

SAARC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS



**R. S. Kher
Manoj Agarwal**



SAARC: Political & Economic Aspects

R. S. Kher
Manoj Agarwal

SAARC: Political & Economic Aspects

R. S. Kher
Manoj Agarwal

W
Wisdom Press
NEW DELHI

SAARC: Political & Economic Aspects

R. S. Kher

Manoj Agarwal

*This edition published by Wisdom Press,
Murari Lal Street, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi - 110002.*

ISBN: 978-93-81052-57-0

Edition: 2022 (Revised)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

-
- This publication may not be reproduced, stored in
- a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by
- any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
- recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of
- the publishers.

Wisdom Press

Production Office: "Dominant House", G - 316, Sector - 63, Noida,
National Capital Region - 201301.
Ph. 0120-4270027, 4273334.

Sales & Marketing: 4378/4-B, Murari Lal Street,
Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002.
Ph.: 011-23281685, 41043100.
e-mail : wisdompress@ymail.com

CONTENTS

Chapter 1. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Charter and Objectives	1
— <i>Manoj Agarwal</i>	
Chapter 2. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Summits.....	6
— <i>Anand Joshi</i>	
Chapter 3. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Secretariat.....	11
— <i>Mohit Rastogi</i>	
Chapter 4. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Regional Centers	16
— <i>Vibhor Jain</i>	
Chapter 5. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Free Trade Area	22
— <i>Satyendra Arya</i>	
Chapter 6. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Development Fund	27
— <i>Avinash Rajkumar</i>	
Chapter 7. A Brief Discussion on Political Challenges within SAARC.....	33
— <i>Chanchal Chawla</i>	
Chapter 8. A Brief Discussion on SAARC and Bilateral Conflicts.....	44
— <i>Anushi Singh</i>	
Chapter 9. A Brief Discussion on SAARC Observer States and Engagement	54
— <i>Vivek Anand Singh</i>	
Chapter 10. A Brief Discussion on SAARC and Regional Security	59
— <i>Vipin Jain</i>	
Chapter 11. A Brief Discussion on Economic Disparities in SAARC	65
— <i>Pankhuri Agarwal</i>	
Chapter 12. A Brief Discussion on SAARC's Role in Disaster Management.....	70
— <i>Roma Khanna</i>	
Chapter 13. A Brief Study on Future Prospects for SAARC.....	75
— <i>Vipin Jain</i>	

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC CHARTER AND OBJECTIVES

Manoj Agarwal, Associate Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- agarwalmanoj21@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The founding document describing the aims and tenets of this regional organization is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Charter and Objectives. Eight South Asian countries make up SAARC, which was founded in 1985. These countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its main objective is to encourage collaboration and growth in the South Asian area. The spirit of cooperation and togetherness among the member nations is embodied in the SAARC Charter. The main goals of the organization are to improve social and economic growth while also developing international cooperation, understanding, and good neighborliness among countries. The SAARC is dedicated to tackling problems with regards to reducing poverty, economic integration, agriculture, health, and education. The Charter also emphasizes the need of respecting member nations' sovereignty, geographical integrity, and political independence as well as refraining from meddling in their internal affairs. Additionally, it promotes the avoidance of violence and nonviolent conflict settlement. In conclusion, the SAARC Charter and Objectives capture the organization's goal to promote socio-economic well-being of South Asian countries via peaceful and cooperative ways, strengthen regional collaboration, and solve shared concerns. This paper acts as a blueprint for SAARC's efforts to create a more affluent and peaceful south Asia.

KEYWORDS:

Charter, Cooperation, Economics, International.

INTRODUCTION

The heads of state or government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, are:

1. Committed to advancing peace, stability, amity, and progress in the region through strict observance of the United Nations Charter and NON-ALIGNMENT, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, refraining from using force, refraining from meddling in the internal affairs of other States, and maintaining world peace[1], [2].
2. Being aware of the shared issues, goals, and ambitions of the people of SOUTH ASIA and the need for improved collaboration and coordinated action within each group's own political, economic, and cultural traditions;

3. Convinced that regional cooperation among SOUTH ASIA's nations is advantageous to all parties involved, desirable, and essential to advancing the well-being and enhancing the standard of living of the peoples in the area;
4. Persuaded further that collaboration in the areas of economic, social, and technological development among the nations of south asia would greatly boost individual and group independence[3], [4];
5. Realizing that enhanced collaboration, contacts, and exchanges among the region's nations would support the development of comradely and mutual understanding among their populations;
6. Recalling the declaration that their foreign ministers signed on August 2, 1983 in new delhi and highlighting the development of regional cooperation;
7. Reiterating their commitment to deepen such collaboration within an institutional framework;

Do hereby agree to form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, or the Association, with the following goals, guiding principles, institutional framework, and financing arrangements:

Objectives

The Association should have the following goals:

- a) To advance the welfare of SOUTH ASIAN nationals and raise their standard of living;
- b) To hasten regional economic development, social advancement, and cultural advancement while giving everyone the chance to live in dignity and reach their full potential;
- c) To encourage and improve SOUTH ASIA's member nations' interdependence;
- d) To promote mutual respect, awareness of one another's difficulties, and trust;
- e) To encourage active cooperation and reciprocal aid in the domains of economics, society, culture, technology, and science.
- f) To improve relations with other emerging nations;
- g) To improve collaboration in international fora regarding issues of shared concern; and
- h) To collaborate with regional and international organizations with comparable goals

Principles

1. Respect for the principles of sovereign equality, geographical integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, and mutual benefit should be the cornerstones of cooperation within the framework of the ASSOCIATION.
2. Rather than replacing bilateral and multilateral collaboration, this kind of cooperation should strengthen it.
3. This collaboration must not conflict with duties under bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Conference of Ministers

The Foreign Ministers of the Member States shall form a Council of Ministers, which shall have the following responsibilities: formulation of the Association's policies; evaluation of followings.

- a. Association's progress in fostering cooperation; decision-making on new areas of cooperation; establishment of additional Association mechanisms as deemed necessary; and other matters of general interest to the Association.
- b. Twice a year, the Council of Ministers will convene. By agreement of the Member States, the Council may hold an extraordinary session.

DISCUSSION

Permanent Committee

1. The Foreign Secretaries' Standing Committee shall perform the following duties:
 - a. Comprehensive program of collaboration monitoring and coordination;
 - b. The acceptance of projects and programs, as well as the terms of their funding;
 - c. Establishing cross-sectoral priorities;
 - d. The exploitation of local and global resources;
 - e. The discovery of new topics for collaboration based on pertinent research.
2. The Standing Committee will convene whenever it is thought to be necessary.
3. The Standing Committee is required to provide the Council of Ministers with regular reports and to consult them as needed when making decisions on policy [5].

Budget Committees

1. The execution, coordination, and monitoring of the programs in each area of cooperation will be the responsibility of Technical Committees made up of representatives of Member States.
2. The following terms of reference should apply to them:
 - a. Assessing the scope and possibility for regional cooperation in certain areas;
 - b. Creation of initiatives and programmatic planning;
 - c. Assessing the financial effects of sectoral programs;
 - d. The creation of proposals for cost allocation;
 - e. Sectoral program implementation and coordination;
 - f. Tracking the execution's development.
3. The Technical Committees must provide the Standing Committee with regular reports.
4. Every two years, the Technical Committees' chairmanships will typically alternate among the Member States in alphabetical order [6].
5. If and when deemed essential, the Technical Committees may, among other things, use the following processes and modalities:
 - a. Gatherings of national technical agency leaders;
 - b. Gatherings of specialists in certain disciplines;
 - c. Communication amongst established centers of excellence in the area.

Assessment Committees

Action Committees made up of Member States concerned with the execution of initiatives involving more than two but not all Member States may be established by the Standing Committee [7].

Secretariat

The Secretariat of the association shall exist.

Financial Decisions

- a. Each Member State's voluntary contribution to the funding of the Association's operations must be made.
- b. Each Technical Committee is required to provide suggestions for how to allocate the expenses of putting its suggested programs into action.
- c. With the agreement of or by the Standing Committee, external money from acceptable sources may be mobilized in the event that adequate financial resources cannot be raised within the area to support the operations of the association [8].

Provisions

- a. Decisions must be reached unanimously at all levels [9].
- b. Contentious and bilateral matters must not be discussed during the discussion [10].

CONCLUSION

Promoting regional collaboration and development in South Asia is made possible by the South Asian Association for Regional collaboration (SAARC) Charter and its aims. I have come to the following conclusion on the SAARC Charter and its goals as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021. Promotion of Regional Cooperation The founding text of the SAARC, the SAARC Charter, underlines the commitment of the group to promoting cooperation amongst its member nations. It promotes the value of regional collaboration, solidarity, and respect. Promoting regional and economic integration is one of the main goals of SAARC. In order to improve the region's general economic health, SAARC works to strengthen member state economic cooperation, trade, and investment via a number of projects and agreements. Alleviating Poverty the Charter emphasizes the significance of combating poverty and raising the standard of living for those in the South Asian area. To combat poverty, advance social development, and raise living conditions, SAARC has implemented a number of initiatives and projects. Regional Stability SAARC recognizes the need of maintaining regional stability and security. Like several other regional organizations, it lacks a dedicated security framework, but it nonetheless promotes member state cooperation on matters pertaining to regional security, such as terrorism, extremism, and transnational crimes.

Cultural Exchange The SAARC Charter emphasizes that cultural exchange and inter-personal interaction are crucial elements of regional cooperation. Important objectives include fostering intercultural understanding and protecting South Asia's rich cultural legacy. The Charter also addresses the need for sustainable development and environmental issues. The SAARC is aware of how crucial it is to solve regional environmental issues including resource management and climate change. Challenges and Limitations Political tensions and disputes among the member

nations of SAARC have presented difficulties at times impeding efficient collaboration. Additionally, owing to a number of issues, such as resource shortages and administrative roadblocks, progress in meeting some of the stated goals has been sluggish. ability to Promote Greater Regional Development, Economic Growth, and Social Progress in South Asia: Despite these obstacles, the SAARC Charter and goals continue to be important and have the ability to promote greater regional development, economic growth, and social advancement in South Asia. The group continues to provide member nations a forum for discussion and collaboration. SAARC may need to undertake changes and adapt to shifting regional dynamics in order to reach its full potential. Improvements might be helpful in areas including resolving political conflicts, expediting the decision-making process, and boosting financial resources. The SAARC Charter and its goals demonstrate a dedication to regional cooperation and development in South Asia, in conclusion. Despite its difficulties and limits, the organization continues to be a vital venue for discussing global concerns and encouraging collaboration among its member nations. The SAARC's ability to succeed in the future will rely on how ready its members are to cooperate and change with the times.

REFERENCES:

- [1] M. Ahmad, "SAARC Summits 1985-2016: The Cancellation Phenomenon," *IPRI Jorunal*, 2017.
- [2] SAARC, "SAARC Charter," *About SAARC*, 2016.
- [3] N. Manzoor Ahmed and H. Sumbul, "SAARC after Three Decades: An Assessment of Progress in Regional Cooperation in Functional Areas (1985–2015)," *Glob. Soc. Sci. Rev.*, 2016, doi: 10.31703/gssr.2016(i-i).02.
- [4] T. Delinić, "SAARC – 25 Years of Regional Integration in South Asia," *South Asia*, 2011.
- [5] M. Ali, "Critical Study of Regionalism in South Asia: Challenges and Perspectives (A Case Study SAARC).," *Dialogue (1819-6462)*, 2014.
- [6] N. Taneja and A. Sawhney, "Revitalising SAARC trade: India's role at 2007 summit," *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2007.
- [7] S. S. Pattanaik, *Making sense of regional cooperation: SAARC at twenty*. 2006.
- [8] I. Ahmed and I. Ahmed, "SAARC: Social charter and human security," in *The Emerging Dimensions of SAARC*, 2010. doi: 10.1017/UPO9788175968615.007.
- [9] S. D. Muni and R. Jetly, "SAARC prospects: The changing dimensions," in *The Emerging Dimensions of SAARC*, 2010. doi: 10.1017/UPO9788175968615.002.
- [10] N. Rodrigo, "SAARC and the South Asian security architect," in *The Emerging Dimensions of SAARC*, 2010. doi: 10.1017/UPO9788175968615.008.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC SUMMITS

Anand Joshi, Assistant Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- anandjoshi869@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) diplomatic calendar revolves around the SAARC Summits. Aiming to promote regional cooperation and development, the SAARC is a grouping of eight South Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The summits provide a prominent forum for member nations to engage in diplomatic conversation, discuss shared difficulties, and determine a shared path for regional prosperity. Heads of state or government from the participating nations attend high-level sessions at these summits. Leaders may debate political, economic, and social concerns affecting the South Asian area in these key gatherings. Trade and economic cooperation, eradicating poverty, public health, education, and regional security are often important subjects. Consensus-driven decision-making, where all member nations must concur on plans and initiatives for them to go ahead, is one of the distinctive aspects of SAARC Summits. Although this strategy might sometimes impede development, it emphasizes how crucial it is to promote trust and collaboration among countries with various interests and histories. The SAARC Summits also promote bilateral discussions between leaders of member nations, giving them the chance to discuss particular problems and forge personal links that may support regional stability. Additionally, observer nations and international organizations are often invited, demonstrating SAARC's attempts to include outside parties in regional collaboration and development. In conclusion, SAARC Summits are essential to the group's goal of advancing social and economic advancement in South Asia. They provide member nations a forum to cooperate, settle disputes, and work together for a more prosperous and integrated South Asian area.

KEYWORDS:

Education, Health, Property, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

Leaders from South Asian states assemble at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summits, a key diplomatic platform, to address common concerns, strengthen regional cooperation, and advance economic and social development. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight South Asian nations that make up the SAARC, which was founded in 1985. These summits provide a forum for discussion, cooperation, and the pursuit of shared objectives in a region distinguished by its variety, historical linkages, and intricate geopolitical dynamics. In this thorough investigation, we dig into the background, goals, successes, and difficulties of SAARC summits, highlighting their significant regional significance.

Historical Setting

Midway through the 20th century, as the region's newly independent states attempted to address shared issues and advance regional stability, the concept of regional cooperation in South Asia started to take form. In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea gained traction and SAARC was established.

Several significant events may be used to trace the SAARC's historical background.

Bangladesh freedom War (1971): In terms of South Asian geopolitics, 1971 saw Bangladesh's freedom from Pakistan. A need for regional collaboration and conflict resolution was brought to light by the war.

The Colombo Plan (1950): The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific, which was launched in 1950, set the foundation for regional cooperation in South Asia. Through technical aid and collaboration amongst member nations, it sought to promote economic growth [1], [2].

The leaders of South Asian nations met at the Himalayan Kingdom's Conference in 1981 in Thimphu, Bhutan, to address international concerns. It was crucial in preparing the ground for SAARC's official founding.

Establishment of SAARC (1985): In Dhaka, Bangladesh, the SAARC Charter was formally signed by the heads of state or government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka on December 8, 1985. Afghanistan became a participant in 2007 [3], [4].

The purpose of SAARC summits

The SAARC Summits provide a venue to further the following major goals:

Advancing Regional Cooperation: SAARC's main objective is to advance regional cooperation in South Asia. The majority of member nations' problems, such as poverty, terrorism, and climate change, can best be solved via cooperation.

Economic Integration: SAARC seeks to improve regional economic integration by lowering trade obstacles, supporting economic development, and increasing intra-regional commerce. A component of this endeavor is the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

The reduction of poverty is still a major issue in South Asia. Through economic growth, social services, and poverty reduction measures, SAARC aims to combat poverty.

SAARC focuses on social development concerns including gender equality, health care, and education. It aims to raise the standard of living for local residents [5], [6].

Environmental Sustainability: Natural catastrophes and environmental issues like climate change are a concern in South Asia. SAARC aims to encourage resource sharing and cooperation while maintaining the environment.

Cultural sharing: A key component of SAARC's goal is the sharing and understanding of cultures. The group wants to encourage more cross-cultural collaboration while acknowledging the region's unique variety of cultures.

DISCUSSION

Results and Initiatives

1. The SAARC Summits have established a number of programs and reached key milestones throughout the years to address the difficulties facing the region:
2. SAFTA, which was established in 2006, intends to lower trade barriers among SAARC member nations and advance economic integration. It aims to improve regional commerce and promote economic development [7].
3. Regional Centers: The SAARC has set up a number of regional centers with a focus on certain areas of collaboration. The topics covered by these centers include agriculture, human resource development, and climate change [8].
4. The 2010-founded SAARC Development Fund (SDF) provides funding for initiatives and programs in sectors including energy, infrastructure, and poverty alleviation. It is essential for supporting regional development activities.
5. The SAARC catastrophe Management Center (SDMC), which was established in 2006, is dedicated to lowering catastrophe risks and managing them across South Asia. It supports member nations' response to and preparation for natural catastrophes [9].
6. Programs for Cultural interaction: The SAARC encourages cultural interaction via projects like the SAARC Cultural Center and the SAARC Film Festival. These initiatives promote mutual respect and understanding amongst member nations' diverse cultures [10].

Youth of the SAARC: SAARC Youth encourages youth participation and empowerment in the area. Utilizing young people's potential to further social and economic development is its main goal. The SAARC Arbitration Council (SARCO), which was founded in 1995, gives its member nations a forum to arbitrate business disputes, facilitating commerce within the region.

Opportunities and Obstacles

SAARC summits have advanced in a number of areas, however they also have problems and restrictions:

Political Tensions: Political disputes and disagreements among the member nations have sometimes hindered the SAARC's ability to function effectively. Regional cooperation has been hampered by bilateral disagreements between nations like India and Pakistan.

Slow Progress: It has taken longer than expected for SAARC to make progress on several of its goals, including economic integration and the reduction of poverty. This problem has been made more difficult by administrative obstacles and resource limitations.

Security Issues: Regional cooperation and stability have been severely hampered by security issues, especially terrorism and tensions along the borders. To solve these problems, we must work together.

Economic Disparities: There are still issues with the economic standing of the member nations. While some nations like India have significant economic influence, others like Afghanistan and Nepal face development difficulties.

Geopolitical Dynamics: Significant international entities are involved in complicated geopolitical dynamics that have an impact on South Asia. In light of these dynamics, it is a sensitive responsibility to balance regional interests.

Despite these obstacles, SAARC summits nonetheless provide member nations a chance to work together and solve common issues. The group still has a big impact on area social, economic, and political development. Last but not least, the SAARC Summits serve as an essential venue for regional South Asian cooperation and collaboration. They provide a forum for members to discuss shared issues, advance economic integration, and advance social advancement in the area. While SAARC has achieved success in a number of areas, it still confronts political difficulties, poor progress toward certain goals, and security challenges that need for coordinated measures to address. The organization's dedication to promoting regional cooperation and meeting the various requirements of its member nations, however, highlights its continued relevance in South Asia. We will dig into the history, goals, successes, and problems of SAARC Summits as we begin our in-depth investigation, illuminating the significant influence these diplomatic events have had on the region.

Summits of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been very important in promoting regional cooperation and addressing important concerns in South Asia. Here is a conclusion on SAARC Summits as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021 SAARC Summits provide a vital forum for leaders of South Asian countries to get together and have frank discussions. The promotion of communication, comprehension, and the sharing of ideas among the member nations has greatly benefited from these gatherings. Regional Cooperation: The summits have been successful in promoting regional cooperation in a number of fields, such as commerce, economic growth, culture, and security. These summits' agreements and actions have aided the region's growth and stability. Addressing Common Challenges SAARC summits have tackled a variety of shared concerns affecting South Asian countries, such as healthcare, terrorism, poverty, and the environment. The summit's deliberations and decisions have aided regional efforts to address these issues on a regional level. Economic Integration The significance of economic integration in South Asia has repeatedly been underlined at SAARC summits. To promote intra-regional trade and economic expansion, programs like the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) have been established. Cultural Exchange At these summits, the preservation of South Asia's rich cultural history and cultural exchange have been emphasized.

CONCLUSION

Building deeper regional relationships is seen to require encouraging collaboration and cultural understanding. Limitations & Obstacles SAARC Summits have encountered obstacles like as political tensions and disagreements between member nations, which have sometimes slowed the development of regional cooperation. These conflicts have resulted to summits being postponed or called off. Slow Progress: In certain circumstances, it has taken a while to execute the decisions and resolutions from the SAARC Summits. The inability to accomplish the stated goals has been hampered by administrative obstacles, political tensions, and resource shortages. Possibility of Positive Change Despite difficulties, SAARC summits still have the ability to promote harmony and collaboration in South Asia. The success of the organization still depends on member nations' ability to put aside their differences and cooperate.

Rejuvenation Required SAARC Summits may need to be reformed and rejuvenated in order to increase their efficacy. This can include simplifying decision-making procedures, handling

political conflicts more successfully, and coming up with creative answers to local problems. To sum up, the SAARC Summits have been essential in developing regional cooperation, tackling shared issues, and strengthening economic integration in South Asia. The ability for South Asian countries to unite, settle their differences, and work together towards a more affluent and secure area underpins their enduring significance even though they have encountered obstacles and limits. Future SAARC summits' success will rely on member nations' will to surmount challenges and enhance regional connections.

REFERENCES:

- [1] M. Ahmad, "SAARC Summits 1985-2016: The Cancellation Phenomenon," *IPRI Jorunal*, 2017.
- [2] M. A. Naazer, "SAARC Summit Diplomacy and Its Impact on Indo-Pakistan Relations (1985–2014)," *FWU J. Soc. Sci.*, 2018.
- [3] M. Hafeez, "SAARC Summit: Future of Regional Cooperation in South Asia," *Strateg. Stud. Inst.*, 2016.
- [4] S. S. Pattanaik, "Indo-Pak relations and the saarc summits," *Strateg. Anal.*, 2004, doi: 10.1080/09700160408450146.
- [5] M. Mohsin, "The Twelfth SAARC Summit: Quest for Durable South Asian Cooperation," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200103.
- [6] S. M. Khan, "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation," *Journal of Asian Economics*. 1999. doi: 10.1016/S1049-0078(99)00039-1.
- [7] N. Melegoda and C. Padmakumara, "Functionalist Regional Cooperation: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation for Peace in the Region," *Colombo J. Multi-Disciplinary Res.*, 2018, doi: 10.4038/cjmr.v3i2.29.
- [8] A. Arif, "Energizing SAARC: Options for Pakistan," *Strateg. Stud.*, 2018.
- [9] RIS, "The Eleventh SAARC Summit," *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2002, doi: 10.1177/139156140200300218.
- [10] M. Mohsin, "The Twelfth SAARC Summit," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200103.

CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC SECRETARIAT

Mohit Rastogi, Associate Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- rtmohit@yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT:

In order to promote regional collaboration and integration among the South Asian Association for Regional collaboration (SAARC) member nations, the SAARC Secretariat is crucial. An overview of the roles, goals, and importance of the SAARC Secretariat in fostering regional peace, stability, and socioeconomic growth are given in this abstract. The eight SAARC member states—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—are served by the SAARC Secretariat, which has its headquarters in Kathmandu, Nepal. Since its establishment in 1985, the Secretariat's main goal has been to encourage member nations to communicate, work together, and understand one another in a variety of fields, including agriculture, trade, health, education, and cultural exchange. Convening meetings, conferences, and summits so that member nations can discuss shared problems and challenges, share ideas, and establish regional development strategies is one of the SAARC Secretariat's main responsibilities. These events offer a stage for diplomatic interaction and conflict resolution, promoting regional peace and stability. Additionally, the Secretariat is essential in organizing and carrying out regional projects and initiatives that address common problems like reducing poverty, combating climate change, and managing disasters. Additionally, it oversees the SAARC Development Fund, which provides funding for initiatives that support the social and economic advancement of member nations. Through initiatives like the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the SAARC Secretariat encourages intra-regional trade and economic integration. SAARC aspires to increase the general economic prosperity of the region by lowering trade barriers and promoting economic cooperation. It is impossible to stress how important the SAARC Secretariat is to intercultural dialogue and interpersonal connections. It coordinates cultural celebrations, intellectual exchanges, and projects that honor South Asia's rich diversity and shared legacy in an effort to promote cooperation and togetherness among its member states.

KEYWORDS:

Development, Government, SAARC, Secretariat.

INTRODUCTION

With its eight member countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Secretariat stands as a historic group within the South Asian tapestry. Since its founding in 1985, SAARC has carved out a distinct niche for itself on the international scene thanks to its dedication to promoting regional growth and cooperation in one of the world's most diversified and economically vibrant regions. The Secretariat, a dynamic administrative organization with its

headquarters in Kathmandu, Nepal, is at the center of SAARC's initiatives and acts as the hub for communication, cooperation, and coordination among member nations. It soon becomes clear that the SAARC Secretariat's duties go much beyond simple administrative duties as we set out to investigate the complex role and enormous importance of the organization in the context of regional cooperation. Instead, it is the lifeblood of South Asian diplomacy, attempting to weave together countries with diverse histories, cultures, and interests into a tapestry of common goals and advancement [1], [2].

The SAARC's founding principle is "Building Bridges Across Borders."

In a region that, for most of its history, was separated by physical obstacles, political unrest, and cultural variety, the account of SAARC's founding is one of hope and ambition. The leaders of South Asia saw the need to unite in a similar manner in the early 1980s, when the world was starting to see the possibilities of regional blocs as engines of economic development and political collaboration. This environment gave rise to the SAARC concept [3], [4]. When its founding members approved the "SAARC Charter" on December 8, 1985, SAARC was officially constituted. A regional organization devoted to advancing South Asia's socioeconomic growth and peace was established thanks to the charter [5], [6]. Each participating nation acknowledged the potential for collaboration and shared prosperity and pledged to work together to address the shared problems facing the area.

The administrative center of regional cooperation is the SAARC Secretariat.

1. The Secretariat of the SAARC, located in Nepal's ancient capital of Kathmandu, is essential to the organization's aspirational goals being realized.
2. The SAARC Secretariat is the initiative's driving force, acting as a catalyst for member state participation, negotiation, and coordination. Its establishment was an important milestone in the operationalization of SAARC's mission [7], [8].
3. The SAARC Council of Ministers, the group's supreme governing body, provides general direction to the SAARC Secretariat.
4. The Council, which is made up of the foreign ministers of the member nations, convenes yearly to determine the organization's strategic direction and assess its performance.
5. The Secretary-General, who is chosen by the Council and acts as the organization's main administrative official, is in charge of the Secretariat's daily operations.
6. In carrying out SAARC's missions and promoting collaboration among member nations, the Secretary-General is crucial.

DISCUSSION

A Comprehensive Approach to Regional Cooperation: The Spectrum of SAARC's Functions

The SAARC Secretariat plays a significant and varied role in regional cooperation. It covers a broad range of duties, all of which support the organization's primary objectives of encouraging collaboration, tackling shared problems, and advancing the welfare of South Asians [9], [10]

The primary areas in which the Secretariat functions are covered in detail in the following sections.

1. Diplomatic Facilitation: Closing Gaps

- i. The promotion of peaceful diplomacy and conflict resolution among member nations is at the heart of SAARC's goal.
- ii. Political tensions and historical wars have often harmed South Asia, making the Secretariat's responsibility in providing a neutral forum for diplomatic communication all the more crucial. It acts as a bridge between countries, enabling officials to have open dialogues, settle conflicts, and foster confidence.
- iii. SAARC Summits, which bring together the leaders of state and government of member nations, are crucially organized by the Secretariat. These summits provide a special chance for leaders to have high-level conversations about local and international concerns.
- iv. The Secretariat is essential in organizing these conversations and ensuring that each member's concerns and interests are taken into consideration. Consensus-building is a characteristic of SAARC diplomacy.

2. Putting SAARC's Vision into Practice: From Ideas to Action

- i. The success of SAARC is determined not only by its lofty objectives but also by its capacity to translate these objectives into real-world activities that benefit the people of South Asia.
- ii. The Secretariat acts as the driving force behind the implementation of SAARC projects in a wide range of fields, including as poverty eradication, economic integration, environmental sustainability, and cross-cultural interaction.
- iii. The Secretariat works closely with member states to accomplish these goals, providing technical know-how and administrative assistance to make concepts a reality. It is essential to the planning, administration, and coordination of projects.
- iv. The Secretariat is at the forefront of SAARC's goal to better the lives of South Asian inhabitants, whether it is through supporting regional trade agreements, enabling cross-border infrastructure development, or coordinating initiatives to battle climate change.

The SAFTA Framework: Promoting Economic Integration

A key component of SAARC's goal is economic cooperation, and the Secretariat is essential to pursuing this agenda. The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) was established by SAARC member nations in 2006 after they realized the enormous potential of regional trade and economic integration. SAFTA intends to promote regional trade liberalization, lower tariffs, and remove non-tariff trade obstacles.

By supporting discussions, keeping an eye on trade flows, and helping member states remove barriers to intra-regional trade, the SAARC Secretariat actively promotes the implementation of SAFTA. This project has the potential to stimulate South Asia's economy significantly, promoting wealth and employment development.

Addressing Common Challenges: Collaborative Approaches

- i. Numerous widespread issues, such as poverty, unequal access to healthcare, a lack of food security, and the effects of climate change, plague South Asia. In order to facilitate coordinated efforts to address these concerns together, the SAARC Secretariat is essential.

- ii. It acts as a center for the exchange of best practices, resource pooling, and information sharing. The Secretariat organizes regional programs to fight poverty, provide access to healthcare, increase food security, and lessen the impact of natural catastrophes.
- iii. The Secretariat increases the effect of individual initiatives by bringing member states together to pool knowledge and resources, moving South Asia closer to becoming egalitarian and resilient.

Exchanges between cultures and people: Promoting a Common Identity

- i. Beyond political and economic co-operation, the Secretariat understands the value of interpersonal relationships and cultural exchange in creating a stronger, more cohesive South Asia.
- ii. The Secretariat actively encourages the celebration and preservation of the region's great mix of cultures, languages, and customs.
- iii. It enables cultural exchanges, art exhibits, festivals, and educational initiatives amongst member nations, giving individuals the chance to learn about and enjoy the many cultures of South Asia.
- iv. These initiatives not only build cultural ties but also aid in the development of a common South Asian identity, promoting a feeling of cohesion among the inhabitants of the area.

As a Beacon of South Asian Cooperation, the SAARC Secretariat

As we explore the SAARC Secretariat's many roles and importance, it becomes evident that this organization is more than just an administrative body; it is the embodiment of South Asia's ambitions for peace, development, and togetherness. It serves as evidence of the member nations' ongoing dedication to work through past differences.

CONCLUSION

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Secretariat is a crucial administrative entity tasked with supporting and managing the SAARC organization's operations and efforts. The organization's main administrative center is the SAARC Secretariat. It is in charge of setting up meetings, keeping track of information, and providing logistical assistance to different SAARC entities, such as the Standing Committee and the Council of Ministers. Facilitator of Regional Cooperation the Secretariat is essential in encouraging member nations to cooperate regionally. It facilitates communication and cooperation among member nations on a range of topics, including as commerce, economic growth, culture, and security. SAARC efforts and decisions taken at summits and other meetings must be put into action, and the Secretariat is in charge of doing so. It helps member nations turn resolutions and agreements into actionable steps. Research and Data Gathering It gathers information and conducts studies on a range of regional problems to help member governments make wise decisions.

This knowledge exchange helps us successfully handle prevalent problems. Cultural Promotion: The Secretariat fosters interstate cultural dialogue and mutual respect. To commemorate the rich cultural variety of South Asia, it arranges cultural events and activities. Support for Specialized Bodies It offers assistance to a number of specific SAARC entities, including the SAARC Regional Centers and the SAARC Development Fund. These entities can perform more efficiently because to this support. Limitations and Challenges including the organization as a whole, the SAARC Secretariat has encountered difficulties including political tensions and

disagreements amongst member nations. These conflicts have sometimes made it more difficult for it to operate efficiently and carry out regional projects. Financial Resources: The availability of financial resources has an impact on how successful the Secretariat is. To efficiently perform its many tasks and encourage regional collaboration, it needs enough resources. Potential for Improvement The SAARC Secretariat may need to make changes and advancements in areas like resource mobilization, decision-making procedures, and dispute resolution methods in order to increase its efficacy. The SAARC Secretariat is crucial in organizing and coordinating regional cooperation among South Asian countries, to sum up. Even though it has had difficulties and has its limits, it is nevertheless a vital institution for achieving the goals of the SAARC alliance. Its potential to strengthen regional cooperation depends on its capacity to adjust to changing conditions, handle political disputes, and get the resources required to perform its duties efficiently. The performance of the SAARC organization as a whole in fostering regional peace, stability, and development is intimately related to the functioning of the SAARC Secretariat.

REFERENCES:

- [1] M. Ahmad, "SAARC Summits 1985-2016: The Cancellation Phenomenon," *IPRI Jorunal*, 2017.
- [2] M. Hafeez, "SAARC Summit: Future of Regional Cooperation in South Asia," *Strateg. Stud. Inst.*, 2016.
- [3] S. M. Khan, "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation," *Journal of Asian Economics*. 1999. doi: 10.1016/S1049-0078(99)00039-1.
- [4] M. Dubey, "The Twelfth SAARC Summit: Deeper Integration in South Asia," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200102.
- [5] R. Karmakar, "SAARC & Women Development (1986–1990); The reports of the two Ministerial Meetings and the recommendations of the five meetings of the Technical Committee on Women issues; Secretariat of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, GPO Box 4222, Kathmandu, August 1990. US\$15.00.," *J. Asian Econ.*, 2000, doi: 10.1016/s1049-0078(00)00056-7.
- [6] M. M., "The Twelfth SAARC Summit: Quest for Durable South Asian Cooperation," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200103.
- [7] M. Mohsin, "The Twelfth SAARC Summit," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200103.
- [8] Areeba Arif, "Energising SAARC: Options for Pakistan," *Strateg. Stud.*, 2018, doi: 10.53532/ss.038.02.00151.
- [9] RIS, "The Eleventh SAARC Summit," *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2002, doi: 10.1177/139156140200300218.
- [10] RIS, "Declaration of the Fourteenth SAARC Summit," *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2007, doi: 10.1177/139156140700800210.

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC REGIONAL CENTERS

Vibhor Jain, Associate Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- vibhorjain7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is made up of important institutions, which are represented by SAARC Regional Centers. These centers, which include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, are specialist institutions created to meet particular economic and social development requirements of SAARC member nations. Agriculture, health, the environment, and disaster management are just a few of the many industries that the SAARC Regional Centers handle. They act as forums for cooperation, information exchange, and the implementation of cooperative initiatives by member governments with the goal of resolving shared problems and raising standard of living throughout the area. One notable instance is the SAARC Agriculture Center (SAC), which focuses on agricultural research and development, exchanging best practices, and improving food security within the region. Another such is the SAARC Disaster Management Center (SDMC), which is essential to disaster planning and response given the region's susceptibility to cyclones, floods, and earthquakes. These facilities encourage member nations to work together, enhance their capacities, and share their knowledge. They help SAARC achieve its objectives of regional cooperation, economic development, and social advancement. Each center runs with the approval and assistance of the member state in which it is situated, enabling active involvement and participation in regional development initiatives. In conclusion, SAARC Regional Centers are specialized organizations that promote collaboration and growth throughout South Asia in significant industries. They are essential in tackling regional issues, increasing information exchange among member nations, and promoting cooperation for the benefit of the local populace.

KEYWORDS:

Association, Centers, Management SAARC, Regional.

INTRODUCTION

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an organization of South Asian nations, which was established on 8 December 1985 when the government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka formally adopted its charter providing for the promotion of economic and social progress, cultural development within the South Asia region and also for friendship and cooperation with other developing countries.

Afghanistan joined the organization in 2007.

It is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The meetings of the heads of the states are usually scheduled annually while the meetings of foreign secretaries, twice in a year. The objectives of the Association as defined in the Charter are

- i. To promote the welfare of the people 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 realize their full potential [1], [2];
- iii. To promote and strengthen selective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- iv. To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems; To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural and technical and scientific fields;
- v. To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries [3], [4];
- vi. To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest; and
- vii. To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes. Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, political equality and independence of all member states. Non-interference in the internal matters is one of its objectives.

Cooperation for mutual benefit.

- i. All decisions to be taken unanimously and need a quorum of all eight members.
- ii. All bilateral issues to be kept aside and only multilateral (involving many countries) issues to be discussed without being prejudiced by bilateral issues.
- iii. Council of Ministers
- iv. Standing Committee
- v. Technical Committee
- vi. Programming Committee
- vii. Secretariat

The areas of cooperation are as follows:

- i. Agriculture and Rural Development
- ii. Investment and Commercial Dispute Settlement
- iii. Biotechnology
- iv. Culture
- v. Economic and Trade
- vi. Education
- vii. Energy
- viii. Environment
- ix. Finance
- x. Food Security and SAARC
- xi. Information and Communication Technology
- xii. Poverty Alleviation
- xiii. Science and Technology

- xiv. Security Aspects- Drug and Drug related crimes
- xv. Terrorism Police matters

Social Development

Tourism Funding Mechanism

- i. First summit: 7-8 December, 1985 (Dhaka)
- ii. Second Summit: 16-17 November, 1986 (Bangalore)
- iii. Third Summit: 2-4 November, 1987 (Kathmandu)
- iv. Fourth Summit: 29-31 December, 1988 (Islamabad)
- v. Fifth Summit: 21-23 November, 1990 (Male)
- vi. Sixth Summit: 21 December, 1991 (Colombo)
- vii. Seventh Summit : 10-11 April, 1993 (Dhaka)
- viii. Eighth Summit: 2-4 May, 1995 (New Delhi)
- ix. Ninth Summit: 12-14 May, 1997 (Maldives)
- x. Tenth Summit: 29-31 July, 1998 (Colombo)
- xi. Eleventh Summit: 4-6 January, 2002 (Kathmandu)
- xii. Twelfth Summit: 2-6 January, 2004 (Islamabad)
- xiii. Thirteenth Summit : 12-13 November, 2005 (Dhaka)
- xiv. Fourteenth Summit : 3-4 April, 2007 (New Delhi)
- xv. Fifteenth Summit : 1-3 August, 2008 (Colombo)
- xvi. Sixteenth Summit: 28-29 April, 2010 (Thimphu)
- xvii. Seventeenth Summit: 10-11 November, 2011 (Maldives)
- xviii. Eighteenth Summit: 26-27 November, 2014 (Kathmandu)
- xix. Nineteenth Summit: 15-19 November, 2016 (Islamabad)

SAARC Specialized Bodies

- i. SAARC Development Fund (SDF)
- ii. South Asian University (SAU)
- iii. SAARC Arbitration Council
- iv. South Asian Regional Standards Organization

DISCUSSION

Problems

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. 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 partnerships than as a region. As a result, growth gaps in South Asia have been widening sharply [5], [6].

The various problems faced by the association are as follows:

- i. Policy of non-interference
- ii. Championed by soft power of India.
- iii. Large variety regional and cultural differences.
- iv. Lack of financial resources and advanced technologies

- v. Bilateral dispute and differences
- vi. Political instability
- vii. Geopolitical tensions
- viii. Trust deficit and lack of social cohesion
- ix. Global challenges
- x. Internal problems constituting social, economic and developmental issues.
- xi. Low level of Intra SAARC trade
- xii. Suffers from an acute resource crunch
- xiii. Underdeveloped Infrastructure
- xiv. Food Security reserve failed to meet the need during crisis in certain states.
- xv. Lack of effective implication of SAARC programmes.

Propects

- i. SAARC, as an organization, reflects the South Asian identity of the countries, historically and contemporarily.
- ii. This is a naturally made geographical identity. Equally, there is a cultural, linguistic, religious and culinary affinity that defines South Asia.
- iii. South Asia needs increased co-operations among its countries to face challenges posed by hikes in food prices, energy prices, recurrent disasters and climate change due to geographic, economic, cultural and other strategic reasons [7], [8].
- iv. South Asia has distinct advantages to cooperate in many areas including cross border infrastructure and services.
- v. South Asia has shown impressive growth in the last decade.
- vi. This growth is reflected in the growth of trade and investment in the region.
- vii. India has been star performer among all South Asian countries.
- viii. More global integration and South Asia's proximity to the growing Asian region (China, ASEAN) are explanatory factors of this growth.
- ix. Large human capital base combined with competition through open economies is playing a crucial role in the growth process.
- x. Increased remittances and growing middle class with high purchasing power.
- xi. Youth bulge in a perspective possible demographic dividend.
- xii. High growth in services with modern technology.

In a region increasingly targeted by Chinese investment and loans, SAARC could be a common platform to demand more sustainable alternatives for development, or to oppose trade tariffs together, or to demand better terms for South Asian labour around the world. The potential of organization to maintain peace and stability in the region should be explored by all the member countries [9]. SAARC should be allowed to progress naturally and the people of South Asia , who make up a quarter of the world's population should be offered more people-to- people contact and cultural cohesiveness [10].

CONCLUSION

Within the SAARC structure, the Regional Centers for SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional collaboration) are specialized organizations that each concentrate on certain facets of regional development and collaboration. In light of my most recent information update in September 2021, the following may be said about SAARC Regional Centers. specialist Knowledge The SAARC Regional Centers provide resources and specialist knowledge in a

variety of fields, including agriculture, public health, the environment, and poverty reduction. These facilities operate as focal points for operations including capacity-building, training, and research. boosting cooperation: By allowing the sharing of information, best practices, and experiences in certain areas, they play a significant role in boosting cooperation among member states. This cooperation may result in better regional policies and procedures. Building Capacity: The centers concentrate on training, seminars, and activities that improve the knowledge and abilities of professionals and officials from member nations. The improvement of institutional capacity and the growth of human resources both benefit the area. Resolving Regional Issues: SAARC Regional Centers play a key role in resolving regional issues, such as those pertaining to agriculture, health, and the environment.

They provide member nations a forum to cooperatively address these problems, promoting regional stability and growth. Promoting Research: These institutions carry out research and studies to provide information and insights on local problems. The study results may influence policy development and decision-making in member states, resulting in solutions that are supported by facts. Resource Sharing Regional Centers often assist member nations in exchanging resources, technology, and experience. Through sharing, resources may be used more effectively and people may help one another during emergencies or crises. Challenges and financing: Like previous SAARC efforts, the SAARC Regional Centers have had difficulties with financing, coordination, and member state political issues. For them to continue to be successful, adequate financial backing and political collaboration are necessary.

Adaptation and Innovation: SAARC Regional Centers may need to adjust to changing regional dynamics and make use of cutting-edge techniques and technology in their specific fields of competence in order to stay relevant and productive. In conclusion, SAARC Regional Centers are essential for fostering regional collaboration, solving shared issues, and building South Asian countries' capacities in certain fields. Their particular emphasis and knowledge support the organization's overarching goals, which include promoting social advancement, economic prosperity, and regional stability. The member nations' willingness to provide the required funding and work well together to resolve regional challenges is essential to the future functioning of these centers.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Q. K. Ahmad, "SAARC: Evisoning the future," *South Asian Surv.*, 2002, doi: 10.1177/097152310200900203.
- [2] Taslim-Uddin, M. Habibur-Rahman, and Raju-Dakhal, "Swot analysis of neuro rehabilitation in SAARC countries," *Neurorehabil. Neural Repair*, 2018.
- [3] H. Awan *et al.*, "Status of Ophthalmic Education and the Eye Health Workforce in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Countries," *Asia-Pacific J. Ophthalmol.*, 2014, doi: 10.1097/apo.0000000000000037.
- [4] N. Manzoor Ahmed and H. Sumbul, "SAARC after Three Decades: An Assessment of Progress in Regional Cooperation in Functional Areas (1985–2015)," *Glob. Soc. Sci. Rev.*, 2016, doi: 10.31703/gssr.2016(i-i).02.

- [5] S. Sohoo, "ICT initiative of SAARC Agriculture Centre in the SAARC Region," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computer Science and Information Technology, ICCSIT 2008*, 2008. doi: 10.1109/ICCSIT.2008.151.
- [6] G. Y. Khan and V. Daly, "Growth Convergence and Divergence in SAARC," *Res. Econ. Manag.*, 2018, doi: 10.22158/rem.v3n4p315.
- [7] A. H. Mostafa and M. S. I. Khan, "A regional information network for South Asia," *Inf. Dev.*, 1990, doi: 10.1177/0266666990000600205.
- [8] L. Sáez, *The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): An emerging collaboration architecture*. 2012. doi: 10.4324/9780203808801.
- [9] M. Dutta, "The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)," in *Economic Regionalization in the Asia-Pacific*, 2013. doi: 10.4337/9781840647624.00042.
- [10] S. M. Thangavelu and S. S. Pattnayak, "Impact of South Asia on global institutions: Economic and social perspectives," in *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Economics*, 2012. doi: 10.4324/9780203827796-31.

CHAPTER 5

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC FREE TRADE AREA

Satyendra Arya, Associate Professor
 Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
 Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
 Email Id- satyendra_arya17@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework, the SAARC Free economic Area (SAFTA) is a significant regional economic pact. SAFTA, which was established in 2006, is an important step towards greater economic cooperation and integration among its eight members, which are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. By lowering or eliminating tariffs and non-tariff obstacles to the interchange of products among member nations, SAFTA's main goal is to encourage intra-regional commerce. As part of SAFTA, participating nations agree to gradually lower tariffs, fostering a more favorable business climate in the area. By maximizing the region's potential for economic growth, this agreement seeks to promote economic development, provide job opportunities, and reduce poverty. SAFTA intends to execute the agreement in phases, enabling member nations to gradually liberalize trade over a predetermined time frame. To ensure that the region's least developed nations benefit from the agreement without experiencing excessive economic burden, special and differentiated treatment measures are also included. SAFTA fosters collaboration in a number of additional areas, such as technical standards, customs practices, and trade-related capacity development, in addition to lowering trade barriers. The agreement represents the joint determination of SAARC member nations to fortify their economic links, advance regional growth, and improve their combined position on the world economic scene. SAFTA, or the SAARC Free Trade Area, is an important regional trade pact that seeks to promote economic integration and cooperation among South Asian countries. SAFTA helps member nations' economies grow and develop by lowering trade barriers and fostering intra-regional commerce, eventually aiming to create a more prosperous and integrated South Asia.

