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South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

expected questions :-

- Idea of Formulation of SAARC :-

→ In late 1970s President of Bangladesh Zia-ur-Rehman conceived the idea that regional countries should make a trade block to promote trust, understanding and friendship.

→ For the first time Foreign Secretaries of South Asia met in Dhaka in 1980 and discussed the draft

→ The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional geopolitical organization of eight countries of South Asia - India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

→ Established - 1985

→ Observer states - Australia, China, EU, Iran, Japan, Myanmar, South Korea, and United States.

Objectives of SAARC :-

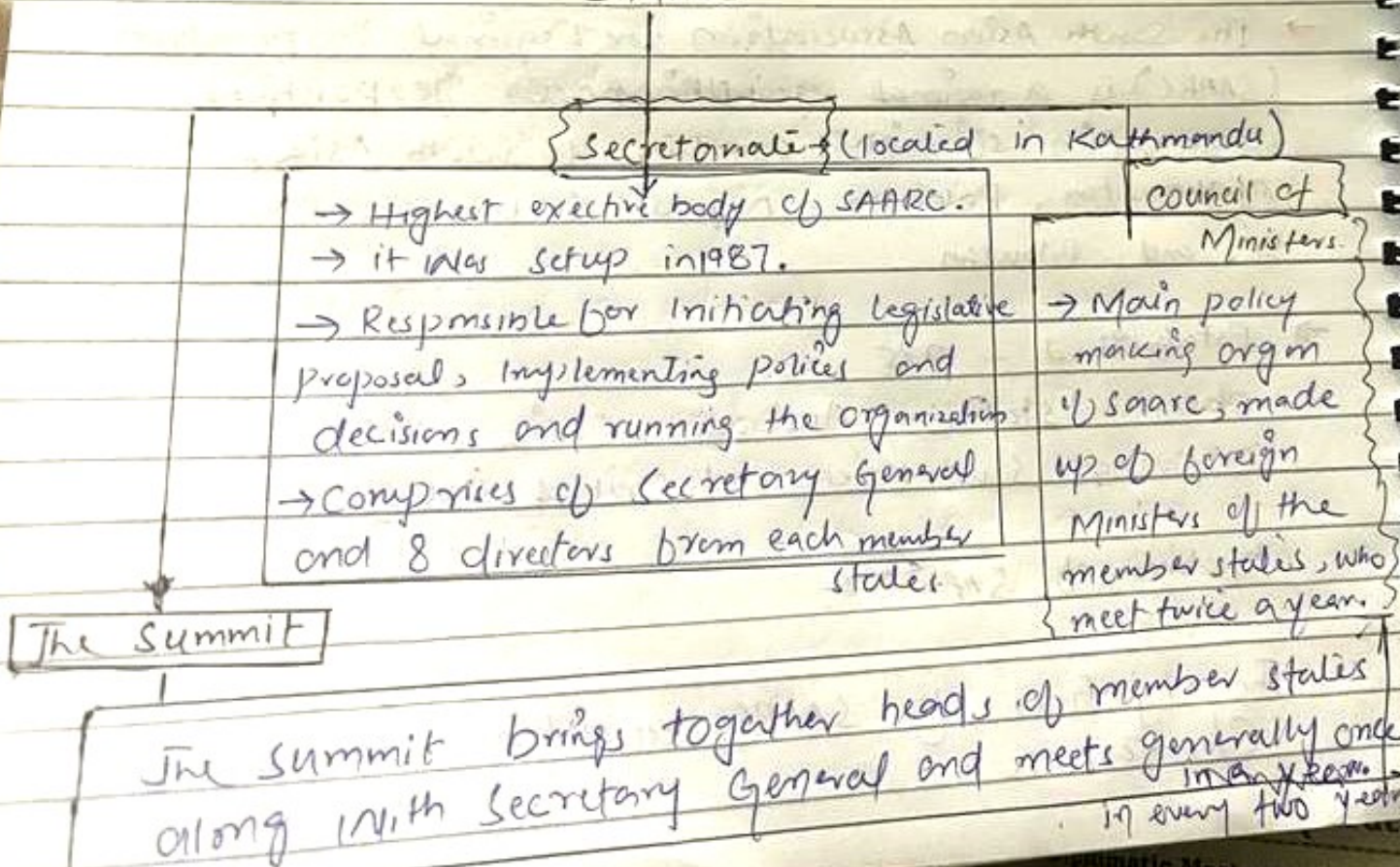
The objectives of SAARC as defined in the SAARC Charter are:

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- To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia.
- To contribute to develop mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problem.
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields.
- To strengthen cooperation among themselves in the international forums on matters of common interest.
- To cooperate with international and regional organization with similar aims and purpose.

