The Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, organised a two-day meeting of the India-Brazil-South Africa Local Governance Forum to discuss “Deepening Democracy through Local Governance”. Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Minister for New and Renewable Energy, Government of India inaugurated the programme at the India International Centre. The deliberations took place in the context of geopolitical shifts and a growing clamour for the redistribution of power. There was consensus that the IBSA countries represent a unique democratic alliance of the Global South, and can lead the way in the fields of decentralisation and democratic development.

H.E. Carlos Duarte, the Ambassador of Brazil, and Mr. Mark Reynhardt, Minister Councillor of the South African High Commission, stated in their opening remarks that the IBSA countries are global players with extensive geopolitical influence, and their common direction and agenda will be reaffirmed at the forthcoming summit.

Hon’ble Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah, implored delegates to remember that democracy is a fragile gift that must be safeguarded. Only by building the basic structure of local democracy together, can we ensure that the edifice of democracy remains intact. Mr. Dinesh Bhatia, Joint Secretary, Multilateral Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, in his welcome address, encouraged IBSA states to devolve powers, ensuring inclusive growth, and inclusive democracy.

Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), welcoming the delegates, affirmed that decentralisation has meant a new “architecture of governance”, and that India, Brazil and South Africa, have a role to play by sharing best practices of democracy and development, both amongst themselves and with other members of the developing world. Dr. M.A. Oommen, Emeritus Professor, ISS, in his keynote address emphasised that democracy is about more than just regular, free and fair elections, and involves issues of social justice and fairness, which come about through public reasoning. The thematic sessions, addressed by eminent political leaders, scholars, diplomats and writers, were on: participatory local democracy; poverty, development and decentralisation; empowerment through equity and inclusion; IBSA vis-à-vis BRICS; democracy and participation in multilevel federalism; and what IBSA has to offer the Global South.

Dr. Partha Nath Mukherji, Emeritus Professor, ISS, presiding over the first thematic session, suggested that it
was pertinent to understand the socio-cultural milieu of countries while studying federal systems. Specially in the context of India, since the concept of nationhood differed from that of the West, it was imperative that the idea of federalism and local governance be ecologically framed. Dr. Rama Naidu, Executive Director of the Democracy Development Programme in Durban, spoke of the role that human dignity should play in development, and asked delegates to keep this idea central to local democracy. Mr. Mxolisi Nyuswa, from Kwazulu, said that in the context of South Africa, which suffers from massive inequality, access to information and decision-making processes is lacking for most people, which feeds a sense of injustice, even if services are delivered. Mr. Davi Horrle Santos, of the Ministry of Cities in Brazil, discussed Brazil’s anti-poverty strategies, such as the successful Bolsa Familia programme, and argued that IBSA’s democratic nature inspires other countries, meaning the grouping can demonstrate practices of good governance and poverty-reducing policies.

Professor Balveer Arora, Chairman of the Centre for Multilevel Federalism, ISS, offered an enlightening comparison of the three IBSA countries. He showed that their federal structures contain various common features, but since models of federalism are fallible, IBSA countries should be willing to learn from each other, while accepting each country’s distinctive contexts. This point was built upon by Dr. Tanvir Aejaz, of Ramjas College, Delhi.

Mr. S.M. Vijayanand, the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, spoke about the different poverty intervention strategies adopted by the Government of India. Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, the UNDP Country Director, emphasised that the challenge of poverty is still gargantuan. Ms. Wiesen discussed the work of the UNDP in breaking down the silo strategies that fail to view poverty holistically. Mr. B.D. Ghosh, Senior Fellow, ISS, and Mr. Sandile Sithole, Executive Director of the Community Law and Rural Development Centre in South Africa, presented cases of poverty reduction strategies in West Bengal and South Africa, respectively.

Discussions of empowerment through equity and inclusion yielded emotive presentations from various panellists, including Mr. Ranjeet Nirguni, district local government member in Bihar; Ms. Rita Sarin, Country Director, The Hunger Project; Ms. Suparna Ganguly, senior faculty member at West Bengal’s State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development, and Mr. Bongumusa Zondo, Senior Manager for Programmes at the eThekwini Municipality Imagine in Durban.

H.E. Carlos Duarte discussed the ways in which IBSA and the BRICS came into being. IBSA was founded on ideals of democracy and south-south cooperation but the BRICS were based on a Goldman Sachs report. He argued that their contrasting geneses and purposes will reflect their different roles, and was confident that IBSA remains relevant in the face of the rise of the BRICS. Mr. Mark Reynhardt agreed with this analysis, adding that IBSA has a large number of working groups and cooperative endeavours on development and democracy projects, whereas the BRICS have a different agenda. Mr. Deepak Bhojwani, a former Indian Ambassador, spoke candidly about the importance of both multilateral bodies, arguing that while IBSA aimed to improve the lot of humanity, the BRICS look outward to reforming international institutions and other structures.

Prof. K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, Senior Fellow, ISS, and Chairman of the Centre for Policy Research, presented an overview of the lack of progress in India’s decentralisation, particularly in the urban context. He claimed that the countries are directionless in their decentralisation efforts. Prof. Patrick Heller of Brown University compared the levels and functionality of the IBSA countries’ federal structures, and argued for local participatory democracy as it makes good citizens, reveals
citizen preferences, and yields public goods rather than patronage goods. Ms. Lara de Lacerda Santos Rodrigues, specialist in International Relations in the Brazilian Department of International Cooperation and Local Governments, presented a case study of decentralisation in Curitiba in Paraná, Brazil. Dr. Lalita Chandrashekar, an independent researcher based in Bengaluru, raised a number of questions about what local democracy would entail, and where there might be conflicts in its design and implementation.

