

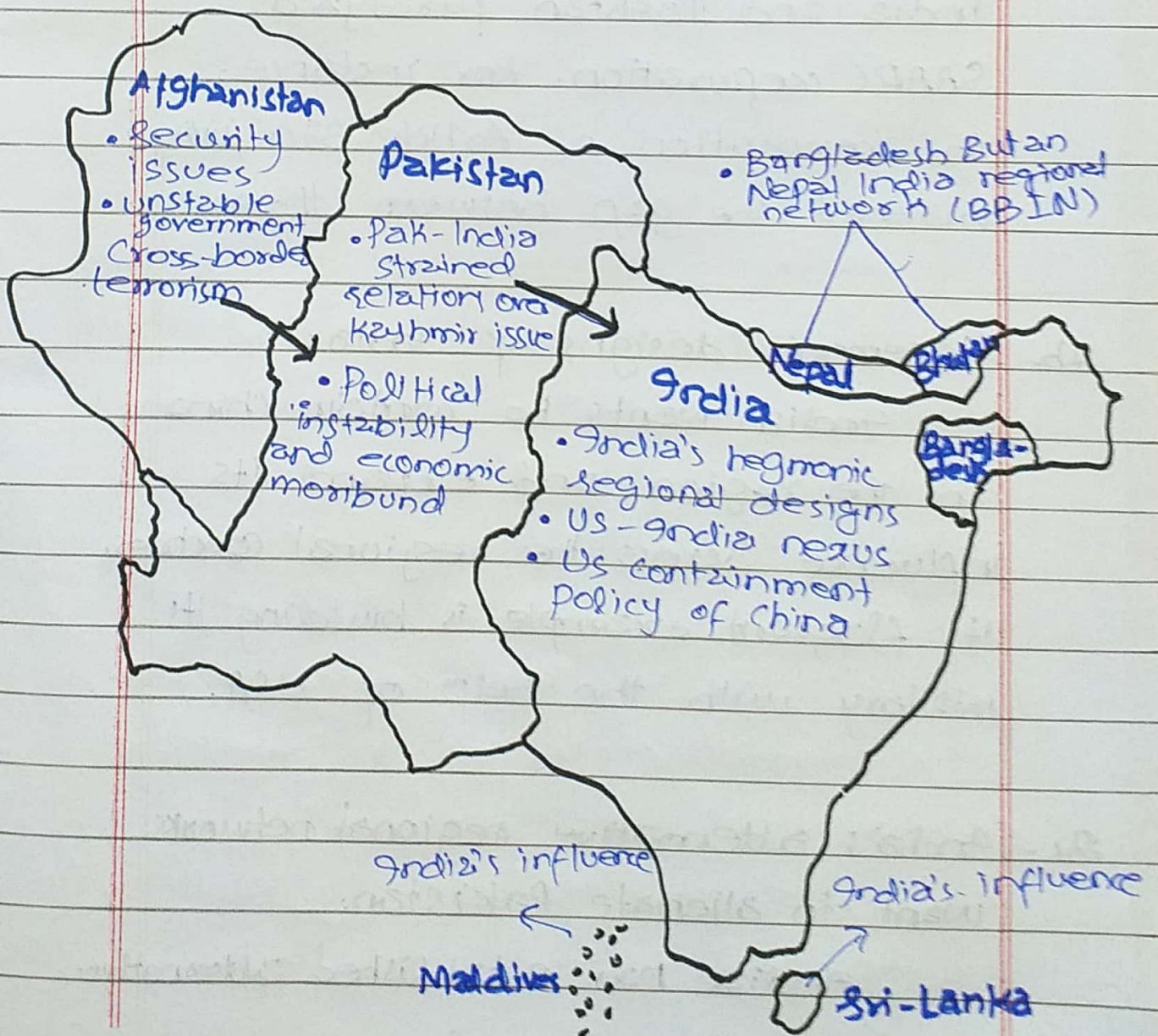
Q: Evaluate the current challenges and opportunities facing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Considering recent geopolitical developments and intra-regional dynamics, discuss the potential scenarios for the future of SAARC and its role in regional integration and cooperation. What reforms or strategies could be implemented to enhance SAARC's effectiveness and relevance in addressing South Asia's collective issues?

1- Introduction: Challenges And Opportunities Facing The SAARC:

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is established in December, 1985 with 8 member countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Maldives and Afghanistan. This regional organization faces several challenges in integration such as conflicting interests of its member states. However, mutual interests and shared goals of

climate, trade and security can unite these states. If a conflict resolution mechanism establishes, then these nations can collaborate to bring peace, stability and development in the region.

2- Challenges That Hinder Cooperation Among SAARC Nations:



Map showing conflicting interests of member states of SAARC

2a- Diverging interests of SAARC nations:

Pakistan and India frayed relation:

The largest nation among SAARC member states is India, which makes it dominant. This is the reason that conflicts between India and Pakistan paralyzed SAARC cooperation. For instance, the revocation of Article 370 further widened the gap between them.

2b- Hegemonic designs of India:

India wants to contain China in the region and expand its influence across the regional countries. Its flagrant example is building its military with the help of USA.

