

SAARC: A Developmental Study

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Abstract

The existence of the human being depends upon the cooperation in the socio-political and economic sectors. The duty of the state is to provide the citizens social security and fundamental rights. The states have limited resources. So, they can fulfill the need of the people to exploit the resources jointly. SAARC is the effort of the concerned countries to participate in this joint venture. The main objective of the research is to highlight the objectives and achievements of the regional organization. The study focuses on the different aspects of this treaty. The research also finds out successes and failures.

Keywords: SAARC, Historical Perspectives, Regional Cooperation.

Introduction

The formation of the South Asian Association for Regional cooperation (SAARC) in December 1985 was hailed as a major diplomatic breakthrough in South Asia. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is an economic and geopolitical organization of eight countries that are primarily located in South Asia. The SAARC is 3rd largest in the terms of GDP after the United States and China and 8th largest in the terms of nominal GDP. SAARC nations comprise 3% of the world's area and in contrast having 21 % (around 1.7 billion) of the world's total population. India makes up over 70% of the area and population among these eight nations. All non- Indian member states except Afghanistan share borders with India but only two other members, Pakistan and Afghanistan, have a border with each other. During 2005-10, the average GDP growth rate of SAARC stood at an impressive 8.8% pa, but it slowed to 6.5% in 2011 largely because of slowdown in India which accounts for nearly 80% of SAARC's economy.

Historical Background

The idea of co-operation in South Asia was discussed in at least three conferences:

- The Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi on April 1947;
- The Baguio Conference in the Philippines on May 1950 and the Colombo power conference held in Sri Lanka in April 1954.(Jang,2004)
- In the ending years of the 1970s, the seven inner South Asian nations that included Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Srilanka agreed upon the creation of a trade block and to provide a platform for the people of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. President Ziaur Rehman wrote official letters to the leaders of the countries of the South Asia, presenting his vision for the future of the region and the compelling arguments for region.
- King Birendra of Nepal gave a call for close regional cooperation among South Asian countries in sharing river waters (Jamshed Iqbal, 2013).
- In 1983, the international conference held by Indian Minister of External Affairs P.V. Narsimha Rao in New Delhi, the foreign ministers of the inner seven countries adopted the

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Declaration on South Asian Association Regional Cooperation (SAAR) and formally launched the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) initially in five agreed areas of cooperation namely, Agriculture; Rural Development; Telecommunications; Meteorology; and Health and Population Activities.

- Officially, the union was established in Dhaka with Katmandu being union's secretariat-general. The first SAARC summit was held in Dhaka on 7-8 December 1985 and hosted by the President of Bangladesh Hussain Ershad. The Declaration signed by King of Bhutan Jigme Singye, President of Pakistan Zia-ul-Haq, Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi, King of Nepal Birendra Shah, president of Sri-Lanka JR Jayewardene, and President of Maldives Maumoon Gayoom.(SAARC Summit Press Release,1985)

Members and Observers

The member states are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. States with observer status include Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and the United States. Myanmar has expressed interest in upgrading its status from an observer to a full member of SAARC. Russia has applied for observer status with observer status include Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and the United States, On August 2006, the foreign ministers of the SAARC countries agreed in principle to grant observer status to three applicants; the US and South Korea, as well as the European Union. On 4 March 2008, Iran requested observer status, followed shortly by Mauritius. (Waliur Rehman. 11 April 2008)

Regional Centers

The Regional Centers are supporting SAARC Secretariat to promote regional cooperation. These Centers are managed by Governing Boards comprising representatives from all the Member States, SAARC Secretary- General and the Ministry of Foreign/External Affairs of the Host Government. The Director of the Centre acts as Member Secretary to the Governing Board which reports to the Programming committee.