Institutional frame work :-

SAARC



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The Council of Ministers is responsible for

- formulating policies
- Reviewing progress
- Deciding on new areas of cooperation; establishing additional mechanisms as deemed necessary.

Achievements of SAARC :-

Establishment of Sarre Terrorist Offences Desk :-

- one of the major achievement is the Sarre convention on the suppression of terrorism.
- The convention, signed during the third Sarre Summit in Kathmandu in 1987, was further consolidated with establishment of Sarre terrorist offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) in Colombo in 1985.

SAARC Food Bank :-

Taking some crucial steps towards poverty alleviation Sarre food security Reserves known as 'The SAARC Food Bank' was established.

Moreover, with an aim to promote a regional dimension of cooperation in social sector, Sarre countries adopted social charter during the twelfth Sarre Summit in Islamabad in 2004.

Facilitation of People to people contacts

A major development in this regard is Sarre visa exemption scheme that was launched during the 1992 Islamabad Summit.

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→ Currently the List comprises 24 categories of entitled person including dignitaries, Judges of higher courts, parliamentarians, senior officials, businessmen, journalists and sportsmen.

South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangements:

→ The most impressive achievement of SAARC, however, was the adoption of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA).

→ The decision to establish (SAPTA) was taken during sixth SAARC Summit in Colombo in 1991, but came into effect on 1st January 2006.

→ The members of SAARC signed a framework agreement on SAPTA to reduce customs duties of all traded goods to zero.

→ But still SAPTA has not been able to improve the trade relations of SAARC members significantly.

South Asian University :-

→ Another breakthrough development for which SAARC is the establishment of South Asian University (SAU). The idea was mooted by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

→ The University has a temporary campus in New Delhi and its first session commenced in 2010.

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Major Impediments in SAARC's failure:-

Complex India-Pakistan Relations:-

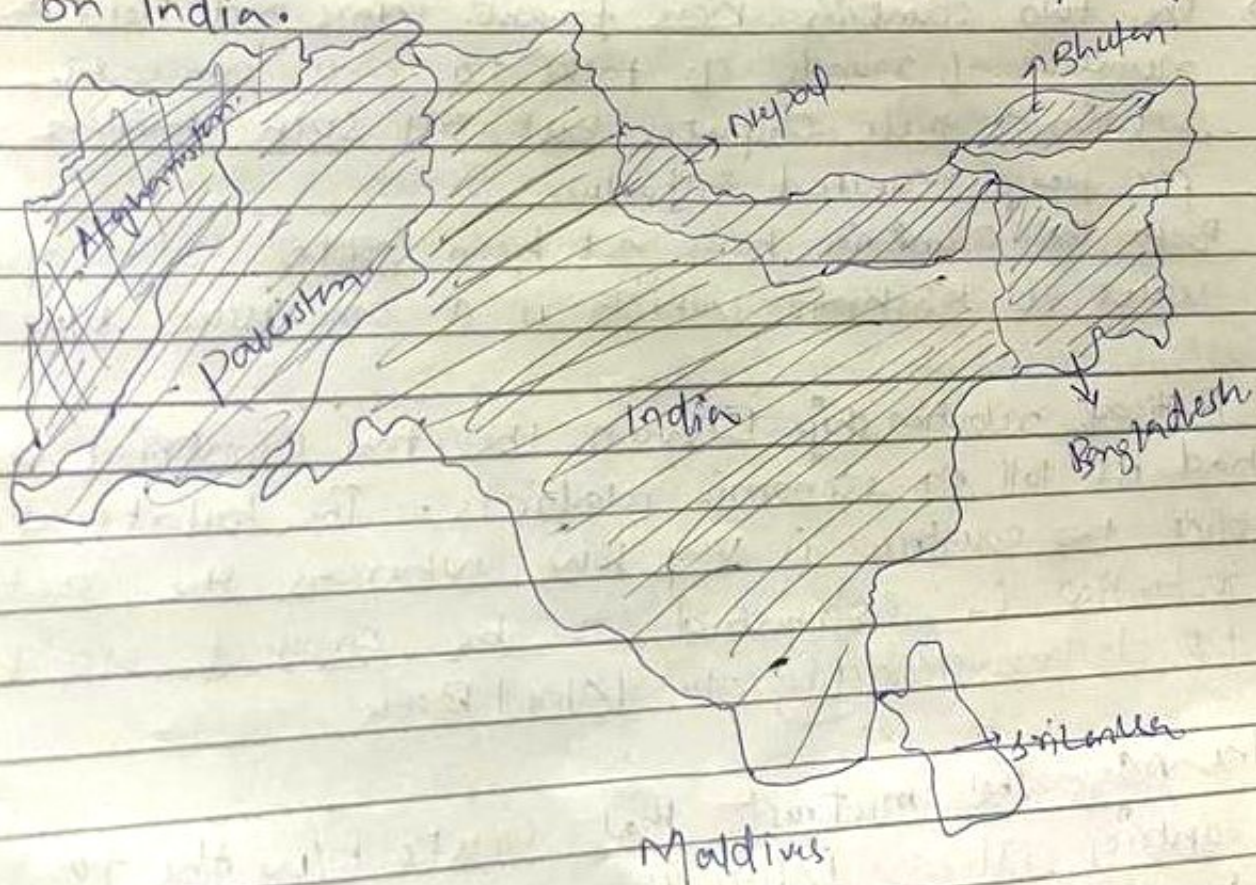
- The first and the foremost reason for SAARC's failure is the complex nature of relations b/w India and Pakistan.
- Both the countries, even after lapse of almost seven decades, have not been able to resolve their differences on various issues.
- The mistrust that exist b/w two countries has badly hampered the social development of two countries.
- Both the countries spend major portion of their national resources on defence instead of social welfare projects.
- The two countries have fought wars and held a number of rounds of talks to seek amicable solution to their disputes but all such failure efforts for peace resulted in failure.
- Both the countries have not been able to resolve issues of Kashmir which is a core issue b/w them.
- Political relationship between the two countries also had its toll on economic relations. The bilateral trade b/w two countries is very low, whereas the actual potential is estimated to be around 10 billion US dollars according to World Bank.
- ~~The~~ The mistrust that exists b/w the two countries along with the reservations expressed by certain industries, Pakistan has also, so far,

