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Focus: SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

Responses, Articles

Foreign Policy Research Centre
NEW DELHI (INDIA)
Preface

The 18th SAARC Summit was held in Kathmandu on 26-27 November 2014. The theme of the summit was ‘deeper integration for peace and prosperity’. The Kathmandu Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the summit clearly recognized, that it was time for SAARC, after “nearly 30 years of its existence”, to revitalize itself “as an effective vehicle to fulfill the development aspirations of the peoples of South Asia”. While SAARC’s commitments to enhance regional cooperation were re-affirmed, the Declaration also identified and acknowledged with considerable frankness, the shortcomings and defects between intent and achievement.

It is heartening to note that a wide galaxy of writers have focused on important themes and other related issues in their writings and comments for this special issue of FPRC Journal on SAARC. They have expressed hope that we can still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives and not consider it a failed organization and look for any other platforms. SAARC has made gradual progress in terms of institutional arrangements and fostering dialogue among member states. The gap between policy formulation and implementation has to be narrowed.

This issue also focuses on international perspective on SAARC. It is widely believed that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized. SAARC’s revitalisation was in the country’s interest and India should work towards it. Sub-regional exchanges have not accelerated and China’s engagement in the region needs to be critically looked into.

We take this opportunity to express our heart-felt thanks to our contributors who have shared our sentiments and accepted our invitation to enrich the contents of the Journal.

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**RESPONSES:**

(1) **Amb. Kant K. Bhargava**

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**Response to Questionnaire**

1. How should the balance sheet of Three Decades of SAARC be prepared?
   **What are its achievements and shortcomings?**

   It is a short question which requires a very long answer. Briefly speaking, SAARC has made some progress on common social and economic issues.
On matters relating to political and security cooperation, progress achieved so far has been practically nil. In specific terms, by way of achievements, one may mention the adoption of the Social Charter, conclusion of SAARC Free Trade Agreement, and Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) in agreed areas such as agriculture, education, science and technology, meteorology, energy, transport and communications etc.

2. Amid China’s moves to deepen its forays into the region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repositioned India in the leadership role in the SAARC, with a clear message that India will move ahead with regional integration process, with or without SAARC. How SAARC should be viewed in the context of India’s national and regional interests?

It is very difficult for India to move ahead with regional integration process without a regional organization such as SAARC. Nevertheless, the situation now in South Asia, the strength of the Indian Economy, as well as global scene today is markedly different from the time when SAARC was born. Earlier there was very little possibility of intra-industry trade in goods. Now complementarities have widened. Possibility of asymmetric distribution of trade gains is now much less compared to 1985. There are now possibilities of horizontal specialization and vertical integration. South Asian countries are now improving importance in the world trade arena at a rate that is greater than the speed with which region has increased its importance for South Asian countries in their trade. This indicates that there is potential for greater intra-regional trade. Trade in services especially in tourism has great potential compared to 25 years ago because of the Service Revolution in South Asia and fast development of tourism industry of late.

Earlier there was complete lack of investible resources limiting any possibilities of investment cooperation. Now the problem of resources is not so much. In fact, now several possibilities of investment cooperation for building supply capabilities and for trade creating joint ventures have emerged. Consequently, there are better prospects for intra-regional trade, sub-regional cooperation and economic partnerships in the region.

Private sector interest is now no longer peripheral but direct and substantial. Many in the private sector in South Asia also see India’s rise as an opportunity. There is hope for a better business climate in India and for economic reforms that will, in turn, reinvigorate the Indian economy. The overarching challenge for SAARC in the future is for translating the opportunities in the relationship into outcomes, the potential into performance and progress.

**Emerging Prospects for Regional Economic Integration**

Earlier regional economic integration did not figure much in SAARC
literature. Now prospects and challenges for regional economic integration is a hot topic for policy and research with Asian Development Bank taking the lead and SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry showing enhanced interest in the matter. Strategy 2020 of ADB includes regional integration, as one of its three development agendas, other two being inclusive economic growth and environmentally sustainable growth.

**Opportunities for Location Specific Cooperation**

There are now numerous more possibilities of location specific bilateral and sub-regional cooperation for energy, food, environment and water than before.

To sum up, while SAARC is a facilitator for regional economic integration, India should proactively work for sub regional economic cooperation and build comprehensive economic partnerships with countries of the region on bilateral and sub-regional basis as is found possible.

**3. How SAARC should relate to extra-regional powers presence in the region? Is it time to review the involvement of the SAARC observer nations?**

Member countries of SAARC will be able to profit from cooperation with extra regional powers better once they build inter se cooperation among themselves.

**4. Do you believe that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized?**

For revitalization of SAARC, there has to be a collective effort on the part of all member countries as decisions in SAARC are taken on the basis of unanimity. But India being a leading country has a pivotal role to play. Subject to its limitations, Indian leadership has always taken up its responsibility in this regard seriously.

**5. Do you agree with the view that SAARC progress was slow because individual members prefer to walk alone rather than exploring new opportunities for engagement?**

In my view, the main reason for slow progress is the existence of bilateral and contentious issues among member countries and their inability to rise above them and seize emerging opportunities for engagement.

**6. Summing up the key takeaways from the recent summit, Indian spokesman underlined that the Kathmandu summit has shown that**
the SAARC is not about India and Pakistan, but it’s about the whole of South Asia. Do you share this optimism?

SAARC is a platform for tackling common problems and not for solving bilateral problems. I have been, and continue to remain, cautiously optimistic about SAARC

7. What role SAARC can play in Achieving Peace through Economic Integration?

Despite SAARC being a vehicle for increasing economic integration, it by itself cannot succeed in achieving peace in the region. It must traverse first the route of economic cooperation and integration, then building of comprehensive economic partnership between and among its member countries, and thereafter instituting a system of political consultations and cooperation among member countries before it can effectively be of help in achieving peace.

8. How is SAARC preparing for new emerging security threats in terms of better cooperation between member states?

SAARC has an ongoing program for cooperation for disaster management, for protection and preservation of environment and for facing problems arising from climate change.

9. Should we still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives. Alternatively, there remain apprehensions that “should we consider it a failed organization and look for any other platform?”

In my view, SAARC is a product of necessity and a source of hope for the South Asian region.

Health Care, Disaster Management, Climate Change, Protection and Preservation of Environment, Energy and Food Security, Water Management are now global issues as well as priorities for future of SAARC. SAARC needs to set up Expert Groups in each of these areas to discuss in-depth and make recommendations to SAARC leaders in regard to:

a) the kind of intra-SAARC cooperation for meeting challenges in these areas as well as
b) global assistance and cooperation that is required in each of these areas.

It is not a question of SAARC being a failed organization and therefore abandoning it. The overwhelming question is how best we can
reinvigorate and revitalize SAARC and at the same time increase cooperation among its member states in other international fora also.

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Response to Questionnaire

1. How should the balance sheet of Three Decades of SAARC be prepared? What are its achievements and shortcomings?

The Kathmandu Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the 18th SAARC Summit, in November 2014, could be considered, to an extent, as a balance sheet of sorts. The Declaration clearly recognized, that it was time for SAARC, after “nearly 30 years of its existence”, to revitalize itself “as an effective vehicle to fulfill the development aspirations of the peoples of South Asia”. While SAARC’s commitments to enhance regional cooperation were re-affirmed, the Declaration also identified and acknowledged with considerable frankness, the shortcomings and defects between intent and achievement.