What can IBSA offer the Global South? According to Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi, Senior Fellow, RIS, the trinity of countries act as role models for the developing South. Mr. Amitava Tripathi, former Indian Ambassador to Brazil, spoke of his experiences in Brasilia on the eve of IBSA's creation, and of his current work with NGOs that practice cooperation with IBSA civil society fora. Other speakers included Dr. Ram Upendra Das, Senior Fellow at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), and Dr. Ruchita Beri, of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis.

Ms. Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, focused her Valedictory Address on the rise of the Global South, pointing out that since the end of the Cold War, great strides have been made in reducing poverty. Governments of the Global South have placed a renewed emphasis on health and education services, developed innovative poverty reduction schemes, and engaged strategically with the rest of the world. Decentralisation certainly has a long way to go, but on current trajectories, a new world order is in the making, with a great geopolitical shift from the North and West, to the South and East. According to Ms. Grande, IBSA is to be saluted for its efforts to spread democracy and equitable development, and the UN recognises IBSA as a unique organisation for promoting South-South cooperation.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of the ISS, spoke of the need to establish an International University on Local Governance. He proposed that this university be based in South Africa, with chapters in India and Brazil. He also committed to organising a delegation of 10 Self Help Group women activists from India to go to South Africa, in order to share their experiences with their South African counterparts. IBSA cooperation has achieved great things, but there is a long way to go.

Twentieth Women’s Political Empowerment Day Celebrations
“Panchayats, Rights and Survival of the Girl Child”

The Institute of Social Sciences organised the Twentieth Women’s Political Empowerment Day Celebrations on 22-23 April 2013, in collaboration with the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), UNICEF, ActionAid and Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD), at the Constitution Club of India, Rafi Marg, New Delhi. Over the two days, participants deliberated on the theme: "Panchayats, Rights and Survival of the Girl Child".

The programme was attended by more than 400 elected women panchayat representatives from 18 States and one Union Territory, self help groups, mahila
panchayat members, government officials, other social workers and NGO partners. The delegates were sponsored by various State governments and NGOs. It led to practitioners of local governance, eminent scholars and activists, contributing towards the richness of the event with their grassroots experiences and thoughts on the role of Panchayats in the empowerment of women and the future of the girl child.

Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, ISS, while delivering the Welcome Address, stated that women, being the epitome of ahimsa, have become essential parts of the new geometry of power that democracy helped create in India. Numerical abundance of children in India must not become a burden due to pervasive malnutrition but should become the source of hope and progress.

Ms. Krishna Tirath, Hon’ble Minister of State for Women and Child Development, appealed to the women delegates from across the country not to tolerate injustice and harassment under any circumstance. The voice of women that is feeble and helpless today must change to become louder, forceful and effective. She also highlighted the effort of National Mission for Empowerment of Women in the emancipation and self-realisation of women in India. She talked about the upcoming scheme of ‘Ahimsa Messenger’ and informed that twenty elected women representatives launched this movement for legal empowerment of women. They will be called Peace Ambassadors.

During the Inaugural Ceremony, the Minister honoured Ms. Nayana Patra, Baruan Gram Panchayat, Odisha, Ms. Shushma Bhadu, Dhani Miyan Khan Gram Panchayat, Haryana, and Ms. Sudha Manirathinem, Nattarmangalam Gram Panchayat, Tamil Nadu, as “Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders 2013” for their exemplary contributions towards the development of their respective Panchayats, with cash awards, citations and plaques.

Mr. Louis Georges Arsenault, Country Representative of UNICEF, said that women’s empowerment begins with the emancipation of girl children, who will always be the best investment the country can make.

Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of the ISS, emphasised that the onus fell on the shoulders of women leaders and citizens in the panchayats to usher in a new era of change and empowerment, while ensuring dignity of the girl child. Dr. Bidyut Mohanty, Head, Women’s Studies, ISS proposed a vote of thanks. She pointed out that the women present in the meeting would be inspired by the presence of the Hon’ble Minister because, it would encourage them to break the glass ceiling and reach Parliament.

The two-day event comprised a series of talks by several eminent personalities who are actively involved in the effort to empower women and the girl child, whether through NGOs or the state machinery. These sessions were interspersed with topical films, testimonials and opportunities for participants to share experiences. Poetry recitals and the singing of folk music added further colour to the sessions.

Ms. K. Ratna Prabha, Additional Secretary and Mission Director, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, delivered the Special Address where she laid out before the participants the challenges of integrating the marginalised sections of the society into the process of governance.
The plenary session, chaired by Ms. Gouri Choudhuri, President, Action India, and addressed by Ms. C.P Sujaya, Vice President, Council for Social Development, touched upon several issues faced by women across India including crimes committed against women and girl children.

The Open House discussion that followed saw active participation by the delegates; so much so that the session became an interface for the government, especially the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), to reach out to the representatives of the Panchayats. Ms. Rashmi Singh, Executive Director, NMEW, enumerated the various programmes under the Ministry through which the Mission was trying to achieve its goals of empowerment. However, participants admitted to the unfortunate predicament of being aware of only part of those listed programmes. Dr. Nupur Tiwari, Faculty, Indian Institute of Public Administration moderated another Open House discussion during which was addressed by Ms. Niti Saxena, Institute of Research and Development. Dr Bijayalaxmi Nanda elaborated on the issues confronting the rights and survival of girl child. Various panchayat members spoke of their determination to save the girl child and prevent child marriage.

