

SAARC: The Regional Integration in South Asia

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INTRODUCTION

The first concept of regional cooperation in South Asia was introduced in November 1980 by the former president of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman.¹ Having met for the first time in Colombo, Sri-Lanka in April 1981 with the seven countries foreign secretaries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri-Lanka, all felt affect regional cooperation in the sub-continent. Subsequently, after few months there was a meeting by all seven countries committee to look for sinews of regional cooperation.² In 1983, in New Delhi the seven countries foreign ministers met for their first time and they agreed to take up the Declaration on (SAARC).³ This was followed up by the proposal of five areas of cooperation, namely, agriculture; rural development; telecommunications; meteorology; and health and population activities. But after earmarking these five areas, the member countries felt the need to include some more avenues of cooperation, such as, such as transport; postal services; scientific and technological cooperation; and sports, arts, and culture. In April, 2007, Afghanistan joined as new member of SAARC. On the other hand, China and Japan were granted observer status by SAARC.⁴

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) looks for to develop the welfare of the peoples in South Asia. Making a good relation of collective self-reliance, rich effective

assistance reciprocal aid in various fields, and get together with international and regional organizations.

The Goals of SAARC

The primary goal of SAARC is to reciprocate the system of economic and social development among the nation states by the combined activity through the proposed areas of cooperation.⁵

In order to have a better connectivity within the member's states of the SAARC has several several goals, principles and common provisions in the SAARC charter progress the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region as well. Apart from that it attempts to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia which is also considered as goals of SAARC. Eventually to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems and revamp to the same would be given priority together.

Principle Cooperation of SAARC

As the regional integration in South Asia, SAARC has principles areas among all the members' countries to work together.⁶ The principles areas of SAARC are as follows:

Agriculture, 2. Rural Development, 3. Health and Family Planning, 4. Woman's Development, 5. Weather conditions, 6. Forestry, 7. Science and Technology, 8. Human resources development, 9. Transportation and traffic, 10. Tourism, 11. Post and telegraph, 12. Save the Children's Rights, 13. Prevent

¹ <https://ipis.ir/en/subjectview/634231/SAARC-35-Years-after-Inception> (Last Accessed on 17 June 2022)

² <https://ipis.ir/en/subjectview/634231/SAARC-35-Years-after-Inception> (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

³ <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/south-asian-association-regional-cooperation-saarc/> (Last Accessed on 19 June 2022)

⁴ https://training.itcilo.org/actrav_cdrom1/english/global/blokit/saarc.htm (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

⁵ <http://saarc-sec.org/SAARC-Charter/5/> (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

⁶ <https://www.saarc-sec.org/index.php/areas-of-cooperation/education-security-culture/38-areas-of-cooperation> (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

the trafficking and use of drugs, 14. Education, Sports and Culture.

Implementations

Former President of Bangladesh Ziaur Rahman had envisioned to build a regional organization in South Asia which would include components of reciprocal economic benefit, political understanding. Security issue in South Asian countries was also to be achieved through regionalism. At the time of establishment of SAARC, it brought enormous hope and possibilities to meet all sorts of demands which were agreed on SAARC charter, subsequently, however, it became both a norm and a practice among the South Asian political leaders to meet according to the official schedule and continue ceremonious talk to address their mutual problems. In the past history of South Asia there is no attempt towards integration among the nation states, since their independence. Unofficial discussions among countries political leaders at SAARC meeting let to rapprochement on many issues. Conducting several noticeable solutions in South Asia. An analysis has been made by Obino, F. (2009), saying that in November 1986 at the second SAARC summit at Bangalore there was an unofficial discussion between Indian and Pakistani PM to reduce the tension between two countries about the issues of Indo-Pak border.

SAARC has already passed a third decades. It is not very long, but enough for a regional organization maturity, however, from this perspective SAARC is fairly successful. The organization seems to have shown enough capacity to survive. Especially, for the expansion of regional cooperation in South Asia, it has established as a platform. For cooperation on non-political issues in the region this Platform are working in different fields. There was an institutional framework of SAARC developed to cooperate regional cooperation which significant progress for the member countries. SAARC has given the opportunity starting from the political leaders to ordinary people of the region so that everyone has a chance to come close to each other.⁷ As a result of which there is a positive environment has been created in where so a lot of misunderstanding is being mitigated.