At Kathmandu, SAARC Heads of State/Government expressed determination to deepen regional integration, and to intensify cooperation, in respect of trade, investment, financial issues, energy, security, economic infrastructure, connectivity, cultural and other issues. They called for implementing projects and activities “in a prioritized, result-oriented and time-bound manner”.

The particular achievements of the Summit were its frank, critical analysis of the shortcomings of SAARC and the recommendations made for practical action to deal with them. A pragmatic and bold procedural recommendation by Heads of States and Government was that Summits be held every two years, rather than often toiling and failing to meet on an annual basis. The Kathmandu Summit took place a full 3 years after the preceding Summit in Maldives in November 2011.
Sri Lanka's President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, in a Message commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the SAARC Charter Day on 8th December, noted that South Asia is “characterized by diverse cultures, ethnic groups, religions which had over centuries nurtured the finest works of philosophies, arts and cultures”. He stated that “common civilizational links bind us through values of unity and tolerance”. The true achievements and shortcomings of the Kathmandu Summit will be more apparent as the processes of implementing its decisions proceed. It would be a practical measure for the next SAARC meeting to frankly assess progress made/delayed/subverted on the consensual decisions made at the Kathmandu Summit.

2. How SAARC should relate to extra-regional powers' presence in the region? Is it time to review the involvement of the SAARC observer nations?

In the globalizing world, extra-regional powers would naturally continue to react and impact on South Asia. At the same time, various aspects of South Asia - its economy, political and security aspects, cultural pull, all do have some influence beyond the region on the SAARC Observers. Interactions have beneficial aspects as well as some threats. Non-State actors active in criminal corporate sectors including in people-smuggling, drug-trafficking, gun-running and other activities across the region constitute a major security threat as well.

The following have been approved as Observers in SAARC: Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, and the United States of America. They all have varying interests in South Asia.

Prior to the 17th SAARC Summit in Maldives, provision was made for all Observers to attend a special Meeting at Addu Atoll which was helpful to indicate their particular interest in securing Observer status, as well as how they could contribute to SAARC activities. I too was invited, as a former SAARC Secretary General, to brief that particular Session on contributions Observers could make.

In the current globalizing world, strategic and security aspects in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) also affect virtually all SAARC states in diverse forms. It is essential for SAARC to continue consultations with the Observer States. Indeed, China’s current initiative of the 21st Century Indian Ocean Silk Road does have an impact on virtually all SAARC countries. At a largely informal, but vital level, most SAARC countries
have had some bilateral consultations as well as regional discussions with China on benefits of the initiative which has historic economic as well as security linkages reaching back to mariner Zheng He’s voyages across the IOR in the 5th Century. SAARC States’ connectivity, economic development, cultural links and their security concerns are intrinsic part of the larger global scenario.

Apart from China, SAARC needs to review and update its linkages and involvement, with all its other Observers, as well as other nations which routinely ply the IOR. The positive aspects need to be developed: the dangers need to be averted.

3. Do you believe that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized?

The invitation extended by Indian Prime Minister Modi to all Heads of SAARC to be present at his inauguration ceremony as Prime Minister was certainly an effective means of establishing confidence in his approach to all the Heads of State, including Pakistan’s Prime Minister. However, at the early part of the Kathmandu Summit, that confidence dropped partly due to well-publicised photographs of the two Prime Ministers literally ignoring each other! Yet the eventual close encounters of the friendly kind between the two Prime Ministers on some of their bilateral issues has restored some confidence that their bilateral issues could be a major factor in helping to revitalize the SAARC process.

4. Do you agree with the view that SAARC progress was slow because individual members prefer to walk alone, rather than exploring new opportunities for engagement?

Not really. Individual members attending SAARC meetings at different levels do hope to gain national benefits through cooperative connectivity with other member states rather than walking alone, expecting to score.

5. Summing up the key takeaways from the recent Summit, Indian spokesman underlined that the Kathmandu Summit has shown that the SAARC is not about India and Pakistan, but it’s about the whole of South Asia. Do you share this optimism?

Certainly. As the Indian spokesman underscored, SAARC involves and concerns all its South Asia member states and not just solely India and Pakistan. It is certainly an idealistic approach which accepts that irrespective of size, population, economic strength and other differences,
all eight member states are considered to have equal rights in decision-making – unlike in the United Nations Security Council where only 5 Permanent Members (Britain, China, France, Russia and United States) have veto powers as against the remaining 10 member states who hold office only for 2 years at a time after being elected.

6. What role SAARC can play in Achieving Peace through Economic Integration?

Aspects of economic integration, or at least cooperation, tend to be one of the most sought-after objectives at SAARC Conferences. Bilateral issues have often arisen at SAARC meetings where a participating member state feels exploited or unfairly treated by another (or a group of others) and has to undergo a sense of being defeated. Bilateral disputes, including on territorial issues, often do have economic gains and losses at its base apart from political failures that need to be explained domestically when the Conferences end and their achievements need to be “sold” to the public at home.

The gains that could be derived through economic integration which is not easy to achieve would be welcomed by the public at home and political credit would accrue to all countries engaged in the process.

7. An aspect that has drawn relatively less attention but is of critical importance is the lack of financial connectivity in the region. Do you agree?

Yes. This is closely related to question 6 as well. Financial connectivity, however slowly, is being achieved in SAARC. It needs to be enhanced and expedited. Economic confidence is a vital aspect linked to wider financial connectivity. Without economic confidence, access to finances and its release will be hampered.

8. How is SAARC preparing for new emerging security threats in terms of better cooperation between member states?

Among SAARC countries, traditional security threats and even violent conflicts have been mostly linked to unsettled borders (a legacy of colonial occupation) and violent acts over cross-border incidents. Religious tensions and terrorism have also triggered major security threats. The horrific terror attacks this December on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan was described by Indian Prime Minister Modi as “an assault on entire humanity”. As an indication of sympathy and support for Pakistan, Prime Minister Modi has, at time of writing, appealed to all...
Security threats in South Asia now arise from gun-running, drug trafficking, people-smuggling, piracy and other such enterprises propelled by globalized corporate criminal gangs across the Indian Ocean region. SAARC cooperation is now being urged to deal with such threats. The Kathmandu Declaration agrees to “take effective measures to combat illicit trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances, arms smuggling, money laundering, counterfeit currency and other transnational crimes”. Agreement has also been now reached in SAARC to launch a cyber-crime monitoring desk.

9. Should we still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives. Alternatively, there remains apprehensions that “should we consider it a failed organization and look for any other platforms?”

Cynicism does exist about the effectiveness of SAARC in bringing the region towards betterment and fulfilling its stated high objectives. The issues that SAARC needs to contend with are complex, and require considerable trust and confidence among its members, apart from negotiating skills.

We can look for “other platforms”, but they will not be able to perform even as effectively as SAARC does. SAARC, despite its defects is not certainly “a failed organization”, but definitely does need to be better organized, more strongly supported and encouraged by all South Asian states. The corporate sectors of South Asia do encourage closer regional cooperation despite some degree of caution.