A team led by Mr. Naresh Hasija, Associate Director, Biocon, Bangalore, demonstrated to the participants a 'tele-health-kit', which would enable Panchayats to be active players in providing for public health, that would detect problems of diabetes and blood pressure and is easily operated by common people.

An overview on the theme of "Violence against the Girl Child in India" was chaired by Dr. Deepti Mehrotra, Consultant, Knowledge Partnership Programme. Ms. Sunita Menon, Director, Education and Training, Breakthrough, showed a documentary film to depict various social situations of overt and covert violence to which the girl child is subjected and the kind of mental setups she develops while growing up.

Dr. Sarat K. Nanda, Senior Fellow, ISS, further elaborated on the role of patriarchy in shaping the societal norms and behaviours and how women’s empowerment is being undermined. Dr. Dipali Sharma, ActionAid, chaired the subsequent Open House discussion during which several participants utilised the opportunity to share their experiences in terms of empowerment of women and fighting patriarchy at the local level.

Ms. Rita Sarin, Vice President and Country Director, The Hunger Project, chaired session on the theme of "Social Sectors and Discriminations against Women and Children". Dr. Deepa Ahluwalia, Senior Project Advisor, NMEW, elaborated on the various forms of discriminations faced by women at each age subdivision, and substantiated her presentation with facts and statistics to inspire participants and apprise them about the unenviable reality of the status of women in India.

Ms. Sneha Banerjee, Assistant Professor, Gargi College, University of Delhi, while defining empowerment, equated it with gender equality.

The valedictory session was chaired by Dr. Mohini Giri, Chairperson, Guild of Service who called upon the women delegates to be courageous amidst all adversities.

Dr. Satish Agnihotri, Director General, Defence Acquisition, Ministry of Defence delivered the valedictory address and shared his thoughts on the future of the girl child in India. He advised the women leaders present there to compel the candidates seeking votes from them to take the initiative in bringing about police reforms.

Dr. Santosh Singh, Senior Research Officer, ISS gave the Vote of Thanks, bringing the memorable two-day celebrations to a worthy conclusion.
The Institute of Social Sciences organized its first Lecture under the Democracy Lecture Series instituted by the Nirman Foundation, a registered trust, which was established by Shri C.R. Parekh and run by Dr. Chandrakant Shroff and Lord Bhikhu Parekh. The trust has the objective of imparting excellence in education to the aspiring youth of the nation.

The inaugural lecture was delivered by Ms. Aruna Roy, social activist and prominent leader of the Right to Information Movement on “RTI and its ethical challenges: All citizens are equal, but some are more equal than others” at Abdul Nazir Sab Hall of the Institute on 17 September.

While welcoming the Chief Guest, Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, ISS, recalled the seminal work of Arunaji and the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan. “What a difference the RTI has made in our life and what bigger difference it will make if we succeed in taming the political class which is hell-bent on undermining it”, Dr. Roy added. He also maintained that thanks to the pioneering efforts of Arunaji and others, “the genie is out of the bottle and the humble citizens have started resorting to the RTI which has given a new meaning to democracy”. Dr. Roy also warmly welcomed Lord Bhikhu Parekh and recalled his famous observation, “no culture is perfect or represents the best life. We benefit from a critical dialogue with other cultures”.

Speaking on this occasion, Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, ISS, said that “Democracy is the most discussed and debated subject today. It is the best form of government in contemporary world. It has found worldwide acceptance. And yet, as Prof. Bhikhu Parekh says: No discussion of the definition and measurement of democracy today can be satisfactory unless it is grounded in and informed by a full appreciation of the inescapable reality of cultural pluralism. This cultural pluralism is best reflected in India than any other country”.

Dr. Mathew quoted a write-up on Ms. Aruna Roy from the Time magazine which appeared in May 2011. It says “Starting from a tiny village in the deserts of Rajasthan in the 1980s, Aruna Roy began a long campaign to bring transparency to India’s notoriously corrupt bureaucracy. Its signal achievement is the 2005 Right to Information (RTI) Act, a law that has given the nation’s poor a powerful tool to fight for their rights and has influenced similar measurers in other countries. It has also inspired thousands of RTI activists, who have exposed everything from land scams to bank embezzlement to the misuse of public funds meant for the poor. Roy doesn’t just condemn a broken system; she changes it.”
Ms. Aruna Roy said that the Right to Information has facilitated the narrowing of the gap between precept and practice in our public and private lives. It has provided a framework where all of us are encouraged to participate more overtly in politics and governing ourselves. It has shown us that in this vast democracy what we do, can, and does matter.

It is open secret, said Ms. Roy, that the powerful and the well connected exercise great influence on opinion and policy in our country. It is a matter of debate as to what and whom the mainstream really consists of. Nevertheless it is true that there is a great divide in perceptions at the two ends of this pyramid. At the top, there seems to be a balance sheet obsession.

According to Ms. Aruna Roy, the ethical norms of a democratic society should be determined through continuous debate and discussion. If we are concerned about the falling moral standards, rampant corruption, the arbitrary exercise of power, the failure of public officials and representatives to discharge their duties, we all first need to get involved in understanding what our own duties are.

Further elucidating her view, Ms. Aruna Roy said that the very first duty of every citizen is to be active participants in evolving and enforcing ethical standards for ourselves individually and collectively: of determining the ethical standards of our democratic polity. Ethics itself being the scientific basis for determining the right and wrong in governance, cannot be left to the whims and fancies of the ruling elite. We also need to understand that as citizens in a democracy it is our responsibility to be involved with politics. If we abdicate our responsibility, we will be victims of a peculiar perversion: we will be held responsible for the acts of people we despise the most.

