

# **18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, at Lund, Sweden, 6–9 July 2004**

## ***Notes from Business meeting on 9 July 2004***

Venue: Nya Festsalen in the Academic Society Building, Sandgatan 2, Lund  
Around 50 people who had participated in the conference took part in the meeting.  
Chairman of the meeting: Staffan Lindberg, SASNET/Lund University

### **1. Reactions to the conference:**

Staffan Lindberg and Lars Eklund, representatives of the conference organisers, were confronted with a large number of positive reactions to the conference just completed. Several people praised the overall organisation, the quick responses always given to e-mails sent, and the successful accomplishment of the 44 panels. On a suggestion by Professor Erik Komarov the business meeting expressed a formal vote of thanks to the conference organisers.

One participant however raised the question of the early starting time for the morning panels, arguing that 9 A.M. should be a more appropriate time, and then the coffee breaks should be cut shorter than the one hour given in the schedule. Staffan Lindberg replied that every panel was free to decide upon its own coffee times, nobody was forced to spend a full hour in the coffee hall.

The question was in a way connected to a larger issue, namely regarding the maximum length of any panel. When the conference was announced the prospective panel convenors were told that they would be given one morning or one afternoon session. Soon however requests came from several panels that they needed more time, and in most cases the organisers let them have an extra session.

Now at the meeting critical voices were heard that it is unjust to give some panels extra time whereas others have had to cope with the limited time given to them initially. Lars Eklund explained the organisers' dilemma, that with a conference consisting of so many panels, each one of them independently handled by their respective convenors, this anarchic situation is certain to appear.

A discussion followed how to deal with this problem in the conferences to follow. It was agreed upon that the normal time to give a panel should be two half-days, and that those suggesting new panels should state the time that would be desirable for their particular panel.

One participant asked why the organisers did not print papers to be distributed at the panels, but instead each paper giver was requested to bring 15 copies of his/her paper to the conference. Staffan Lindberg answered that since the conference was web based it was easy for participants to get hold of panel abstracts and papers beforehand.

Laxman Satya similarly asked whether the organisers plan to publish the conference and panel proceedings in print. Staffan informed that no such plans are made, but it is up to every single panel to decide about its material and some panels are actually planning for such publishing.

In any case the conference web site stays on the net after the conference, and it is even expanded by publishing more and more of the papers presented, as pdf-files. The meeting was positive towards this and a discussion followed how long the material should be there. Roger Jeffrey suggested that the web site should remain on the net till the end of the year.

Rita Afsar felt sorry that the conference lacked representation from some of the smaller countries of South Asia. Roger Jeffrey on the other hand commended the Lund conference for its very varied mix of participants, including more researchers from South Asia than at any ECMSAS conference before.

The same thing applied, Jeffrey said, to PhD students who were very well represented at the conference. On the other hand he pointed out that many established senior researchers from Europe unfortunately were missing, and that is a thing to regret because a balance is needed between young PhD students and senior researchers. The next conference should be aware of this.

## **2. Venue for next conference**

Unlike all previous conferences this time there were no candidates suggested beforehand regarding the important issue of who should arrange the 19<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies. Instead the floor was open for people to come with suggestions, some of which were rejected right away by representatives of the concerned institutions, including Leiden, Oslo and Brussels.

As no solution could be found a decision was made that the EASAS board should continue to search for a suitable organiser of the conference 2006. A decision should be made before 1 October 2004.

Possible venues could be

- Leiden together with other institutions in the Netherlands, including the Kern Institute
- Paris (suggestion by Dietmar Rothermund)
- An East European university (suggestion by Bo Lindblad, adding that it would make it possible to get EU funding)
- Italy
- Oxford

Staffan Lindberg promised the organisers of the coming conference all possible support from the previous ones in organisational matters.

Many of the participants to the meeting had come specifically because they wanted to hand over suggestions for panels to be organised at the 2006 conference, but as no organiser could be decided upon the suggestions were kept with Staffan Lindberg.

A discussion of general interest followed on whether the coming conference should focus on a specific theme or continue to offer the varied smorgasbord of disparate panels, as has been the case so far. The Lund conference had tried to mix the two models by having a joint panel on Poverty and human development in South Asia besides the 44 specialised panels.

Bo Lindblad suggested that the theme for the conference could be e g poverty, or AIDS. By doing so funding would be an easy thing, something other speakers agreed to.

Dietmar Rothermund suggested that the general plenary session should be expanded and be focused on a specific burning issue, but on the other hand the conference should stick to its plurality that is essential.

S T Hettige suggested that the theme should be broad enough to include several fields. Health is such an issue.

Many people came with ideas on topics important enough to make a conference theme, e g • Education; • Democracy; and • Environment.

Roger Jeffrey commented on the discussion that there is a dilemma involved. The organisational model EASAS uses for its conferences gives the local organisers complete independence to plan for the content of their respective conference. No organiser is bound to stick to decisions made at an EASAS business meeting, and that is certainly the case here. He also argued that we should not give up the conference principles on plurality only because we should get funding more easily.

Staffan Lindberg and Dietmar Rothermund finally recommended that conference themes could be suggested to the organisers in the same way that prospective convenors suggest panels. These suggestions should be published on the Internet.

Notes by:

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