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- Edited, India-Bangladesh Relations: Historical Imperatives and Future Direction (Gyan Publishers-IDSA, Delhi, 2012).
- “India’s Neighbourhood Policy: Perceptions from Bangladesh”, Strategic Analysis, January-February, 2011
- “New Radical and Old Islamists: Pakistan’s Problem of Religious Radicalisation and its Implications” Strategic Analysis, July-August, 2011
- “India’s Afghan Policy: Beyond Bilateralism”, Strategic Analysis, July-Aug 2012
- “Majoritarian state and the Marginalised minorities: Case Study of Hindus in Bangladesh”, Strategic Analysis, July-August 2013
- Federalising India’s Neighbourhood Policy: Role of States, Strategic Analysis, Jan-Feb, 2014

Response to Questionnaire

1. How should the balance sheet of Three Decades of SAARC be prepared?

The balance sheet can be prepared by looking at the agenda of SAARC since its inception. The organization has moved from social agenda to economic and further to include security agenda. The security agenda includes the SAARC convention on terrorism and additional protocol, drug trafficking etc. The countries also have moved from having preferential trade regime to free trade regime. The SAARC Development fund has been established with three windows: social, economic and infrastructure. There is a talk of SAARC bank and a move towards a South Asia Economic Union in the future. Any evaluation of SAARC would not be complete if it does not recognize the difficulties in bringing
the countries of the region together that shares mistrust and suspicion and continues to be burdened with historical baggage of partition.

2. **Do you agree with the view that SAARC progress was slow because individual members prefer to walk alone rather than exploring new opportunities for engagement?**

SAARC progress was slow because there was no synergy between the regional agenda and the national agenda of its member states. Moreover, due to India-Pakistan bilateral problem; Pakistan often blocked the trade initiatives and connectivity that would have facilitated regional economic integration. As a result, bilateral initiatives emerged as an alternative route. Although one cannot say that bilateralism has substituted regional multilateralism. One now witnesses a move towards greater integration, though Pakistan attitude towards regional connectivity would remain a major stumbling block. Connectivity will provide India a direct link to Afghanistan which Islamabad is not in favour.

3. **What role SAARC can play in Achieving Peace through Economic Integration?**

Economic integration has been one of the most significant areas of cooperation which will facilitate trade and also connect the countries with each other. India plays a significant role in this given its geographical location and foreign policy direction that aims to integrate the region. Any developmental activity is likely to generate peace as it holds the promise of economic dividends like economic opportunity through creation of job and larger economic activities that is connected to trade.

4. **Non-official interaction between the countries was happening in the economic field but little in the social sphere. Also there were no opportunities for the academicians and students to interact with each other. What steps do you suggest to make this happen?**

Within SAARC; Nepal and Bhutan share open border with India. Thus there is ample opportunities for interaction between these countries. Similarly the visa regime that exists between India and other countries of the region except for Pakistan is liberal. Apart from the visa, internet has emerged as tool that facilitates societal interaction especially between the countries that have rigid visa regimes. Youths connect with each other through facebook, twitter and skype. These interactions happen in spite of the state. Therefore, the raison d'être of controlled visa regime is defeated. However such interaction will get further boost if there is a
liberal visa regime in the region. Though SAARC has 24 categories of people who are exempted from visa; it is yet to extend this facility to the academicians. Research visas are closely scrutinized so that these researchers do not unravel state construction of nationalism and history. Greater interactions between students are likely to undermine what is taught in the text book especially in the context of India Pakistan relations.

5. How social media mediums such as Face book, twitter etc can bring people in the region together?

These medium are not restricted by the state. This provides an opportunity for the general people in both the countries to interact with each other and get to know each. This interaction is also beyond the state portrayal of enemy image and would help in deconstruction of statist paradigm.

6. Do you agree with the assessment that SAARC as an institution has failed to achieve the goal of poverty eradication in South Asia by 2012 even though this particular goal was high on the social agenda of SAARC since the 6th Summit in Colombo in 1991?

It has failed largely as there is no synergy between national and regional agenda. However, individual countries have done better as far as millennium development goals are concerned. Perhaps the region as a whole could have performed better if there is a regional body that monitors these developments or the member states are asked to provide a report card regarding its progress.

7. Should we still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives. Alternatively, there remain apprehensions that “should we consider it a failed organization and look for any other platform?”

SAARC can act as a nodal organization for all multilateral activities. For example: trade and investment or having an energy grid that will boost industrial output. Single country initiated approach will not suffice. Developing road, rail, air and waterway connectivity networks within the region or dealing with transnational terrorism and terror finance; a regional approach would be important. SAARC should focus on these issues as it is beyond the capacity of a single state to deal with. Whereas issues like girl child, poverty alleviation etc. form part of national agenda.
of most of the countries and these will also be achieved without the regional cooperation organization.

I do not agree that SAARC is a failed organization. Any such assessment does not take the regional complexity and the partition baggage into account. Moreover, SAARC is an important forum for India’s smaller neighbours to play a role in the region. This would provide them greater political visibility as regional stakeholders.

8. Do you believe that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized?

I think that under the new leadership, SAARC will be revitalized. India’s attempt at revitalizing SAARC, I would say started, more specifically in 2007. India declared that it has ‘asymmetric responsibility’ within the SAARC during the 14th SAARC summit which was held in New Delhi. Moreover, for the present government neighbourhood remains a primary focus area. As economic development would remain a key goal for India, neighbourhood would remain a major area of foreign policy engagement.

9.Summing up the key takeaways from the recent summit, Indian spokesman underlined that the Kathmandu summit has shown that the SAARC is not about India and Pakistan, but it’s about the whole of South Asia. Do you share this optimism?

I would say the only face saving factor in this summit was the agreement to establish energy grid. Though Pakistan has agreed to complete its internal consultation process on SAARC Regional Agreement on Railways and Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic among member states; it may not come through.

Its summit meetings cannot be a show case for India Pakistan relations. The media has always focused on whether India and Pakistan leadership shook hand, or interacted with each other or what was their body language when they came face to face with each other etc. during the summit. This takes the attention away from the summit. Moreover, media has a role to play in providing publicity to SAARC agenda and generate a debate on regional goals and create a critical mass to pressurize government to deliver. Political differences between these two countries have an impact on SAARC. However, SAARC charter provides for sub-regional cooperation. Therefore, SAARC agenda should be how to make progress on the issues that have been identified. The motive of the organization is larger regional goals. Therefore, bilateral problems should not be allowed to hinder SAARC’s progress.

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Response to Questionnaire

1. How should the balance sheet of Three Decades of SAARC be prepared?
   By reviewing the impact of various SAARC agreements and decisions such as the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area, the decision on SAARC Seed Bank.

2. Do you agree with the view that SAARC progress was slow because individual members prefer to walk alone rather than exploring new opportunities for engagement?
   Yes, I agree and that is where the leadership role comes in. SAARC needs strong leaders to take forward its agenda and the SAARC Secretariat is to be strengthened.

3. What role SAARC can play in Achieving Peace through Economic Integration?
   Through better implementation of the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area, and by providing the necessary emphasis on physical and institutional connectivity as well as people-to-people connectivity. Border tourism should be allowed and encouraged for the betterment of people-to-people connectivity.
4. The organization was not alive because there was no economic convergence among member states. Do you share this assessment of SAARC?

True to a large extent and it is reflected in not having common positions in international negotiations. For regional public goods such as trade, food security, there should be common positions at international negotiations. It is good to note that SAARC countries are exploring a common position on climate change negotiations.

5. It is often stated that most of the South Asian countries have uncertain economic outlook. And mega regional trade blocs need to be exploited for regional integration. Your comments.

