

PAKISTAN & REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

SAARC

• INTRODUCTION: (Background)

SAARC came into being as an expression of South Asia's collective resolve to develop a coherent regional cooperative framework in an increasingly inter-dependent world and to keep a pace with changing times for socio-economic well being of its people. It was meant to bring a change in terms of poverty eradication and sustainable development to a region which is home to 1/5th of humanity. Even after ~~quarter~~ History & Member-

The ~~idea~~ South Asian Association for Regional Organization (SAARC) is an international organization for south Asia countries. It comprises of 8 countries - Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal & Afghanistan. The idea of South (SAARC) was initiated by Bangladesh whose president Zia-ur Rehman floated the idea of forming SAARC. Zia-ur Rehman conceived idea in 1980. He believed that the nations of South Asia had common values which rooted in their social ethnic

cultural and historical traditions.

After the consultation, the foreign secretaries of the seven founding member nations met for 1st time in Colombo in April 1981. The meeting identified 5 broad areas for regional co-operation.

The Foreign Ministers of South Asia at their 1st Meeting at New Delhi in August 1981 adopted declaration of South Asia (SAARC) and formally launched the integrated Programme of Action in 5 areas.

- 1) Agriculture
- 2) Rural Development
- 3) Meteorology
- 4) Telecommunication
- 5) Health & Population.

The Foreign ministers decided to have SAARC at Summit meetings of Heads of State Government at the 1st SAARC Summit held in Dhaka 7-8 December 1985, adopted the charter formally establishing the SAARC.

SAARC SECRETARIAT:

The SAARC Secretariat and member-states observe December 8 as the SAARC Charter Day.

The Secretariat of SAARC is located in Kathmandu. It is headed by a secretary general (appointed in Alphabetical Rotation) and serves

the channel of communication b/w SAARC and other international organization.

SAARC secretariat is supported by Regional Centres established in member countries to promote regional cooperation. These centres managed by Governing Boards comprising representatives from member states, SAARC secretary-general and Ministries of Foreign (External) Affairs of host countries.

PRINCIPLES: (ARTICLE - 11)

The principles of SAARC are as follows:

a) Cooperation within the framework of Association shall be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and mutual benefit.

b) Such cooperation shall not be a substitute for bilateral and Multilateral cooperation but shall complement them.

Such cooperation shall not be inconsistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations.

cultural and historic traditions.

After consultations, the Foreign

OBJECTIVES: (Article - 1)

The objectives and the aims of the Association as defined in the Charter are:

- * To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life.
- * To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potential.
- * To promote and strengthen selective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia.
- * To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems.
- * To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields.
- * To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries.
- * To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purpose.
- * To maintain peace in the region.

MEETINGS OF HEADS OF STATE (Article - III)

Heads of state of Government shall meet once in a year / more often as and when considered necessary for member states.

COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES: (Article - IV)

Council of Ministries consisting of Foreign Ministers of the member states shall be established with following functions:

- a) Formulation of policies of ASSOCIATION.
 - b) Review of the progress of cooperation under ASSOCIATION.
 - c) Decision on new areas of cooperation.
 - d) Establishment of additional mechanism under association as deemed necessary.
 - e) Decision on other matters of general interest to ASSOCIATION.
- ⇒ The Council of ministers shall meet twice a year. Extraordinary session of the council of may be held by agreement among the member states.

STANDING COMMITTEE (Article - V)

is comprised of Foreign Secretaries shall have following

- functions:
- a) Overall monitoring and coordination of programme of operations
 - b) Approval of projects and programmes and modalities of their financing.

- c) Determination of intersectoral priorities.
 - d) Mobilisation of regional and external resources.
 - e) Identification of new areas of cooperation based on appropriate studies.
- 2) The standing committee shall meet as often as deemed necessary.
 - 3) The standing committee shall submit periodic report to council of Ministers and make reference to it as and when necessary for decision on policy matters.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEES: (ARTICLE VI)

- 1) Technical committees comprising representatives of Member states shall be responsible for the implementation, the coordination and monitoring of programmes in the respective areas of cooperation.
- 2) They shall have following terms of reference:
 - a) Formulation of programmes and preparation of projects.
 - b) Determination of financial implication of sectoral programmes.
 - c) Formulation of recommendations regarding appointment of cost.
 - d) Implementation and coordination of sectoral programmes.

3) Technical Committee shall submit ^{periodic} report to the Standing Committee.

4) Chairmanship of Technical committees shall normally rotate among members in alphabetical order every 2 years.

ACTION COMMITTEES: (ARTICLE VII)

3) The Standing committee may set up Action Committees comprising members states concerned with implementations of projects involving more than 2 but not all member states.