List of the Regional Centers

- SARRC Agricultural Center (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh
- SAARC Meteorological Research Center (SMRC) , Dhaka, Bangladesh
- SARRC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Center (STAC), New Delhi, India.
- SAARC Human Resources Development Center (SHRDC), Islamabad. Pakistan.
- SAARC Coastal Zone Management Center (SCZMC), Maldives
- SAARC Information Center (SIC), Nepal
- SAARC Energy Center (SEC),Pakistan
- SAARC Disaster Management Center (SDMC), Bhutan
- SAARC Forestry Centers (SFC), Bhutan
- SAARC Cultural Centers (SCC), Sri Lanka

There are six Apex and recognized Bodies of SAARC. These are:

- SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry SCCI
- SAARCLAW (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation in Law. Harmant Batra is the current incumbent Secretary General of SAARCLAW.
- South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA)
- South Asia Foundation(SAF)
- South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children(SAIEVAC)
- Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FSWAL)(Apex and Recognized Bodies)

Issues

Lasting peace and prosperity of the Indian subcontinent has been elusive due to the ongoing conflicts in the region. Political dialogue is often conducted on the margins of SAARC meetings which have refrained from interfering in the internal matters of its member states. During the 12th and 13th SAARC summits, extreme emphasis was laid upon greater co-operation between the SAARC members to fight terrorism (Jhawar, Shiv, 2004, p.44)

SAARC Awards

SAARC Award comprises a gold medal, a letter of citation and cash prize of US\$25,000 (15 Lakhs). Since institution of SAARC Award in 2004, it has been awarded only once and the Award was posthumously conferred upon late President Ziaur Rehman of Bangladesh. (SAARC Awards)

SAARC Youth Award

The SAARC Youth Award is awarded to outstanding individuals from the SAARC region. The award is notable due to the recognition it gives to the Award winner in the SAARC region. The award is based on specific themes which apply to each year. The award recognizes and promotes the commitment and talent of the youth who give back to the world at large through various initiatives such as inventions, protection of the Environment and Disaster relief. The recipients who receive this award are ones who have dedicated their lives to their individual causes to improve situations in their own countries as well as paving a path for the SAARC region to follow. The committee for the SAARC Youth Award selects the best candidate based on his/her merits and their decision is final.

Secretaries General of SAARC

- Abdul Ahsan (16 January 1985 to 15 October 1989)
- Kant Kishore Bhargava (17 October 1989 to 31 December 1991)
- Ibrahim Hussein Zaki (1 January 1992 to 31 December 1993)
- Naeem U. Hasan (January 1996 to 31 December 1998)
- Nihal Rodrigo (1 January 1999 to 10 January 2002)
- Q.A. M.A. Rahim (11 January 2002 to 28 February 2005)
- Chenkyab Dorji (1 March 2005 to 29 February 2008)
- Sheel Kant Sharma (1 March 2008 to 28 February 2011)
- Fathimath DHIANA Saeed (1 March 2011 to 11 March 2012)
- Ahmed Saleem (12 March 2012 to 28 February 2014)
- Arjun Bahadur Thapa (1 March 2014 to Present)

Domestic Dynamics

SAARC, success is likely to bring enormous economic and security benefits to Bhutan and the Maldives, the two smallest South Asian Countries. It is, therefore, not surprising that these two countries have shown, and continue to show, a great deal of interest in the growth of regional cooperation in South Asia.

Except for the Maldives and Bhutan, India has bilateral disputes with all her neighbours. However, with the establishment of a democratic government in Nepal and withdrawal of India's peacekeeping forces from Sri Lanka in 1990, India's bilateral relations with these two countries have improved considerably. But India's relations with Bangladesh have not improved despite the resolution of the Tin Bigha controversy. The dispute over Chakma refugee problem and the Farakka issue on the sharing of the Ganges water continue to adversely affect Indo-Bangladesh relations (Partha S. Ghosh, 1989, pp.73-95)

The most crucial and serious problem that divides south Asia is the Indo- Pakistan conflict. Since independence, the relationship between India and Pakistan has shown a unique pattern of dualism: while the official relations are based on a zero-sum mentality and the classic “security dilemma”. The people of both countries across the border continue to recall past contacts with nostalgia and are eager to maintain a close relationship with each other. Indian and Pakistan’s policy makers are aware of the fact that any bold initiatives or a greater role by India and Pakistan in SAARC will strengthen the South Asian neighbors’ perception of Indian hegemonism, and thereby jeopardize prospects for further regional cooperation. On the other hand India’s lack of initiatives may be interpreted as a lack of sincerity for SAARC.

