



Dialogue – An Important Tool in Political Peace

India | Bangladesh | Maldives

Minutes of Meeting | 29 January 2022

Phuro Innovations hosted its second virtual discussion on Pursuit of Political Peace on 29 January 2022, as a series of year-long engagements/ innovative solutions and research-oriented approach. The virtual meet brought together the thought processes of leaders from India, Bangladesh, and Maldives on the subject of “Dialogue - An Important tool in Political Peace”.

The discussions were very fruitful and following solutions/ innovative ideas were presented by the stalwart leaders.



Rachna Sharma | India

Founder of Phuro Innovations, Co-Chair of HAE India, and Alumnus of Harvard Business School

Beginning with a view on peace and politics, Ms. Sharma stated that the roots of violence lies in the traditional approach of politics, a subject which people fear to talk about. In her argument, she established the need for constructively participating in the peace building process by beginning to talk about political peace peacefully.

Further, Ms. Sharma pointed out that the onus lies on the people of SAARC region to solve problems peacefully because the people of the region are naturally unified given the shared histories, cultures and to some extent the genes. Calling SAARC the potential next powerhouse owing to the region’s demographic dividend, she argued that SAARC doesn’t need to solely depend on international institutions, but create a structured framework suited to the needs of the region in order to resolve conflicts locally.

She further highlighted the vision of Phuro Innovations to act as a torch bearer of advocacy, bringing together the organizations or leaders or shared philosophies which could help the region in maintaining peace. She emphasised on the need of leaders of SAARC region to keep half a day in a month for thinking and another half a day for calling other leaders around the region, just to say hello. As per her, that would solve half the problems, and rest would automatically fall in place.

She concluded by mentioning that violent leadership relies on the absence of power to gain and sustain power, and violence arrests time and movement which is fundamental for human evolution. Calling this approach as an age-old way of gaining power through manipulation of neural connections, she underlined the need for public awareness on the science and epistemology of peace.



Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya | Bangladesh

Macro Economist & Public Policy Analyst, Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Dhaka, Former President – Governing board of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to WTO and UN Offices in Geneva and Vienna

Dr Debapriya began by emphasising the need for ‘Just Peace’ rather than ‘Positive Peace’. He maintained that if you do not have “just peace” within your own country, then you cannot have it in cross-border relations either. He argued that, if there is no respect for human rights, evidence-based discourse, space for public reasoning and opportunity to solve social and political conflicts through peaceful means within a country, then harmonious relationships should not be expected in cross-border issues.

Dr Debapriya pointed out that a country’s external overtures are essentially an extension of its internal policy. The major reason why SAARC has become dysfunctional is because democratic polity has been diminished within our respective countries.

Dr Debapriya in his intervention underscored the need for a shared framework for regional cooperation. One of the basis for it could be our collective allegiance to the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which allows space and voice to all stakeholders. A second element could be the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” as it is a handy mechanism to regenerate the South Asian spirit of regional cooperation.

Finally, Dr Debapriya opined that for South Asia, its historical past is now more of a “baggage” and our “asset” is our shared future. However, with the upcoming 4th Industrial Revolution and technological advancements, he wondered who would take up leadership in this regard. He held that the emerging youth community in our respective countries, who are much more globalised and outward looking, would lead the future and build a “new” South Asia.

In response to a query, Dr Debapriya reckoned that the Indo-Bangla relationship is undergoing a metamorphosis and it has obtained three major achievements in the recent past, namely the Ganges water treaty, the land boundary treaty and uprooting of cross-border terrorist elements. However, there remains a strong perception in Bangladesh that India has not adequately reciprocated to our needs. On this, Dr Debapriya mentioned two outstanding issues such as stopping border killings and signing of Teesta Water Treaty.

Looking ahead, Dr Debapriya said that the future of Indo-Bangla relationship lies in giving shape to a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), between the two countries.

Dr Debapriya ended with a congratulatory note to Phuro Innovations for acting as a forum for dialogue in SAARC.



Abdullah Kamaludeen | Maldives

Founder member of Maldives Policy Advocacy Caucus, Former Minister – Home Affairs | Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources | Human Resources, Employment and Labour | Public Works and National Development | Planning and National Development | Environment and Construction; the Republic of Maldives

Mr. Kamaludeen began on a note that South Asia region isn't the same as it was decades back in terms of political landscape, demographics, and along with a multitude of other factors. He emphasised that South Asia is the fastest growing region in the world and the epicentre in the race for global dominance. And with most of the countries in the region being highly active, he underscored the need for foreign policies to be drawn keeping in mind the long-term strategic goals objectives of a nation in alignment with the common interests of its neighbours and other geopolitical partners.

Further, Mr. Kamaludeen opined on the subject of India-Maldives relationship that both sides must refrain from leveraging their mutual relationship for political reasons. Rather, India-Maldives relations should be stronger than political changes and both sides must establish and maintain good relations with leaders on all sides of the political spectrum and both sides must ensure that the relationship is horizontal and not vertical.

In response to the query on the subject of increased radicalisation in Maldives, Mr. Kamaludeen reasoned that political instability and socio-economic uncertainty form the basis of radicalisation in Maldives, though the scale of radicalisation is not much larger in Maldives as of today the percentage is still relatively small. He further affirmed that there is a thin line between free speech and responsible speech, and with coordinated effort, responsible leadership and calculated measures, Maldives can overcome the challenge of radicalisation.

When asked about the role that Maldives can play in SAARC region, Mr. Kamaludeen highlighted hospitality and resilience as the key strengths of Maldives deep rooted in the nation's history. He mentioned that when it comes to SAARC region, Maldives can play an important role by being a neutral ground for all the national players to ease tension and find common ground through dialogue, in a very similar way that Brussels and Geneva played for Europe. He further pointed out that Maldives is naturally gifted to play this role for regional mediation, dialogue, trade and security.

Shedding light on his vision of creating innovative solutions for the challenges being faced by Maldives in today's time, Mr. Kamaludeen argued that the countries in SAACR region should look at erasing the history drenched in vengeance and open new channels of communication so that we can prosper as a region.

He concluded by saying, "war is costlier, and peace is prosperous. Create dialogue and opportunity. Make an effort to understand and stop fanning the fire." He emphasised on the region to avoid hostile acts towards each other which compels all nations to spend heavily on armaments. Rather we should be looking at collectively solving the humanitarian challenges of the region.



Anshu Khanna | India

Columnist and Author, Craft Revivalist, and Communications Expert

Sharing her vision of linking craft with women development, Ms. Khanna started by mentioning about her active involvement in the conflict ridden state of Jammu & Kashmir to economically empower local crafts women. She soulfully expressed her thoughts on political peace as a chance for women to move freely, to not lose their families, and to be insulated to some extent from the devastation caused by violence.

Referring to views put by other panellists, she emphasised on the need for SAARC nations to introspect and look inwards as a region, as to what is going wrong. She concluded by emphasising on the need of the people and leaders of the region to open hearts, talk to each other and create an ecosystem of collaboration and peace.