KEYWORDS:

Area, Agreement, SAFTA, SAARC, Trade.

INTRODUCTION

In the center of South Asia, a region of great variety, complexity, and unrealized economic potential, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Free Trade Area stands as a light of opportunity and optimism. SAARC, which was established in 1985 with the intention of fostering regional cooperation and development, brings together eight nearby nations: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA) is one of SAARC's most ambitious projects since it would make it easier for people to transport products and services throughout the region, spur economic development, and raise millions of people's standards of living. Although SAARC has achieved tremendous progress in this quest over the years, problems still exist. This in-depth

investigation seeks to clarify the development, relevance, difficulties, and future possibilities of the SAARC Free Trade Area as it works to alter South Asia's economic environment [1], [2].

SAARC's Development: From Vision to Reality

When SAARC was created, the concept of regional cooperation in South Asia was not new. Although there were many historical, cultural, and economic connections in the area, political and bilateral conflicts often eclipsed the likelihood of cooperation. SAARC was created as a diplomatic forum for these countries to interact, put aside their differences, and work toward common objectives. On December 8, 1985, the charter for SAARC was adopted in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the organization was effectively established. The group was founded with the intention of fostering regional security, peace, and prosperity via teamwork. The goals of SAARC were centered on economic integration and collaboration from the beginning [3], [4].

The signing of the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) in 1993 was one of the early manifestations of this economic desire. In order to ultimately create a Free Trade Area, SAPTA established the groundwork for lowering tariffs and trade restrictions inside the area. The requirements of SAPTA were intended to be implemented gradually over many years in order to promote economic development, reduce poverty, and boost regional commerce.

The SAARC Free Trade Area Roadmap

A major accomplishment in the area of regional economic integration is the creation of the SAARC Free Trade Area. Its objective is to remove tariffs and non-tariff trade restrictions among member nations, fostering a climate that will promote greater trade and economic development. But the path to achieving this goal has been paved with both victories and setbacks.

The conversion of SAPTA into the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2004 was the first key step toward the SAARC Free Trade Area. The objectives of SAFTA were to hasten and broaden the liberalization process. Under SAFTA, participating nations agreed to lower their tariffs on a variety of products over a certain time frame [5], [6].

SAFTA was established on the tenets of reciprocity, justice, and consideration for the unique requirements of the region's least developed nations. With provisions for technical assistance and special treatment for the least developed countries (LDCs), the agreement took into account the different degrees of development among SAARC members and aimed to guarantee that everyone could benefit from trade liberalization.

The SAARC Free Trade Area's Importance

For South Asia and the whole world, the SAARC Free Trade Area is of utmost importance. With roughly one-fifth of the world's population, this developing economic area has enormous potential to develop into a thriving and active trade sector. The SAARC Free Trade Area is significant for many reasons.

DISCUSSION

The SAARC area is marked by substantial economic differences.

1. Regional Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction. While some of the member countries, like India, have seen great economic progress, others, like Afghanistan and Nepal, still have a long way to go in terms of development. By boosting commerce, luring capital, and generating

employment opportunities, the SAARC Free commerce Area has the potential to support more balanced economic growth. This in turn may help millions of people in the area live better lives and fight against poverty.

2. Promoting intra-regional trade: Historically, South Asian nations have traded with one another at a far lower rate than they did with other areas. By lowering trade obstacles and enticing member nations to do more business with their neighbors, the SAARC Free Trade Area aims to buck this trend. Increased intra-regional commerce may result in a more diversified economy, one that is more resilient, and one that is less reliant on outside markets [7], [8].

3. Strengthening Political and Diplomatic Ties: The SAARC Free Trade Area includes political and diplomatic components in addition to its economic ones. By promoting stronger economic linkages, it may help member nations cooperate and trust one another, thereby reducing long-standing political tensions and conflicts. South Asia's stability and peace are important for the whole world as well as the region.

4. Increased Competitiveness: South Asian industry may become more competitive as a result of increased regional trade. Countries in the area must raise the quality and effectiveness of their goods and services as they work to increase market access. This desire for competitiveness may lead to innovation, better infrastructure, and higher product standards, all of which are advantageous to both consumers and companies[9], [10].

5. Global Economic Integration: For South Asian countries, the SAARC Free Trade Area is a first step toward deeper global economic integration. The SAARC members are better positioned to participate in the larger global economy by harmonizing their trade rules and regulations. This may increase the region's involvement in global value chains, draw in foreign investment, and foster technical transfer.

Issues and Obstacles to Implementation

The SAARC Free Trade Area has a lot of potential, but it also faces a number of difficulties and roadblocks that have prevented it from reaching its full potential.

Political Conflicts and Bilateral Conflicts: Regional economic integration has sometimes been stalled by political conflicts and protracted diplomatic disagreements. The SAARC region's member states have complicated historical and political ties that may make it difficult to work together on trade-related problems. For instance, SAARC endeavors have often been eclipsed by the India-Pakistan war.

Non-Tariff Barriers and Trade Facilitation: Sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, customs processes, and standards all continue to obstruct intra-regional trade. The process of harmonizing and streamlining this legislation is still difficult since it calls for cooperation across member states with different capabilities and goals.

Infrastructure Deficits: The efficient movement of commodities throughout the area is hampered by inadequate infrastructure, particularly transportation and logistics networks. Reducing trade costs and raising the competitiveness of South Asian economies need improved infrastructural connections.

Disparate Levels of Development: The SAARC member nations' various levels of development provide a serious problem. While some nations are capable of competing on a global scale,

others, especially LDCs, need specific help and consideration in order to successfully participate in the SAARC Free Trade Area. It's challenging to strike a balance between everyone's interests and fair benefits.

Geopolitical issues: As a strategically significant area, South Asia, geopolitical factors might have an impact on economic cooperation. The effectiveness of SAARC activities may be impacted by the participation of outside forces and regional rivalry.

SAARC's Free Trade Area's potential

Despite these obstacles, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the SAARC Free Trade Area's future. A powerful driver of advancement is the member nations' dedication to regional cooperation and the possible economic gains. Additionally, outside variables

The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) is a pact that aims to encourage economic integration and trade liberalization among members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). As of my most recent information update in September 2021, the SAARC Free Trade Area is as follows commerce Promotion the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) is a key step in encouraging commerce within the area. It aims to increase intra-regional commerce and economic development by lowering and removing tariffs and trade barriers between member nations. Regional Economic Integration: The significance of regional economic integration is emphasized by SAFTA.

It aspires to enhance economic engagement and cooperation by establishing a shared economic space among SAARC member nations. Tariff Reduction The agreement has clauses that provide for gradually lowering tariffs on a variety of products. South Asian goods are anticipated to become more competitive in regional markets as a result of this decrease, perhaps resulting in greater trade volumes. SAFTA's complete implementation has encountered difficulties, despite the fact that it has a lot of potential. Its full potential has been hampered by problems including non-tariff obstacles, political unrest, and a lack of infrastructural connection.

Positive Effect on Regional Economies: Despite difficulties, SAFTA has had a favorable effect on a few regional economic sectors. It has facilitated the movement of certain commodities and pushed South Asian nations to diversify their economies. SAFTA emphasizes inclusive development because it understands the need to make sure that the advantages of trade liberalization are distributed widely across society. It has mechanisms to support economically struggling member nations and safeguard weak sectors.

CONCLUSION

With a large population and a variety of economies, South Asia has the potential to develop significantly via improved regional commerce. SAFTA may act as a spur for regional economic growth and poverty eradication. In the framework of the dynamics of world commerce, SAFTA is still important. Regional trade agreements like SAFTA are becoming more significant as nations try to diversify their trading partners and lessen their dependence on outside markets. Future Obstacles For SAFTA to be as effective as possible, member nations must overcome lingering issues such non-tariff obstacles, infrastructure improvement, and political squabbles. All of the member nations must work together and maintain their commitment. SAFTA, or the SAARC Free Trade Area, is a key regional project that aims to advance trade, economic integration, and inclusive development in South Asia. Despite difficulties with execution, it

nevertheless has the ability to increase regional economic development and reduce poverty. The willingness of the SAFTA member states to remove current trade restrictions and cooperate to create a more supportive regional economic climate is essential to the agreement's success.

REFERENCES:

- [1] M. J. Abdin, "Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in SAARC Countries," *SSRN Electron. J.*, 2015, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2660625.
- [2] Q. K. Ahmad, "SAARC: Evisoning the future," *South Asian Surv.*, 2002, doi: 10.1177/097152310200900203.
- [3] H. Awan *et al.*, "Status of Ophthalmic Education and the Eye Health Workforce in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Countries," *Asia-Pacific J. Ophthalmol.*, 2014, doi: 10.1097/apo.0000000000000037.
- [4] R. Vadra, "A study on India s trade relationship with SAARC countries," *Int. J. Indian Cult. Bus. Manag.*, 2012, doi: 10.1504/ijicbm.2012.044016.
- [5] S. Kelegama, "Towards Greater Economic Connectivity in South Asia," *Econ. Polit. Wkly.*, 2007.
- [6] N. Manzoor Ahmed and H. Sumbul, "SAARC after Three Decades: An Assessment of Progress in Regional Cooperation in Functional Areas (1985–2015)," *Glob. Soc. Sci. Rev.*, 2016, doi: 10.31703/gssr.2016(i-i).02.
- [7] L. Sáez, *The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): An emerging collaboration architecture*. 2012. doi: 10.4324/9780203808801.
- [8] S. Sohoo, "ICT initiative of SAARC Agriculture Centre in the SAARC Region," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computer Science and Information Technology, ICCSIT 2008*, 2008. doi: 10.1109/ICCSIT.2008.151.
- [9] A. H. Mostafa and M. S. I. Khan, "A regional information network for South Asia," *Inf. Dev.*, 1990, doi: 10.1177/0266666699000600205.
- [10] M. Dutta, "The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)," in *Economic Regionalization in the Asia-pacific*, 2013. doi: 10.4337/9781840647624.00042.

CHAPTER 6

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC DEVELOPMENT FUND

Avinash Rajkumar, Assistant Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- avinashtmimt1982@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

A crucial financial organization within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). The SAARC member nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka make up the SDF, which was established in 2010 as a financial mechanism to assist and finance development projects and initiatives within the SAARC. The SAARC Development Fund's main goal is to lessen socioeconomic inequities within the region through funding initiatives that encourage economic development, poverty eradication, and sustainable development. Infrastructure, education, healthcare, agriculture, and energy are among the areas that are emphasized as being crucial to the region's prosperity. Each financing window used by the SDF is devoted to a different set of development goals. By addressing the specific demands and difficulties encountered by SAARC member nations, these windows ensure sure that the fund's funds are efficiently directed into initiatives that directly improve people's lives. The SDF's dedication to inclusive and sustainable development stands out as one of its most remarkable characteristics. It places a strong emphasis on the involvement of all member nations, even the less developed ones, and works to guarantee that development initiatives are socially and ecologically responsible. By providing funding for initiatives that benefit many member nations, the SAARC Development Fund plays a crucial part in fostering regional cooperation and integration. Additionally, it encourages cooperation between governments, non-governmental organizations, and the commercial sector, helping SAARC to fulfill its main goals. Finally, it should be noted that the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) is an important financial organization whose goal is to support sustainable and equitable growth across the South Asian area. The SDF is crucial in promoting regional cooperation and integration while also improving the well-being of citizens of SAARC member nations by funding initiatives that address urgent socioeconomic concerns.

KEYWORDS:

Development, Fund, Financial, Organization SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to promote regional cooperation and economic growth, eight South Asian neighbors Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka formed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. The SAARC Development Fund (SDF) has become a key organization within the SAARC framework for eliminating poverty, fostering economic growth, and encouraging sustainable development in the region. This thorough investigation looks at the SAARC Development Fund's history, goals,

workings, successes, difficulties, and hopes for the future while examining how it contributes to the socioeconomic development of South Asian countries.

History and Establishment of SAARC Development Fund

The SAARC member states' shared aim of regional cooperation and development served as the foundation for the creation of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). The SAARC organization was created as a venue to discuss the socioeconomic problems that South Asian countries confront. The concept of establishing a specialist fund for regional development progressively gained support in this setting [1], [2].

When the SAARC Council of Ministers approved the SAARC Development Fund (Establishment) Agreement on April 29, 2010, the SDF was legally constituted. This signaled a commitment to tackle the development gaps that are pervasive in South Asia and represented a critical turning point in the organization's history. The main objectives of the fund were to promote sustainable growth, infrastructural development, and the reduction of poverty in the area.

the SAARC Development Fund's goals

The broad goals of the SAARC Development Fund are to promote regional collaboration and prosperity. They are as follows:

1. **Poverty Alleviation:** The main objective of the SDF is to lessen poverty in South Asia. The fund aims to provide funding for initiatives and projects that directly assist economically and socially underprivileged people and solve the critical issues associated with poverty in the area.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** The foundation of economic expansion is infrastructure. The SDF aspires to engage in vital infrastructure initiatives that may boost commerce, increase connectivity, and boost regional economic activity. These initiatives include, among other things, the transportation, energy, and telecommunications sectors.
3. **Human Resource Development:** The SDF supports programs that emphasize education, healthcare, and skill development because it understands the significance of human capital in development. With these initiatives, the workforce in the area will be given the information and abilities required to promote innovation and economic progress.
4. **Trade and Economic Integration:** The SDF promotes greater trade and economic ties among SAARC members. In order to harness the region's economic potential and lower trade obstacles, it aims to facilitate cross-border commerce, investment, and corporate cooperation.
5. **Environmental Sustainability:** The SDF's strategy is based on the idea of sustainable development. It helps fund initiatives and programs that advance environmental protection, the use of renewable energy sources, and climate resiliency, making South Asia a greener and more sustainable region.

DISCUSSION

Mechanisms for the SAARC Development Fund's operations

The SDF's operational framework is intended to efficiently direct funding toward worthwhile initiatives in South Asia. The fund adheres to the following major guidelines:

1. The SDF is controlled by a Board of Directors, which includes representatives from each SAARC member state. This governance framework guarantees inclusive decision-making that takes into account the varied needs and objectives of the area [3], [4].
2. **Funding Sources:** The SAARC member nations, development partners, and other sources also contribute to the SDF. Each member state pledges to support the fund financially, while development partners may contribute via grants or subsidized loans.
3. **Project Selection and Implementation:** The SDF assesses project proposals in accordance with the goals and standards of the fund. Then, in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders, chosen initiatives are put into action. Throughout the course of a project, the fund places a strong emphasis on local ownership, transparency, and responsibility.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The SDF uses excellent monitoring and evaluation methods to guarantee the success of its activities. These procedures evaluate the status, results, and effect of projects, enabling ongoing development and education.
5. **Technical Assistance and Capacity Building:** The SDF helps member states efficiently plan, carry out, and manage development initiatives by providing technical assistance and capacity-building support. Sharing of information, instruction, and the promotion of best practices are all included in this support[5], [6].

SAARC Development Fund Successes and Effects

The SAARC Development Fund has significantly advanced regional collaboration and development since its founding. Its effects may be seen in many dimensions:

1. **Poverty Reduction:** The SDF has supported initiatives that directly assist marginalized groups, helping to reduce poverty in South Asia. Initiatives in healthcare, education, and livelihood development are among these endeavors.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Trade facilitation and regional connectivity have both improved as a result of investments in vital infrastructure. The development and integration of the economy have been facilitated by improved energy, transportation, and road infrastructure.
3. **Human Resource Development:** The region's human capital has been bolstered by the SDF's support of educational and skill-development initiatives. A more skilled and flexible workforce that can spur innovation and productivity has been produced as a consequence.
4. **Trade and Economic Integration:** The SDF has expanded intra-regional trade and investment as a result of its initiatives to lower trade barriers and advance economic integration. This has boosted economic activity and given enterprises in South Asia new chances.
5. **Environmental Sustainability:** Projects that emphasize renewable energy, environmental preservation, and climate resilience demonstrate the SDF's dedication to sustainability. These programs are crucial for reducing the effects of climate change in the area.

Problems and Prospects for the Future

Despite its successes, the SAARC Development Fund confronts a number of difficulties that should be taken into account:

1. **Political Tensions and Bilateral Conflicts:** The operations and efficacy of the fund have sometimes been hampered by political tensions and protracted conflicts among SAARC member nations. Collaboration and resource mobilization may be hampered by these conflicts [7], [8].
2. **Resource Mobilization:** It is still difficult to get sufficient and ongoing financing for the SDF. For the fund to be viable and have an effect, member nations' financial obligations and the recruitment of development partners are crucial.
3. **Implementation ability:** Both at the national and regional levels, effective project implementation needs strong institutional ability. This capacity-building and -strengthening effort is continuing.
4. **Alignment with National goals:** For ownership and effect, SDF-funded initiatives must be in line with the national goals of the participating countries. It might be challenging to balance regional and national development objectives.
5. **Geopolitical Factors:** The geopolitical realities of South Asia might affect how the fund operates. Decision-making and the distribution of resources may be impacted by regional rivalries and the participation of outside authorities [9], [10].

The SAARC Development Fund's future possibilities are still dependent on the region's capacity to surmount hurdles and realize its unrealized potential for development and collaboration. The SDF is a monument to the shared desire of its member nations to promote a more affluent and linked South Asia as the region continues its path toward greater regional integration and development. The SAARC Development Fund's development, successes, problems, and opportunities will all be thoroughly examined as part of this investigation, which will go deeper into each of these areas as it works to fulfill its mandate of promoting regional cooperation and well-being.

CONCLUSION

Facilitating Regional Development: The SAARC Development Fund is a critical mechanism for facilitating and financing development projects and programs in South Asia. It plays a crucial role in addressing regional challenges and promoting economic growth. **Funding Diverse Sectors:** SDF supports projects across various sectors, including infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. This diversification reflects a comprehensive approach to addressing the region's multifaceted development needs. **Empowering Member States:** SDF empowers SAARC member states by providing financial resources, technical expertise, and capacity-building support for project implementation. It encourages self-reliance and ownership of development initiatives within the region. **Poverty Reduction:** A significant focus of SDF is on poverty reduction and social development. By funding projects that directly benefit vulnerable populations, SDF contributes to improving the living standards of people in South Asia. **Economic Integration** SDF aligns with the goal of economic integration within the SAARC region. It promotes regional cooperation by facilitating the financing of cross-border infrastructure projects and trade facilitation measures. **Challenges in Fund Allocation:** The allocation of funds and the selection of projects have faced challenges related to the equitable distribution of resources among member states and ensuring that the most impactful projects receive funding. **Resource Mobilization:** The success of SDF depends on its ability to mobilize adequate financial resources. Member states' financial contributions, as well

as external donor support, are essential to sustain and expand the fund's activities. Coordination and Implementation Effective coordination among member states and timely project implementation are critical for realizing the intended outcomes of SDF-funded projects. Continued Relevance as South Asia experiences evolving development needs and opportunities, SDF's continued relevance hinges on its adaptability to emerging challenges and its ability to align its initiatives with the changing dynamics of the region. In conclusion, the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) is an important instrument for promoting regional development and addressing common challenges within the SAARC region. By providing financial resources and technical support for a wide range of development projects, SDF contributes to the improvement of living conditions, economic growth, and social progress in South Asia. Its success depends on the commitment of member states to provide funding and effective project management, as well as its ability to adapt to the changing needs of the region.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) as a financial organization to assist and advance regional development efforts within the SAARC area. Here is a conclusion on the SAARC Development Fund as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021 Facilitating Regional Development The SAARC Development Fund is a crucial tool for coordinating and funding South Asian development projects and initiatives. In resolving local issues and fostering economic development, it is essential. Providing Financial assistance for Diverse Sectors: SDF provides financial assistance for initiatives in a range of fields, including as infrastructure improvement, poverty reduction, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. This diversity demonstrates a thorough strategy for meeting the region's varied economic demands. By providing financial resources, technical know-how, and assistance with capacity development for project execution, SDF strengthens SAARC member states. It promotes independence and regional initiative ownership for development. Social development and poverty alleviation are major areas of emphasis for SDF. The SDF makes a contribution to raising the quality of life for people in South Asia by supporting initiatives that directly assist underprivileged communities.

Economic Integration SDF supports the objective of regional economic integration within SAARC. It encourages regional cooperation by making it easier to finance international infrastructure projects and trade facilitation initiatives. Money Allocation Issues: The equal distribution of resources among member states and ensuring that the most effective projects get financing have been issues that have arisen throughout the money allocation process. Resource Mobilization: SDF's capacity to gather enough financial resources is essential to its success. The financial assistance of member nations and other donors is necessary to maintain and grow the operations of the fund. cooperation and Project Implementation: Successful project implementation and timely member state cooperation are essential for achieving the goals of SDF-funded initiatives. Continuing Relevance: As South Asia experiences changing development possibilities and requirements, SDF's continuing relevance depends on its capacity to adapt to new problems and to coordinate its actions with the shifting dynamics of the area. Finally, it should be noted that the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) is a crucial tool for advancing regional development and resolving shared issues within the SAARC area. SDF helps to raise living standards, promote economic growth, and advance social progress in South Asia by providing financial resources and technical assistance for a variety of development initiatives. Its success relies on the willingness of the member governments to provide finance, efficient project management, and the capacity to adjust to the changing demands of the area.

REFERENCES:

- [1] F.-R. Chowdhury, A. Basher, M. Amin, N. Hassan, and M. Patwary, “Rabies in South Asia: Fighting for Elimination,” *Recent Pat. Antiinfect. Drug Discov.*, 2015, doi: 10.2174/1574891x10666150410130024.
- [2] E. Gogoi, A. V Bahadur, and C. R. del Rio, “Mainstreaming adaptation to climate change within governance systems in South Asia: An analytical framework and examples from practice,” *ACT Learn. Pap.*, 2017.
- [3] R. Sedhain, “Role of Foreign Direct Investment on Economic Growth: A Case of SAARC Countries,” *SSRN Electron. J.*, 2017, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2780359.
- [4] S. K. Bhattacharya and G. G. Das, “Can South–South Trade Agreements Reduce Development Deficits?: An Exploration of SAARC during 1995–2008,” *J. South Asian Dev.*, 2014, doi: 10.1177/0973174114549129.
- [5] M. Arshad, *The charter of SAARC development fund / Ministry of Justice*. 2010. doi: 10.29171/acku_pamphlet_hc417_c53_2010_n1028_english_title2.
- [6] M. K. Saravanan, R. Satyanarayana, and N. Prabhakar, “Reaching the unreached: Determinants of financial inclusion through access and usage of banking services in SAARC countries,” *St. Theresa J. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, 2017.
- [7] H. N. Poudel, “State of Human Development: SAARC and Nepal,” *Econ. Lit.*, 2016, doi: 10.3126/el.v12i0.14887.
- [8] I. Ahmed and I. Ahmed, “SAARC: Social charter and human security,” in *The Emerging Dimensions of SAARC*, 2010. doi: 10.1017/UPO9788175968615.007.
- [9] K. Bhattarai, “Economic Growth and Development in India and SAARC Countries,” *Indian Econ. J.*, 2012.
- [10] D. Bhattacharya, “Regional Integration and the Post-2015 Framework: A South Asian Perspective,” *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1391561415594903.