In addition to India, Pakistan’s initiatives and active role are necessary for the growth of regionalism in South Asia. Unfortunately, while Pakistan has shown greater enthusiasm and taken many initiatives for the growth of the Economic cooperation Organization (ECO), it has shown only a modest interest in the growth of SAARC. The bilateral dispute with India (mainly on Kashmir) and the perception that the strengthening of SAARC will lead to the consolidation of India’s dominance in the region appear to be the main reasons for Pakistan’s lack of enthusiasm for the growth of SAARC. It is important to note that except for India, Pakistan has cordial relations with all the South Asian countries (Hafeez Malik, 1993).

Bangladesh has an enormous interest in the growth of regional cooperation in South Asia. Bangladesh has no outstanding disputes with any SAARC country Bangladesh’s exports to Pakistan in such items as tea, newsprint, jute goods, and leather. In turn, Bangladesh can import, at a competitive price from Pakistan, such as textiles, cement, light engineering goods, machinery, and railway rolling stock. The visit of Bangladesh Prim minister Khalida Zia to Pakistan in a April 1995 made the prospects of revival of trade cooperation between the two countries possible.

The most important concern for Bangladesh, however, to improve political and economic cooperation with India. India has the capability to provide security and meet Bangladesh’s need for manufactured goods, such as steel, chemicals, light engineering goods, capital goods coal and limestone. Both India and Bangladesh can agree to set up joint ventures to improve the exports and the mutual capacity of the two countries. Nepal has no deep-rooted political conflicts with her neighbors. It is because of her cordial bilateral relationships that the South Asian countries unanimously agreed to set up SAARC’s permanent secretariat in Katmandu. Nepal remains deeply interested in the growth of regional cooperation in South Asia. Two major considerations guide this interest of Nepal

- The Desire to promote the country’s security through multilateral diplomacy
- The desire to promote balanced interdependence as opposed to an absolute dependence on India.

Sri Lanka shared the initial enthusiasm with Bangladesh and Nepal for the establishment of SAARC. Sri Lanka’s enthusiasm for SAARC reflected the anxiety that exists in the small state-large state relationship. Since its independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has always shown keen interest in joining with such international or regional organizations as the United Nations, the Colombo Plan, the Non- Aligned Movement (NAM), and ASEAN. Sri Lanka’s attitude towards SAARC has always been and will likely continue to be determined by the degree of cordially in the Indo- Sri Lankan bilateral relationship. In South Asia (Kishore C. Dash.1996)

Conclusion

It is conclude that the member states should adopt the realistic approach. It is unrealistic to believe that any substantial growth of regional cooperation is possible without easing political tensions. SAARC is likely to experience only a “stop-and go’ pattern of growth. (Gerald and lars, 1994)

The other issue concerns the development of a pragmatic economic interdependence in South Asia. So, it is suggested that the approach of the member states should be gradual and based on the economic capability of each state. The SAARC countries should negotiate with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the development of joint projects.

It is necessary to establish a south Asian Development Fund (SDF) in order to provide financial support to regional projects. The fund should not replicate the role of existing multilateral institutions such as the World Bank in South Asia. Resources for the SDF can come from contributions of SAARC countries as well as from external sources. United States, Germany, OPEC countries, the Nordic group, and other donor countries to contribute some percentage of their ODA to the SDF.

World is facing the evils of terrorism, poverty, hunger etc. It is in favor of the whole countries to show integrity against the enemies of humanity. In this way, they can meet the challenges of the 21 century.

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