

INDIA AND SAARC RELATION

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Introduction :

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was formed under Article 52 of the United Nations Charter providing existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters, relating to the maintenance of international peace and security with the purpose and principles of UN charter.

It was established on 8th December, 1985 after about four and half years of its preparation. The basic aim of the Association is to accelerate the process of economic and social development in member countries through joint action in the agreed areas of cooperation. The region of SAARC lies in the South Himalayas surrounded by Hindu Kush Mountains. The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first initiated by late President Zia- Ur- Rehman of Bangladesh who visited Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during 1977- 78 to explore the possibilities of regional economic cooperation among the SAARC Countries. He proposed for the collective self-reliance in a common quest for peace and development of all these countries. In May 1980, he issued a formal call for SAARC Regional Cooperation. His call received a positive response from all the SAARC countries. Hence, consultations at official level were carried out for the proposed cooperation. These preliminary exchanges brought out clearly that regional cooperation should on the hand, reflect the spirit of mutual trust, understanding and sympathetic appreciation of the political inspiration existing among the countries of the region, and on the other hand, such cooperation should be based in respect of the principles of sovereignty equality, territorial integrity, non- interference in internal affairs of other nations and mutual benefit.

SAARC and India :

India since her freedom from foreign rule has always been keenly interested and deeply committed to regional cooperation for the solution of common problems in various fields viz. the cultural, economic political ones. Jawaharlal Nehru the great leader and first prime minister of India stresses for unity and solidarity of Asia in his speeches and writing repeatedly. On 7th September, 1946 in his very first ever broadcast to the nation, Jawaharlal Nehru said. "We are of

Asia and the people of Asia are nearer and closer to us than other. India is so situated that she is pivot of Western, Southern and South-East Asia". Similarly, on another occasion Nehru reiterated the same "When we talk of Asia, remember that India, not because of any ambition of hers, but because of the force of circumstances, because of geography, because of history and because of many other things, inevitably has to play a very important part in Asia... Even if you think in terms of regional organizations in Asia... you have to keep in touch with the other regions. And whatever regions you may in mind, the importance of India cannot be ignored. Further, Nehru for the maintenance of an atmosphere of cordiality and cooperation in Asian relations conference in New Delhi emphasized the fact that countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavor. He said that "It is fitting that India should play her part in this new phase of Asian Development". Nehru had an opinion and hoped that some permanent Asian Institute for the study of common problems and to bring about closer relations emerging perhaps as a school of Asian studies. While leaving the conference he said "I shall not venture to enumerate all the subjects; for it is for you to discuss them and arrive at decisions.

The idea of South Asian Regional Cooperation was first mooted in May 1980. It was followed by Foreign Secretaries of seven countries meeting for the first time in Colombo in April 1981 namely India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. The formal formation of regional cooperation took place on December 8, 1985.

The SAARC member countries include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan is the eighth member of the SAARC. The region is of strategic importance between the east and west with respect to defense, trade, transport population growth and economic development particular for India directly and indirectly. The Indian Ocean plays a vital role in defense, trade and water transport is in the proximity of the majority of South Asia countries.

The SAARC region is a landmass of 3.3. Percent of the world and has one-fifth of the population. All the SAARC countries can be categorized into different groups. Firstly, there are two land-locked countries namely Bhutan and Nepal. Secondly, there are two Islands such as Sri Lanka and Maldives and thirdly, the three countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh which have the Indian Ocean in the South and South West and the Indo-Gangatic plains stretching along these countries.

The South Asian Free Trade Association (SAFTA), in the treaty seeks to remove trade barriers, phased elimination of tariffs and establishment of a ministerial level mechanism for administering the treaty and dispute settlement among members. This treaty was to come into operation by January 1, 2006. In fact, the exchange of mutual experience among the countries is more relevant, cheap and cost effective and provides a vast scope for mutual cooperation in

various areas. Mostly agriculture will continue to dominate these economies for many years to come. The economy development such as food for growing population, fodder for livestock, raw material and market for industries are the main market goods. "

SAARC Principle and Objective :

- a. Cooperation within the framework of the Association is 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 is to complement and not to substitute bilateral or multilateral cooperation.
- c. Such cooperation should be consistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations of member states.
- d. Decisions at all levels in SAARC are taken on the basis of unanimity.
- e. Bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from its deliberations.

Objectives :

The objectives, principles and general provisions, as mentioned in the SAARC Charter, are as follows:

- i. To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- ii. 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 potentials.
- iii. To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- iv. To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- v. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- vi. To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries; common interests; and
- vii. To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Development of SAARC

The First SAARC Summit :

The First SAARC Summit was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 7th -8th December 1985. In the First Summit it was approved that the Standing Committee should set up a Study Group to examine the problem of terrorism as it affects the security and stability of Member States of SAARC. Further, it also approved that a similar exercise be carried out with regard to the problem of drug trafficking and abuse. "

The Second SAARC Summit

The Second SAARC summit met in Bangalore, India, on 16th 17th November, 1986. The second SAARC summit agreed for South Asian Broadcasting Programme covering both radio and television to be launched. The Heads of State and Government laid emphasis on people-to people contacts and for taking concrete steps to facilitate tourism in the region, including facilities for limited convertibility of national currencies for tourists from SAARC countries.