SECRETARIAT: (ARTICLE VIII)

There shall be secretariat of ASSOCIATION

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: (ARTICLE IX)

1) The contribution of each member state towards financing of the activities of the ASSOCIATION shall be voluntary.

2) Each Technical Committee shall make recommendation for the apportionment of costs of implementing the programme proposed by it.

3) In case of sufficient financial resource can not be mobilised within the region for funding activities of ASSOCIATION, external financing from appropriate source may be mobilised with approval of or by the standing committee.

GENERAL PROVISIONS (ARTICLE X)

- ⇒ Decision at all level shall be taken on the basis of unanimity.
- ⇒ Bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberation.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

The SAARC has identified 16 areas of cooperation which are as follows:

- a) Agriculture and rural development
- b) Biotechnology
- c) Culture
- d) Economic & trade matters
- e) Energy
- f) Environment
- g) Finance
- h) Funding mechanism
- i) Information and media
- j) Communication and media
- k) People to people contact
- l) Poverty Alleviation
- m) Science and Technology
- n) Security Aspects
- o) Social development
- p) Tourism.

AREAS OF CONFLICT AND ISSUES

South Asia continues to be plagued with ongoing disputes among nations and the countries of the SAARC are grappling with conflicts within their own national territorial boundaries.

- 1) Kashmir issue
- 2) Border disputes
- 3) Trade disputes in interest affairs
- 4) Terrorism and interference
- 5) Public opinion of mutual hatred and distrust.

Tiffs between India and Pakistan have dominated SAARC since its formation in 1985, and played the central role of failing to boost economic growth and collective self-reliance. Both countries have undermined the bloc to the extent that members do more trade through bilateral partnership than as a region. As a result growth gaps in South Asia have been widening sharply.

The common vision upholding the ideals of peace, stability, good-neighbourly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation in South Asia remains a distant dream. SAARC has neither improved the quality of life in our region nor accelerated the common growth, social progress and cultural development of its member states.

The following are key issues faced by SAARC.

- 1) ENERGY: SAARC region is facing energy problems due to lack of interest of political parties to maintain and properly utilize energy centre of SAARC. SAARC members are still producing energy through expensive and non-renewable resources.
- 2) Climate Change: In last year 2022 SAARC major countries Pakistan and India both were worstly affected by repercussions of climate change. In Pakistan.

almost 46% of crop was destroyed due to heavy horizontal rain and around 1500 km road network was destroyed.

3) Poverty: South Asia is today one of the world's poorest region of the world with a vast majority of its people still living in grinding poverty and sub-human conditions. 5 out of 8 SAARC member states (Afghanistan, ~~Bangladesh~~, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal belong to the United Nations Category of least Developed Countries (LDCs). With one or two exceptions, SAARC countries also lag behind in developing genuine democracy, rule of law and good governance.

With its unbroken legacy of poverty, hunger disease, illiteracy, and conflict, SAARC as a regional cooperation organization has not gone beyond declaratory pronouncement with no tangible achievements to its credit. SAARC's regional approach not only lacks operational 'adequacies' but is also captive to the peculiar geopolitical environment in which India's hegemonic role and its outstanding problems with its neighbours continue to hamper meaningful progress towards regional integration.

India's geographic centrality in the region has given rise to host of border conflicts and water disputes in the region all of which involve India, be it India-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh or others. Absence of an intra-regional dispute settlements mechanism has severely limited SAARC's capacity to contribute to regional peace, security and development without which there can be no meaningful security progress in socioeconomic and cultural cooperation in the region.

South Asia must free itself of tensions, conflicts and escalating military budgets. Along with its limitation, SAARC has been confronted with several challenges as well. The nature and relationship b/w and among SAARC countries creation of SAARC in itself was challenge.

SAARC CHALLENGES

1) **ILLITERACY**: Despite concerted efforts, South Asia remains a backward region where the largest number of illiterates live. ~~There~~ Some member countries like Maldives and Sri Lanka has highest literacy rate 99% & 98% respectively but in Afghanistan rate is 28%. SAARC countries must

2) **Population**: The region represents almost 21% of world population, but share \$ 2109 in world's gross national income. It has not fully geared up to provide material benefits to more than 1.5 billion inhabitants. Most of the quality of life indicators are weak.

The number of poor is more than **5500 million**, more than one third of the region's total population.
→ SAARC is amongst the regions having a low profile quality of life.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS-

The average per capita income at US\$ **2117** is only **17%** of the world's average of US\$ **12,167**.

With vast resources, the SAARC region is confronted with the formidable challenges posed by poverty, unemployment, low levels of production and pressure of population.

