

Expert for end to Indo-Pakistan imbroglio

He reckons that this holds key to bringing peace to the South Asian region

Staff Reporter

CHENNAI: The key to peace in the South Asian region lies in resolving the India-Pakistan imbroglio, according to Ishtiaq Ahmed, visiting senior research fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies of the National University of Singapore.

Mr. Ahmed, a Swedish political scientist and author of Pakistani descent, was speaking on 'Making South Asia a region of peace and prosperity: what needs to be done,' here on Friday. The event was organised by the East-West Centre Alumni Association's Chennai chapter and the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies and the School of English and Foreign Languages of the University of Madras.

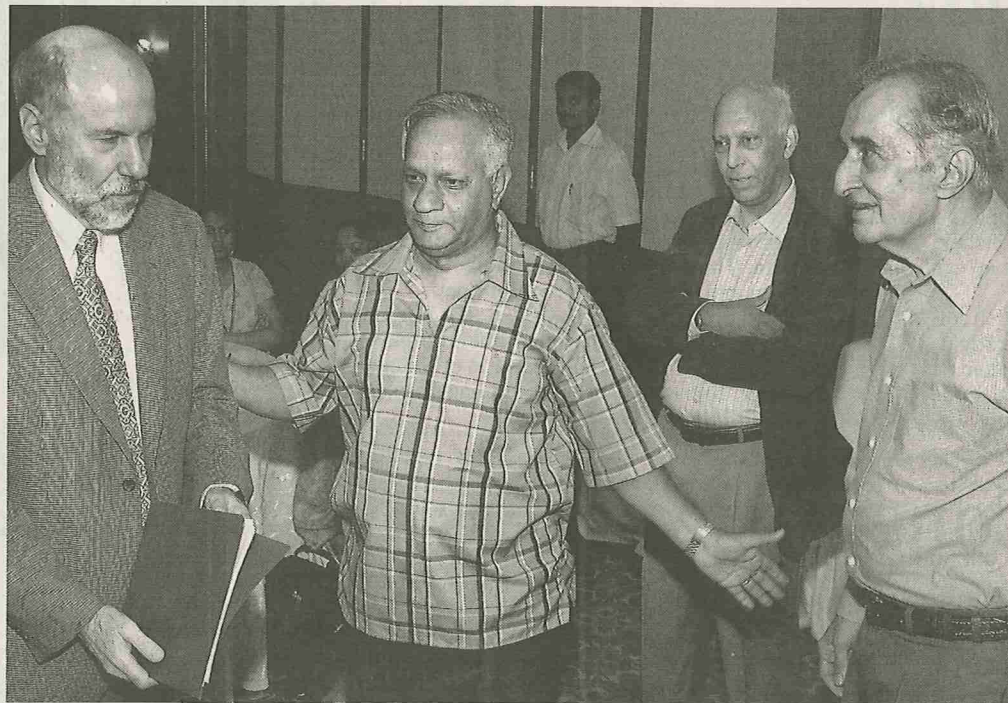
The South Asian region comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives, Dr. Ahmed said. Iran and Afghanistan were sometimes considered part of this regional grouping. Though it was encouraging that democracy had been adopted in all these countries, it remained a tension-ridden region. "Ultra-nationalists, religious fanatics and ethnic

purists exploit differences rather than similarities."

The confrontational relationship between India and Pakistan affected the overall character of the region. But, war as an option was ruled out because the world could not afford a conflict between nuclear-tipped neighbours, he said. In this context, it was fallacious on India's part to assume that there could be "surge strikes" without nuclear weapons. It was equally fallacious on Pakistan's part to assume that terrorism could continue without India reacting, he said. Besides pressure, Pakistan must be given assistance to dismantle terror networks.

For peace initiatives to succeed, other players, besides the State actors, had to be roped in, Dr. Ahmed said. "We must forsake ideology and political rancour and adopt enlightened pragmatism."

Apart from widening the scope of informal peace initiatives involving civil society, measures such as an open visa permitting free travel would help. Economic and educational reforms permitting free flow of ideas and goods would also help in cementing ties, he said.



FOR A PRAGMATIC APPROACH: (From left): Fred Kaplan, Consul and Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Consulate-General in Chennai; Gopalji Malviya, Head of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Madras; Ishtiaq Ahmed, visiting senior research fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies of the National University of Singapore; and P.M. Belliappa, retired IAS officer, at a talk in Chennai on Friday.

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