True and such uncertainties are to be addressed through better economic cooperation. SAARC countries should realise that if there is growth in one country, there will be positive spill-over effects in a neighbouring country. Mega regionals will have some negative impacts on SAARC countries and they need to do more trade and investment among themselves to mitigate such impacts.

6. Do you subscribe to the view that the possibility of intra-regional trade has increased and there is a marked change in the field of investment and has better prospects?

While the possibilities of the enhancement of intra-regional trade is always there, it has to be realised through policy changes, particularly with respect to the betterment of connectivity as procedural barriers are one of the key factors hindering intra-regional trade. There should be greater emphasis on investment in service sectors so that intra-regional trade can get reinforced.

7. Do you agree with the view that SAARC as an institution has failed to achieve the goal of poverty eradication in South Asia by 2012?
even though this particular goal was high on the agenda of SAARC since the 6th Summit in Colombo in 1991?

Yes and that is because there was no coordinated efforts on the part of SAARC countries. A number of good initiatives are being implemented in several countries. There should be a mechanism at the regional level to learn from each other’s experience and apply them appropriately by taking into account local factors.

8. Should we still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives. Alternatively, there remain apprehensions that “should we consider it a failed organization and look for any other platform?”

The time has come to take a hard view on SAARC as it has failed to deliver. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka, could be another option where things are expected to move faster.

9. Do you believe that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized?

Yes but there should be full reciprocity on the part of other members too.

10. Summing up the key takeaways from the recent summit, Indian spokesman underlined that the Kathmandu summit has shown that the SAARC is not about India and Pakistan, but it’s about the whole of South Asia. Do you share this optimism?

I do share a cautious optimism. Let us see how the energy agreement will be implemented and by when the SAARC members will sign the motor vehicle agreement.

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Three Decades of SAARC
(Some Observations with specific reference to Energy Sector)

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1. Context

With much fanfare, pomp and show, the two-day long 18th summit of the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) concluded on November 27, 2014 in Kathmandu Nepal in a pleasant atmosphere. It may be mentioned that it had started against the backdrop of a very cold relationship between India and Pakistan. The outcomes of the summit were a 36-point declaration and signing of a regional framework agreement on electricity trade in the region. It may be recalled that during the 1980’s, the then leaders of South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, came together and decided to form a regional

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organization for South Asia with such objectives, among others, as promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life; promoting active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields; and strengthening cooperation among themselves (member countries) on matters of common interests. The organization formally came into existence with a secretariat in Kathmandu, when its Charter was formally approved on 8 December 1985 by the Heads of State or Government of the member countries in its first summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Afghanistan became a member of the organization in 2007 during the Fourteenth Summit held in Delhi, India. The European Union, Australia, China, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, and USA have joined SAARC with Observer status.

2. Cooperation in the Energy Sector and Institutional Mechanisms

South Asia has a huge potential, especially in the hydro power sector, coal and oil to some extent (SAARC Secretariat 2010). But

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1 According to an unpublished paper on South Asia Energy Vision: per capita consumption of electricity in the region varies from about 900 kwh in India to less than 100 kwh in Nepal. Even in India, in a few states, it is less than 100 kwh. The regional average per capita consumption is just 555 kwh, as compared to 2337 kwh per person in East Asia. whereas, from the view point of resource the region is rich. India has 285 billion tonnes of coal reserve, its present annual production is less than 600 million tonnes. It has 100-150 GW of Hydro Power potential, the capacity commissioned is 40 GW. Nepal has more than 100 GW of Hydro Power potential, developed capacity is less than 1 GW. The USAID’s South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Cooperation and Development (SARI-Energy) estimates that on a regional level, SAR as a whole has exploited less than 15% of its combined hydropower generation potential. Also the region has vast under-exploited gas reserves; concentrated in India (1,241 bcm), Pakistan (1,188 bcm) and Bangladesh (400 bcm). Pakistan has 185 billion tonnes of coal and lignite reserves that have barely been tapped into. Imported oil has been largely used in SAR as a default option when other sources of energy for power generation have been lacking, exposing countries to higher import bills and price volatility. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka import all of their oil products. Most oil reserves are concentrated in India (757 million tonnes) and Pakistan (104 million tonnes) (The sources cited are the World Bank figures of 2010, estimates compiled from: CEA, BP Statistical Review 2012 and Geological Survey of India, Geological Survey of Pakistan).
the region 'does not produce enough oil and gas to meet its needs; thus depends heavily on imports. Equally important is that 'most of the Member States are also not able to generate sufficient electricity to meet their demands. It has been estimated that energy needs of South Asia will increase three times in the next fifteen to twenty years' (http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/cat-detail.php?cat_id=55).

Thus the major challenge before SAARC countries is how to secure 'sustainable energy supplies to meet energy needs at reasonable/affordable prices... ' (Ibid). So, for meeting the growing demands and finding ways to secure the sustainable energy and to enable member countries to cooperate in the sector, SAARC has identified energy as one of the 16 areas of cooperation. And for this purpose, first of all, a Technical Committee on Energy (TCE) was established in January 2000. After realizing its importance, the Council of Ministers – the main political arm of SAARC decided to raise the status of the committee from technical level to the Working Group on Energy (WGoE) in 2004. There also exist a forum of SAARC energy ministers and another forum for senior officials from the energy related ministries of the member countries, which meets before the meeting of the energy ministers. In addition, there also exist expert groups for different themes (discussed below) and a SAARC Regional Energy Center at Islamabad has been established, which is mandated to:

I. To promote development of energy resources, including hydropower; and energy trade in the region;
II. To develop renewable and alternative energy resources; and
III. To promote energy efficiency and conservation in the region.

3. **Achievements and Major Milestones**

After the upgrading of the technical committee into a working group e.g. Working Group on Energy (WGoE) in 2004 and the establishment of a specialized SAARC energy center at Islamabad in 2006, the actual work
for cooperation for energy sector started within the SAARC framework. The Heads of State or Government recognized the importance of energy in the development process and started giving directives (see: 12th, 13th, 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th summit declarations) to the SAARC energy ministers and through them to the various agencies- SAARC secretariat, WGoE, expert groups and SAARC energy center. The SAARC energy ministers had five meetings so far. The last one was held at New Delhi in October 2014. The WGoE has, so far, met eight times, the last meeting was held at Colombo in August 2014.

While discussing and approving the draft concept paper on *South Asia Energy Ring*—considering it as a dynamic concept that would evolve over time—the third meeting of SAARC energy ministers held in Colombo in January 2009, decided to form four thematic expert groups. They are (i) Oil and gas group with Bangladesh as lead country; (ii) Electricity group with India as lead country; (iii) Renewable Energy group with Pakistan as lead country; and (iv) Technology/Knowledge sharing (including energy efficiency, coal etc) group with India as lead country. So far, the Expert group on Electricity has met three times, the last one at New Delhi in December 2013, the Expert group on Renewable energy has met twice, the last one at Islamabad in June 2014; and the Expert group on Technology and Knowledge Sharing met once at New Delhi in May 2012 (Annex IV: Report of the Meeting of Senior Officials Preceding the Fifth Meeting of the SAARC Energy Ministers, New Delhi Oct. 16, 2014).

In addition to governmental efforts, various donors, such as Asian Development Bank, Energy Charter Center, Brussels, USAID and Japan are collaborating with the SAARC secretariat and SAARC Regional Center in organizing various seminars, workshops and funding studies.