4) TRADE: In spite of SAARC's emphasis on trade as one of the major priority areas of economic cooperation total external trade of the region amounts to a mere

approximately **2.12%** (2020) intra regional exchange represents only **75%** regional Trade - **6%** export

5% imports. Tariffs are among the highest in the world.

The region receives only a nominal amount of private capital inflows with regional share in FDI limited to less than **2%** of the world FDI flows.

i) KASHMIR ISSUE: It is one of the major challenge for SAARC to work as regional organization in the South Asia. Due to Kashmir issues recent

last year summits has not been conducted due to India-Pakistan tension because of ^{revokes} ~~imposed~~ ^{on 5th August 2019} ~~locks~~ ^{provokes} Article 370 of Indian's constitution that granted special rights to Muslim-majority states.

- Afghanistan remain battle ground for big empires which is major challenge for SAARC.
→ Biggest challenge for SAARC.

7) **TERRORISM**: As recent and abrupt shifts of NATO and US forces from Afghanistan can create enhance the terrorism attacks in the south Asian regions. Terrorism has base in the south Asian region specially in Afghanistan. SAARC has major challenge of terrorism in its members state due to involvement of non-state actors.

SAARC: FUTURE

COLLABORATE & INTEGRATE

OR

CONFRONT & DISINTEGRATE.

SAARC members states must collaborate and integrate with each others avoiding bilateral relations b/w each other. The objectives of SAARC as set forth in its Charter represent our "common vision" which should continue to guide regional cooperations in a holistic manner while striking balance b/w ambition, the region's peculiar environment.

and operational capacity. The foremost priority should be to ensure we have our regional perspective clearly before us. SAARC goals and priorities pragmatically defined and

SAARC-FREE TRADE AREA:

In 1975, SAARC initiated first step towards a South Asian Free Trade Area. It was signed by on 6th January 2004 during 12th SAARC summit held in Islamabad, Pakistan.

SAPTA can become game changer for SAARC's revival and integration which can lead towards having largest common market through having major portion of population ^(1.8 billion) is the south Asian region.

SAARC region has future potential for interlinked market. Pakistan is a bridge for region to have free trade b/w south Asian countries.

ENERGY: SAARC member countries are mostly importers of energy. They are not producing their own energy. If countries start producing their own energy which will enhance their economic and trade growth in the region. All the member countries are growing economies.

Pakistan is to play major role in the development of SAARC due to its geostrategic location and Pak-India relations resolution is ~~major~~ essential for the revival and expansion of SAARC. Both countries have to focus on SAARC to make it successful ^{regional} organization like ASEAN.

Pakistan can play vital role to eradicate terrorism from Afghanistan and ^{can} provide them access to Indian to introduce their sdg in foreign markets.

REMEDIAL ROADMAP

I. CONCEPTUAL REORIENTATION:

Besides political commitment and deeper engagement on the part of its member states SAARC needs a new result-oriented conceptual framework and operational culture consistent with the regional ground realities.

II. ATTITUDINAL CHANGE:

No other region in the world is today in a greater need to redirect its energies and resources to eradicate poverty and to improve the quality of life of its people. SAARC must find ways to work together towards the agreed common vision. This would require an attitudinal change both at national level and regional levels. Do move from "declaratory stance" to an "implementation mode" equipped with necessary means and resources.

III. **ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:** Conflicts is the last thing the region needs. Given the unique political history of South Asia and the particular social and cultural proclivities of its inhabitants, this region needs stable peace, not confrontation. It needs a cooperative approach towards the resolution of contentious issues through dialogue, not perpetuation of hegemonic ambitions, which generate disputes.

For an enabling environment, South Asia must free itself of tensions, conflicts and confrontation and escalating military budgets. For peace and tranquillity in the region efforts will have to be made to promote mutual trust, confidence building and conflict resolution.

SAARC could be an appropriate forum to generate mutuality of interest and common benefit in regional approach

IV. **OPERATIONAL READJUSTMENT**

As matter of general principle, all regional programmes and activities should be based on a realistic evaluation of the socio-economic situation of the region supported by latest economic data and information. General attention and allocation of GDP ratio to education at national levels as a means of steering

the member states to development and modernity. Health, including basic health facilities, population welfare and community development must also remain priority areas.

→ To enhance intra-SAARC business and trade, adequate infrastructure is needed for transportation of goods. Regional banking facilities and mutual certification measures and standards might help expedite intra-regional business transaction.

Joint efforts to gain freer access to markets outside the SAARC region for raw materials and finished products of the Association's member-states.