In his speech Lord Bhikhu Parekh said that “democracy in India is facing a threat and is almost at the verge of being killed. Dissent is integral to the idea of democracy. In India, we have a 2,000-year-long tradition of debate right from the Vedic time. But there is no serious debate happening on a number of critical issues. This in itself is a threat to our culture of debate and democracy,” said Lord Parekh.

According to Lord Parekh, “during past few decades, the quality of public deliberation at all levels has suffered a dramatic decline. Parliament meets for far fewer days. Even when it meets, there are regular interruptions with members rushing to the Well of the House, leading sometimes to the suspension of the day’s proceedings and the wiping out of the vital question hour. As a result, bills of momentous importance are sometimes passed without careful scrutiny,” he said.

Lord Parekh strongly maintained that the elected representatives are expected to act rationally not on a whim or by consulting a soothsayer, and to choose a course of action best supported by evidence and argument. Public deliberation by itself is not enough either. A government might allow it, but that does not make it a democracy if people have no power to replace it or hold it accountable. Democratic politics is institutionally mediated, and representative institutions are at its centre, he concluded.
The Institute of Social Sciences in co-operation with the University of Kashmir organized a landmark conference of elected women panchayat representatives of Jammu and Kashmir in Srinagar on 28-29 September 2013. This was the first such meeting to be convened since the halqa panchayat elections were held in 2011 with great public enthusiasm despite militant threats.

The meeting was co-sponsored by United Nations Development Program’s India office and the Planning Commission of India. The University of Kashmir extended academic and logistics support. Several hundreds of elected women representatives of panchayats (EWRs), women activists from different districts of the state, scholars, legal luminaries and political leaders participated in the conference.

The Conference aimed to examine the current situation of women elected representatives, discuss how they could effectively function as leaders and decision makers in public life, document cases of successful leadership, create awareness about the importance of their role in panchayats, and deliberate on ways and means to ensure good governance at village level.

The Inaugural Session commenced with rousing songs by the girls of Rahat Ghar, a home for children orphaned by conflict in the state. Prof. Nilofer Khan, Dean, Department of Student's Welfare and Director, Women's Studies Centre, Kashmir University and Ms Shamima Raina, Sr. Vice-President, Jammu & Kashmir Mahila Congress, welcomed the delegates and guests.

Quoting Iqbal’s inspiring verse on Kashmir - “The earth whose dust conceals the fire of the chinar in its conscience can never go cold, nor ever lose its self respect” Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) spoke of Institute’s commitment to make Jammu and Kashmir one of the priority states in its work of promoting democratic local governance.

The UNDP Deputy Country Director Alexandra Solovieva congratulated the Panchayat women and said that global evidence shows that progress towards development goals is undermined "if opportunity and justice are not universally accessible to all sections of society. Due to inherent power imbalances, women are more prone to such exclusions". However, when women have a strong presence in local bodies they tend to ensure adequate investment in areas like education, health, water and sanitation, and access to economic opportunities and justice, all of which are critical to human development.

The chief guest, Mr Ali Mohammad Sagar, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayats, in his inaugural address stated his government’s plans for devolution of powers and finances to panchayats. He announced that monthly honoraria to panchayat members would soon become a reality, that orders have been issued to 14 departments and block and halqa level officials to cooperate with elected representatives and involve them in implementation of development schemes, and that his ministry has asked...
the union government for enhanced aid in order to transfer Rs 10 lakhs annually to each panchayat to accelerate development activities.

Groups of elected members met the Minister to voice their grievances directly to him and these interactions were well reported in the press.

Planning Commission member Dr. Syeda Hameed in her address said that the panchayats were at this point of time the most important sector in government, the one that was actually going to make a difference to the state. She raised the issue of the steep decline in child sex ratios in many districts of the state, a trend that has only emerged recently, as the Census 2011 has highlighted, and exhorted the Panchayat leaders to tackle this problem urgently in their respective districts.

Mr. A.R. Rather, Minister of Finance & Ladakh Affairs, Government of Jammu and Kashmir complimented the ISS for holding this timely conference. He recalled the provisions for women's empowerment spelt out in a separate chapter in the 'Naya Kashmir' Manifesto put together by Sheikh Abdullah, founder of the National Conference party which now runs a coalition government in the state. More than 70 years ago the state had developed policies that envisaged equal participation of women in all spheres of public and professional life. People had challenged some of the policies, such as 50 per cent reservation for women students in medical colleges in the courts but that provision had been vehemently defended by former Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah, himself a medical doctor, said Minister Rather.

According to him, the 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in panchayats is a revolutionary step and a precursor to their equal participation in State Legislative Assemblies and Parliament. He gave some practical advice to the assembled Panchayat members: to work with honesty and dedication in their panchayats, accept the most bitter criticism with equanimity, tolerate all forms of adversity and non-cooperation. "In the administration, some people won't want you there, some people will taunt you or not listen to you, and the MLAs will fear competition - you have to tolerate all this if you wish to be elected once more. It is from amongst you that the future political leaders of the state will eventually emerge".

Nazrana-e-Khusro: In the evening, Urdu litterateur Begum Zakia Zaheer and Dr. Syeda Hameed presented a scintillating recital of compositions by the 13th century poet-mystic Amir Khusro, sung by Rene Singh. Amir Khusro, a multi-faceted polyglot, has been venerated in Asia and the Middle East for over 800 years. His poems and paheliya (riddles) survive in the oral traditions of Urdu, Persian and Hindi speaking peoples. He thus symbolizes the synthesis of cultural, linguistic and mystical traditions that developed in North India in medieaval times.