So far, under the energy sector cooperation, following studies and activities (Annex 1 and 1.1), in addition to getting a regional framework agreement for Energy (Electricity) cooperation- signed during the
18th summit held at Kathmandu in November 2014 (Annex 2), are either already undertaken or completed or are in the process of completion:

I. SAARC Regional Energy Trade Study (SRETS)
II. Commissioning of a Study on Regional Power Exchange
III. Holding of South Asia Energy Dialogue in New Delhi
IV. Enunciation and Discussion on the idea of South Asia Energy Ring
V. Circulation of Concept papers related to the Study on the Establishment of SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME)
VI. Some important studies undertaken through SAARC Energy Center, Islamabad are:

- Developing Integrated Energy Policies in South Asia
- Strong Institutional capacity to support energy efficiency in selected South Asian market
- Critical success factors in renewable energy project in South Asia
- Regional hydro power plants legal opportunities in Bhutan and Nepal
- Review of Electricity laws and regulations of SAARC member states
- SAARC Action Plan on Energy Conservation
- Pre-feasibility study for regional/sub-regional coal power plant


It may be recalled that consequent to the directives of the Heads of State or Government made during different summits, a draft agreement - SAARC Framework Agreement For Energy Cooperation (Electricity) - was prepared by the professionals associated with the concerned government agencies of the member countries in collaboration with SAARC secretariat and presented it in the 5th SAARC energy ministers meeting.
held at New Delhi in Oct 2014\textsuperscript{2}, which finalized and approved it for submission to the SAARC summit through the Council of Ministers. Since Pakistan was not present at the meeting, it was uncertain whether the framework agreement would get Pakistan’s consent and be signed during the 18\textsuperscript{th} summit. After initial reservations, Pakistan finally agreed. And in the final hours of the summit\textsuperscript{3}, the agreement was signed by the SAARC foreign ministers. It contains 20 articles (Annex 2). About the signing of the framework agreement in the last hours of the summit, i.e. afternoon of November 27, 2014, Sharma and Daniel in their dispatch to Reuters on the 18\textsuperscript{th} SAARC summit had written:

’a brief meeting between India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart on Thursday salvaged a summit of

\textsuperscript{2} As to who first made the draft of the framework, as per the agenda no 8 related to THE REPORT OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON ELECTRICITY (NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER 2014) of the fifth meeting of the SAARC Energy Ministers, the Government of India circulated a draft Framework Agreement to the Member States. The draft was considered in a Workshop held in Udaipur on 19 January 2011. The draft was further deliberated during the Sixth Meeting of the Working Group (Islamabad, 25-26 August 2011) and it was agreed that Member States may offer their comments on the elements to be included in the proposed draft Agreement, latest by 31 October 2011. The Secretariat received comments from Bhutan only, which were forwarded to the Government of India. The draft SAARC Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) was further deliberated during the Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on Energy (Marawila-Sri Lanka, 15-16 March 2013), then it was further submitted to the third Electricity Expert Group meeting held in December 2013, and Eighth Energy Group Meeting held at Colombo in August 2014. Subsequently the draft was discussed and finalized at length by the meeting of the Senior Officials preceding to the fifth meeting of the SAARC Energy Ministers, and the ministers decided to request all Member states to convey their approval for the framework agreement well before the 18\textsuperscript{th} SAARC summit, so that it could be signed during the summit in Kathmandu. According to one Nepalese official, during the senior officials and ministers meeting at New Delhi, the issue of the absence of Pakistan in the meetings had been felt and suspicion was raised whether or not Pakistan would agree to the draft recommended for approval.

\textsuperscript{3} Till Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif talked to each other on the initiative of Prime Minister of Nepal, Sushil Koirala during their retreat at Dhulikhel on Nov. 27, it was almost certain that the 18\textsuperscript{th} Summit was not going to be successful from the point of regional energy cooperation agreement as Pakistan had blocked, along with it, other two agreements dealing with the rail link and motor vehicle movement in each other’s country.
South Asian leaders, with all eight countries clinching a last-minute deal to create a regional electricity grid.

Through the framework agreement, all the SAARC members have agreed to establish transmission interconnectivity within the region. The agreement allows power supply from surplus countries to those with deficit in the region. Through this agreement, the 'member countries have also agreed to gradually lift barriers, including the customs duty for enhancing the regional connectivity as per the laws and acts of all the member states' (Ekantipur.com, November 28, 2014). According to the Nepal government officials, as quoted in the Ekantipur online:

'the agreement will facilitate development of a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Market of Electricity (SAME)'.

4. Observations

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that since the formation of the technical committee on energy in 2000, it took almost fourteen years for the member countries to come up for a regional framework to initiate the process of the trading in energy (electricity) among themselves. The signing of the framework agreement could, thus be considered as the first concrete step made by the SAARC in relation to cooperation in the energy sector, that too in electricity trade. Otherwise, SAARC efforts in the energy field, so far, were mainly confined to organizing meetings and sponsoring studies (as mentioned above and given in Annexes 3). This is why one of the senior officers associated with the Nepalese Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) in discussion with this contributor on the subject had said 'SAARC forums or meetings in the energy sector have remained merely a Talking Club among the professionals and officials and has not delivered any concrete things at all'. He further stated that 'the contribution of the SAARC energy center too has remained very minimal, and it has not been able to prove itself as an effective organization, mainly due to political relations among some SAARC countries'. In such a background, the signing of the framework agreement could be considered as a mere beginning not an end itself. To
ensure its implementation, the member countries have to have the political will to implement its provisions by initiating and starting the process of making changes in their national policies and changes in their existing laws and regulations as per the provisions of the framework agreement. Also some pre-conditions have to be met. In this regard, three following studies recommended by the second meeting of the Expert Group on electricity (held at Udaipur in 2011) needed to be completed:

I. Framework for planning cross-border transmission links and associated system strengthening and related matters,

II. Operation of stable and secure SAARC Electricity grids, and

III. Structures, functions and institutional mechanisms for SAARC regulatory issues on electricity exchange/trade

It may be noted that long before the birth of SAARC Nepal had expressed her willingness to cooperate with the lower riparian countries in water resources. Late King Birendra, while addressing a gathering of foreign delegates to the 26th Colombo Plan Consultative Meeting at Kathmandu in 1977, had ‘referred to abundant water resources of the country and expressed Nepal’s readiness to develop and share resources – like the waters from the snow capped Himalayas – for the collective benefit of all the people of the region’ (Lohani 2013). In the very first summit of the Heads of State or Government of SAARC held in Dhaka in 1985, King Birendra again floated the idea and emphasized the need for regional cooperation in the field of water resources. Responding to the proposal of Birendra, the then Prime Minister of India indirectly hinted that the