Again, the Heads of State and Government emphasized the importance they attach to students, scholars and researchers in their countries having ready access to reliable and up-to-date information on technical, scientific and developmental matters. This need could be best met by a SAARC Documentation Centre as the repository of such information. 16

The Third SAARC Summit

The Third Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 2nd 4th November, 1987. The Kathmandu Declaration provided for a renewed thrust and direction to the future course of regional cooperation in South Asia.

The SAARC summit also declared on the intention to initiate the process of dealing with the causes and consequences of natural disasters and decided to commission a study on natural disasters and the protection and preservation of the environment in a well-planned and comprehensive framework.

The Fourth SAARC Summit

The Fourth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was held at Islamabad, Pakistan, from 29th -31 December, 1988.

The member states decided to declare 1989 as the SAARC Year Against Drug Abuse in order to focus attention on drug-related problems facing the region.

Challenges of SAARC :

The threats to India's peace and security environment have multiplied enormously, just as the threat to world peace is far more somber and sinister now. The regional and international balance of forces is menacingly hostile. The most ominous problem, the most agonizing issue, facing India today is the nuclear option.

On the multilateral level Indo-Pak cooperation became a part of the South Asian effort to generate coordinated and concerted momentum for mutual development. India played a low-key role in the beginning for fear of arousing suspicion among smaller neighbours, but Bangladesh and Nepal displayed greater initiative. The Foreign Secretaries of the seven South Asian nations (Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives and India) met in early 1981 in Colombo to promote mutual cooperation in areas which would benefit the entire region and set up working groups for studies for cooperation in the fields of agriculture, rural development, meteorology, health and population, and telecommunications. The working groups identified some 13 projects in these areas. The second meeting of the Foreign Secretaries in Kathmandu in November 1981 expanded the scope of regional cooperation by including for study three new projects, postal services, science and technology and transport. The Kathmandu meeting provided the much-needed spur and accelerated the process of finding common ground for cooperation.

The South Asian region was beset by many political problems, besides the massive economic difficulties. The legacies of suspicion, often bitterness, loomed too large to be easily dismissed. Clearly regional cooperation could not take the form of political cooperation forthwith. Yet, the lesson of history was equally clear. Either cooperate and advance together or suffer separately and individually. South Asia had to find its road towards regional cooperation that would not ignore regional realities and would not, therefore, die premature death. Necessarily this road had to be the road of economic cooperation to begin with, so as to lay a stronger foundation for overcoming political problems. The process had just begun and it was

too early to say whether political turbulence would swamp it or whether it would be able to control political vicissitudes. It was for the politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals, in fact for the whole people in all these countries to safeguard, consolidate and carry forward the process regional cooperation.

Harsher and Colder World :

The SAARC countries have historical reasons, and many other factors for non-cooperation. The differences in political as well as mutual suspicion and lack of trust are the greatest enemies of cooperation among the SAARC countries, the problem and issue of Kashmir between India and Pakistan, water and refugee disputes between India and Bangladesh, the intervention of India in Sri Lanka's military, trade and transit treaty between India and Nepal, the ethnic problem between Bhutan and Nepal etc. are some of the troubled spots in the SAARC region where all the countries have to come out open and join for cooperation whole heartedly.

There is also a compulsion and intra-competition among SAARC countries for political factors superseding the economic factors with each other. Some examples like competition between India and Sri Lanka for export of tea, jute market competition between India and Bangladesh, rice export competition between India and Pakistan, cotton textile between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in the world market. The fear of the SAARC countries towards India is that India dominates in terms of area, population, technological advancement and military which may lead the basic factor for continuous and slow growth of cooperation among SAARC countries. The religious and cultural factors also hinder to some extent the growth of SAARC. Country like Pakistan prefers economic and cultural cooperation with Islamic nations; Nepal and Bhutan are religiously and culturally closer to India as these countries are dominated by the Hindu and Buddhist religions. In the economic perspectives also there are different apprehensions that India and Pakistan are more advanced and developed than Bhutan, Nepal and Maldives as more relatively developed partners would exploit them.

Though there is lack of trust and suspicion irritating one another, yet, still there is vast scope for cooperation among SAARC countries. The SAARC countries must focus on agriculture. Agriculture is the only way to grow and progress is cooperation because these countries have core competence in this sector and their economies are dominated by agriculture too. There

Conclusion :

The SAARC strength and progress is determined by the member states. Cooperation and friendly relations would bring a change develop the region. It is very interesting that international politics is always awake for SAARC blends.

The expectation and dream would progress and fulfill the needs of the people and region in particular through mutual respect and understanding. Prejudice, suspicion, hatred and discrimination in its role would destroy and defeat all objectives. Technology sharing, facilitation of trade amongst the nation states for economic and political development will enhance development towards global growth. Population explosion should be controlled to speed up the process of development. Culture, religion, social and race commonality would keep the essence of attachment in every sphere. Any disharmony and social turbulence would defeat any positive development.

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