

Submitted by: Sobia

Submitted to: Sir Shehroze Abbas

Batch : 47

Assignment : Pakistan Affairs (Organizations)

Assignment No: 1

Topic: Recommendations to SAARC

Recommendations to Re-Build the broken bridges at SAARC:

The political will and pro-active approach of the South Asian leaders to resolve internal and bilateral issues through peaceful negotiations is the key and would provide the much desired springboard to implement peace, harmony and achieve economic integration through SAARC association.

First, SAARC leaders must seize the opportunity, put ego aside and work towards regionalism based on equal opportunities. To kick start, if India and Pakistan, by keeping the superpowers at bay, must negotiate and resolve their age-old disputes bilaterally, thereby enhancing the chances of success. Given South Asian region current security dimension and economic inter-connectedness, cooperative security is the only window for India and Pakistan's political leadership to solve conventional military and nuclear confrontation in the region.

Second, Indian leaders need to project India as the flag bearer of soft power rather than hard power, thereby regaining trust of its neighbours by focussing on the mantra of 'Dependable India'. COVID-19 pandemic has provided India the desired platform, wherein, India's pro-active approach spearheaded by PM Narendra Modi, to bring all the

SAARC nations on a common video platform has provided a glimmer of hope for the revival of SAARC. Though public health is not an asset of SAARC nations but the thought and initiative itself is commendable. Even when the global crisis looms large, India has projected itself as a leader and depicted that SAARC spirit is alive to rejuvenate regional cooperation.

Third, conduct of SAARC meeting, physical or virtual is quintessential. Pakistan must take a bold initiative to call for the SAARC meeting and India, regardless of cold Indo-Pak relations, must act like a Big Brother, accept the personal and spearhead the SAARC Summit to re-engage with its neighbours using its soft power. If required, a kick start could be given by conducting a virtual meeting, much required to break the ice.

Fourth, economic integration is the key to all the problems. South Asian Region must identify economic and social element as priority rather than being marred by the security element. SAARC Nations must remain connected either economically, geographically or culturally. India's outreach during COVID-19 pandemic to offer vaccines to SAARC Nations including Pakistan and recent humanitarian assistance extended to Sri Lanka may act as future enablers for revival of economic and market related activities in SAARC.

India's initiative and plans must be propagated to generate regional economic activity to make commodities available at competitive and cheaper rates and thereby enhance inter-dependence, paving a path for 'Atmanirbhar SAARC'.

Fifth, redefining the SAARC charter, which includes removal of excessive safeguards, inclusion of 'SAARC Minus' concept and focus on Trade Facilitation, Energy Trade Connectivity, HADR Coordination, Visa Regimes and Cultural Exchanges.

Sixth, SAARC must adopt a comprehensive and region-specific approach, wherein all acts of terrorism must be condemned and responded by a common thread.

Seventh, South Asian Nations, still undeveloped and marred by over-population need to work out alternatives and adopt cooperative transboundary water management measures to counter the perceived challenges, like the one evolved by India with Bangladesh.

Eighth, the sudden US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 has left a vacuum. Rather than various terrorist and extremist forces filling the vacuum, a joint UNPKF from the SAARC region under the UN aegis is an option to be considered.

Conclusion:

Nelson Mandela said "if you want to make peace with your adversary, you have to cooperate with your opponent, then he joins you as a partner."

SAARC has the potential to bring nations together. Overall, it needs better branding and visibility amongst South Asian population, wherein concerted focussed and holistic efforts must continue at all levels to revive SAARC.