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4 Engineer Sher Singh Bhat, Deputy Managing Director, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), who has been engaged in the expert group meeting from Nepal, does agree with this view. He is of the opinion that the system coupling and market coupling are the preconditions needed to be fulfilled for the coming of the framework agreement into force. He also thinks that since Bhutan, India and Bangladesh are already connected, once ongoing construction Dhalkewar-Muzzafarpur interconnection (Nepal-India Interconnection) is completed, there is a possibility of trade taking place in the electricity sector among these four countries.
matter which are bilateral in nature are going to be dealt with bilaterally' (Upadhyay 2013). His actual response was: *We have not sought to melt our bilateral relationship into a common regional identity, but rather to fit South Asian cooperation in our respective foreign policies as an additional dimension* (quoted in Upadhyay 2013). However, Bangladesh had 'supported the offer of Nepal and mentioned it as a positive move' (Ibid). The support of Bangladesh to Nepalese proposal was considered as ganging up by Nepal and Bangladesh against India (Rasgotra, 2004). And the idea of regional cooperation in the water could not proceed. Similarly, in 1990’s another idea of sub-regional cooperation among the eastern countries of South Asia- Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal called South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ), under which water was thought of as one of the areas of cooperation, was mooted. This also could not move ahead, mainly due to the lack of India’s interest in it. Likewise, the US supported SARI energy too could not secure the support of India, as a result of which the four-border study could not proceed. Against such a backdrop and in the context of bilateralism as a stated policy of the Government of India (basis India’s National Water Plan of 2012) towards her neighbor in the water resources sector (the major source of energy in Nepal and Bhutan), the signing of the regional framework during the 18th SAARC summit can be considered as an important achievement of SAARC, provided it is implemented. Nevertheless, one would like to ask a question: has India that has been following bilateralism in the hydro power sector and water relationship with her neighbor, really changed her policy? If so, why? In other words, can we assume that India is really interested to move from bilateralism to regionalism? If so, the other question that comes to our mind is: why does she want to have regionalism in the energy sector now? The credible answer has to come from India whose attitude and thinking would have a direct bearing on the success of the recently signed framework agreement for regional cooperation in the energy sector.
By recalling the decision of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu (2010), *i.e.* to enhance cooperation in the energy sector to facilitate energy trade, development of efficient conventional and renewable energy sources including hydropower, the framework agreement in a very subtle manner has emphasized the importance of hydroelectric power, which is but natural in the context of growing global warming. It may also be mentioned that some SAARC countries, especially India and Bangladesh have their eyes on the prospects of developing large storage hydropower projects in Nepal. Indeed Nepal has the prospects of developing 23 large hydropower projects, which could produce 65-70 terawatt hours of power annually (World Bank 2012) and that too clean energy. Furthermore, they are multi-purpose in nature and could provide benefits to the lower riparian countries—benefits in irrigation, flood control, drinking water and augmentation of water in the Ganges. And undertaking such projects in Nepal means that she (Nepal) would lose thousands of hectares of fertile land, forest resource, heritage sites and displace thousands of people from their houses. In such a context, even if Nepal is the signatory to the recently signed framework agreement, unless she is fully confident that she would be adequately compensated for the losses and paid for the benefits received by the lower riparian counties for the storage projects being built in her territory, it would not be possible for Nepal to enjoy the benefits from such regional framework agreement.

Interestingly, the framework agreement does not say anything about the stored water and the system of calculating the benefits accruing from such water. Over the time period, this issue will emerge and if serious consideration is not given to this issue, complication will arise in the implementation of the framework agreement. So water has to be interlinked with electricity. They can’t be separated, at least from Nepal’s perspective, from each other.
In addition, any government in Nepal, which agrees to participate in the regional energy trade with other SAARC member countries without addressing her ever increasing electricity shortage and addressing the long hours of load shedding, will not be able to withstand public outrage and criticism. Also there are very vocal and strong professional groups, that believe that there would be little or no surplus hydro power from Nepal to export to other countries as her present per capita consumption is very low and her own demands would increase once her development pace moves faster.

Water is considered to be the main source of clean energy in the region. But it is also getting scarce day by day. This is why professionals and activists are of the opinion that there is also need for a South Asian Water Convention to ensure the optimal and sustainable use of water for the benefit of the people of South Asia. This issue was raised by the participants during the water forum of the People's SAARC held in Kathmandu before the 18th SAARC summit on November 22, 2014. SAARC, thus after working on the framework agreement on energy (electricity) should now consider this matter seriously, work in this area and come up with a convention on South Asian Water. In addition, it would be desirable for SAARC to have its own energy vision - vision for a short period, medium period and long term.

Despite the fact that SAARC is an association of eight members, India has been the most important factor in terms of its achievements and shortcomings during its existence of almost three decades. Her policies and attitude towards SAARC member countries, especially her relationship with Pakistan, has remained a critical factor in the functioning of SAARC. In other words, the relationship between the two countries has had a direct bearing on the decision making process of SAARC and the implementation of its decisions. Nepal's success in convincing the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan that the 18th summit should not be allowed to become a failure, contributed to the...
signing of the framework agreement on energy trade-electricity-among the SAARC member countries. The successful implementation of the framework, too, would depend upon the relationship of these two SAARC member countries. From this perspective, signing of the framework agreement alone would not guarantee that it would have smooth sailing in terms of its implementation since one of the provisions of the agreement reads as follows:

*Member States shall enable cross-border trade of electricity on voluntary basis subject to laws, rules and regulations of the respective Member States.*

In the light of this provision, unless the member states' rules and regulations allow for cross border energy trade including the establishment of the cross border inter-connection, the framework agreement would merely remain an agreement waiting to be implemented by the member states. If past is any guide, for example the unsuccessful story of the US/SARI energy initiative on the four border project – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal and non move of the SAGQ, unless there is mindset change among the member nations, especially India, the likelihood of the framework agreement becoming successful is remote.

The only ray of hope is the emergence of Prime Minister Modi – a man of action heading the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led Government of India with a clear majority in the Lok Sabha (House of Representatives).

SAARC's area coverage is very vast ranging from Bangladesh in the east to Afghanistan in the west, to Maldives and Sri Lanka in the South, and to Nepal and Bhutan in the north. But from the point of view of water resources and the river system, they, excluding Sri Lanka and Maldives, belong to three major river systems: Brahmaputra-Meghna, Ganga and Indus. So in order to give concrete shape to the energy trade in the region, especially hydro-electric power, it would be desirable for SAARC to go for sub regional framework along the above mentioned river system within the regional framework, as SERTS too has recommended such an arrangement. Hoping that as a signatory to the framework agreement,
India’s new leadership would not object to go for such sub regional cooperation arrangement.

Because of the contribution of the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China (TAR/PRC) in the waters of Indus, Brahmaputra and tributaries of the Ganga, she should also be involved in the sub regional arrangement. Since the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is already an Observer in SAARC, there should be neither any problem nor should any member have any objection to her involvement in the proposed sub regional arrangement.

The countries that need to be involved in the sub regional arrangements should be as follows:

I. Brahmaputra-Meghna sub-regional arrangement: Tibet (People’s Republic China), India, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

II. Ganga sub-regional arrangement: Tibet (People’s Republic China), Nepal, India, and Bangladesh

III. Indus sub-regional arrangement: Tibet (People’s Republic China), India, Pakistan and Afghanistan

The framework agreement has just been signed and has not yet come into force, so it would be premature to say about its future. But judging from its provisions on review and withdrawal by the signatories, it has

5. It may be mentioned that with the support of the Asian Development Bank, an initiative called South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) has been going on with a view to bring together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in a project-based partnership that aims to promote regional prosperity, improve economic opportunities, and build a better quality of life for the people of the sub region. One of the supports SASEC has been providing is in the field of improving energy security by developing infrastructure and promoting intra-regional power trade to reduce costs and import dependence (http://www.adb.org/countries/subregional-programs/sasec). In this context, the idea of sub regional cooperation under the SAARC would be a good initiative to start.
some elements which could run counter to its objectives. First of all, the
review period is very short compared to the trading nature of electricity.
As per the agreement, the 'Member States shall meet in order to review
this Agreement on request or at the end of five years from the date of its
entry into force, unless they notify one another in writing that no such
review is necessary'. This period from the point of view of investor seems
to be short because of the fact that the electricity sector demands heavy
investment and the benefits could not be ensured within a span of five
years. In this regard, it may be mentioned that Nepal has a Power Trade
Agreement (PTA) with India, which has a life span of 25 years and would
automatically be renewed thereafter every ten years unless either party
gives the other party a written notice three months in advance of its
intention to terminate the agreement. When a bilateral treaty has such
provision, how could the regional framework treaty have only five year’s
time-frame for its review? This is a moot question to which the treaty
drafting team will have to answer.