CHAPTER 7

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL CHALLENGES WITHIN SAARC

Chanchal Chawla, Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- chanchalchawla0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Since its founding in 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has faced ongoing political difficulties. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight nations that make up SAARC. Although the organization was created with the noble intention of promoting regional cooperation and prosperity, over time, a number of political obstacles have impeded its growth. The following are some of the significant political difficulties that SAARC is now facing: Bilateral disputes: The ongoing bilateral disputes, particularly the rivalry between India and Pakistan, may be the biggest political problem facing SAARC. The potential for collaboration within SAARC has often been eclipsed by these conflicts, which have caused the delay or cancellation of multiple SAARC meetings. These conflicts are based on territory disputes and historical issues. Different national interests are shown by SAARC member nations, as are their political philosophies and top priorities. It may be difficult to come to an agreement because of these conflicting interests about resource allocation, the direction of regional activities, and the rate of integration. In light of regional cooperation measures, several member nations are worried that their sovereignty may be at risk of being eroded. They worry that choices taken collectively by SAARC may violate their national sovereignty.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Political, Regional, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

These issues are genuinely regional in scope, affecting all south Asian polities directly or indirectly, and pressing for regional political initiatives due to a complex shared background of social, ethnic, political, and economic features (whose analysis is outside of my current purpose). What does it mean for the degree of collaboration a regional organization like SAARC has in place?

Geopolitical Influence: The participation of outside forces and observer governments in SAARC has sometimes generated rivalry and distrust among member nations. External geopolitical interests may have an impact on intra-SAARC dynamics. Border conflicts and terrorism are two security issues that the area must deal with. These security worries have the potential to increase tensions between member nations and divert attention and resources away from cooperative efforts.

Economic Disparities: Political difficulties are brought on by economic differences among SAARC members. More rich members may be concerned about resource allocation and obligations, while less developed countries look to them for help and assistance. In conclusion, SAARC's political problems, such as bilateral disputes, divergent country interests, worries about its sovereignty, outside pressures, security concerns, and economic differences, often prevent the group from reaching its full potential. It will need persistent diplomatic efforts, trust-building strategies, and a shared commitment to regional cooperation and development to address these issues. In order to use South Asia's combined might for the good of all its members and its people, these challenges must be overcome.

At this point, making a differentiation regarding the potential nature of cooperative processes becomes essential in order to emphasize and comprehend why a complete institutional regional framework is useful and required. We might refer to the first kind of collaboration process (and associated concerns) as "efficiency-centered," as in the case of educational initiatives, travel regulations, and even technical advancements in industrial operations. In these situations, let's assume that authority A follows the time and resource-efficient strategies of a neighbor B who chooses to share it actively most of the time. This procedure facilitates policymaking on a common, required decision relevant to both authorities, but has no significant impact on the "effectiveness" of outcomes (the minimal results will be achieved anyway, but via a different use of time and resources). Because of how uncontroversial and technical these topics often are, interactions between players are also uncontroversial, and cooperative methods are either voluntary or practically avoidable [1], [2].

Otherwise, issues can involve two or more regional actors simultaneously and inseparably - with varying levels of contentiousness - each of whom has a necessary but insufficient reach to address a particular issue, from migrations to international criminality, terrorism, river-sharing and ethnic conflicts, bilateral conflicts, and nuclear security. Cooperation may be a necessary condition for arriving at any workable solution in the second scenario. The complexity of the problem necessitates numerous sources of authority (single states in this instance), and it exposes the structural limitations of one person acting in a self-interested manner. Therefore, politics in the form of deliberation, negotiation, and agreement processes must be included in the least endowments of a regional organization intended to address such concerns. In other words, this suggests that there will be some kind of disagreement and that it will be resolved via organized channels to produce agreed policy. In fact, SAARC was created to address this complicated reality, but on the other hand, it was not given the institutional resources and authority to do so.

Institutional Deficits

In terms of institutional history, the SAARC Charter was the first to be established. Article X stipulates that bilateral and contentious issues must be kept clearly apart from the association's activities. Additionally, the principle of unanimity was established as the only official decisions procedure, setting aside any institutional processing of dissent. These provisions clearly defy the option of using the association as a direct political lever in order to resolve (either or both) bilateral and contentious issues [3], [4].

In order to create a strict intergovernmental institution (e.g., association), its signing members originally Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka agreed to give up very few, if any, of their sovereign powers, most importantly the ability to make political decisions. Afghanistan was added to the list of signatories in November 2005. A secretariat was

naturally given the non-creative role of monitoring and coordination; a council of ministers along with standing committees and technical committees would share proposal, monitoring, and coordination tasks; and, at the apex, annual summits of heads of state would retain all decision-making authority. This cautiousness was fully reflected by the institutional design developed in Dhaka in December 1985. Finally, the latter would adhere to the restrictions outlined in Article X of the Charter [5], [6]. In addition to this, no method was planned for the nations to address these concerns via more conventional routes. Because of this, there was no consensus on political endowments to turn SAARC into an overtly political organization or platform in Dhaka or at the 15 other summits that were held later. Every stride in that direction would thus enter what has been referred to as "uncharted" land, which is what it undoubtedly did.

Numerous historical arguments have been made in favor of this decision, but none have stood the test of time. The organization had to take into consideration India's mistrust of US influence on the novel regional arrangement as well as the need to prevent India from experiencing the diplomatic embarrassment of being cornered by smaller neighbors in majority vote proceedings, which would have essentially left it with the non-choice of either ceding ground or leaving the association. These reasons were indeed circumstantial, but they weren't enough to support the exclusion of politics from the SAARC. In actuality, the political significance of SAARC did quickly become a defining feature of south Asian leaders' pragmatic approach to regional politics, both inside and beyond the organization [7], [8].

Surmounting Obstacles

All academic and media analyses of SAARC are severely deficient in a rational account of this aspect of the organization. How, therefore, have politics always been intertwined with SAARC's operations, at various levels but often crucially? The arbitrary interruption of summits, the informal diplomatic discussions during summits, and the ongoing member dispute over the inclusion of political matters on the association's official agenda are the three places I single out where this is unmistakably but variably obvious.

Using SAARC Summits as Negotiation Points

The heads of state shall meet at least once a year, as required by Article 3 of the Charter. Nevertheless, there have only been 15 peaks since 1985. I must briefly mention a few key instances in order to provide more detail. In what was deemed a "major blow" to collaboration, Sri Lanka ordered the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) as a need before the fifth summit in 1989 could take place. Since India did not resolve the issues that Sri Lanka considered to be illegal until after, the summit was ultimately postponed to November and moved to the Maldives; The seventh summit was delayed twice) due to the unrest that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India. Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao announced his "impossibility to attend" due to the exceptional rise in communal violence that followed, which spread across borders to Bangladesh and Pakistan in both the east and west; The eighth summit (New Delhi) was postponed from 1994 to 1995 due to Indo-Pakistani diplomatic freezing;

The 11th summit was postponed indefinitely for three years (from 1999 to January 2002) as a result of the Indo-Pakistani armed conflict, which included the Kargil conflict, the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight by terrorists who were allegedly supported by Pakistan, the October

1999 military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan, a flurry of terrorist activity across the border in Kashmir, and the bombings of the Indian Parliament.

The 12th summit (held in Islamabad) was postponed from 2003 to January 2004, and the 13th summit (held in Dhaka) was postponed from January to December 2005 as a result of the tsunami emergency in late 2004 and a sudden Indian withdrawal on its own. The latter was supported by noting the most recent neighborhood changes [9], [10].

The explosions in Dhaka, the assassination of Bangladesh's finance minister, and Gyanendra's royal takeover of Nepal were all security-related difficulties. In addition to the security justification, if the summit had taken place, it may have endorsed and acknowledged Gyanendra's right to reign (ibid).

The frequency with which political unrest inside and among member nations has caused summit meetings to be postponed, delayed, or even cancelled goes well beyond basic record-keeping. If the summits have been postponed, it is because SAARC does not have any institutionalized opportunities to address these concerns at any level of the organization. Summits, whether they were held or much more so when they weren't, acted as a catalyst for regional tensions from 1985 to 2007. In any case, there would be serious restrictions on an apolitical regional cooperation structure in South Asia. On the other hand, some nations, such as Sri Lanka in 1989 and India from 1994 to 2005, have used SAARC as a tool to further their interests and perceptions of national security, going well beyond the bounds of the Charter. They did so in a way that was blatantly calculated and well aware of the repercussions that such unilateral and strategic "use" of SAARC as a political and diplomatic bargaining chip would have had on the region as a whole.

Additionally, a closer examination of the issues reveals that rather than being bilateral, they are rather isolated manifestations of more pervasive regional characteristics: violent communalism in the early 1990s, the ethnic conflict associated with the IPKF intervention in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s, terrorism, border disputes, environmental crises, and military coups have all had a tangible impact on the political reach and relevance of SAARC, even though they did not do so by directly extending its political institutional endowments.

Corridor Diplomacy: The Unofficial Political Forum of the SAARC

When discussing how SAARC has functioned as a significant political platform, the practice of holding corridor discussions in addition to summit meetings assumes a crucial role. The only practice mentioned here that both academics and media paid attention to is this one. Its importance and significance in reducing stress and fostering communication are in fact often acknowledged.

Naturally, SAARC meetings have provided the first-ever chance for regular top-level gatherings of all regional leaders with closed doors, creating the most conducive environment for political debate to occur. This occurrence has been quite beneficial since it has allowed for several informal meetings and talks to take place alongside summits on topics that could not be included on the official agenda and were often bilateral and contentious in character.

If there is a specific issue, the members endeavor to remedy it right away, according to the statement. By evaluating these interactions, we may determine if SAARC has provided a

particularly fruitful political arena and to what degree. We get a better indication from the informal gatherings' frequency and successes:

- i. Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian prime minister, and H. M. Ershad, the president of Bangladesh, reached an agreement on the trilateralization of the Ganga waters during the first summit (held in Dhaka in 1985). On the same day, the Indian Prime Minister and General Zia-ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan, decided to forgo any assault on nuclear installations in the event of conflict;
- ii. At the second summit the following year, India and Bangladesh maintained their bilateral discussions about the Chakma insurgency and the Teen Bigha issue. India initiated negotiations with Sri Lanka on Tamil separatism, while Pakistan and India addressed their stances on the nuclear problem. The SAARC foreign ministers met in 1987 and decided to deploy the IPKF, which would later cause controversy;
- iii. India and Pakistan reviewed their bilateral ties at the third (Kathmandu 1987) and fourth summits (Islamabad 1988); in Male (1990), following particularly severe times of conflict, they discussed the Kashmir problem;
- iv. After a particularly tense nuclear standoff, India and Pakistan resolved to begin official-level communication during the 10th summit in Colombo (1998), but with very little result (Asiaweek, 14 August 1998).
- v. Importantly, it was at the 12th summit in Islamabad (2004) that India and Pakistan decided to issue the joint statement through which they resumed talks on the Kashmir issue, reached an agreement on confidence-building measures (CBMs), and established the firm foundation for dialogue that has not been derailed since, despite all obstacles. Additionally, Pervez Musharraf met privately with the heads of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives (Pakistan Foreign Relations Yearbook 2003-2004: 26-30).
- vi. The Indian prime minister, had private conversations with the heads of government during the 15th summit in Dhaka.

Weekly Economic & Political

Other states of the Maldives, Nepal, and Pakistan, addressing with the latter the infiltrations and breaches of the ceasefire across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir as well as Pakistan's role in the most recent bombings of the Indian embassy in Kabul. Similar to this, Pakistan and Afghanistan started talking about how terrorism is really hurting both nations.

For the circumstances under which it was held, the 12th summit was archetypal. The summit took place in the midst of restless and idle mutual blaming and political mistrust building between India and Pakistan following several years of prolonged violence on the Kashmiri contested border, the 1999 Kargil war, the nuclear confrontation, the bombing of the Indian Parliament, and the complete freezing of diplomatic relations at all levels between India and Pakistan since 2001.

What is significant is that, for the first time in SAARC history, neither the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif nor the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee mentioned any bilateral issues in their opening remarks. This unheard-of action may have depended on both nations' perception of the mutual benefits that resuming bilateral ties concurrent with the summit would have provided the summit gathering was selected for this purpose since it was anticipated that it would be the best setting for a political reconciliation.

Since each nation, not only India and Pakistan, participates in the SAARC summits, informal diplomacy is a fairly well-established technique through which each nation analyzes its bilateral ties and resolves any pressing bilateral issues. The essence of the problems at stake, however, is often regional per se rather than bilateral, as I have previously argued. This approach is one that is being progressively adopted by the members and the organization, but shockingly not by researchers.

In addition, this conduct is applauded and encouraged in official papers, which opens the door for another significant observation in support of my claim. The member nations established the guidelines for official support of informal discussions beginning with the seventh summit statement, using the phrase "a more business-like and functional approach in the conduct of summit meetings". President Kamaratunga of Sri Lanka, who "officially advocated informal political decisions within the SAARC," eagerly endorsed this pragmatism argument at the 1995 Delhi summit.

In an unprecedented move, the member states at the subsequent summit agreed that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful," according to Paragraph 8 of the declaration. The consensus was that doing so would have advanced the organization's mission of promoting peace and understanding across all fronts. Subsequently, the 1998, 2002, 2004, and 2005 statements would all include the phrase "Enhancing Political Cooperation" as their heading. The Group of Eminent Persons (GEP)⁷ also supported a similar, if not even more enthusiastic, viewpoint against the background of a negative assessment of an otherwise extremely critical evaluation of SAARC action throughout almost two decades of its existence. It urged for the continuation of this practice as one of the recommendations in its Final Report.

The 11th summit statement approved the GEP report, exposing, even if no implementation was to follow, a cohesive official perspective on the matter from a body authorized to represent SAARC as an independent organization, free of national partisanship. It further urged that its institutionalization. Thus, it may be said that SAARC's informal political life is enthusiastically embraced and supported because it effectively balances the varying interests of its members with the organization's desire to develop into a distinctive, well-resourced, and powerful regional entity.

The paradoxical finding is that while such informality has entered official routine for reasons some observers find contingent and inevitable at this point⁸, its informal cover is the sole assurance of its very feasibility. The member nations and the organization both acknowledge the need of an informal political forum, but not because of its accomplishments or significant qualities. A key component of SAARC's political importance to regional affairs is its "under cover" diplomacy. Dealing with it officially would be necessary to make it sufficient. The focus now moves to whether an official channel regardless of its form has ever been envisioned, would ever be feasible, and, ultimately, based on what knowledge of regional politics.

Adding politics to the schedule

Since the nature of India's role, position, and guarantees in the region was the primary concern underlying Article X of the charter, the debate over expanding the official scope of the organization to include political matters has persisted at the scholarly, journalistic, and official levels ever since the Charter was first drafted. I shall limit my attention at this time to the official discussion among SAARC's state members. Sadly, Pakistan has been the most outspoken

proponent of the "politicization" of the SAARC agenda. In 1998, at the 10th summit in Kathmandu, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif proposed a "Development and Security Initiative for South Asia," but it was too late to be included on the agenda for formalistic reasons. Small nations, especially Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, proved to be incredibly proactive in this regard and driven by the same reasons. At the 2004 Islamabad summit, Musharraf reissued a substantially identical proposal; in his opening speech in Colombo in August 2008 Yoosuf Raza Gilani restated this claim. He claimed that the lack of an institutional mechanism appropriate to deal with bilateral and contentious issues stood as the major obstacle in the way of SAARC's successes. Even more than at the 2008 Colombo summits, which principally focused on terrorism, energy security, and social and food security, the opening and closing remarks by the heads of state at the 2007 Delhi summit reveal a lot about this discussion. Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president of Sri Lanka, made a passing reference to it in his inauguration statement when he called for increased.

When emphasizing that handling security challenges with an etiologic approach toward the "root causes that lead to violent action" is the only way to achieve regional development, Fakhruddin Ahmed, the top advisor of Bangladesh, made an oblique reference to political collaboration. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the president of the Maldives, fervently supported a new "political commitment" as well. He believed that in order for the "concept of regionalism" that drives SAARC to be adopted "fully and irrevocably," this was not only "necessary," but also "desirable" and "attainable." When there is a lack of a common political will, connectivity is regarded as a valuable but insufficient factor. Once again, Nepalese politician Girija Prasad Koirala said that "the issues of marginalization, poverty, governance, globalization, and violent conflict [should be] dealt with] in a holistic manner." He said that it was feasible to open a "meaningful new chapter" in regional cooperation without jeopardizing the sacred values of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and good neighborliness. He envisioned "a win-win situation for all" and put forward that idea.

Therefore, several focuses (practicality, prosperity, connectedness, and comprehensive regionalism) were blended with bilateralism and problematic regional connections (terrorism, security, governance, and violent conflict). It was made very apparent to go ahead in each situation. This demonstrates how this posture is not to be dismissed as Pakistan's tactical attempt to encircle India. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who represents the most worried actor, seems to support the latter claims, if tentatively. He said that regional concerns should be resolved locally and that the SAARC was still developing as an effective tool. The call for a more robust joint commitment was made. He clarified further that such security considered four specific areas: water, energy, food, and climate, noting security as a vital issue where SAARC's agency is now necessary. Nevertheless, India relaxed the "bilateralism" term as the single and exclusive method of referring to bilateral and contentious problems in its diplomatic lingo for the first time after more than two decades of SAARC existence.

Even if this Indian posture seems evasive and modest, it is unheard of. It may be argued that the admission of the need of regional cooperation on regional concerns equates to a tacit acceptance of the rights of the less developed nations. It is believed that neighboring nations are fellow regional players with whom real collaboration is required, rather than hostile and organized gangs. This was a significant turning point in history; it came after India and Pakistan successfully (though not necessarily permanently) restarted their discussion. Thus, political

discussion as part of the official SAARC agenda and upcoming Charter reform have gained an unusual amount of momentum.

The overwhelming skepticism against SAARC serves as evidence of how debatable this assertion is. However, in order to be important, political autonomy does not have to be attained in its entirety. It is both a viewpoint and a prospect that influences the actions and words of both individual members and the organization as a whole. The image above so seems to completely confirm that SAARC is a real and distinctive political organization that is continuing under development. Why was much of this discussed in silence throughout the academic debate? What could provide a better window into the SAARC's political dynamics? What explains SAARC's significance as a political forum?

DISCUSSION

There is a public discussion on SAARC's political endowments in the area, and intellectuals occupy the center of it. Scholars are frequently found to be wearing the citizen's toga in a significant number of papers, regardless of the theoretical perspective from which international relations (IR) may be approached, and even directly in opposition to it. I'll contend that the three main currents from which SAARC commentators hail, such as Realism, Functionalism, and Liberal Institutionalism (broadly construed), fall short of theoretical insight when applied in various ways to south Asia because they exclude in some way both the understanding of specifically political issues as being genuinely regional and the possibility of addressing them by empowering cooperation with mechanisms able to overcome.

The Battle of the "Black Boxes" and Realism, Neo-Realism

The nation state is the sole actor, anarchy and the battle for life are environmental circumstances, and the national interest serves as the justification for action in any realist analysis. Therefore, it is believed that nation states want power at any costs in a chaotic environment where material power (military, nuclear, and technical) is the only thing that can ensure their existence. This very final idea which in these words is referred to as "national interest" is the sole appropriate justification for action at all levels. This understanding has a significant impact on all authors who are interested in national perspectives on SAARC, foreign policy analysis, security, or geopolitics. According to this understanding, analysis begins with a country's material opposition to one or more other countries, such as India versus Pakistan or India versus all of its neighbors. The purpose of the power quest is to motivate national FPs. The regional imbalances in south Asia are naturally represented by stories of hegemony and counterhegemonic conflict. Therefore, any nonpurely material aspect (psychological, ideological and historical).

Weekly Economic & Political

The idea of structure is often included by neo-realist theories, which account for a nation's potential against the constricting background of the endowments and plans of other governments. The focus on material power finds its ontological and analytical limits in its conception of political as merely strategic, material, and national; however, it acknowledges the extent to which conflicting perceptions of power balances in the region, particularly the Indo-Pakistani enmity, condemns the institution to progress at a "glacial pace".

Functionalism and the Postponement of SAARC Politics,

Second, regional cooperation is urged to address specific problems according to their regional reach, following the conclusion that regionalism is a rational-choice policy arrangement for south Asia. Third, cooperation is deemed to gradually spillover to reach political and security issues as soon as economic cooperation opened for an interdependent and a contact-intensive regional economy. The economic, technical, cultural, as well as social and societal cooperation set forth in the SAARC Charter are thus held to be unrelated to and follow politics; however, it is striking how frequently political disruptions, however tangential and alien they may be to SAARC stated scopes, constitute a major impediment to the fostering of the charted scopes (and vice versa, see, significantly, the decades-long Indo-Nepalese tense relation).

Nothing disproves the notion that a "incremental" strategy is nothing more than a poor excuse to put politics off. In sum, by relegating politics to a secondary position, the instrumentalism paradigm falls short of explanations regarding the intrusive and impeding impact politics have on the SAARC process as well as its dimension as an informal diplomatic forum. In these cases, the only theoretical resource is to recur to Realism.

Liberal Institutionalism and the 'Empty Box' Paradigm

The third, and most pervasive, set of presumptions I find in the secondary literature is liberal institutionalist in nature. Its premise is that the creation of international economic institutions is the most efficient way to maximize and regulate economic activity under conditions of globalization. As the relevant ontological units are individuals, firms, and organizations with an economic purpose and acting in markets, states do not make a difference. All the scholarly discussion on the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA 1993), South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA 1993), and South Asian Regional Economic Integration These economic functions are considered to be neutral in terms of politics and to correspond to the natural circumstances of growth. Politics is dismissed as unimportant or given over to realism as a valid cogent explanation of international conflicts.