V) Non-Governmental Role:

Increased engagement of non-governmental stakeholders, including NGOs, civil society and the private sector in realization of SAARC goals and objectives will not only help bridge the mental divide, created by governmental policies and propaganda, between the people of the region but will also give an added impetus to process of regional cooperation.

- Visa regime in South Asia must be more open.
- Promote people-to-people contacts, business and cultural exchanges and cooperative linkages among educational institutions in the region.

vi) FUNCTIONAL METHODOLOGY:

Decision in SAARC are contingent upon unanimity. Combined with existing political rivalries the rigid insistence on unanimity on all decisions makes negotiations an cumbersome exercise often leading to a barely palatable compromise. This aspect needs to be rationalized by restricting the principle of unanimity to vital issues, where as decision on other matters should be taken on the basis of simple majority of the total membership provided that the remaining members choose to abstain and/or are not against decision.

vii) STRUCTURAL REINFORCEMENT

SAARC's "structural reinforcement" needs coherent modalities and effective mechanism for follow-up and implementation. Some of the proposed measures are

a) Hierarchically, the highest authority must remain with the heads of state and government who should meet biennially or as and when necessary to provide political impetus to regional process.

b) SAARC's organizational structure should have fewer but more decisive organs.

- Council of Meeting should continue as at

present, meeting twice a year with the responsibility the formulation of Association policies, reviewing progress and deciding on new areas of cooperation.

CPR should have 3 functional Committees (Economic, Social, Cultural) at expert-working level to meet on regular basis at The Secretariat in Kathmandu.

VIII) INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION:

SAARC must seek close linkages with other Asian regional organizations, namely ECO, ASEAN and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), to explore areas of common interests and build complementarities for mutual beneficial inter-regional cooperation, especially trade energy and transport and communication.

- Efforts should be made to enhance collaboration with all relevant organizations of UN system including trade and finance institutions for capacity building of SAARC in its regional endeavors.

CONCLUSION:

South Asian Association Regional Cooperation is the regional organization of South Asia having 8 member and 9 observer states. SAARC member states bilateral relations are negatively affecting the

performance of SAARC. Pak-India rivalry, poverty, population, Terrorism and climate changes are major challenges for SAARC. Moreover India's hegemonic behaviour with other SAARC members states created tension in South Asia. ~~SAARC~~ ~~Now~~ ~~in~~ ~~not~~ ~~shall~~, SAARC needs revitalization and Expansion to become successful regional organization like ASEAN. The real challenge, therefore lies in moving from realm of ideas to implementable plans of ~~action~~ action. South Asia needs an exceptional impulse to keep pace with the changing times. This fresh regional impulse, must spring from within South Asia. Increased engagement of non-governmental stakeholders, including NGOs, civil society and private sector in realization of SAARC's goals will not only help bridge the mental divide, created by governmental policies and propaganda between peoples of the region but also give an added impetus to the process of regional cooperation.

- Must promote people-to-people contacts, business and cultural exchanges and cooperative linkages among educational institutions in the region.

ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN STRENGTHEN SAARC

Since independence of Pakistan, Pakistan has never favored isolation in international matters.

It has always been keen and eager to develop close and friendly relations with the neighbours.

Example: Gratia: Swap of retard of Pakistan in February 2019 and returned balls abhi Nandan to India.

→ Pakistan played a pivotal role in the formal launching of the SAARC at 1st summit at the Dhaka in 1985. After the formation of SAARC Pakistan has lived upto its commitments by taking part in all the activities of the SAARC.

→ Pakistan is an active member of SAARC which provide suitable frameworks to its member states to collectively stimulate cooperation and progress and to promote peace and stability in South Asia.

→ Pakistan has advanced its belief that a secure and peaceful environment in South Asia is crucial for the advancement of social welfare, economic development and prosperity in the field of collective interests.

→ Pakistan believes that the resolution of core issues among the member states would give a remarkable boost to the organization.

→ Complication between the nuclear armed India and Pakistan has caused apprehension and tension among the SAARC members.

→ SAARC could not develop into a powerful organization due to the belligerent positions of India in the region and Pakistan's apprehensive attitude. Pakistan is not able to accept Indian supremacy and confesses India is not ready to negotiate on equal terms with Pakistan.

→ Though such Indian efforts aimed at helping Pakistan, but they are damaging her own interest as such acts are against its economic advancement and poverty alleviation.

→ Pakistan has strengthened SAARC as follows:

- 1) Promote regional trade through BRI
- 2) Bilaterally / Involve UN to resolve Kashmir disputes
- 3) Arrange peace talks of Iran with USA

Focus more on the changing regional dynamics and the role of SCO.

4) Pakistan can play leading role in both initiating and welcoming visits and exchanges with personalities from various fields of life in the member countries of the SAARC.