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restrained from granting most favoured Nation status to India. despite approval by its Cabinet
→ This mistrust had its fallout on in november 2011. SAARC and has rendered this regional Organisation Ineffective.

Geography :-

Geography is also one of the reasons for the disappointing performance of SAARC. India is the only country that shares boundaries both land and maritime, with all the South Asian countries. This has been disadvantageous since smaller countries become totally dependant on India.



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Preponderance of India :-

- Since India shares borders with almost all the South Asian countries, it has problems with other neighbours as well.
- Traditionally, the threat-perception of smaller states from India and fear of hegemony have dominated the bilateral relations with India. There is a general feeling that India perpetually interferes in their internal affairs.
- India has water sharing disputes with Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- There is also issue of open border b/w India and Nepal.
- The Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 which is seen to be heavily favour of India, has also upset the equation of the bilateral relations.
- The smaller countries are cautious of India's role
"General Pervez Musharraf, while referring to the unimpressive progress of the organizations in his speech at the opening session of 11th summit in Kathmandu in 2002 said "The way forward is to make SAARC genuinely potent and through it sink

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Differences, resolve disputes on the basis of sovereign equality.

SAARC Charter does not include bilateral and contentious issues to be discussed; interstate conflicts are never discussed in this forum.

Generally, regional countries are more inclined towards forging relations on bilateral basis.

Similarly, SAARC's inability to progress on a desired pace is partly because some countries, particularly India have global ambitions.

Indian government tends to look towards other regions particularly South East Asia. This approach has also left SAARC behind other regional organisations.

→ Lack of political will on the part of regional countries is also cited as one of the reasons for SAARC's failure.

No Room for Bilateral Discussion - Article 20 (2) not allowed bilateral issue discussion

→ In contrast, India is steadfastly against any change in the present arrangements of SAARC's charter.

→ It sees no reason for amending the charter

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and is convinced that more harm than good will result from any alteration of the provisions that forbids the inclusion of the contentious issues.

→ Bangladesh is also of the same view and is opposed to the amendment of the charter to allow discussion on bilateral matters.

→ However SAARC have mainly addressed economic or functional issues rather than any hard core political or territorial disputes, which shows the failure of SAARC.

Diversity of the Region :-

→ The attitude of SAARC states shows their nationalistic inclinations. Since the end of World Wars, even the most patriotic and nationalistic European states started discussing collaboration.

→ While regional organizations such as the EU and the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN) have integrated the states which include even the past enemies, but this blue print has not succeeded in South Asia.

It is primarily because SAARC nations, comprising Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists do not belong to the same civilization.

The Culture, religious and Ideological landscapes in South Asia are complex. There is no sense of belonging to one region among SAARC states and they are reluctant to let go of their individual identity.

States that are part of successful regional Organization, like EU and ASEAN, most often refers to themselves as "The 'ASEAN'" and "the Europeans".