The startling limitation of liberal institutionalism is that such explanations of SAARC never include the influence of politics on the process, not even as a problematic roadblock as is done in functionalist literature. Once again, a normatively highly constrained view of politics leaves no room for any evaluation of the political component of SAARC. The three cases that make up the theoretical deadlock are as follows: in the first, politics are Hobbesian in nature and do not extend beyond national governments; in the second, politics are postponed to an unspecified future where it would be ostensibly simpler to address them cooperatively; and in the third, regional cooperation has nothing to do with politics and dissent but is instead institutionalized free-market international trade and economy. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that a Realist perspective always wins out when politics are immediately in issue and that the political side of SAARC is ignored. Thus, it may be argued that such techniques are inappropriate for even considering the political function of a cooperative organization. Their ability to fully comprehend the SAARC process is constrained by their normative presumptions about the function and character of politics in international relations.

As historical proof of SAARC's highly active political involvement and at the very least a growing shared commitment to 124 addressing publicly and formally its political purpose does exist at the institutional level, a significant evaluation of SAARC by the academic community must develop and completely overhaul its theoretical attitude. Finally, the convergence of political wills towards the political endowments of SAARC emerges in fact, first, as a reflection

of a blueprint for a "South Asian unity" catalyzing the attention and political aspirations of all south Asian countries, and, second, it opens for wider reflections on the actual place and role politics occupy in the theory and practice of IR and regional cooperation frameworks, beyond a-critical and abstract normative constraints.

CONCLUSION

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) internal political issues have consistently stood in the way of the group's potential and effectiveness. Here is a summary of the political problems within SAARC as of my most recent information update in September 2021. **Bilateral Conflicts** The existence of long-standing bilateral conflicts and disagreements among member nations has been one of the most important political issues within SAARC. For instance, tensions between India and Pakistan often affect SAARC meetings, causing summits to be postponed or cancelled and impeding regional collaboration. **Security problems:** Cooperation on regional problems has been hampered by political unrest and security concerns in several member nations. There have been instances when other development-related goals have been eclipsed by the emphasis on security issues, such as counterterrorism. **Lack of Consensus:** SAARC functions under the consensus principle, which requires that all member nations concur on all actions and decisions. When member nations have conflicting interests or political difficulties, this criterion might result in impasse, making it difficult to advance pressing concerns. **Economic Disparities:** Political difficulties have also been brought on by economic differences amongst the member nations. There are differences in financial contributions and expectations for the distribution of gains from regional cooperation since some member nations are much less developed than others. **Resources are limited for SAARC** in terms of both finance and administrative capability. These restrictions may make it more difficult for the organization to carry out regional activities and successfully handle political issues.

SAARC diplomatic ties have periodically been strained due to worries over involvement in the internal affairs of member nations. Member nations are often wary of what they perceive to be outside interference in their internal affairs. **Geopolitical rivalry:** South Asia is a key geopolitical area, and foreign nations have interests there. Geopolitical rivalry may make intra-regional collaboration more difficult and have an impact on SAARC's political dynamics. **Regional Uncertainty:** Uncertainty and instability in the area, especially wars in nearby nations, may affect South Asia and intensify SAARC's internal political disputes. **Bilateral vs. Regional Focus:** Member nations sometimes place a higher priority on bilateral ties than on regional collaboration, which might reduce SAARC's ability to effectively handle shared regional concerns. **Potential for Cooperation:** Despite these political difficulties, SAARC has a great deal of potential to solve interregional problems, spur economic development, and enhance the quality of life for South Asians. Success of the organization relies on member governments' willingness to put aside political differences and cooperate for the benefit of the area. In conclusion, SAARC's inability to fully achieve its goals and potential has been hampered by political issues inside the organization. It takes diplomatic efforts, conflict resolution, and a common resolve to place regional cooperation ahead of bilateral disagreements to address these issues. The SAARC's ability to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in South Asia depends on its member nations' capacity to get past these political hurdles and create a more cohesive and wealthy area.

REFERENCES:

- [1] G. Rafiq, "Revitalizing SAARC: Challenges and Prospects," *J. Secur. Strateg. Anal.*, 2018.
- [2] V. Pulla, "Water and Communities in South Asia: A Case for Regional Cooperation," *Sp. Cult. India*, 2018, doi: 10.20896/saci.v6i3.392.
- [3] N. Melegoda and C. Padmakumara, "Functionalist Regional Cooperation: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation for Peace in the Region," *Colombo J. Multi-Disciplinary Res.*, 2018, doi: 10.4038/cjmr.v3i2.29.
- [4] R. Jetly, "Conflict management strategies in ASEAN: Perspectives for SAARC," *Pacific Rev.*, 2003, doi: 10.1080/0951274032000043244.
- [5] T. Tewary and K. S. Ranjani, "The prospects of revival of safta in south Asia: An indian perspective," *International Journal of Economic Research*. 2017.
- [6] A. Aggarwal, "Regional Economic Integration and FDI in South Asia : Prospects and Problems," *IUP J. Int. Bus. Law*, 2008.
- [7] R. Wirsing, "Perilous Waters : The Changing Context of River Rivalry in South Asia," *Whitehead J. Dipl. Int. Relations*, 2011.
- [8] R. Chanda, "Challenges to Regional Services Integration in South Asia," *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1391561415594730.
- [9] S. K. Srivastava, "A Framework for Regional Cooperation on Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in South Asia," in *Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia*, 2010. doi: 10.1007/978-90-481-9516-9_34.
- [10] E. Ali and D. K. Talukder, "Preferential trade among the SAARC Countries: prospects and challenges of regional integration in South Asia," *J. Adm. Gov.*, 2009.

CHAPTER 8

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC AND BILATERAL CONFLICTS

Anushi Singh, Assistant Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- anushigaur@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Long-running bilateral disputes among the member nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been a constant source of difficulties. The complexity of these disputes and their effects on SAARC's goal of regional cooperation and development are explored in depth in this abstract. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight nations that make up the SAARC, which was founded in 1985. Although SAARC was established with the noble intention of promoting regional cooperation, a number of bilateral disputes have continuously hampered the organization's efforts. The rivalry between India and Pakistan is the most well-known and persistent issue in SAARC. This conflict has often eclipsed SAARC's cooperative goals since it is based on old conflicts, such as territory claims and security issues. The SAARC organization's capacity to operate efficiently has been hampered by the postponing or cancellation of multiple summits. Historical Disagreements: Old grudges and disputes between other SAARC members, like those between India and Bangladesh or India and Nepal, have periodically reappeared, hampering diplomatic efforts.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Development, Organization, SAARC, Regional.

INTRODUCTION

SAARC was established in 1985 and operates on the guiding principles of consensus decision-making, a focus on social and economic problems, and avoidance of discussion of sensitive bilateral issues. Members of SAARC are "desirous of peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment, in particular respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, and peaceful settlement of all disputes," as stated in the SAARC Charter (1985). In 1985 in Dhaka, the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka signed this charter. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has made attempts throughout the years to address a number of regional issues, including drug and human trafficking, economic cooperation among south Asian governments, the development of a south Asian social identity, and most recently, the threat of terrorism in the area. SAARC has struggled with interstate, intrastate, and regional disputes for years despite its professed aims as a regional organization. Since its founding in 1985, SAARC has come under fire for failing to establish a strong sense of regional identity. The SAARC has been impacted by outside parties and other

regional organizations, but it has also been affected by intra-state disputes and the bilateral interests of member states [1], [2].

Impact on collaboration: These inter-bilateral disputes often create barriers to collaboration in vital fields including commerce, connectivity, and regional security. Conflicts might prevent the organization from reaching its full potential by preventing agreement on regional activities. Among SAARC member nations, there is a lack of confidence due to bilateral disputes. A lack of open communication might make it difficult to handle regional issues and discrepancies in an effective way. Geopolitical concerns outside of South Asia may worsen bilateral disputes inside SAARC. The participation of outside forces and observer governments might exacerbate existing tensions and impede diplomatic attempts. In conclusion, SAARC has faced a recurrent problem since its founding: bilateral disputes, particularly the India-Pakistan conflict. The organization's efforts to promote regional cooperation and development have been hampered by these disputes, compromising the goal of a prosperous and integrated South Asia, which is widely held. For SAARC to reach its potential as a driver of stability and development in the region, these problems must be resolved.

It would be naive to think that SAARC can thrive in isolation in a world that is interconnected and rapidly globalizing. The political alignments and great power politics in other areas often have an impact on South Asian integration initiatives, either directly or indirectly. In order to develop into a powerful regional organization, SAARC must now put aside bilateral disputes and build tighter ties with other regional and international organizations. The SAARC has developed into a venue for discussing a broad range of regionally relevant problems since its founding in 1985. Annual summits are when member nations gather, and foreign ministers are required to meet at least twice a year. The secretariat of the SAARC is situated in Kathmandu, Nepal. There have been 15 annual summits and 31 Council of Ministers sessions over the past 23 years. The SAARC agenda has grown significantly over time, demonstrating the desire and capacity to collaborate on issues related to, among others, agriculture and rural development, health and population, women, youth, and children, the environment and forestry, human resource development, information and communications technology, biotechnology, and energy. The SAARC forum has made significant efforts to promote social cohesion and economic cooperation. The SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry were established in 1992 to foster regional cooperation in the fields of trade and economic connections with the overarching goal of economic unification. The SAARC Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) Agreement, which was signed in April 1993 and came into effect in December 1995, marked a turning point and paved the way for a potential increase in intra-SAARC trade [3], [4].

The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of the SAARC nations at the summit conference in January 2004. SAFTA was ratified and came into effect in January 2006. Its goals include removing all trade barriers, facilitating the free and fair movement of goods, encouraging fair competition and a free trade environment in light of the current economic climate to ensure the greatest benefit, and establishing an institutional framework to encourage and expand regional cooperation. The compensation for income losses for smaller regional economies (Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives) in the case of tariff reductions is one of the main features of SAFTA. The developing nations of South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, were required to bring their obligations up to par by the conclusion of the first two years of SAFTA's implementation, 2006–2007 [5], [6].

20 percent less. The 20 percent fee will be decreased to zero during a five-year period ending in 2012 via a series of yearly reductions. On the other side, the South Asian region's least developed nations Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives are given a further three years to obtain duty-free status, giving them till 2017. In addition to promoting economic integration, the SAARC places a high priority on social cohesiveness among its member nations in order to foster a strong sense of South Asian identity. In order to address issues like population stabilization, women's empowerment, youth mobilization, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition, and child protection, all of which are crucial for the welfare and well-being of South Asian populations, the SAARC social charter was signed in Islamabad in 2004.³ Other initiatives taken by the SAARC include the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (1987). SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians Association (1992).

SAARCLAW: An organization for members of the SAARC nations' legal systems (1992). The Additional Protocol on Suppression of Terrorism (2004). The SAARC Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution (2002). The SAARC Scheme for Promotion of Organized Tourism was established as a step to support the growth of intra-regional tourism and with the overall goal of promoting people-to-people interaction in the region. SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme: Through increased contact between students, scholars, and academics, this effort aims to promote idea-cross-fertilization. The major goal of the SAARC Youth Volunteers Program (SYVOP) is to channel young people's idealistic energy into regional cooperation initiatives by giving them the opportunity to serve as agricultural and forestry extension workers abroad [7], [8].

In order to further SAARC goals, member nations decided during the 14th SAARC Summit held in New Delhi in April 2007 to establish the SAARC Development Fund, the South Asian University, a SAARC Food Bank, and the SAARC Arbitration Council. Afghanistan was formally invited to join the SAARC community in a significant move, and the People's Republic of China, the European Union, the Republic of Korea, and the United States of America were invited as observers to add their perspectives and experience to the SAARC agenda. To increase its effectiveness, it has been suggested that SAARC membership should include Iran and China. Iran has made a formal request for observer status in the SAARC in March 2007.

Conflicts in South Asia: Regionalist Challenges Each country's membership in a regional organization gives the term "regionalism" a unique meaning and function. Since most regional cooperation is restricted to economic collaboration via free trade agreements, governments that collaborate in any framework for regional cooperation often have some fundamental distinctions. When there are conflicts between the member nations, there are more differences among the members of the regional cooperation groups. Even while governments seem to agree on certain topics on the forum of that specific regional cooperation organization, their motivations for regionalism and its goals are fundamentally unlike. Regionalism has faced obstacles as a result of interstate disputes [9], [10].

This tendency is quite evident in how the SAARC operates. The SAARC was created with the intention of creating a South Asian identity, but it has been repeatedly criticized for failing to achieve this goal. The SAARC framework has several limitations that may be attributed to its incapacity to resolve interstate problems, which has often forced it to become prisoner to bilateral conflicts, and the nationalistic interests of member nations. Aside from that, both India's neighbors and the major actors in international diplomacy have an Indo-centric strategic vision.

Elites in South Asia lack confidence in one another: SAARC was founded with limitations and restrictions that were mostly self-imposed. It embraced a practical strategy of collaboration in uncontentious spheres like social and cultural ones in the hopes that, if successful, chances for cooperation in more important ones may arise. Additionally, SAARC adheres to the rules that no bilateral or contentious matter may be on the SAARC agenda and that all decisions must be reached unanimously. This obviously demonstrates a poorer inter-state connection toward ensuring that South Asians have a fair say in how policies are made.

The lack of confidence between member states has often shown itself in the inefficient management of a number of the SAARC's efforts. The SAFTA is a noteworthy example. Although the seven SAFTA signatories reduced their tariffs for the first time on July 1, 2006, Pakistan and India are failed to accept the benefits of this agreement. The SAFTA Ministerial Council, which consists of the commerce and trade ministers of the SAARC nations and is in charge of overseeing and carrying out the SAFTA agreement, was invited to an emergency meeting in July 2006 by India. According to the SAFTA agreement, the "free trade area" functions in accordance with the "sensitive list." India charged Pakistan of breaking its pledge under the multinational SAFTA agreement during this emergency meeting. However, this is not the first instance of how the two nations have taken a combative stance at the SAARC platform.

There have been several instances when both nations have debated divisive topics while postponing the adoption of crucial regional tools for peace and economic integration. In addition to the ongoing India-Pakistan war, the dominating role of larger nations, notably India, in the regional structure has often been raised at SAARC summits. Given the size and power gap between India, a country of over a billion people, and all of its neighbors, the latter are understandably concerned about India's domination in the area and possible meddling in their internal affairs. The SAARC's cooperative policies are influenced by the concern among some of the smaller states surrounding India that interdependence will lead to the erosion of their political autonomies and undermine their advantages for securing "honor" and security. At various times, this has been a significant strand in the policy thinking of states like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, which has caused them to seek security assistance from outside South Asia when they need it.

This is evident from the reasons given by a number of member nations for joining this regional organization. Nepal joined SAARC with the hopes that this forum would provide it the chance to express its most pressing issues, the majority of which are connected to India. Nepal also preferred international collaboration over a bilateral agreement with India, particularly in disputes involving water. When SAARC was first conceived, Bangladesh's leadership had severe reservations about sharing Ganges water with India. As a result, they anticipated that the SAARC framework would help them find answers to this and other problems. In light of its stronger and more advantageous commercial relations with countries in South East Asia, Sri Lanka was originally reticent to join SAARC.

However, Sri Lanka's internal problems pushed her to join SAARC in the hopes that SAARC would be able to aid the region ease its concerns about India. A sign of how seriously SAARC members are committed to developing an effective regional cooperation framework in South Asia might be the SAARC member states' increasing military modernization. The constant increase in military spending indicates a bad atmosphere for both human development and peaceful interstate relations; even on the SAARC platform, member states have shown a lack of

confidence in those they have a disagreement or conflict with. Increasing defense spending will not only worsen regional human security and poverty but also the internal and external conflicts between the countries.⁸ Five South Asian states' defense spending is as follows, according to data from the International Institute of Strategic Studies. While there hasn't been a single direct effort by SAARC to resolve any of the conflicts previously listed, there have been bilateral discussions amongst the SAARC member nations to ease their differences.

India and Pakistan are now engaged in a number of conversations, and most recently, Pakistan and Afghanistan hosted Peace Jirgas to ease bilateral tensions using this time-honored method of resolving disputes. Pakistan suggested developing a SAARC conflict resolution structure under Musharraf's leadership to handle any intra-regional bilateral disputes. South Asia has also been impacted by globalization, particularly in terms of how it has affected intra-regional politics and economy. South Asian governments have sometimes been under pressure to demonstrate a commitment to seriously considering opportunities for collaboration and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Regarding this, the Norwegian government has mediated between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in an attempt to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan. Recently, dispute resolution was included in the SAARC framework.

The SAARC member nations decided to create a SAARC Arbitration Council in Pakistan during the SAARC summit in Dhaka in 2005. The council's goal is to facilitate more investment by citizens of one member state into the territory of another member state. The goal of this effort is to establish a South Asian forum for the mediation and arbitration of business disputes. However, SAARC has not yet made any significant efforts to address the problem of inter-state disputes among its member nations. The fact that there are many inter-state disputes in South Asia is not due to the lack of strong motivation on the side of the parties involved in creating productive peace via back channels, track II diplomacy, bilateral negotiations, third-party mediation, etc.

The sustained engagement of South Asian nations in UN Peacekeeping Operations is evidence of their commitment to peace-building endeavors. It is ironic that the same international peacekeepers continue to stymie several conflict resolution procedures inside their own area given that four of the top four UN peacekeepers in the world at the moment are from South Asia: Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and India¹⁰. According to some commentators, the lack of an institutionalized security structure has posed a threat to the stability of the South Asian area. Even though SAARC did not emerge as a system for resolving bilateral disputes, it has dealt with a few controversial topics including terrorism and human trafficking.

The SAARC member countries pledged to "reinvigorate cooperation of all peoples of South Asia" in the Declaration that was written as a result of the SAARC summit that year, which was held in Islamabad. "We envision South Asia to be a peaceful and stable region where each nation is at peace with itself and its neighbors through peaceful means and dialogue," the member nations said. The importance of peaceful conflict resolution was emphasized in this declaration, but neither the outcome of forcing member states to engage in any dialogue toward resolving their inter-state conflicts nor the success of SAARC in serving as a forum for these crucial issues have been very positive. For a country or organization to act as a facilitator in a regional setting to resolve bilateral conflicts, it must be acknowledged as a neutral player. It is difficult to see any nation as neutral in the case of South Asia owing to its sociocultural ties and political history.

India might act as a mediator in settling intra-regional issues given its economic might and geographic advantage. But due to India's involvement in several inter-state wars in South Asia, such is not feasible. Second, using the SAARC observers (EU, USA, China, South Korea, Japan, and Iran)¹² to help resolve bilateral disputes in South Asia is a possibility. However, there are still continuous difficulties among the observers, as seen by the tense relations between the USA, Iran, and China, for example. Relying on the UN's poor dispute settlement process would likewise be a tiresome endeavor. Along with their disagreements with one another, the member nations also differ on the need of a South Asian conflict resolution mechanism to settle bilateral problems. Conflict resolution as a SAARC responsibility is not supported by India, Nepal, or Sri Lanka. But the SAARC has shown the capacity to develop into a platform for discussion, bargaining, preventative diplomacy, and confidence- and peace-building.

The 'personality' of the South Asian community is largely influenced by three interconnected economic and political factors: first, the nature of economic transactions, such as formal and informal trade relationships and whether an honest effort has been made to reduce trade imbalances; second, how leaders feel about the persistent regional problems, especially bilateral ones, like the Indo-Pakistan conflict and India-Bangladesh border disputes, and those leaders' efforts to minimize them. The region's inability to maintain regular flights between the cities of South Asia speaks eloquently about the dominance of "mindless" politics over the concerns of the populace.

The concerned Indian and Pakistani authorities just recently decided to expand the number of flights and routes between their nations. Lahore and Karachi in Pakistan and Mumbai and New Delhi in India are currently connected by a single airline from each nation. In the last three years, portions of the former Indian and Pakistani railway lines and roadways have returned to bus and train traffic. Even yet, despite a generally high propensity for amicable ties between India and Pakistan, the latter refused to provide India access to its transit system for commerce with Afghanistan. The interested parties have engaged in extensive discussion of "peace pipelines" to address the anticipated energy crisis in South Asia. Iran-Pakistan-India and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) are the two peace pipeline concepts.

These two projects have not yet reached completion. In the areas of developing natural resources, human resources, and infrastructure, societal aspirations for significant collaboration are still negligible. There are still open possibilities for collaboration in the sectors of hydropower, natural gas, ports and waterways, transportation, and communications. Many service-related prospects for human development that make use of local infrastructures for human and development have remained out of focus.

Bad policy is to blame for the low amount of intraregional commerce now existing. Some powerful decision-makers have exploited the Kashmir and other border disputes as tools to deny the people of India and Pakistan access to economic and social possibilities. The authorities have not made a sincere effort to lessen state-sponsored violence and intimidation of residents in the nearby areas. To reduce poverty, halt violence, stop environmental degradation, advance human development, balance inter- and intra-regional commerce, and promote peace and harmony, South Asians confront a severe lack of pro-people governments and policies today.

Unofficial SAARC A Way Out Despite the criticism, the SAARC forum has provided member nations with a useful arena for communication. The relationship-building that SAARC has enabled outside of its regular sessions has been a major success. There is an unofficial channel of

communication and contact among member nations in addition to the formal organizations formed under the auspices of the SAARC. I.K. Gujral noted that the SAARC process has resulted in an unofficial SAARC process in his opening remarks at the SAARC 2015 meeting. It is clear that South Asian institutions, agencies, and civil society groups have engaged in unprecedented levels of networking and contact during the last 20 years.

The promotion of human rights, the settlement of disputes, health, commerce, the performing arts, etc. are among the many subjects where there is this informal collaboration. Mr. Gujral concluded by saying, "I have a growing suspicion that the informal SAARC process will be the driving force behind the official SAARC process. This "new regionalism" in reality encompasses the whole South Asia area, and civil society has a significant interest in fostering regional cooperation, according to this theory. An evaluation of the SAARC process' effectiveness in fostering a sense of regional identity must take into account its intangible results. The pressure placed on the individual governments by the civil society to develop legislative measures to combat the problem of trafficking of women and girls in South Asia is the most recent illustration of this.

DISCUSSION

In spite of ups and downs in political relations of countries in the South Asian region, civil society organizations have been consistently working to improve relations and provide spaces for the governments to develop agendas for the ups and downs. It was this networking among civil society organizations and activists that forced the SAARC leaders to sign a Convention to combat this critical problem at the eleventh SAARC summit held in Kathmandu in early 2002. Over 38 track-II channels were reportedly operating in South Asia in 1998–1999 alone,¹⁸ which is a sign of the participation of civil society players. The practice of unofficial SAARC has significantly affected the conflict between India and Pakistan. As a result, it is quickly rising in local and regional peace constituencies. A turning point was the January 2004 SAARC summit in Islamabad, when the leaders of the two nations, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf and India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, took a constructive stance toward one another for the first time since the 1999 Lahore Declaration. In a separate joint statement, they vowed to pick up state-level discussions on Kashmir.