The Valedictory function witnessed the culmination of the two days of aspirations, enthusiasm, energy, emotions and hard work that the women who had gathered there had put in over the last two days. Prof. Talat Ahmed, Vice-Chancellor Kashmir University, while enumerating the key objectives of the conference in his introductory remarks, succinctly captured this mood. Moved by the enthusiasm of the elected women representatives as well as that of the students and faculty of the university, he assured future cooperation of the university for similar academic research and endeavors.

The Governor of Jammu & Kashmir H.E. Mr. N.N. Vohra, who is Chancellor of Kashmir University, was the chief guest of the valedictory function. In his address the Governor said, "Women have to play a vital role if the State has to achieve..."
speedy progress and prosperity.” He called upon the women Panchayat representatives to take keen interest in their new role and contribute meaningfully to ensure the effective implementation of welfare and development programmes in the villages. Quoting constitutional provisions, which support the empowerment and rights of women, and the decentralization of powers, the Governor stressed the need for increasing awareness among women Sarpanchs and Panchs so that they are fully aware of their rights and duties. He added that devolution of powers at the grassroots level is the key for securing a balanced and all round development of communities and the state. The Governor complimented the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, and the University of Kashmir and their collaborators for organizing such a Conference on an extremely important theme and for bringing elected women representatives from remote districts to Srinagar. He expressed hopes that both the institutions would join hands to organize more such programmes in the near future.

Ms Seema Khajuria, Additional Advocate General, Jammu and Kashmir felicitated the elected women representatives who had stood up to contest the elections against great odds, including threats to their lives in the 2011 panchayat elections. Dwelling on the constitutional aspects regarding women’s empowerment, she emphasized that no country can prosper if 50 per cent of its citizens were unable to realize their rights. Ms. Khajuria highlighted the many facets of genuine empowerment including the ability to take decisions on one’s own.

Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of ISS while addressing the gathering, confessed that the occasion had made him emotional as both Panchayati Raj and the state of Jammu and Kashmir were close to his heart. He thanked the Governor H.E. N.N.Vohra and the state ministers Mr. Ali Mohd. Sagar and Mr. A.R.Rather for their support, as well as the University of Kashmir and its Vice Chancellor Prof. Talat Ahmed and the people of the state for helping to make the conference a success.

Prof. Nilofer Khan, University of Kashmir, proposed a vote of thanks, bringing to a close a unique event that brought University faculty and students, independent research scholars, political party workers and leaders and media persons together with grassroots elected women local government members for the first time in the history of Panchayati Raj in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
The President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee received the first copy of an encyclopedic publication titled *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India 2013* at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 6th November 2013.

The volume was presented by its General Editor Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences in the presence of Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Union Minister for Panchayati Raj.

The 737-page volume traces the history of rural local governments from the colonial period up to the present day. Apart from an introduction which gives an overview of the Panchayati Raj system, the volume has special articles such as “Appraisal of Panchayats in Fifth Scheduled Areas”, “Panchayats and Women” and “Fiscal Decentralization”.

Thirty-five chapters have been written by academics and senior officials with inputs from the research team of the Institute of Social Sciences.

Apart from an introduction which gives an overview of the Panchayati Raj system, the volume has special articles such as “Appraisal of Panchayats in Fifth Scheduled Areas”, “Panchayats and Women” and “Fiscal Decentralization”.

Each chapter on States and Union Territories contains socio-economic profiles with latest statistics on area, demography, economy, education, health, poverty, access to potable water, public distribution system, etc; District and Block level data; conformity Acts - strength, weakness, amendments, elections; devolution of powers; State Finance Commission - constitution, reports, present status; District Planning Committees - achievements and overall functioning and women’s participation.

The publication provides exhaustive data on Blocks/Talukas/Mandals and Districts based on the 2001 and 2011 Census along with maps, demographic data on the Districts and Blocks as also the socio-economic profiles of each State and Union Territory.
Hon’ble Vice President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari releases *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India 2013* edited by George Mathew

Vice-President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari released the *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India 2013*, an encyclopedic publication of the Institute of Social Sciences at a function held at the conference hall of the Vice-President’s residence on 2 December 2013.

Welcoming the guests, Dr. George Mathew, General Editor of the Volume and Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences said that “the book is the latest of our more than 250 publications which have created a knowledge base on critical areas of social sciences in the country in the development of our democracy. Of course, the most important areas of our concern have been decentralization, grass roots democracy, local government, women’s political empowerment and human rights”.

This book, as Mani Shankar Aiyar has written in his Foreword, “brings together on one platform some of the best minds in the nation”.

This is the outcome of a teamwork by more than 50 scholars, researchers and local government practitioners from all over the country. Our objective was to gather as much information about the status and functioning of the panchayats in India as possible. It was indeed time consuming to collect and compile data from 28 states and 7 union territories.

In his presidential address, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar said that “Dr. George Mathew and his Institute have done this remarkable job of finding experts for every state and every union territory to place before us the state of the panchayats in that state and that territory. And the story that emerges from this is that in the last two decades we have made panchayati raj ineluctable, irremovable and irreversible. That is a major achievement and it has happened only because the constitution amendments had given constitutional sanction, constitutional sanctity and constitutional safeguards to the institutions of panchayati raj”.

