference. I also express my sincere gratitude to H. E. Mr. Dietrich Andreas, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Bangladesh, and his staff for their generous support. I would like to put on record my sincere gratitude to H. E. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, MP, Honourable Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs,

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and H. E. Mr. Reaz Rahman, Honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for gracing the Conference as the Chief Guests in the Inaugural and Concluding Sessions respectively. My sincere thanks are due to H. E. Ambassador Dr. Gunter Mulack, Commissioner for the Dialogue of Civilisations, German Foreign Office, for gracing the Conference as Special Guest in the Inaugural Session.

Dated: Dhaka  
February 20, 2004

Major General Md. Abdul Mubeen, ndc, psc  
Director General  
Bangladesh Institute of International and  
Strategic Studies (BISS)