In South Asia, there have also been social movements started by the civil society to provide forums for inter-group communication. Additionally, it has made it possible for non-governmental opinions to be heard regionally. The South Asia Partnership International (SAP-I), which has affiliates in Bangladesh, Canada, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, is one such project. Through efforts from the civil society, they have been advancing regionalism for more than 20 years. Since the official SAARC framework is insufficient to provide contact with the civil society, this network has been conducting the People's Summit since 2001 to advance the agenda of the people. SAARC and other Regional Cooperation Mechanisms SAARC's relationships with outside parties are also very important in light of state-centric interests monopolizing the regional agenda.

For instance, smaller members in SAARC see India's expanding influence in world affairs with distrust and anxiety, and the recent strategic alliance between India and the United members only serves to amplify this fear. As a result, whereas foreign actors may encourage regional integration by using their economic and political clout to do so and by teaching it valuable lessons, they could also serve as a barrier to the fledgling South Asian integration process. Other

areas, some of which are controlled by lower-income developing governments, have benefited from the development of reciprocal systems that either directly or indirectly serve their security concerns.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), which effectively ended war between the Western states after 1945 (and have helped to contain their lingering internal disorders) and then spread the benefits more widely with the enlargement decisions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, are two examples of how Europe has investigated this formula and demonstrated its advantages in the most comprehensive way. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has recently expanded to include nations like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, as well as its increasingly formalized cooperation and dialogue relationships with Asia's more powerful states, have all contributed to the recent ending of the region's protracted and bloody interstate conflict. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has helped to normalize China and Russia's relationship, which is nevertheless complicated.

The multilateral organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean are generally viewed as weaker, in part due to their multiplicity and numerous overlaps, but their explicit efforts for confidence building and conflict prevention or resolution have undoubtedly contributed to the gradual phasing out of interstate conflicts in the region and the containment of such intra-state ones as remain (e.g. in Colombia and Haiti). The lack of violence between the member nations is unquestionably a significant accomplishment of ASEAN, despite the occurrence of fourteen inter-state confrontations (territorial and maritime wars).

No ASEAN member state has engaged in a direct conflict with a state that is not a member of ASEAN since the organization's founding in 1967. In contrast to SAARC, ASEAN has not shied away from addressing interstate conflict concerns while concurrently expanding its conflict prevention mechanisms to the Asia Pacific area. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), also known as ASEAN's model of preventative diplomacy and conflict resolution, has existed since 1994 in this respect. The success of regional organizations like the European Union and ASEAN may be attributed to a variety of integrative factors. The ASEAN utilized the idea of "Cooperative Security and Comprehensive Security" while establishing the fundamental goals of this conference.

These goals included promoting healthy communication and consultation on political and security matters of shared interest and concern, as well as making a substantial contribution to regional efforts at confidence-building and preventative diplomacy. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), Preventive Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution were established as three stages of the process. ARF also includes Pakistan and India as members. Contrarily, SAARC has not significantly experienced these integrative influences and will need to if the region is to foster any feeling of community. Without a shared understanding of the advantages of collaboration among people and their leaders, strong regional cooperation can never succeed. The establishment of SAARC as a community will remain a long way off unless trade and economic leaders recognize the comparative benefits of intra-regional commerce and until the elites of each member nation determine the cost of non-cooperation. Members of SAARC participate in international frameworks for cooperation outside of the South Asian area, giving them the chance to study and adapt some of these efficient processes. The idea that involvement by SAARC members in other regional frameworks would dilute member states' interests and

impede the development of this regional cooperation mechanism is often contested. Others, however, contend that SAARC would advance more quickly by benefiting from the experiences of other regional frameworks as a result of its official and informal interactions with them.

CONCLUSION

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has faced a serious and ongoing difficulty as a result of bilateral disputes. Here is a conclusion on the association between SAARC and bilateral disputes as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021. Regional cooperation is being hampered by bilateral tensions, notably the long-running hostilities between India and Pakistan. These disputes often overflow into SAARC discussions, causing summits to be postponed or cancelled and halting the advancement of regional projects. Political gridlock: Unresolved bilateral disputes contribute to political gridlock within SAARC. Decisions must get the unanimous consent of all member nations since the organization functions on the consensus basis. When there are bilateral disagreements, it is difficult to come to a compromise, which hinders regional collaboration. At times, the emphasis on bilateral disputes has drawn attention and resources away from tackling urgent regional issues like poverty reduction, economic growth, and social advancement. The potential effect of SAARC in these important sectors has been reduced as a result. Bilateral disputes have economic repercussions for the nations of South Asia. Trade restrictions, a lack of free movement across borders, and tense diplomatic ties have made it difficult for the area to integrate its economies and cooperate. Missed Chances with its many and diversified member nations, SAARC has a great deal of potential to solve regional problems and foster economic development. Opportunities to exploit this potential for the benefit of the people in South Asia have been lost as a consequence of bilateral disputes. Bilateral disputes within SAARC often have geopolitical implications, with the involvement of foreign forces. Geopolitical rivalry may make attempts to resolve conflicts even more difficult and impede regional cooperation.

Civilian Impact in the afflicted areas, bilateral wars have significantly impacted people, causing misery, displacement, and instability. However, these tensions limit SAARC's capacity to effectively promote peace and stability. Potential for Diplomacy: Despite these difficulties, SAARC nevertheless offers member nations a forum for diplomatic interaction. It provides chances for discussion, steps to increase confidence, and attempts to resolve conflicts. Need for Bilateral conversations: To successfully resolve bilateral disputes within SAARC, member states must have concurrent bilateral conversations and other confidence-boosting actions. These discussions may help to foster an atmosphere that encourages regional collaboration. In conclusion, bilateral disputes have seriously hampered SAARC's ability to accomplish its goals for regional cooperation and development. These tensions have hampered economic integration, brought about political impasse, and drawn focus away from important regional challenges. Even while SAARC has the capacity to serve as a venue for diplomatic interaction, it is still necessary to settle bilateral disputes before South Asia's regional cooperation can reach its full potential. The member nations must all share a commitment to regional peace and stability in order to successfully resolve these problems.

REFERENCES:

- [1] T. Ashraf and M. N. Md. Akhi, "Saarc As A Tool Of Regionalism In South Asia: Lessons From Asean," *J. Southeast Asian Stud.*, 2016, doi: 10.22452/jati.vol21no1.1.

- [2] M. Idrees, M. Naazer, and S. Ashfaq, "Conflicts and Conflict Management in SAARC: Assessing Challenges and the Way Forward," *Lib. Arts Soc. Sci. Int. J.*, 2017, doi: 10.47264/idea.lassij/1.2.1.
- [3] M. Idrees, M. Naazer, and A. U. Rehman, "Conflicts and Conflict Management in SAARC LassiJ," *Lib. Arts Soc. Sci. Int. J.*, 2017.
- [4] N. Melegoda and C. Padmakumara, "Functionalist Regional Cooperation: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation for Peace in the Region," *Colombo J. Multi-Disciplinary Res.*, 2018, doi: 10.4038/cjmr.v3i2.29.
- [5] M. A. Naazer, "SAARC Summit Diplomacy and Its Impact on Indo–Pakistan Relations (1985–2014)," *FWU J. Soc. Sci.*, 2018.
- [6] M. Singh, "SAARC for Geopolitical Symbolism," *South Asian Surv.*, 2016, doi: 10.1177/0971523118760628.
- [7] V. Jayshwal, "US-Nepal and India: Trilateral Relations on Global and Regional Strategic Perspective," *Dera Natung Gov. Coll. Res. J.*, 2017, doi: 10.56405/dngcrj.2017.02.01.10.
- [8] M. Singh, "SAARC for Geopolitical Symbolism: Whither Multilateralism?," *South Asian Surv.*, 2016.
- [9] T. Fatemi, P. K. Singh, M. Ali, N. S. Thapa, C. R. Jayasinghe, and A. Kundu, "Outcomes and implications of the 12th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Summit, Islamabad," *Contemp. South Asia*, 2004, doi: 10.1080/0958493042000209898.
- [10] S. R. Khan and F. H. Shaheen, "Regional Integration , Trade and Conflict in South Asia," *Int. Inst. Sustain. Dev.*, 2007.

CHAPTER 9

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC OBSERVER STATES AND ENGAGEMENT

Vivek Anand Singh, Assistant Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- vivekanand.ima@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a South Asian organization that predominantly comprises of eight member states as of my most recent information update in September 2021. However, SAARC also includes a number of observer governments and organizations that interact with the group in different ways. While not full members, observer states take part in SAARC meetings and activities. Please take note that observer state status and their level of SAARC engagement may have changed since then, therefore you should confirm the most recent information from reliable sources. The SAARC observer states as of 2021 included: China is a member of SAARC with observer status and actively participates in its activities, including economic and development cooperation. Another observer state, Japan has participated in SAARC programs and activities geared at regional development. The United States has participated in SAARC as an observer and has expressed an interest in expanding regional economic and security cooperation. With observer status, the EU has engaged in discussions and collaboration with SAARC on a range of topics, including commerce and development.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Development Goal, Regional, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

Engagement with observer nations by SAARC is evidence of its dedication to transparent and all-inclusive regional collaboration. A way to include nations and organizations outside of the immediate SAARC membership in the organization's operations was by introducing the notion of observer states. In order to encourage discussion, improve teamwork, and broaden the scope of regional cooperation, observer status was envisioned. As a spectator, Australia has expressed interest in regional collaboration with SAARC nations, notably in fields like disaster management and education. As an observer, South Korea has taken part in SAARC initiatives for regional growth and economic co-operation. Iran participates in debates about regional connectivity and stability as a member of SAARC with observer status. As an observer, Mauritius has expressed interest in fostering trade connections and collaborative efforts with SAARC nations. Myanmar has also participated in SAARC as an observer state.

Afghanistan was a member of SAARC with observer status, but since 2021, its membership may have been impacted by political changes. These observer states' interactions with SAARC can differ in intensity. While others take part in meetings and debates on regional issues, some are

actively interested in cooperative and regional projects. Please be aware that since my previous update, SAARC's effectiveness and the involvement of observer states may have changed. For the most recent information on SAARC observer states and their engagement, I advise checking the organization's official website or other trustworthy sources. In 1997, the People's Republic of China was given the first observer status within SAARC. This achievement signaled the start of a trend in which other nations and organizations would seek a comparable level of participation with the organization. A number of foreign nations, regional organizations, and international organizations have joined SAARC as observers throughout the years, demonstrating the group's expanding prominence and influence on the world arena [1], [2].

Observer Status Goals and Justification

Multiple aims that all contribute to the organizations main objectives are served by the involvement of observer nations in SAARC:

Enhancing regional dialogue is the main goal of observer states, who add a variety of viewpoints, life experiences, and knowledge to the SAARC platform. Through their engagement, regional discussion is enriched, global dynamics are better understood, and the sharing of ideas and best practices is encouraged [3], [4].

Stimulating Economic and Trade Relations: Many observer states are important sources of investment and business for SAARC member nations. The region's economy may expand and flourish as a result of observer status, which enables the discovery of business prospects, trade alliances, and investment potential.

Fostering Regional Security and Stability: The dynamics of regional security are often heavily influenced by observer nations. Engaging with them may help with regional stability, conflict resolution, and security problem management [5], [6].

Facilitating Technical aid and Capacity Building: Observer nations often provide technical aid, support for capacity-building, and experience in a variety of disciplines. This support may strengthen SAARC's initiatives in crucial fields including healthcare, education, infrastructure improvement, and disaster management.

Increasing SAARC's Global Reach: SAARC's Observer status enables it to increase its global participation and outreach. It improves the company's presence and standing in international fora and promotes collaboration on universal problems like climate change, sustainable development, and catastrophe preparedness.

DISCUSSION

Observer States and their SAARC Positions

As regional and international politics have changed throughout time, so too has the list of SAARC observer nations. The following nations and organizations were SAARC observers as of the most recent update in 2021:

China: As the founding member of the SAARC's observer community, China is important. Its involvement includes conversations about regional security, infrastructural development, and economic collaboration. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China has enormous effects on commerce and connectivity in South Asia [7], [8].

Japan: Japan's commitment to supporting infrastructure development, disaster management, and economic growth in South Asia is highlighted by the country's observer position. Regional resilience and sustainable development have greatly benefited from Japan's contributions to SAARC efforts.

United States: The United States' role as an observer indicates its involvement in South Asian politics, notably in areas like trade, security, and counterterrorism. U.S. participation has prioritized resolving issues of regional security, promoting economic development, and bolstering democratic institutions.

European Union (EU): As a regional organization, the EU collaborates with SAARC on a variety of subjects, like as commerce and development. The goals of SAARC are aligned with the EU's assistance for governance, capacity building, and sustainable development.

South Korea: The country's observer status underlines its goal in establishing economic and commercial ties with South Asian nations. Technology transfer, infrastructural improvement, and educational exchanges are all included in cooperation with South Korea.

Australia: The main focuses of Australia's participation with SAARC are trade and economic cooperation, disaster resilience, and education. Australia's contributions to regional development projects have been essential in overcoming shared difficulties.

Iran: Iran is an important observer state because to its geographic closeness to South Asia and its long-standing relations there. Conversations between Iran and SAARC have focused on regional security, energy cooperation, and commercial alliances.

Mauritius: The island nation's observer status serves as a reminder of the importance of maritime security and cooperation in the Indian Ocean. Trade, sustainable development, and connectivity are prioritized in the nation's interaction with SAARC.

Myanmar: The fact that Myanmar is an observer nation indicates the strategic importance of its location as a neighbor to South Asian connectivity. Trade, infrastructural growth, and regional security are all aspects of engagement with Myanmar [9], [10].

Engagement and collaboration mechanisms

SAARC has created a number of structures to encourage collaboration and interaction with observer governments, including:

1. **Observer Sessions:** Observer nations participate in summit meetings of the SAARC and other high-level events, where they have the chance to converse with member states and provide input on discussions of regional concerns.
2. **Establishing Expert Groups and Committees to Facilitate Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building:** SAARC creates expert groups and committees in a variety of industries. Observer nations often provide knowledge, resources, and technological support in these fields.
3. **Bilateral Consultations:** Member nations often have bilateral consultations with observer states to discuss potential areas of cooperation, solve common concerns, and strengthen economic, political, and cultural connections.

4. **Specialist Working Groups:** The SAARC creates specialist working groups to deal with certain problems including commerce, the environment, and disaster management. Observer nations are often requested to join these meetings and provide their expertise.

Challenges and Importance of Observer Engagement

Significant implications for regional cooperation and development result from observer nations' participation in SAARC:

Enhancing SAARC's efforts and debates, observer nations provide important viewpoints, resources, and expertise.

1. **Greater Regional Cooperation:** Their involvement aids in the regional fusion and expansion of South Asia's economy.

2. **Global Outreach:** SAARC's interactions with observer nations raise its profile and influence in world affairs. In areas like climate change, sustainable development, and disaster management, it puts the organization in a position to tackle global issues and support global initiatives.

3. **Economic possibilities:** Working with observer states may lead to business collaborations, foreign direct investment, and other possibilities that can spur regional economic expansion and employment creation.

4. **Diplomatic Challenges:** It may be difficult to strike a balance between the many geopolitical rivalries, observer nations' differing interests, and their differing sensitivities. In order to maintain the core emphasis of regional cooperation, SAARC must successfully negotiate these complications.

5. **Agreement Building:** SAARC functions on the idea of agreement, which may be difficult to establish when observer nations have contrasting interests or viewpoints on certain subjects. Effective diplomacy and negotiation are necessary to reach agreement.

CONCLUSION

An important facet of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) operation has been the participation of observer nations. As of my most recent information update in September 2021, the SAARC Observer States' involvement is summarized as follows: **Diverse Participation:** The nations and organizations that make up the SAARC Observer States come from all over the globe. They are participating because South Asia is significant to global geopolitics and there is a worldwide interest in its issues. Many Observer States have economic and strategic interests in South Asia, including as trade and investment possibilities, energy cooperation, and geopolitical sway. They may pursue these objectives because of their participation in SAARC. **Facilitating Communication** Observer States help SAARC member states and the world community communicate and work together. They may facilitate diplomatic efforts and act as middlemen. **Resource mobilization:** Some Observer States support SAARC activities and projects financially and technically, assisting with resource shortages and fostering regional growth. **Enhanced Regional collaboration:** By exchanging their knowledge, skills, and best practices, Observer States may help SAARC improve regional collaboration. They may also aid South Asian capacity-building initiatives. **Engaging with SAARC** has been difficult for Observer States because of the organization's emphasis on regional concerns and its consensus-

based decision-making procedure. Tensions may arise as a result of divergent agendas between member states and Observer States.

Potential for Conflict Settlement Observer States may contribute positively to the promotion of peaceful resolutions to regional conflicts via the SAARC, which offers a forum for diplomatic interaction and conflict settlement. Sensitivity Required SAARC and its member states must handle their interactions with Observer States with tact, striking a balance between the advantages of global involvement and the need to safeguard the group's autonomy and regional interests. Continued Relevance in order to make sure that Observer States' involvement is in line with the changing objectives and requirements of the organization and the region, it is important to regularly examine the relevance of Observer States within SAARC. Finally, SAARC Observer States provide the group with important global viewpoints and resources. Their participation may strengthen regional collaboration, encourage economic growth, and support South Asia's attempts to resolve disputes. However, successful participation requires careful management of the goals and interests of both SAARC member states and Observer States. For SAARC to remain relevant and successful, it is crucial to strike a balance between these interests and protect the organization's autonomy and regional emphasis.

REFERENCES:

- [1] S. Kaler, "Successes and Failures Of Saarc," *Indian J. Appl. Res.*, 2016.
- [2] M. A. Naazer, "Politics, Tourism and Regional Cooperation in South Asia," *PAKISTAN-Annual Res. J.*, 2018.
- [3] S. Mansingh, "Between Asia and global community: India and China in comparative perspective," *Int. Stud.*, 2002, doi: 10.1177/002088170203900402.
- [4] M. Singh, "SAARC for Geopolitical Symbolism: Whither Multilateralism?," *South Asian Surv.*, 2016.
- [5] M. Singh, "SAARC for Geopolitical Symbolism," *South Asian Surv.*, 2016, doi: 10.1177/0971523118760628.
- [6] M. Naazer, and A. U. Rehman, "Conflicts and Conflict Management in SAARC Lassij," *Lib. Arts Soc. Sci. Int. J.*, 2017.
- [7] M. Idrees et al., "Conflicts and Conflict Management in SAARC: Assessing Challenges and the Way Forward," *Lib. Arts Soc. Sci. Int. J.*, 2017, doi: 10.47264/idea.lassij/1.2.1.
- [8] Irfan Shahzad, "Pakistan and Regional Cooperation Organizations: Towards a Futuristic Approach," *Policy Perspect. J. Inst. Policy Stud.*, 2017, doi: 10.13169/polipers.14.1.0121.
- [9] M. Khan Afridi and M. Akbar Kundi, "China's Role and the Potential of Pak-China Cooperation in Regional Organizations," 2017.
- [10] N. Melegoda and C. Padmakumara, "Functionalist Regional Cooperation: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation for Peace in the Region," *Colombo J. Multi-Disciplinary Res.*, 2018, doi: 10.4038/cjmr.v3i2.29.

CHAPTER 10

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC AND REGIONAL SECURITY

Vipin Jain, Professor

Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- vipin555@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT:

In order to solve regional security issues within the South Asian area, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is essential. The organization's achievements and difficulties in preserving and increasing regional security are examined in this abstract. Eight nations make up the SAARC, which was founded in 1985: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SAARC acknowledges that sustainable development cannot be accomplished without guaranteeing regional security, despite its major emphasis on economic and social development. Important information on SAARC and regional security is provided below: Security issues South Asia has a variety of security issues, including border conflicts, terrorism, separatist movements, international crime, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. These problems have the potential to undermine stability and impede economic growth. SAARC processes SAARC has built frameworks and processes to handle regional security challenges. These include the Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and the Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties. In order to promote communication and collaboration among its member nations on security-related issues, SAARC frequently holds seminars and workshops. SAARC has worked to improve counterterrorism cooperation given the region's susceptibility to terrorism.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Management, Organization, SAARC, Regional.

INTRODUCTION

In a world with intricate geopolitical dynamics, regional organizations are crucial in determining the nature of the security environment. One such group that has worked to promote collaboration and improve security in the South Asian area is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in 1985. South Asia, which is home to about a quarter of the world's population, is an area of great variety and importance, but it is also characterized by old rivalries, territorial conflicts, and security issues. This introductory article explores the complex relationship between SAARC and regional security with the goal of illuminating the organization's history, its accomplishments and weaknesses, and its ability to solve the many security issues that continue to plague South Asia [1], [2].

Initiatives designed to combat terrorism include the SAARC Terrorist Offenses Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. Bilateral disputes: SAARC's capacity to adequately handle regional security has been hampered by

ongoing bilateral disputes, notably the India-Pakistan conflict. Collaboration may be hampered and these disputes may mask more significant security issues.

Non-Traditional Security challenges: SAARC acknowledges the significance of tackling non-traditional security challenges, such as climate change, natural catastrophes, and public health crises, which may have significant security repercussions. To lessen these concerns, the organization encourages regional collaboration. overseas engagement The security dynamics in South Asia are made more complicated by the engagement of overseas powers. In order to improve regional security and stability, SAARC seeks to positively engage foreign parties. In conclusion, SAARC's efforts to resolve regional security issues demonstrate its dedication to the welfare of South Asian countries. Even if the organization has challenges including bilateral disputes and outside pressures, it continues to be an essential forum for fostering communication, collaboration, and teamwork with the goal of attaining long-term regional security and prosperity.

SAARC's Origins: A Struggle for Regional Cooperation

In order to promote regional collaboration and development in South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional collaboration (SAARC) was established in the middle of the 1980s. This area is distinguished by its vast cultural variety and historical legacy, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. However, it is also distinguished by a complicated web of old conflicts, border tensions, and security issues.

Historical Background: A quick rundown of South Asia's historical background is necessary to comprehend SAARC's position in regional security. Although there have been centuries of cultural and commercial interchange in the area, there have also been disputes and power struggles there. The political environment of the area bears the wounds of colonial control, division, and post-independence conflicts. Regional cooperation attempts have often been eclipsed by these historical considerations [3], [4].

SAARC was built on the principles of territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs of member nations, and sovereignty. This founding concept aims to provide a forum for discussion and collaboration while honoring the sovereignty of each country. These values were essential for fostering trust amongst countries that had long-standing mistrust and disagreements.

SAARC's Development: Successes and Obstacles

Despite significant obstacles, SAARC has achieved notable advancements since its founding in a number of sectors. To fully comprehend the organization's contribution to regional security, it is imperative to look at both its accomplishments and its enduring difficulties [5]. With projects like the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the South Asian Development Fund (SADF), SAARC has achieved progress in economic cooperation. Since economic interconnectedness often contributes to stability, these initiatives have aimed to improve regional commerce and development, which may have repercussions for security [6].