The Achievements of SAARC

According to Ma, J. (2012), “in the past 26 years, owing to joint efforts of member countries, SAARC has made some progress, and a commendable achievement in reducing widespread poverty,

⁷https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8a368f41-f5d0-6ffe-1d25-9a4a1a0a35a3&groupId=252038 (Last Accessed on 19 June 2022)

strengthening energy cooperation, food security, promoting trade, improving social welfare, providing educational opportunities, increasing personnel exchanges, and fighting against terrorism.” Apart from that SAARC has remarkable achievements in the sports and cultural fields which can pay a close contact or co-operation has been increased among SAARC countries.⁸ Moreover, the SAARC Agricultural Information Center is considered as a significant success of SAARC which has been established in order to eradicate poverty and will for safeguarding food security⁹ for South Asian region. Most significantly in the area of sports and cultural, among the SAARC countries, the South Asian Federation (SAF) games is a pivotal one which brings the positive thing of SAARC.¹⁰

Subsequently other achievements have also been made by the SAARC such as SAARC Tuberculosis Centre, SAARC Documentation Centre, and SAARC Meta Research Centre through which the particular goals will be reached to in the South Asian region.¹¹ However, in the fourteenth SAARC Summit, there was a proposal has been approached to introduce a SAARC passport¹² by which the free movement among the SAARC countries will increase. Finally, in order to meet up the food security during the emergency food crisis an attempt would be made to provide food package to the most impoverished people in the SAARC region by establishing the SAARC Food Bank. The above mention things are considered as the achievements of the SAARC during last years of its establishment.

The Challenges of SAARC

On 7 December 1985, the South Asian political leaders came together to deal with the problems of the country's economic growth and prosperity and to accelerate the process of regional integration. Despite located in very close proximity to each other and among the seven countries but as the European Union or ASEAN, the rate of internal-trade did not increase between them.¹³ Foreign investment and the creation

⁸⁸<https://www.saarc-sec.org/index.php/areas-of-cooperation/education-security-culture>

⁹<https://www.sac.org.bd/> (Last Accessed on 17 June 2022)

¹⁰<http://generalnote.com/General-Knowledge/Sports/SAF-Games.php> (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

¹¹<https://www.saarctb.org/> (Last Accessed on 19 June 2022)

¹²<https://books.google.co.kr/books> (Last Accessed on 18 June 2022)

¹³https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=ASEAN-EU-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics (Last Accessed on 19 June 2022)

of new markets in member states are the prerequisites for economic progress in South Asia. This is to fulfil the conditions this regional organization seems to have a very limited role. India's supremacy and its impending hegemony that is inevitably felt by the other member countries, is responsible for this trend. However, according to Bishwakarma, J. K., & Hu, Z. (2022), there are problems in the balance of power among the SAARC member states. As a large and powerful country India does not seem to be a partner of other SAARC countries. Moreover, Majid, A. (2017) has observed that the lack of balance of power among the SAARC countries, and the Indo-Pakistan rivalry tends to outmanoeuvre regional unity and integration. As a result, it has become difficult to implement effective management of commercial contracts. For this reason, alliance member countries and the agreement came out single and bilateral initiatives respective commercial and economic interests to be seen. It can be seen from a three-decade review of the activities of SAARC, South Asia, as well as economic and social policies, not the architect, seminars, symposiums and conferences to encourage regional negotiations as a forum of SAARC activities than has been known.

As a regional organization, or coalition the effectiveness of this organization has faced some formidable challenges. In fact, it is not the optimal structure of the SAARC regional cooperation as envisioned by its precursors. The SAARC summit conference is the highest authority for policy makers. As partners of the summit conference, it has been observed that the member countries are reluctant to, partake in the proceedings and pledge substantive material emoluments for the organization.

On the other hand, there stands the example is of the India-Pakistan conflict. Before talking about trade and commerce with New Delhi, Pakistan gives emphasis on the conflicts of its bilateral in particular on the settlement of the Kashmir issues with India. But India does not want the inclusion of the 'K' question. Destabilization and interference in the domestic matter of another has been the hallmark of Indo-Pak relations. Both nuclear-armed countries are locked in a competitive dyad. To face Pakistan, India

has joined in a sub-regional group comprising with Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan in SAARC region.

Conclusion

Having scrutinized the above discussion regarding the SAARC it can be said that the importance and attraction of SAARC, the regional cooperation organization of these 8 countries, is gradually increasing towards the developed countries and regional forums of the world as well. However, the SAARC represents a quarter of the world's population, therefore, in this context, the SAARC has provided the wherewithal and hope for regional integration particularly in South Asian region. By applying cheap labour, cheap raw materials, fertile agricultural land and the environment, regional development and to cope with external economic aggression, it could be the beginning of a commitment which promises the integration of the South Asian region. Because of bad and hostile Indo-Pak relation, regional integration has become the hostage.

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