While releasing the Book the Hon’ble Vice President Shri M. Hamid Ansari said that “in a country of our size and diversity there is no option but to devolve governance to the local levels in order to deal with myriad local issues and services, which need local solutions and delivery, with active participation of the intended beneficiaries. he further said that the Panchayati Raj system is founded on the tenet of decentralisation. This refers, according to a definition offered by the UNDP, to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at all tiers in accordance with the principle of ‘subsidiarity’, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the
system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels”.

Shri Hamid Ansari further said that “it also offers a formula for achieving the required change through a three dimensional approach of political will, people’s awareness and building healthy conventions and traditions, backed by constitutional and legislative measures. In turn, local governments are expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, such as increasing people’s opportunities for participation in economic, social and political decisions, assisting in developing people’s capacities, and enhancing government responsiveness, transparency and accountability”. The Vice President took note of the unprecedented widening of the democratic base of the Indian polity. Apart from the number of elected representatives is the unparalleled increase in the number of women and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in both rural and urban local bodies. This bodes well for the inclusion and empowerment of the marginalised and deprived sections of society. Despite the challenges of ‘proxyism’, women representatives have performed exceptionally in the local bodies, in terms of leadership, integrity, responsiveness and sensitivity. The projection in this study is that after 10 to 15 years, women may occupy more than 50% seats in all three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system. This is heartening.

Shri Ansari also expressed his concern on the role of the State Governments in terms of recognising the jurisdiction of local bodies and devolving financial and human resource powers to them. Some reports about it make disturbing reading. Failures on this count could have far reaching implications not only for the Panchayati Raj Institutions but also for other levels of governance, given the electorate’s expectations on participation and accountability.

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty, Head, Department of Women’s Studies, Institute of Social Sciences, proposed a vote of thanks.

Thirteenth D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture on
“Asia’s Rise or Fall: Challenges and Opportunities in the XXI Century” Delivered by Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta

The Institute of Social Sciences organized the thirteenth D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture on “Asia’s Rise or Fall: Challenges and Opportunities” on 4 December 2013. Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta, the former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Laureate. He is presently United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the UN Integrated PeacebuildingOffice in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS).

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Hon’ble Minister of State for Human Resource Development presided over the lecture.

In his welcome address, Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences said that “This lecture series has undoubtedly been a high point in the Institute’s journey, for it includes a galaxy of world renowned figures: Amartya Sen, Mahbub-ul-Haq, Muhammad Yunus, Justice Albie Sachs, Noam Chomsky, Bhiku Parekh, Romila Thapar, I. G. Patel, Anthony Giddens, Joseph Stiglitz, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam and Helen Clark”.

He further said that “Dr. Lakdawala’s advocacy of decentralized planning strengthened the vision of Institute of Social Sciences to...
specialize in the field of decentralization, local government and empowerment of the marginalised. As far as the Institute is concerned, he was more a friend, philosopher and guide than Chairman for more than seven years. He taught us, how not to traverse a trodden path, till his untimely death in 1992. Dr. Lakdawala along with S. K. Dey, Malcolm Adiseshiah, Lakshmi Chand Jain, Nirmal Mukarji — all men of great vision and integrity — guided our destiny to play a role in decentralized governance and local governments in the country, to keep our federation alive and kicking. Dr. Lakdawala, the renowned economist and great policy planner, above all, was a great humanist”.

Dr. Mathew thanked the United Nations Development Programme for supporting this year’s lecture. He said that “the Institute has a long association with the UNDP and has conducted several research projects and programmes with the UNDP support”.

Dr. Santosh Singh, Senior Research Officer, Institute of Social Sciences, proposed a vote of thanks.

Excerpts from Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta’s speech on “Asia’s Rise or Fall: Challenges and Opportunities”

Being a founding-father of my country, I beg your indulgence to allow me to share with you the challenges and developments that are taking place there. Timor-Leste remains a success story in Asia. We have come a long way in a fairly short time, since the restoration of independence in 2002.

10 years on, we are proud that the latest UNDP Human Development Report accords Timor-Leste a HDI for 2012 that jumped to the value of 0.576, placing our country in the medium human development category; at independence in 2002 it was 0.375.

According to the UNDP-commissioned report: ...Timor-Leste, Cambodia, Ghana, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Mongolia were the HDI growth leaders in the Medium Human Development grouping.

The East Asia and the Pacific region has an average HDI value of 0.683 and registered annual HDI value growth between 2000 and 2012 of 1.31%, with Timor-Leste leading with 2.71%, followed by Myanmar at 2.23%. The East Asia-Pacific region has the highest employment-to-population ratio (74.5%) in the developing world. (Source: UN Human Development Report, 2012)

Timor-Leste’s economy continues to perform well. Bank deposits grew by 10.5% year on year in the first half of 2013. Private sector credit was 10.3% higher in June 2013 than a year earlier, reaching a new high of $165.6 million.

Since 2005, life expectancy at birth in Timor-Leste increased by more than two years and now averages 64 years.

GNP per capita increased 228 per cent during the same period to over US$5,000. Average annual growth has exceeded 10 percent for the last four years and real non-Oil GDP growth remains strong.

According to forecasts by The Economist, Timor-Leste is among the nine fastest growing economies of the world in 2013.

While our democracy is young and therefore imperfect, nevertheless Government and opposition have found common ground on key strategic priorities for the country and have been able to work together to consolidate peace and national reconciliation, creating an enabling environment for sustainable development.

We are living in times of great challenges in much of the world but also of hope and optimism for our peoples and our continent.