Social and Cultural Exchange: SAARC has been praised for its efforts to solve shared social problems including poverty and healthcare via cultural exchanges, relationships between individuals, and other activities. These "soft power" strategies might ease tensions by promoting goodwill among the member nations [7].

Regional Security Challenges: However, SAARC has had to deal with ongoing security issues. The organization's capacity to successfully promote peace and security has been put to the test by transnational terrorism, territorial disputes, and unsolved wars. Particularly, the competition between India and Pakistan has had a significant negative impact on SAARC's security efforts.

DISCUSSION

Success Stories of SAARC: Examples of Effective Cooperation

Despite the major security obstacles, SAARC has seen examples of effective collaboration that have improved regional security.

Disaster Management: SAARC has made excellent attempts to coordinate relief operations and handle disasters. The organization's Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) has enabled coordinated responses to crises in the area, which is vulnerable to natural catastrophes. Along with saving lives, this collaboration fosters trust amongst the member nations [8].

Health Initiatives: The COVID-19 pandemic brought attention to the value of regional healthcare collaboration. The SAARC countries teamed together to exchange knowledge, resources, and experience in order to jointly tackle the virus. This action highlighted SAARC's capacity to handle widespread security risks [9].

Energy Security: In South Asia, energy security is a major problem. With projects like the South Asian Association for Regional Electricity (SAARC-ARE) aimed to improve energy connection, SAARC has made measures to encourage energy cooperation. Reliable energy supply may promote economic stability and ease conflicts over resource distribution [10].

Challenges that Remain: The India-Pakistan Problem

Although SAARC has achieved considerable progress in a number of areas, the long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan continues to be a significant obstacle to overall regional stability. Beyond bilateral disagreements, the problems between these two nuclear-armed neighbors have wider consequences for South Asian stability.

Kashmir Conflict: One of the world's longest-running conflicts and a significant source of tension between India and Pakistan is the Kashmir conflict. Despite several tries, SAARC has been unable to broker a durable resolution to this problem. The security situation in the area is nevertheless hampered by the Kashmir issue.

Conflict history and shared threat perceptions between India and Pakistan have created a security conundrum that has resulted in an arms race and a lack of confidence. The SAARC's attempts to create a more secure South Asia have been hampered by its failure to resolve this conundrum.

Cross-Border Terrorism: One of South Asia's biggest security challenges is the terrorism that comes from non-state groups working across borders. There have been heated standoffs and crises as a result of India accusing Pakistan of backing such organizations. Due to the standoff between India and Pakistan, SAARC's ability to combat cross-border terrorism has been constrained.

The SAARC's contribution to peacebuilding and conflict resolution

SAARC has worked to foster peace and stability in the region via conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities, notwithstanding its limits in settling the India-Pakistan issue.

Platforms for Dialog: SAARC offers a forum for Diplomacy and Dialog amongst Member States. The organization has fostered negotiations on sensitive problems, such as water sharing and border conflicts, which are crucial for long-term security, even though progress may be sluggish and patchy.

Track II diplomacy: Track II diplomacy, which includes academics and non-governmental players, has been helpful in fostering communication and steps to create trust. Official discussions have often been made possible by these measures.

In order to promote international peace and security, certain SAARC member nations have sent soldiers to UN peacekeeping operations. This involvement shows a dedication to maintaining regional and global stability.

The Future of Regional Security and SAARC

There are a number of ways SAARC's role in fostering regional security might be strengthened as it continues to face difficulties and possibilities.

Reviving Dialogue: SAARC member states must give negotiation and settlement of disputes top priority. In the case of India-Pakistan, in particular, tensions must be reduced by continuous diplomatic efforts and confidence-building measures.

SAARC should broaden its collaboration outside its usual spheres. Addressing new security risks in the area may be accomplished through improving cooperation in marine security, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity.

Engaging foreign Partners: There are more ways to handle regional security issues by involving foreign partners and organizations like the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

People-Centric Initiatives: Supporting people-centric initiatives may help member states feel more unified and less distrustful of one another. Examples include cultural exchanges, youth participation, and educational projects.

SAARC should continue to place a high priority on economic integration, lowering trade obstacles, and fostering intraregional commerce. Economic stability can make a big difference.

CONCLUSION

For the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the problem of regional security has been complicated and varied. Here is my assessment of SAARC's function and difficulties in addressing regional security as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021. Territorial conflicts, cross-border terrorism, militancy, and the spread of weapons are just a few of the security issues that have plagued South Asia. The stability and collaboration in the area have been severely hampered by these problems. SAARC was not initially intended to be a security-focused body, according to its mandate. Economic and social growth were its main goals. However, inside the SAARC framework, security concerns have risen to the front more

and more over time. Limited Progress Due to political tensions and unsolved disputes among member nations, SAARC has had difficulty resolving security problems. Meaningful security cooperation has often been hindered by bilateral disputes, notably the India-Pakistan conflict, which frequently bleed over into SAARC discussions. Lack of Security Mechanism: Unlike some other regional groups like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC does not have a specific security framework or mechanism for dealing with security issues. This has made it harder to coordinate responses to widespread security risks. Geopolitical rivalry: SAARC's security dynamics have been made more complex by the geopolitical rivalry in the area, particularly the impact of outside countries. These conflicts may breed distrust and prevent productive regional security cooperation. Initiatives to Combat Terrorism: Through programs like the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, SAARC has attempted to combat terrorism and extremism. The execution and enforcement of these measures, however, have been difficult. Conflict settlement: SAARC offers a forum for diplomatic interaction and conflict settlement, although progress in settling protracted issues has been modest. Security in the area is still seriously hampered by the India-Pakistan war. Human Security In addition to more conventional security concerns, SAARC has acknowledged the significance of human security problems such environmental sustainability, public health, and disaster management. The solutions to these problems must be collaborative since they are related to regional security. Despite its difficulties, SAARC has the capacity to serve as a platform for the promotion of peace, stability, and confidence-building measures in South Asia. For this promise to be achieved, member nations must put regional security ahead of bilateral disagreements. In conclusion, unsolved wars, political unrest, and a lack of specialized security systems provide SAARC with substantial problems in handling regional security. Even though its main focus is on economic and social development, the organization is increasingly aware of how critical it is to handle regional security issues. The willingness of member nations to get over political hurdles and collaborate to advance South Asia's peace and stability will determine how well SAARC advances regional security. For the area to achieve its larger objectives of economic development and social advancement, it is essential to address these security issues.

REFERENCES:

- [1] T. H. M. S. R., "Prospects Of Renewable Energy Resources And Regional Grid Integration For Future Energy Security & Development In Saarc Countries," *Int. J. Res. Eng. Technol.*, 2013, doi: 10.15623/ijret.2013.0201009.
- [2] B. Pandey, "Book Review: SAARC Secretariat, Regional Poverty Profile 2009–2010: Food Security Challenges for the Poor and Social Inclusion," *South Asia Econ. J.*, 2014, doi: 10.1177/1391561414548954.
- [3] M. Barthwal-Datta and S. Basu, "Reconceptualizing regional security in South Asia: A critical security approach," *Secur. Dialogue*, 2017, doi: 10.1177/0967010617717619.
- [4] S. K. Lenka and A. Bairwa, "Does financial inclusion affect monetary policy in SAARC countries?," *Cogent Econ. Financ.*, 2016, doi: 10.1080/23322039.2015.1127011.
- [5] F. Krampe and M. Mobjörk, "Responding to Climate-Related Security Risks: Reviewing Regional Organizations in Asia and Africa," *Current Climate Change Reports*. 2018. doi: 10.1007/s40641-018-0118-x.

- [6] K. Sridharan, "Regional Organisations And Conflict Management: Comparing Asean And Saarc Kripa Sridharan," *Cris. States Work. Pap.*, 2008.
- [7] M. Jabeen and I. A. Choudhry, "Role of SAARC for Countering Terrorism in South Asia," *South Asian Stud. A Res. J. South Asian Stud.*, 2013.
- [8] K. Mukherjee, "The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: Problems and prospects," *Prog. Dev. Stud.*, 2014, doi: 10.1177/1464993414521524.
- [9] M. Mohsin, "The Twelfth SAARC Summit: Quest for Durable South Asian Cooperation," *South Asian Surv.*, 2005, doi: 10.1177/097152310501200103.
- [10] P. K. Sahu, P. Mishra, B. S. Dhekale, K. P. Vishwajith, and K. Padmanaban, "Modelling and Forecasting of Area, Production, Yield and Total Seeds of Rice and Wheat in SAARC Countries and the World towards Food Security," *Am. J. Appl. Math. Stat.*, 2015.

CHAPTER 11

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON ECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN SAARC

Pankhuri Agarwal, Associate Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- dreams.pankhuri@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) area has long faced a serious challenge from economic inequalities. Here is a conclusion on economic inequality in SAARC as of my most recent information update in September 2021. Wide Disparities: The SAARC member nations have stark economic differences, with some being much more developed than others. Inequalities in economic levels, infrastructure, access to essential services, and measures of human development are all clear. Regional Integration Barrier: Economic differences might stand in the way of successful regional cooperation and integration. Countries with less advanced economies could find it difficult to fully engage in regional projects, which would result in uneven advantages from collaboration. Limited Intra-Regional Trade: Because of economic inequalities, it is sometimes difficult for less developed nations to import products and services from their more developed neighbors. Trade restrictions and protectionist measures only make the situation worse. Resource distribution: Within SAARC, resource distribution is impacted by economic inequality. While nations with lesser incomes often depend on outside finance and help, member states with greater incomes may contribute more to regional projects. Social Consequences: In certain member states, economic inequalities may have serious social repercussions, including poverty, inequality, and restricted access to healthcare and education.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Economic, Organizations, SAARC, Regional.

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is an area with a lot of promise and potential because of its diversified landscapes, lively cultures, and long history. Underneath this vibrant and culturally diverse fabric, however, is a sobering reality: the member nations of South Asia suffer from significant economic inequities. Eight countries make up the 1985-founded South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. One of the most densely inhabited and economically varied regions on the globe, these nations account for roughly one-fifth of the world's population [1], [2].

For the region's population to live in better well-being, these inequities must be addressed.

Initiatives for Inclusive Growth: SAARC has included the alleviation of poverty and the necessity of inclusive growth in its agenda. To alleviate economic imbalances and raise the underprivileged communities inside their nations, member states have launched a variety of initiatives and projects.

Potential for Synergy: While economic inequalities are a problem, SAARC offers more developed member states the chance to support the development of their less developed counterparts via regional cooperation. The SAARC Development Fund is one initiative that aims to lessen these gaps.

Engagement of the Private Sector: Promoting private sector involvement and investment in the area may promote economic development and reduce economic inequalities. Better infrastructural connection may make this procedure easier.

Role of External Partners: Through financial support, technical aid, and capacity-building assistance, external partners, such as international organizations and donor nations, may help SAARC resolve economic imbalances. In SAARC's mission to promote regional integration and collaboration is severely hampered by economic imbalances in the area. Trade, resource distribution, and social well-being are all impacted by these discrepancies. They also provide more developed member nations the chance to help less developed neighboring countries achieve equitable and sustainable development. To advance economic growth, lessen poverty, and increase the general prosperity of South Asia, member nations must work together to address economic inequities and interact with foreign partners.

The SAARC region has glaring and enduring economic imbalances. They are seen in the member nations' greatly disparate income levels, development metrics, and access to essential services. While some nations have achieved tremendous advancements in economic growth, the decrease of poverty, and human development, others are still struggling to overcome the daunting obstacles of severe poverty, poor infrastructure, and restricted access to healthcare and education. The disparity in development levels between the most and least developed SAARC countries raises serious concerns about the capacity of the area to pool its resources and promote fair growth [3], [4].

The Causes of Economic Inequality

A careful examination of historical, geographical, and structural variables is necessary to comprehend the causes of economic differences within SAARC:

Historical Legacies: The economic landscapes of SAARC member nations have been permanently shaped by historical legacies, particularly colonialism. Disparities in infrastructure, institutions, and human capital are a result of various levels of colonial control and exploitation.

Geographical Difficulties: The unique terrain of South Asia offers both possibilities and difficulties. While some nations profit from advantageous geographic locations that promote communication and commerce, others have geographical challenges like being landlocked or being vulnerable to natural catastrophes [5].

Structural considerations: Within SAARC countries, structural factors worsen economic inequality. These include unfair land distribution, unequal access to healthcare and education, corruption, and problems with government [6].

DISCUSSION

The Effects of Economic Inequality

The effects of economic inequalities within SAARC are extensive and diverse. They have an impact on people's wellbeing as well as regional stability, collaboration, and the accomplishment of SAARC's broad objectives [7].

Widespread poverty and income inequality are the effects of economic imbalances that are most immediately felt. Millions of people in the area lack access to essentials, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability [8].

Social Development: Inequalities in access to healthcare and education have significant effects on social development. Progress in areas like life expectancy, literacy rates, and mother and child health are hampered by these inequities.

Regional unity and cooperation; may be hampered by economic inequalities within SAARC. They often result in distrust, political strife, and divergent goals among member nations, impeding the organization's capacity to successfully solve shared problems [9].

Political Stability: Ongoing economic inequalities have the potential to erode political stability and spark civil unrest. For the region's security, marginalized people may become more vulnerable to radicalization and political extremism.

Development Objectives: The achievement of global development objectives, like as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is significantly impacted by economic inequality within the SAARC. Addressing inequalities both inside and across countries is necessary for achieving these objectives [10].

Issues with Reducing Economic Disparities

The task of addressing economic inequalities within SAARC is intricate and multidimensional. Progress is hampered by a number of problems and barriers:

Political Tensions: Historically, attempts to reduce economic inequities have been overshadowed by political tensions and wars, such as the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir. Bilateral disputes take time and money away from economic efforts.

Resource Allocation: Political factors and power dynamics may have an impact on decisions on resource allocation within SAARC countries, often to the cost of underprivileged groups.

Governance and Corruption: Problems with governance, such as inefficiency and corruption, may make economic inequalities worse. The efficient provision of public services and the growth of infrastructure are hampered by weak governance.

Infrastructure Deficits: Poor infrastructure may obstruct regional integration and economic progress by restricting access to electricity and transportation networks. Landlocked and isolated areas are disproportionately affected by infrastructure shortages.

Limited Access to Education and Healthcare: Differences in access to education and healthcare support inequality and impede the development of human capital. Another urgent issue is gender inequality in employment and education.

Possibilities for Inclusive Growth and Regional Cooperation

Although economic inequalities provide significant difficulties, they also offer chances for regional collaboration and equitable progress within SAARC:

Regional Initiatives: To encourage trade, economic integration, and infrastructure development, SAARC has undertaken a number of regional initiatives, notably the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). These programs have the ability to narrow economic gaps and encourage shared prosperity.

Observer States: Cooperation with watchdog nations like China and Japan provide chances for capital investment, technical support, and capacity growth. When it comes to closing economic inequalities and fostering sustainable development, observer states may be a crucial player.

Human Capital Development: The potential of the region's human capital may be unlocked by prioritizing expenditures in healthcare and education. Economic and social progress depend on having a skilled and fit labor force.

Implementing inclusive policies that prioritize women; minority groups, and at-risk communities is crucial for eliminating economic inequalities. These regulations need to include social safety nets, land reform, and focused development initiatives.

Regional connectedness: Improving regional connectedness via investments in digital and transportation infrastructure may boost the economy, ease commerce, and lessen inequities, especially in rural and landlocked regions.

CONCLUSION

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has a considerable obstacle in achieving its goal of promoting regional cooperation and development due to the economic differences among its member nations. The nature and effects of economic inequality within SAARC are examined in this abstract, which also emphasizes initiatives to overcome them. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight nations that make up the SAARC, which was founded in 1985. The discrepancies in these countries' economic development levels may be seen in a number of ways, including Income disparities: While some SAARC member states, like India and Pakistan, have considerably greater per capita incomes, others, like Afghanistan and Nepal, are among the world's least developed nations and have much lower income levels, are among the least developed countries internationally. Infrastructure Disparities: Between member states, there are still gaps in the availability of high-quality healthcare, education, transportation, and technology. Infrastructure problems often impede the socioeconomic development of less developed countries.

Within SAARC, trade relations are impacted by economic imbalances. The industrial bases and trading capacity of more developed countries tend to be stronger, while less developed countries often rely on basic industries like agriculture inequities in social development indices, such as health and educational results, are strongly correlated with economic inequities. Increasing population well-being is sometimes more difficult in less developed countries. An example of a SAARC initiative to ameliorate economic inequities is In order to close the economic gap and encourage balanced growth, the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) offers financial assistance for development initiatives in its less developed members. commerce facilitation Projects like the

SAARC Free Trade Area (SAFTA) aim to increase intra-regional commerce, spur economic development, and lessen inequalities by fostering economic integration. Building Capacity SAARC member states participate in capacity-building initiatives to exchange knowledge, skills, and technical support to aid less developed countries in enhancing their capacities for economic and social development. Regional Projects Through the promotion of infrastructure development in the area as a whole, cooperative projects like regional connectivity initiatives seek to minimize economic inequities. Foreign Investment: Supporting FDI and regional investment possibilities might boost economic development in less developed member states. As a whole, SAARC's economic inequalities provide a challenging issue that affects many aspects of development, including income levels, infrastructure, commerce, and social well-being. While the organization has made progress in addressing these inequalities via programs like the SDF and trade facilitation, continued efforts are essential to make sure that the advantages of regional cooperation are dispersed more fairly among member states.

REFERENCES:

- [1] J. Ahmed and M. Fahim Bashir, "An empirical investigation of banking sector development and economic growth in a panel of selected SAARC countries," *Theor. Appl. Econ.*, 2016.
- [2] S. Tripathi and M. Bhatia, "Level of education and economic development in saarc member countries: A panel data approach," *Man India*, 2016.
- [3] R. Zaheer, "The Economic Performance of SAARC Member Countries," *Res. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, 2013.
- [4] R. Ullan Awan, T. Akhtar, S. Rahim, S. And, and A. R. Cheema, "Governance, Corruption And Economic Growth: A Panel Data Analysis Of Selected Saarc Countries," 2018.
- [5] H. I. Russell and J. Kouraklis, "Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on Economic Growth of the SAARC Countries," *J. Econ. Sustain. Dev.*, 2017.
- [6] M. A. Idrees, "Foreign capital inflows and economic growth in SAARC," *J. Bus. Stud.*, 2018, doi: 10.4038/jbs.v5i2.38.
- [7] T. Sampathkumar and S. Rajeshkumar, "Causal Relationship between Export and Economic Growth: Evidence from SAARC Countries," *IOSR J. Econ. Financ. Ver. I*, 2016.
- [8] C. Kumar, "Human Trafficking in the South Asian Region: SAARC's Response and Initiatives," *J. Soc. Sci. Humanit.*, 2015.
- [9] E. Lundsgaarde and B. Ghosh, "Effects of infrastructure on regional income in the era of globalization: New evidence from South Asia," *Asia-Pacific Dev. J.*, 2006, doi: 10.18356/a8de85db-en.
- [10] P. Srinivasan, M. Kalaivani, and P. Ibrahim, "An empirical investigation of foreign direct investment and economic growth in SAARC nations," *J. Asia Bus. Stud.*, 2011, doi: 10.1108/15587891111152366.

CHAPTER 12

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON SAARC'S ROLE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Roma Khanna, Assistant Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- romakhanna11@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The South Asian area, which is particularly susceptible to natural catastrophes, benefits greatly from the disaster management efforts of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). This abstract explores SAARC's role in disaster management and its initiatives to lessen the effects of disasters. Eight nations make up the SAARC, which was established in 1985: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Numerous natural catastrophes, like as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and landslides, threaten the region's infrastructure, people's lives, and economic stability. In a region that is vulnerable to a variety of natural calamities, SAARC's involvement in disaster management is essential. In order to assist member nations better plan for and react to catastrophes, SAARC facilitates collaboration, capacity development, and financial support, eventually enhancing the safety and resilience of South Asian populations. The organization's capacity to respond to catastrophes fully is still being hampered by issues including political unrest and resource shortages.

KEYWORDS:

Cooperation, Disaster, Management, Organization, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

Natural catastrophes are common in the South Asian area, including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, tsunamis, landslides, and droughts, among others. These catastrophes have the power to inflict a horrifying human and economic toll, undoing hard-won development achievements, and reversing advancements in the fight against poverty and human development. They transcend national boundaries and often affect other countries, necessitating a regional strategy for prevention, preparation, reaction, and recovery [1], [2].

Important details on SAARC's involvement in disaster management:

Disaster Response & preparation: SAARC has put in place procedures to improve preparation and response. By encouraging the exchange of best practices and coordinating response initiatives, the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) acts as a focal point for regional cooperation.

Building ability: SAARC conducts training sessions, seminars, and exercises to increase the member nations' ability for disaster management. These programs concentrate on early warning systems, response coordination, and catastrophe risk reduction. Regional cooperation is encouraged by SAARC, including the sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources in the

management of disasters. During times of crisis, the group promotes regional cooperation. The 2011-founded SAARC Regional Fund for catastrophes (SRFD) offers financial aid to member governments afflicted by catastrophes. It aids in relief and restoration activities and aids in the reconstruction of impacted populations' lives.

Climate Change Adaptation: SAARC is aware that climate change increases a country's susceptibility to calamities. The group works for international climate action and climate resilience measures Cross-Border Coordination due to the common boundaries in the area, SAARC promotes international coordination for disaster relief. This involves coordinated disaster response actions and cross-border aid.

A Brief History of Disaster Management in SAARC

Disaster management was added to SAARC's agenda as a result of awareness of the region's susceptibility to natural catastrophes and the need of a coordinated response. A specific framework for collaboration in disaster management was approved during the eighth SAARC Summit, which took place in New Delhi in 1995. This was the turning point for SAARC's involvement in disaster management, which has since developed into one of the most significant and important projects for the group.

The foundation of the SAARC's framework for regional disaster management cooperation is the idea of solidarity, collaboration, and shared responsibility. It acknowledges that member states are all equally vulnerable to natural catastrophes and that in order to successfully handle this complex issue, it is necessary to combine resources, skills, and knowledge [3], [4].

Disaster Management's Complexity in South Asia

The complexity and sheer variety of issues faced by disaster management in South Asia are notable:

Geographic Diversity: The large contingent of South Asia is home to a variety of landscapes, including the towering Himalayan ranges, the fertile plains of the Indo-Gangetic basin, and the extensive coastal areas along the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Due to their differences, many geographical areas are vulnerable to various forms of catastrophes, from storms near the coast to earthquakes in the Himalayan region [5], [6].

Population Density: South Asia has one of the largest densities of people in the whole planet. Effective disaster management is crucial for preventing fatalities and alleviating suffering since catastrophes are made worse by the concentration of people in sensitive locations.