The other provision that would also obstruct the achievement of the
objective relates to withdrawal from the framework agreement. In this
context, the relevant provision reads as follows: Any member State may
withdraw from this agreement at any time after its entry into force. Such
withdrawal shall be effective six months from the day on which written
notice thereof is received from the SAARC Secretariat, the depository of
this Agreement'. This provision gives freedom to its signatories to come
out from the agreement at any time.

5. Conclusion

In the context of SAARC not being able to deliver any concrete result in
the energy sector, the signing of the regional framework for energy trade,
especially for electricity trade, among the member countries can be
considered as a welcome step. But the moot question that needs to be
addressed is: will its provisions be implemented at all? Furthermore,
member countries would be able to engage in meaningful trade in the
electricity trade only when domestic demands are met. Also, along with the framework agreement on energy, it would be better to have a South Asian Water Convention and a South Asia Energy Vision- for the short term, the medium term and the long term, on the basis of which the SAARC members could cooperate with each other. One of the elements that need to be included in the water vision is the acceptance that large storage projects would accrue many other benefits other than the generation of electricity, which need to be calculated and shared by the riparian countries. Above all the success of the whole effort in the energy sector including the hydropower sector would largely depend upon the relationship between the two big member nations of SAARC- Pakistan and India, as it was observed during the 18th Summit itself. Had Nepal’s effort towards facilitating Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan shaking their hands not succeeded, the summit would have been another failure in the 30 years’ history of SAARC and the regional framework agreement on energy (electric) trade would not have been signed at all.

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Annex 1

Brief Analysis of some Major SAARC Energy Cooperation related activities
1. Study on SAARC Regional Energy Trade Study (SRETS)
The 12th summit held in Islamabad in 2004 gave the following directives with regard to energy:

_A study on creating a South Asian Energy Cooperation including the concept of an Energy Ring should be undertaken_ …

Consequent to the said directive, the SAARC secretariat with the support of the Asian Development Bank commissioned a study, called the _SAARC Regional Energy Trade Study (SRETS)_ . The study was completed in March 2010, which from the view point of current and future energy demand supply situation, had identified these six key challenges before the SAARC countries: (i) increasing energy deficits, (ii) dominance of single fuel in energy mix, (iii) limited exploitation of the renewable resources, (iv) high dependence on traditional fuels, (v) rising import dependence and (vi) lack of requisite energy infrastructure (SAARC secretariat 2010). To address these key challenges, the study had suggested four options for consideration by SAARC. They were: (i) Trade option- regional/sub-regional power market, (ii) Energy trade option: Regional/Sub-regional Refinery, (iii) Energy trade option- Regional/ Sub-regional LNG Terminal and (iv) Energy-trade option- Regional/Sub-regional Power Plan (Ibid and Raza, 2012).

In addition the study had suggested harmonizing legal and regulatory framework, building comprehensive and reliable energy data base, promoting alternative financing mechanism for developing regional energy trade and cooperation initiatives. The other major recommendation of SRETS was to go for a common agreement to promote energy trade in the region (SAARC secretariat 2010).

As a follow-up to the SRETS, SAARC commissioned a _Study on Regional Power Exchange_. The study was to explore the development of a regional power market involving SAARC countries that already have interconnection, as well as those that have planned interconnections. Also it was to examine both economic and technical requirements of establishing a regional power exchange that would maximize the potential for power transfers among SAARC regions to reduce power shortages and take advantage of economic benefits. The study funded by the Asian Development Bank was to be completed in 2012. But it is, as per the concerned officer of Nepal’s Ministry of Energy, yet to be completed.

2. **Holding of South Asia Energy dialogue in New Delhi**

Realizing the importance of dialogue among the stakeholders the Heads of State or Government in their 13th summit meeting held in Dhaka in 2005, had
directed for initiating South Asian Energy Dialogue process involving officials, experts, academics, environmentalists and NGOs, to recommend measures to tap potentials of cooperation in energy sector and to provide inputs to the Working Group on Energy (WGoE) (http://www.saarc-sec.org/userfiles/Summit%20Declarations/13%-20-%20Dhaka%20-%2013th%20Summit%20-%202013%20-%20Nov%20-%202005.pdf). As per this directive, a South Asia Energy dialogue was organized by the Government of India at New Delhi in March 2007. In his inaugural address, the then Union Power Minister of India Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde had expressed the view that due to the energy output from energy sources in the region varied in different seasons with surpluses and deficits, giving rise to the possibility of complementing each other. And while setting the agenda he had said:

_The challenge is to meet the energy demand through safe, clean and convenient forms of energy at an affordable cost in a technically efficient, economically viable and environmentally sustainable manner._ (http://pib.nic.in/newsdesk/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=25409)

**South Asia Energy Ring:** One of the elements of 2004 12th SAARC summit declaration was the recognition of the idea of Energy Ring for South Asia. In this regard the Heads of State or Government had directed the WGoE to undertake a study on this. During the inauguration of the South Asia Energy dialogue, Minister Shinde had touched upon this concept also. About the concept of Energy Ring the Minister had said:

_This would basically consist of trans-national energy lines for trade in electricity, gas and oil as facilitating and promoting trade in energy in South Asia region has been identified as one of the key areas for cooperation. He said the energy output from energy sources in the region varies in different seasons and there are surpluses and deficits which could complement each other (Ibid)._  

The issue of Energy Ring was subsequently discussed and the Concept paper on this developed by an expert group was approved by the Third Meeting of Energy Ministers during their meeting held in Colombo in January 2009 (http://www.mea.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1581&Itemid=75 and annex 1.1)

3. **Preparation of Concept Papers related to the Study on the establishment of South Asia Energy Market (SAME)**

It was during the 15th Summit held in 2008 that the leaders felt the need for the development of the 'regional hydroelectricity potential, grid connectivity and gas
pipeline’. At a meeting held a year later (2009) in Thimpu, the Working Energy Group ‘rephrased the proposal as ‘Regional Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement’ and included other thermal energy sources within the ambit of energy sources’ (Ekantipur.com, November 28, 2014). But it was at the 16th summit held at Thimpu, Bhutan in 2010, that the Heads of State or Government further emphasized the need ‘to enhance cooperation in the energy sector to facilitate energy trade, development of efficient conventional and renewable energy sources including hydropower’. They had further emphasized the need to undertake studies to develop regional energy projects, promote regional power trade, efficiency, conservation and development of labeling and standardization of appliances, and sharing of knowledge and technologies. They also realized the importance of SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME), and the need for a roadmap in this regard and came out with the following declaration:

The Leaders noted the proposal from India for preparing a Roadmap for developing a SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME) on a regional basis, as SAARC is considering electricity trading, supported by enabling markets in the Member States.