The challenges we face in Asia are immense and complex. I would dare say that our region is the most dangerous in the world, the most militarized, most nuclearized, with nuclear weapons targetting neighbors; with complex land and maritime border disputes, regional rivalries, ethnic and religious conflicts that have exploded frequently in and among states.

Africa and Latin America have long freed themselves from the legacies of the Cold War. The conflicts still prevailing in the two regions pale by comparison with the security challenges we face in Asia.

Africans and Latin Americans have created regional political bodies, democratic systems, rule of law and human rights practices and monitoring mechanisms that make us Asians look like we still live in feudal XIX Century.

Only in Asia there is a regime like the one in North Korea, as barbaric as the worst of the Stalinist era; in parts of Asia we have stone age beliefs and practices that deny girls the right to go to school; in some parts of Asia acid is thrown on girls for daring to sit in a class room; girls are married off or simply sold off; In parts of Asia a woman can be sentenced to death by stoning for committing adultery.

As long as all these horror stories occur daily in our region, as long as we have religious fanatics who want half of humanity, the women, to remain enslaved to ignorance and poverty, as long as too many in Asia believe in a God that is MERCILESS and in His behalf they kill those who disagree with certain interpretations of the holly script; the XXlst Century will not be ours.

As long as leaders and peoples of North East Asia (China, Japan and Korea) are not able to free themselves from the past, as long as Japanese officials and educators continue to rewrite history and trivialize the facts of the suffering caused by the Imperial war unleashed on Asians, and as long as leaders and peoples in China do not have the courage and magnanimity to free themselves from this chapter in their history with Japan, this Century will be still the American Century or it might be the African Century - an Asian Century will be elusive to us! )

Our challenges are overwhelming, daunting. But we
can overcome these challenges by pooling resources, solutions, in partnerships, without exclusions.

Asia must further develop partnerships with the US and the EU, technological powerhouses and large economic areas that have much still to contribute to global solutions.

Against the many negatives facts and complex challenges cited above, there are many good news, dramatic positive transformations. Hundreds of millions of people have been freed from poverty, in particular in China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, The Philippines, Thailand; others, the Republic of Korea, Japan and Singapore continue to outshine much of the world in science, technology and innovation.

As we enter the second decade of the 21st Century, Asian economies have become the powerhouse of global economy.

China, the Republic of Korea, India and Indonesia have been growing at annual rates of between 6 and 10 percent for sustained long periods.

The economies of China, Korea, Japan and India put together already account for over 14 trillion dollars of annual GDP.

Asia can and should lead on tackling the challenges we face in the 21st Century: we have resources to alleviate and finally eradicate poverty; we master sciences and technology; we possess know-how to lead the search for global answers to the challenges of climate change and the need for sustainable increase in food production.

Asia can and should lead on reversing environmental damage and ensuring sustainable development, while keeping up with the welfare of our peoples.

In our globalized world, Asia can lead only in partnership with other stakeholders, specially emerging countries. However, the challenges facing Asia as a whole are enormous and should not be underestimated.

Asia needs a roadmap of priorities and resource allocation to answer our challenges and it needs also leadership to establish and implement this roadmap, strengthening peaceful relations.

I believe that time has come for Asia to lead and guide the world while navigating the challenges of the 21st Century.

The XXIst Century will be Asia’s Century, Asia’s Age of Enlightenment, if a new Mahatma Ghandhi emerges, who inspires and leads all, the 4 billion people of this vast region that extends from the doors of Constantinople to Dili, a region of great civilizations, religions and cultures, of great challenges and great possibilities; we need a new Mahatma Gandhi to unite us, to inspire, to have the courage to overcome the shackles of the past, face the present and adopt a Roadmap to build a Future of Peace, Freedom and Prosperity.

Excerpts of Dr. Shashi Tharoor’s Presidential Address
I am confident that I speak for all of us in the audience when I say that we were inspired and provoked in equal measure hearing Dr. Ramos-Horta’s lecture today. His are no words of an armchair theorist. They derive their force and worth from his relentless efforts to restore democracy and peace in Timor-Leste. As you all are aware, Dr. José Ramos-Horta worked extensively to create a human rights network to voice the struggle and concerns of the Timorese on a global platform. He was in exile for a greater part of three turbulent decades before Timor-Leste gained independence from military rule. He used this time to advance dialogues and deliberations, and mobilise efforts to restore peace in his home country. As a former official of the United Nations (UN), I distinctly remember the efforts of Dr. Ramos-Horta in garnering support for his nation when he became the youngest person to address the UN and his own compelling advocacy which eventually culminated in the UN resolution that led to the independence of Timor-Leste. He was a crucial global face of, and voice for, the struggle of the Timorese people. Dr. Ramos-Horta’s lifelong efforts were duly acknowledged by the world when he
was conferred the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 along with his fellow Timorese Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo “for their work towards a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor.”

Dr. Ramos-Horta’s efforts have also shown the world that while nation building is a much more important and arduous task than the task of the restoration of peace in a strife torn region, it is eminently doable with the right kind of leadership. As Timor-Leste gained independence, though at a terrible cost of innumerable lives, the world looked on with hope and goodwill. We are aware that he acted as one of the chief architects of the new country’s Government in his position as a Senior Minister. After a brief spell of peace, Timor-Leste was once again engulfed with violence in 2006. It was then that he assumed the responsibilities of Prime Minister and later those of President to lead his country towards a peaceful and prosperous future. During his tenure as a President, the Government’s motto “Goodbye Conflict, Welcome Development” brought in an era of peace, reconciliation and economic growth. Timor-Leste, under the leadership of Dr. Ramos-Horta, exemplified a model for building democracy in the twenty first century. After the end of his tenure in 2012, Timor’s loss was the world’s gain as he returned to the international arena when he accepted an appointment from the UN Secretary General as a Special Representative of the Secretary General to the African nation of Guinea Bissau, where I hope he is thriving on cashews grown there and processed here! (It’s called value-added, José — just like you: grown in Timor-Leste and processed on the global stage!)