Rising sea levels, altered precipitation patterns, and a rise in the frequency and severity of severe weather events are all aspects of climate change that the area is now experiencing. Disaster management in South Asia has additional difficulties due to climate change [7], [8].

Trans boundary Effects: A lot of natural calamities, such floods and landslides, disregard national boundaries. They often have an impact on numerous nations at once, needing a coordinated regional response.

Resource Limitations: Some SAARC members have limited resources and ability for disaster management, which emphasizes the need of regional collaboration and aid.

Disaster Management Systems in the SAARC

The SAARC has created a comprehensive framework for managing disasters that includes all phases of the cycle:

Preparedness: SAARC members work together on early warning systems, methods for reducing disaster risk, and the development of the capabilities of emergency response teams.

In the wake of catastrophes, SAARC enables the prompt deployment of regional reaction teams, relief supplies, and humanitarian aid. The organization's reaction mechanisms are meant to supplement and improve on existing national initiatives[9].

Restoration of infrastructure, livelihoods, and communities is part of the post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation operations that SAARC assists its member nations with. The goal is to improve resilience and rebuild better.

Exchange of Knowledge: The core of SAARC's disaster management activities is the exchange of knowledge and information. The group promotes the sharing of best practices, academic discoveries, and life experiences to increase catastrophe resilience.

DISCUSSION

Achievements of SAARC in Disaster Management

Over time, SAARC has achieved important advancements in disaster management, reaching remarkable results:

Early Warning Systems: The South Asian Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) and the South Asia Flash Flood Guidance System are two examples of regional early warning systems that have been made possible by SAARC. The capacity of the area to anticipate and react to catastrophes is improved by these systems.

Regional Disaster Response: In the aftermath of several catastrophes, such as earthquakes in Nepal and Pakistan, floods in Bangladesh and India, and cyclones in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, SAARC's regional response mechanisms have been activated. These replies have shown how dedicated the company is to teamwork.

Building Capacity: SAARC member nations have benefitted from building capacity efforts, such as training courses for experts in disaster management, the creation of regional standards, and the exchange of knowledge in fields like search and rescue.

Cross-Border Cooperation: The SAARC has promoted cross-border cooperation in disaster management, allowing member governments to coordinate preparation, response, and recovery operations that span national borders [10].

Future Directions and Challenges

Despite its successes, SAARC still confronts a number of difficulties in disaster management:

Effective disaster management has sometimes been hampered by bilateral disputes between SAARC member nations. Political enmities may prevent timely cooperation and information exchange.

Resource Constraints: Some member states are still struggling to handle disasters due to capacity issues and resource restrictions. It's still difficult to address these inequalities.

Climate Change: The growing effects of climate change need a flexible and futuristic strategy to catastrophe management. SAARC has to keep up with the changing issues caused by climate change.

Pandemics: The pandemic brought attention to the need of a strong public health response in the context of crisis management. The SAARC's framework for managing disasters must include pandemic preparation.

Rapid urbanization in South Asia creates additional difficulties for disaster management, especially in regions with high population densities. To deal with these shifting challenges, SAARC must modify its tactics.

In the area, disaster management has been greatly aided by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Here is a summary of the SAARC's involvement in disaster management as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021. South Asia is very susceptible to natural calamities including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and droughts. In order to improve disaster management, SAARC has acknowledged the need of tackling these risks. Coordination and cooperation: SAARC has given members a forum to exchange best practices for disaster response and to coordinate their efforts. The group encourages member governments to work together and assists them in combining their resources and skills in times of crisis. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) was formed to promote interregional coordination in disaster planning, response, and recovery. It fosters initiatives to increase capacity and acts as an information center.

SAARC member nations have worked together to create early warning systems for a number of different kinds of disasters, including cyclones and tsunamis. By giving at-risk groups timely information, these technologies have assisted in saving lives. Joint Exercises and Training: SAARC has established joint disaster management training programs and exercises to improve member nations' preparation and response capacities. In times of crisis, this has increased cooperation.

SAARC has aided in the distribution of resources, including as money and humanitarian supplies, to afflicted member nations after calamities. Responding to humanitarian needs has relied heavily on this help. Regional Protocols: SAARC member nations have ratified regional protocols and agreements on risk reduction and disaster management. These contracts formalize collaboration and establish standards for local catastrophe response.

CONCLUSION

Despite its efforts, SAARC has had trouble playing its part in disaster management due to political disputes among its member nations, a lack of resources, and restrictions on infrastructure and technology. These difficulties may reduce the efficiency of local efforts to control disasters. Future Directions by resolving these issues, boosting cross-border collaboration, and strengthening infrastructure resilience, SAARC has the ability to significantly increase disaster management. Future programs may emphasize long-term risk reduction and

adaptation to climate change. By encouraging collaboration, easing coordination, and offering a regional framework for disaster planning and response, SAARC has, in my opinion, significantly contributed to South Asia's disaster management efforts. Even if difficulties still exist, the organization's efforts have helped lessen the effects of catastrophes and preserve lives in the area. The commitment of member nations to collaboration and tackling the changing difficulties brought on by natural disasters and climate change will determine SAARC's ability to handle catastrophes in the future.

REFERENCES:

- [1] M. Nakayama and M. Maekawa, "Economic benefits and security implications of trading hydropower through transboundary power grids in Asia," *Int. J. Water Resour. Dev.*, 2013, doi: 10.1080/07900627.2012.747127.
- [2] S. K. Srivastava, "A Framework for Regional Cooperation on Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in South Asia," in *Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia*, 2010. doi: 10.1007/978-90-481-9516-9_34.
- [3] K. Ray, M. Mohapatra, B. K. Bandyopadhyay, and L. S. Rathore, *High-impact weather events over the SAARC region*. 2015. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-10217-7.
- [4] M. S. A. Islam D. M. and D. M. Islam, M. S. Ahammad, "Investigating The Relationship Between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Household Consumption Expenditure (HCE) In Two SAARC Countries: Nepal and Pakistan," *Int. J. Sci. Bus.*, 2017.
- [5] S. Kanta Kafle, "Disaster Risk Management Systems in South Asia: Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, Disaster Risk and Legislative and Institutional Frameworks," *J. Geogr. Nat. Disasters*, 2017, doi: 10.4172/2167-0587.1000207.
- [6] Taslim-Uddin, M. Habibur-Rahman, and Raju-Dakhal, "Swot analysis of neuro rehabilitation in SAARC countries," *Neurorehabil. Neural Repair*, 2018.
- [7] E. Ferris, "Better Together: Regional Capacity Building for National Disaster Risk Management," 2014.
- [8] B. R. Mulam, "(A230) Emergency Medical Preparedness for Disaster Risk Reduction: The Role of Health Sector Personnel - An Overview," *Prehosp. Disaster Med.*, 2011, doi: 10.1017/s1049023x11002160.
- [9] E. Ferris, "In the Neighborhood: The Role of Regional Organizations in Disaster Risk Management," 2013.
- [10] M. D. Chowdhury, "Socio-Economic Impacts of Mobile Penetration in SAARC Countries with Special Emphasis on Bangladesh," *Asian Bus. Rev.*, 2015, doi: 10.18034/abr.v5i2.56.

CHAPTER 13

A BRIEF STUDY ON FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR SAARC

Vipin Jain, Professor
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management and Technology, Teerthanker Mahaveer University,
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email Id- vipin555@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Since its founding in 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has served as an essential forum for promoting regional cooperation among South Asian countries. Despite initial optimism and promise, SAARC has had many difficulties throughout its history, such as political disputes, slow economic integration development, and outside pressures. This abstract analyzes SAARC's prospects for the future, taking into account both the difficulties it faces and the advantages it may take advantage of. SAARC's capacity to make major progress on regional issues has been hampered by political rivalry and historical disputes among its member states, particularly between India and Pakistan. It still presents an enormous task to resolve these tensions. SAARC has made little progress toward its goal of promoting economic integration within the region, mostly because of non-tariff obstacles, trade imbalances, and a lack of infrastructure connection. As China and the United States have engaged South Asian nations more frequently on an individual basis, the regional impact of SAARC may be at risk. Concerns about security include terrorism and territorial disputes, which draw focus and resources away from collaborative efforts in South Asia. With a sizeable fraction of the world's population living there, South Asia has tremendous economic potential. This promise might be realized through improved infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and regional economic integration. South Asia is home to a sizable pool of young, educated, and diversified human resources. Regional growth might be fueled through investments in entrepreneurship, innovation, and education. projects to increase connectivity with neighboring nations, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and India's projects, have the potential to boost regional trade and collaboration. Collaboration on disaster management and environmental sustainability can promote regional resilience as South Asia deals with the growing effects of climate change

KEYWORDS:

Disaster, Management, Prospects, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the region's resolve to develop a regional cooperative framework, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) was established in 1985. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are its seven founding members. Afghanistan formally joined the group in 2007. As observers, the SAARC now includes Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, the Republic of Korea, and the United States of America. In 1985, Dhaka, Bangladesh, hosted the inaugural SAARC summit, while Kathmandu, Nepal, hosted the 18th Summit in 2014. The 19th Summit, scheduled to take place in November 2016 in Islamabad, Pakistan, has been postponed [1], [2].

Precisely 3.3% of the world's landmass is made up by the SAARC area. One fifth of the world's population resides in SAARC nations. Bhutan and Nepal are two of the region's landlocked nations. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are two island nations in the SAARC area. In the south and south-west, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India touch the Indian Ocean. Agriculture is the primary source of income for most people in SAARC nations [3], [4].

Targets of SAARC The SAARC Charter's stated goals are to Advance the welfare of South Asia's peoples and raise their standard of living; Promote regional economic, social, and cultural development by giving everyone the chance to live in dignity and reach their full potential; Encourage and develop South Asian nations' ability to rely on one another Encourage active cooperation and mutual help in the domains of economics, society, culture, technology, and science; Contribute to mutual trust, understanding, and respect of one another's concerns [5], [6];

In international fora, developing nations should cooperate more closely with one another as well as with other developing nations on issues of mutual concern. They should also work with regional and global organizations that share similar objectives. Standards of the SAARC2 Respect for the ideals of sovereign equality, geographical integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, and mutual benefit underpin cooperation within the framework of the Association. Such collaboration should enhance rather than replace bilateral or multilateral cooperation [7], [8].

Such collaboration needs to be in line with the member nations' duties on a bilateral and global scale. In the SAARC, decisions are made unanimously at all levels. It does not engage in discussion of matters that are bilateral or controversial. Agriculture and rural development, biotechnology, education and culture, economics and trade, energy, the environment, finances and funding mechanisms, information, communication, and media, people-to-people contacts, poverty alleviation, science and technology, security issues, social development, and tourism are just a few of the areas in which SAARC nations collaborate. The execution, coordination, and monitoring of the programs in their particular areas of cooperation are handled by a number of Technical Committees made up of members of Member States [9], [10].

Successes of SAARC3 in spite of highly challenging political conditions, SAARC has been able to establish settings, organizations, and platforms where Heads of State have convened during the last 30 years. It offers a venue for the people of South Asia to collaborate in an atmosphere of friendliness, trust, and understanding. Important issues for the area have been addressed by SAARC, including a social charter, development agreements, and even the delicate problem of terrorism prevention.

The agreements on transportation, energy, and food banks are all significant milestones in the right direction. One of the foundations of South Asian integration initiatives is exchanges in research and civil society. After 10 years of SAARC's existence, the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA), which was signed in 1995, paved the way for further intra-regional trade liberalization and economic cooperation among the member nations. By lowering import duties on products that qualified, SAPTA aimed to secure preferential treatment while also guaranteeing special consideration for the region's least developed nations. A Customs Union, Common Market, and Economic Union were the primary goals of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which was intended to be the first step in that direction.

The SAFTA Agreement was ratified on January 6, 2004, in Islamabad, Pakistan, during the 12th SAARC Summit. The Trade Liberalization Program began on July 1, 2006, and the Agreement went into effect on January 1, 2006. By 2009, members of SAARC were required to reduce their obligations to 20%.

The SAFTA Ministerial Council (SMC), made up of the member states' commerce ministers, was created when the Agreement entered into effect. The SAARC exports climbed significantly from US\$206.7 billion in 2009 to US\$354.6 billion in 2012. Over the same time span, imports also rose from US\$330 billion to US\$602 billion. However, the intra-SAARC trade only represents little more than 1% of SAARC's GDP. Contrarily, ASEAN's intra-block commerce accounts for 10% of its GDP while being smaller economically than SAARC.

In 1992, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme was introduced. The leaders of the SAARC countries decided that certain categories of dignitaries should be entitled to a Special Travel document, which would exempt them from obtaining a visa for the region, at the Fourth Summit, which took place in Islamabad from December 29 to December 31, 1988. The list of eligible categories was routinely reviewed by the Council of Ministers in accordance with the Summit's directive.

There are now 24 categories of entitled individuals on the list, including dignitaries, judges from higher courts, legislators, senior officials, businesspeople, journalists, athletes, etc. The corresponding Member States issue the Visa Stickers to the appropriate groups of that nation. The Visa Sticker typically has a one-year expiration date. The SAARC Member States' Immigration Authorities periodically assess the implementation.

At the 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, the SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation (Electricity) was formally adopted. This Agreement permits the voluntary cross-border exchange of electricity according to the laws, rules, and regulations of the individual members. It, among other things, gives Member States the ability to agree on the conditions, payment security system, and duration of power trading.

India approved the Agreement on July 30, 2015. It is being ratified by more Member States at the moment. The agreement's implementation ought to help reduce energy shortages, especially in our North East. The 17th SAARC Summit in November 2011 saw the signing of the SAARC Agreement on Rapid response to Natural Disasters with the intention of institutionalizing regional cooperation on disaster response among SAARC nations.

For the SAARC member nations, India has also hosted a number of seminars, conferences, and training programs on disaster management. When Nepal experienced major earthquakes last year, India quickly provided support and expertise. India took the initiative to ask the SAARC Governments for their opinions by submitting a Concept Paper for the SAU. All SAARC Member States supported the notion of a South Asian university, and on April 4, 2007, during the 14th SAARC Summit in New Delhi, an interministerial agreement for the establishment of a South Asian university was signed. At the 16th SAARC Summit, which took place in Thimpu in 2010, the SAARC Secretariat endorsed the idea of forming the SAU.

So, in August 2010, the South Asian University welcomed its first group of students. The university's permanent campus in Delhi is expected to be moved shortly. Problems and worries for bilateral and internal political reasons, SAARC failed to conduct 11 annual summits

throughout its 30 years of existence. Three years have passed since the last time the Kathmandu Summit was convened. Despite the presence of logistical benefits and 30 years after the founding of SAARC, SAFTA only accounts for around 10% of all regional commerce.

During the years 2013 and 2014, the total amount of intra-SAARC trade flows under SAFTA was close to US\$ 3 billion. An estimated 5% of India's total commerce is with South Asia. Contrastingly, intra-regional trade accounts for about 65% of all trade within the European Union, 51% within the NAFTA region, 26% within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and 16% within the Mercosur trade bloc in Latin America. The same applied to FDI.

DISCUSSION

FDI received by SAARC nations has greatly improved over the last three decades, however in 2012, only India got more than 84% of all FDI, compared to Nepal's 0.16 percent. In order to successfully implement the road map of transforming SAPTA into SAFTA, further into the South Asian Customs Union, and ultimately into the South Asian Economic Union by the year 2020. South Asian countries will need to address both economic and non-economic factors, such as creating political will and building confidence. While other parts of the globe have advanced all the way to monetary union, SAARC has not even managed to draft a free trade agreement. The eight SAARC presidents had to approve three connectivity agreements on roads, rails, and energy even at the 2014 Kathmandu Summit. Only one of them has been signed, the one on energy.

recently occurring events Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister of Bangladesh, said, "The effectiveness of SAARC is still there and I think, there's a lot to work on it," during an interactive session titled "Harnessing Regional Cooperation in South Asia" at the Congress Centre in Davos on January 17, 2017. SAARC is really active. Sheikh Hasina, however, commented on the SAARC Summit's postponement in Pakistan, saying, "What did happen was that one SAARC Summit was postponed.

There is no need for concern since the next SAARC Summit might happen soon. The Nepalese Commerce Minister, Mr. Romi Gauchan Thakali, stated on the sidelines of the two-day Asia-Pacific Business Forum in Dhaka that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is still relevant and will remain so despite the ongoing controversy over its future. He continued by saying that Nepal fully believes in the significance of SAARC and that SAARC is an established organization. In spite of many obstacles and conflicts, he expressed pleasure with the SAARC's progress over the last three decades and said it is now time to work harder to develop the regional cooperation agreement.

Speaking with Arjun Bahadur Thapa, the departing Secretary General of SAARC, on January 28, 2017, Sartaj Aziz, the adviser to the Pakistani prime minister on foreign affairs, stated that Pakistan is still committed to hosting the 19th SAARC Summit as soon as possible so that the goals of regional cooperation under the SAARC banner can be pursued more vehemently.

The Pakistani Foreign Minister also underlined Pakistan's commitment to regional cooperation within the SAARC framework for advancing the well-being of South Asia's people and enhancing their standard of living, economic development, social advancement, and cultural collaboration. Another breakthrough was the launch of the first South Asian satellite by India on

May 5. It was made by the Indian Space Research Organization and was totally sponsored by India.

The South Asia Satellite, which Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi proposed, will aid partner nations in better communication, better governance, better banking, better education in remote areas, more accurate resource mapping, more reliable weather forecasting, access to world-class medical care through telemedicine, and quick response to natural disasters. The SAARC process, which struck a hitch when the 19th Summit, set for Islamabad, was postponed, witnessed rebirth as all eight member nations participated in a two-day Committee meeting, conducted at the level of the foreign secretary, and a SAARC Council of Ministers meeting, held at the level of the foreign minister.

Various administrative and budgetary matters pertaining to the SAARC Secretariat and its organizations were covered by the Programming Committee. Along with other topics, the budget of the SAARC Secretariat and the five regional SAARC centers were also covered. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the deputy head of the Pakistani mission, recently said during remarks on the sidelines of a SCO event in Beijing that it is crucial for both nations to expand the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation SAARC.

We really hope that SAARC, our regional organization, would resolve its issues so that India may attend the summit in Pakistan since, at the end of the day, we are neighbors, added Baloch. Given India's stance on Pakistan's participation in cross-border terrorism, it is still unclear if the summit will take place at the end of this year as well. However, Baloch said that Islamabad is attempting to host the meeting. In order to fulfill its mandate to work for regional peace and stability as well as improved relations and harmony among member states for the benefit of the region's people, the SAARC forum must be used effectively.

Overcoming regional conflict and promoting more collaboration amongst the states in the area are the SAARC's current challenges. As is really the case, SAARC should be seen as more belonging to the region's peoples than to its governments. On February 1 and 2, 2017, the SAARC Programming Committee met in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. After the SAARC Standing Committee, the Programming Committee is the lowest level institution in SAARC.

CONCLUSION

Political dynamics, regional wars, economic inequities, and shifting global realities are just a few of the many variables that have an impact on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) future prospects. Here is a judgment on the future possibilities for SAARC as of my most recent information update in September 2021. Persistent Challenges: SAARC continues to encounter significant obstacles, including as unsolved regional conflicts, political disagreements among member nations, and slow development in crucial areas like economic integration and security cooperation. Bilateral Conflicts: The India-Pakistan conflict continues to be a major roadblock to the organization's success. To realize the full potential of SAARC, progress in resolving bilateral problems is essential. Economic Disparities There are still persistent economic gaps between the member nations, and closing them will need coordinated action. Prioritizing measures to facilitate trade and foster economic cooperation would help the area grow and prosper. Geopolitical rivalry South Asia's geopolitical rivalry, which includes the impact of outside countries, may make regional dynamics more complicated. For SAARC to succeed, it must manage these complicated geopolitical situations. Human

Security and Development: In order to solve problems with regional healthcare, social development, and environmental sustainability, SAARC may be very helpful. There are several prospects for collaboration in these areas. Resource Mobilization SAARC's future efforts and projects will need strong financial assistance from its member countries as well as efficient resource mobilization. SAARC's future relevance and success will depend on its capacity to adjust to shifting regional and global circumstances. To confront fresh difficulties and grab new possibilities, the organization must adapt. **People-Centric Approach** The relevance and influence of SAARC may be increased by putting the needs of the people in South Asia first via programs that combat poverty, inequality, and social development. Promoting equitable economic development, private sector involvement, and networking initiatives may encourage economic integration and lessen inequalities. **Stabilizing Regional Institutions** SAARC Regional Centers and specialized organizations are essential to fostering collaboration. The area may gain from improving these institutions' capacity and effectiveness. **Partnerships with External Parties** Addressing regional issues and advancing development initiatives may be facilitated by working with external parties and international organizations. In conclusion, possibilities and difficulties both affect SAARC's chances for the future. Despite ongoing challenges, SAARC has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the peace, stability, and development of the region. It will be necessary for member nations to put regional cooperation first, get over political divisions, and adjust to changing South Asian dynamics in order to realize this promise. The capacity of SAARC to adapt and successfully deal with local and global developments, as well as the member nations' willingness to cooperate in the pursuit of shared objectives, will determine the organization's future success.

REFERENCES:

- [1] K. C. Dash, *Regionalism in South Asia: Negotiating cooperation, institutional structures*. 2008. doi: 10.4324/9780203930366.
- [2] A. M. Khalid and G. Rajaguru, "Financial market linkages in South Asia: Evidence using a multivariate GARCH model," *Pak. Dev. Rev.*, 2004, doi: 10.30541/v43i4iipp.585-603.
- [3] P. Bhalla, "Regional groupings in Asia: Should SAARC follow the ASEAN model?," *J. Int. Dev.*, 1990, doi: 10.1002/jid.3380020301.
- [4] R. Tripathi, "Reorienting the regional discourse on South Asia: Vision for a people's SAARC," *South Asian Surv.*, 2006, doi: 10.1177/097152310601300213.
- [5] J. Ara Parveen, "Current Status of Tourism Industry In Bangladesh: An Empirical Evaluation," *Sci. Res. J.*, 2013.
- [6] I. H. Zaki, "Recent Developments in Saarc and Prospects for the Future," *South Asian Surv.*, 1994, doi: 10.1177/097152319400100101.
- [7] I. Shaheen, "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Its Role, Hurdles and Prospects," *IOSR J. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, 2013, doi: 10.9790/0837-1560109.
- [8] R. Singh, "Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems and Prospects," *Pakistan Horiz.*, 2010.

- [9] T. H. M. S. R., “Prospects Of Renewable Energy Resources And Regional Grid Integration For Future Energy Security & Development In Saarc Countries,” *Int. J. Res. Eng. Technol.*, 2013, Doi: 10.15623/Ijret.2013.0201009.
- [10] M. Hassan, “A Review on Energy Situation ‘Solar Energy Policies and Targets’ in SAARC Countries,” *J. Energy Nat. Resour.*, 2017, doi: 10.11648/j.jenr.20170604.11.