2c- India's alternative regional networks:

want to alienate Pakistan:

India has established alternative

regional networks to strengthen its regional influence such as Bhutan Bangladesh India Nepal (BBIN) network and The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

2d- Current geo-strategic and geo-political milieu: US and Western powers' influence:

US containment policy of China and its nexus with India has created volatile situation in the region, which makes it almost impossible for regional cooperation among SAARC states.

For example, US presence in Indo-Pacific region and South-China sea.

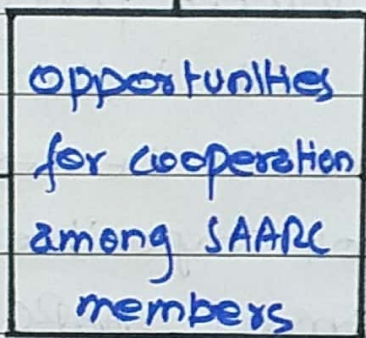
3- Opportunities For Cooperation Among SAARC Nations:

"SAARC has the potential to transform South-Asia into a region of peace, harmony and development. But this requires

all member nations to
act with commitment and sincerity”

- Maithripala Sirisena,
former President of Sri Lanka

(3a) Climate change and climate
diplomacy: Reparations demand
from developed countries:
Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Maldives
are particularly most vulnerable to
disastrous impacts of climate change.
Therefore through SAARC platform
they can collectively demand for
climate compensation:

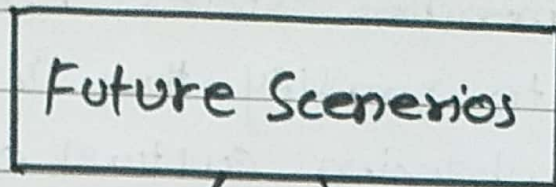


(3c) Tourism and
people-to-people
interactions:
By promoting
trade and cultural
exchanges, peace
and stability in
the region can be
promoted.

(3b) Cooperation
to resolve
security issues:
The resurgent terrorism
poses threat to all
states. It's an opportunity
to bring all states
together to resolve
this mutual threat.

(3d) Energy crisis and bilateral trade
integration to resolve energy-
related issues:
The Russia-Ukraine war and
conflicts in Middle East is a
grave threat to energy cuts.
Therefore, all states of SAARC
can explore other energy sources
such as CASA 1000 and TAPI
can be operationalized.

4- Potential Scenerios For The Future Of SAARC And Its Role In Regional Integration And Cooperation:



(4a) **Completely paralyzed due to expansionist policies of India**
 Until the conflicts among member countries of SAARC settled, they cannot achieve regional integration and cooperation. It is likely to be expected that India surpasses China's power in the region with the help of USA. It will adversely impact cooperation among SAARC nations.

(4b) **Convergence and Cooperation on mutual interests**
 The cooperation can be achieved by working on shared threats of climate change and terrorism. All SAARC states can negotiate to build strong economic and trade ties. It will ensure regional integration and cooperation.

4c- Promotion of cultural exchanges among SAARC nations can boost up regional integration:

All member states have potential to amplify their interests through enhancing cultural exchanges. Other organizations such as ASEAN, African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) are examples of building friendly ties with each other through cultural exchanges.

4d- Technological advancement as an opportunity to bring SAARC countries together for mutual development:

Most of the South Asian countries are far behind in technology. Therefore, through mutual collaboration, they can also forge strength of their people in learning new skills such as Information technology and software programming. India is already emerging in IT sector.

5- Strategies To Enhance SAARC's Capacity To Collaborate On Mutual Threats:

“SAARC should work more closely together to ensure sustainable development, eradicate poverty, and improve the quality of life of the people of this region.”

— Sheikh Hasina, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh

5a- Establish conflict resolution mechanisms:

It is imperative to establish an independent body that oversees conflicting issues. It helps in peacefully resolve issues through bilateral talks.

Case study of ASEAN's ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF): It promotes security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, ARF

employs preventive diplomacy to manage regional conflicts. SAARC can emulate it to establish such conflict resolution mechanism.

Sb- Need to prioritise economic integration over contentious issues: Functionalist approach:

All members of SAARC should strive to explore cooperation opportunities rather than focusing on conflicts. As China and India have clashes over border, they do trade of almost 100 billion dollars every year. Pakistan and India should also prioritize trade ties over conflictual interests.

Sc- All states need to focus on low politics to bring regional stability and peace:

The South Asian countries should not indulge in great power rivalry. Afghanistan presents example

of exploitation at the hands of western rivalry. They should learn lesson from this and focus on economic integration among themselves.

5d- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is stark example of regional cooperation:

ASEAN focuses on economic growth, social progress and cultural development among Southeast Asian nations. SAARC can emulate ASEAN's economic cooperation mechanisms.

6- Conclusion:

SAARC is South Asian States regional organization that faces myriad of challenges to bring unity in diversity. Nonetheless, with political will, conflict resolution mechanisms and shared goals, all states can cooperate with each other. It will help them to foster regional peace and stability.