Dr. Dr. Ramos-Horta’s lecture today gave us an insight into the everevolving complexities in Asia and what the world and Asia can learn from each other. The trajectory of Timor-Leste exemplifies the journey of many Asian nations. In the 20th century, the majority of Asian nations sought emancipation from foreign colonial rule or homegrown brutal autocracies. A few of the countries, including India and Timor-Leste, turned into democracies while many others chose to follow a very different path. However, all these nations were bounded by common factors of a fragile economy, abysmal demographic indicators, daunting gender disparity, and precarious foreign relations. However, many Asian nations have toiled hard to convert these problems into potential opportunities.

Dr. Ramos-Horta has championed the cause of unity in Asia (advocating setting up an Asian Fund for Sustainable Development and a 30-year Asian Road Map for Human Development) to further increase the cooperation between the Asian nations and between Asia and other regions of the world. He is one of the pioneering advocates who focused on realigning the strategies of the Asian nations to fully capitalise on the opportunities and successfully face the challenges of the 21st century. He is a founding member and the Vice-President of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council which focuses on resolving conflicts through silent diplomacy, which is also his signature style of working.

Today, I also take the opportunity to congratulate the Institute of Social Sciences under the able leadership of Prof. George Mathew for successfully hosting the 13th D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture. The Institute has established new grounds of initiating action through germane discourses on participatory democracy, local governance, human rights and social and economic issues. I applaud the efforts of the Institute to channelise policy advocacy in to fruitful action. Not surprisingly, the research, discussions and interventions have brought the Institute significant national and international recognition since its inception in 1985. The Institute’s approach of facilitating research with action is much desired in the public policy domain and is now being adopted by other think-tanks in India as well.

Asian nations have seen volatility at its best and worst. The first decade of the 21st century concluded with the rise of two contending and even contradictory forces in the world; on one hand were the forces of convergence, the increasing knitting-together of the world through globalisation, modern communications and trade, and on the other were the forces of disruption, of religious polarisation, of the so-called “clash of civilisations”, and of terrorism. Both these forces put together have resulted in the creation of new set of challenges and opportunities for Asia in the 21st century. As a continent that accounts for over half of the global population, the world is eagerly looking forward to Asia’s response to these new dynamics.

The challenges that sweep the continent include the rise of sophisticated terrorism and extremism and the use of these as instruments of state policy, and the daily terror of hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, disease and the effects of climate change. Dr. Ramos-Horta called Asia the most militarised and most nuclearised continent. And less obvious but equally potent are the widespread restrictions on regional trade and transit. These challenges reflect some of the passions of the 20th century and have also acquired some of the complexities of the 21st century.

Not everything is gloomy in the Asian continent. The region has also been blessed with an abundance of natural and human resources, a rich spiritual and civilisational heritage, a demography where youth are preponderant, (except, as Dr. Ramos-Horta pointed out in Japan and China), and a creative zeal manifests in all spheres of human endeavour. The region has also turned into an economic powerhouse of the world, led by China and India. We are gradually strengthening regional cooperation to promote cultural ties, tourism and solving demographic challenges.

Dr. José Ramos-Horta is right to warn that the goal of an “Asian Century” might prove elusive. But here are
encouraging signs. On the economic front, by some estimates the volume of global trade is expected to jump from USD 37 trillion in 2010 to USD 287 trillion by 2050, driven largely by growth in emerging markets, with China and India occupying the top two positions respectively as they are expected to constitute 27.2% of the world trade by then. Such strong economic growth has two interpretations for the Asian nations. First, in the post-recessionary world, the Asian giants will have to increasingly assume a leadership role in strengthening global financial structures. Second, in the light of the continuing deadlock in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)’s Doha round, Asian nations should come together to conclude more Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) as India has done with ASEAN. Bilateral trade relations have also touched a new high as India seeks to engage its neighbouring and distant trade partner nations with equal zest. For instance, India has clinched notable bilateral arrangements with individual countries in Asia: Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Sri Lanka and Thailand, comprehensive economic partnership agreement with Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia and Japan.

On the regional cooperation front, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) exemplifies the benefits of such collaboration. India accounts for 70% of the population of eight countries that make up this premier regional organisation. India also accounts for 80% of the SAARC region’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With increasing regional engagement on core areas of development, especially health, education, energy, agriculture and infrastructure, awareness about the effectiveness of SAARC in delivering fruits of development to South Asians at the grass roots has begun to increase. SAARC’s transformation from declarations to actions has also generated interest among non-SAARC states, with nine observers including, intriguingly China formally expressing their intent to engage with SAARC. The increasing economic interdependence among member states, heading in the future towards a SAARC Customs Union, a South Asian free trade area or even, one day, a single SAARC currency no longer appears to be a fantasy.

Asia stands at the cusp of immeasurable and innumerable challenges and unprecedented opportunities in the 21st century. Our experiences have taught us that we can overcome the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities if we successfully come together, working as a single unit. We need to look to the future, to an interrelated future where geography becomes an instrument of opportunity in our mutual growth story, where history binds rather than divides, where trade and cross-border links flourish and bring prosperity to all our peoples. This need not require a new Mahatma Gandhi, since one of those is not born every year! We can and must do it together.