However, SAARC nations do not own their Organization since it's highly unlikely that people of India and Pakistan will ever introduce themselves as SAARCIANS.

Hence, the lack of Common Identity leads to failure of SAARC.

- Lack of Connectivity :-

→ The lack of connectivity among the member states is another weakness of the SAARC. This ties with the lack of a proper Infrastructure of the member states. This Infrastructure deficit in turn leads to reduced connectivity among the SAARC nations. South Asia needs to invest up to 2.5 trillion dollars to bridge its Infrastructure gap over the next ten years, says a 2014 World Bank report.

Critical Analysis:- (11)

states can take notes that despite differences and clashes, trade b/w India - china and US - china at optimum level.

If these states can do trade, South Asian states can also normalize their trade relations which will ultimately reduce tension and lead to cooperation in other fields.

In addition, environmental crisis in South Asia is a major issue for countries as South Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change, 2022 floods in Pakistan is the evidence of climate change.

→ Both Pakistan and India are also facing smog, floods, glaciers melting, water crisis. Besides there is low literacy rate, child labours over-population, gender disparity, youth bulge in South Asia which demand the collaborative approach.

Cooperation in these field would surely open a window to resolve other bilateral issues. States must learn from the EU and ASEAN to form a single identity.

Any attempt to forge regional integration without cultivating this identity would be doomed to failure.

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→ Regionalism is impossible without the resolution of bilateral issues. So, it is the need of hour that India should stop thinking of itself as hegemony of South Asia's and SAARC nations must put an end to their mutual hostility, heal old wounds and work together for the better future.

Demographic structure of the region :-

- According to some analysts, the demographic distinctiveness of SAARC region is one of the major reasons for the ineffectiveness of SAARC.
- Some consider backwardness in education and economic system as major reasons for the failure of SAARC. While on other hand, some writers hold the size, influence and centralized position of India, in the region, responsible for the SAARC's jeopardized position and performance.

India is a major country in the region. It has a vast territory, house of great number of population and shares borders with almost all SAARC members. This distinctive feature has made South Asia, according to some writers, India Centric.

" In terms of territory, population, natural resources military might and economic

Strength, India is enjoying the most Predominant position in the region. 76% area of total region of South Asia belongs to India. Its population is 77% of the total population of the region of South Asia and its GDP is 71% of the total GDP of South Asia. It shares border with all members except Afghanistan which has joined recently. As a result of this dominant position, India can play a sort of Hegemonic role in the region. This in return creates a sense of Insecurity among the other member countries and thus puts a negative impact on the performance of SAARC.

This distinctive feature, of South Asia, has deep effects on the working and success chances of SAARC.

Way forward :-

Following steps are the cornerstones to revitalize regional cooperation under SAARC.

- ① Political will for regional connectivity will decrease the level of conflict, insecurity and under development in South Asia.
- ② Resumption of composite dialogues should be assured to normalize relation India and Pakistan as apparently cordial Indo-Pak ties

can reincarnate SAARC.

- ③ → China's full membership in SAARC could bring stability in SAARC working. It can definitely reduce Indian political and economic clout on it. Over and above that, China is already investing in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal in the shape of CEPC and BCIM corridors. With strengthened inter-regional connectivity among South Asian countries as well as their intra-regional association.
- ④ → SAARC does not have any robust conflict-resolution mechanism like that of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) where South Asian states could discuss and move forward from their political disputes. Therefore political will for the establishment of such mechanism to resolve such disputes is also need of the hour.
- ⑤ SAARC can also benefit from a framework with the objectives of secure regional environment by joint planning of civilian and military operations and comprehensive approach to crisis management like that of EU's crisis management and planning Directorate (CMPD).
- ⑥ SAARC needs to work on improving infrastructure and regional connectivity - collaboration in scientific research, University exchange programs,

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and tourism etc, will have a positive effect on relations among countries.

- ⑦ All countries should come together to sort out their differences, either multilaterally or bilaterally. It's not necessary to sort out differences but despite that, it is necessary to work with differences like that of India-China, Japan and China, Russia and Japan.
- ⑧ Further more SAARC must seek closer linkage with the other Asian organisations, namely, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to explore areas of common interest and build complementarities for mutual beneficial inter-regional cooperation, especially trade, energy, transport and communications.

India Role:-

→ India constitutes 70% of SAARC Area and Population. India has to redefine its role to being prepared to go the extra mile in meeting the aspirations of all other SAARC nations. India must invest in SAARC as Germany did in EU, through structured funding for infrastructure.

→ SAARC must then move beyond free trade area to enhance investment activity within its member states.