As a follow up, the Government of India prepared a Draft Concept paper on the road map, which was circulated among the member nations. It was deliberated and revised during the second meeting of the Expert Group on Electricity held at Udaipur (India) in January 2011. The Expert group in return recommended: (i) the development of a draft SAARC Inter-Governmental Agreement and (ii) preparation of three concept papers: (a) Framework for planning cross border transmission links and associated system strengthening through joint system studies; methodology for implementation of trans-country transmission infrastructure including financing arrangements, ownership and security of assets; (b) Operation of stable and secure SAARC electricity grids; coordinated scheduling and settlements procedures for long term and short-term cross-border electricity exchange/trade; and (c) Structures, functions and institutional mechanisms for SAARC regulatory issues on electricity exchange/trade. India prepared concepts for the first two themes and circulated it to SAARC members for their comments. Bangladesh has prepared the concept paper for the third theme, and is shortly going to circulate to the member countries (Ibid). Regarding the SAME, the 17th Summit held at Maldives in Nov. 2011 had directed the conclusion of the study on this matter. But, as per the concerned officer of the Ministry of Energy, GoN nothing has happened so far.
Annex 1.1

Energy Related Activities of SAARC: A Glance as of October, 2014

1. Securing sustainable energy supplies to meet energy needs at reasonable/affordable prices has become a major energy policy imperative of Member States. The sky-rocketing oil prices and increasing energy demand have put severe strains on resources of all South Asian Countries. It has serious implications including slowing down of economic development, increasing inflation, deepening poverty and causing political and social instability in the region.

2. The South Asian region is energy deficient as it does not produce enough oil and gas to meet its needs and, thus, depends heavily on imports. Most of the Member States are also not able to generate sufficient electricity to meet their demands. It has been estimated that energy needs of South Asia will increase three times in the next fifteen to twenty years.

3. The process of regional cooperation in the energy sector began in January 2000 with the establishment of a Technical Committee on Energy. The Technical Committee on Energy met twice. Thereafter, recognizing that this vital area requires focused attention, the Council of Ministers approved the creation of a specialized Working Group on Energy in January 2004.

4. The First Meeting of the SAARC Energy Ministers (Islamabad, 1 October 2005), decided on the formation of an Expert Group to deliberate on the options and potential of energy conservation and energy efficiency measures and to formulate a road map for implementation in the SAARC region.

5. The Thirteenth SAARC Summit, decided to establish the SAARC Energy Centre in Islamabad; to promote development of energy resources, including hydropower; and energy trade in the region; to develop renewable and alternative energy resources; and promote energy efficiency and conservation in the region. The Centre which was established in 2006 has become fully operational. For more information visit www.saarcenergy.org

6. As directed by the Thirteenth SAARC Summit, the government of India organized South Asia Energy Dialogue on 5th March 2007 which was attended by experts, academic think tanks and other stakeholders in the
region. The Dialogue made a number of recommendations to promote cooperation in this vital area.

7. The concept of Energy Ring was developed by an Expert Group, which was approved by the Energy Ministers in their Third Meeting held in Colombo in January 2009.

8. The Working Group since its establishment in 2004, has held ... meetings so far, and has made a number of important recommendations to promote cooperation in the field of Energy among the Member States. It prepared a Plan of Action in its First Meeting held in Islamabad in June 2004 which is in the process of being implemented. The Fifth Meeting held in Bhutan in April 2009, decided to establish Expert Groups on: a) Oil and Gas, b) Electricity, c) Renewable Energy and, d) Technology/knowledge sharing (including energy efficiency, coal etc.). These Expert Groups will prepare groundwork for energy cooperation in the specific Energy commodity.

9. A Task Force has finalized a common template on technical and commercial aspects of electricity grid interconnection amongst the SAARC Member States.

10. SAARC Energy Trade Study (SRETS) has been completed with the assistance of Asian Development Bank. It has identified four trade options which will be considered by the relevant SAARC mechanism in order to prepare a roadmap for implementation. As a follow SAARC has commissioned a study on Regional Power Exchange. The study likely to be completed in 2012 will explore the development of a regional power market involving SAARC countries that already have interconnection, as well as those that have planned interconnections. It will also examine both economic and technical requirements of establishing a regional power exchange that would maximise the potential for power transfers in the SAARC region to reduce power shortages and take advantage of economic benefits;

11. As a follow up to the Summit Directive, the Expert Group on Electricity at its Meeting held in January 2011 considered the (i) Concept Paper on the Road Map for developing SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME)) and (ii) Concept
Paper on SAARC Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement for Regional Energy Cooperation...

**Source:** www.saarc.org (The information provided in the portal is old and SAARC secretariat seemed not to have updated, as such the latest information is not available)

**Annex 2**

**SAARC Framework Agreement For Energy Cooperation (Electricity)**

The SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Member States, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka;

**Recognizing** the importance of electricity in promoting economic growth and improving the quality of life;

**Realizing** the common benefits of cross border electricity exchanges and trade among the SAARC Member States leading to optimal utilization of regional electricity generating resources, enhanced grid security, and electricity trade arising from diversity in peak demand and seasonal variations;

**Convinced** of the need of increasing economic cooperation and creating new opportunities in electricity sector;

**Recalling** the decision of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu (2010), to enhance cooperation in the energy sector to facilitate energy trade, development of efficient conventional and renewable energy sources including hydropower;

**Emphasizing** the need to promote regional power trade, energy efficiency, energy conservation and development of labeling and standardization of appliances, and sharing of knowledge;

**Recalling further** the decision of the Seventeenth SAARC Summit held in Addu City-Maldives (2011), which directed the conclusion of the Inter-governmental Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation;

**Now, therefore,** in the spirit of solidarity and mutual cooperation, and subject to laws, regulations and international obligations of the Member States, wherever applicable, have agreed as follows:
Article 1
Definitions

Buying and Selling Entities
Buying and Selling Entities means any authorized public or private power producer, power utility, trading company, transmission utility, distribution company, or any other institution established and registered under the laws of any one of the Member States having permission of buying and selling of electricity within and outside the country in which it is registered.

Article 2
Objective
Member States shall enable cross-border trade of electricity on voluntary basis subject to laws, rules and regulations of the respective Member States.

Article 3
Scope
Member States shall enable Buying and Selling Entities to negotiate the terms, conditions, payment security mechanism and tenure of electricity trade.

Article 4
Duties & Taxes
Member States shall work towards exempting from export/import duty/levies/fees etc. for cross-border trade and exchange of electricity between Buying and Selling Entities.

Article 5
Data updating and sharing
Member States shall share and update technical data and information on the electricity sector in an agreed template.

Article 6
Promoting competition
Member States shall encourage the process of opening up of electricity sector guided by respective national priorities with the aim of promoting competition.

Article 7
Planning of Cross-border interconnections
Member States shall enable the transmission planning agencies of the Governments to plan the cross-border grid interconnections based on the needs of the trade in the foreseeable future through studies and sharing technical information required for the same.

**Article 8**

**Build, Operate and Maintain**

Member States shall enable the respective transmission agencies to build, own, operate and maintain the associated transmission system of cross-border interconnection falling within respective national boundaries and/or interconnect at mutually agreed locations.

**Article 9**

**Transmission Service Agreements**

Member States shall enable authorized entities to enter into transmission service agreements with the transmission service providers for the purpose of cross-border electricity trade.

**Article 10**

**Electricity Grid Protection System**

Member States shall enable joint development of coordinated network protection systems incidental to the cross-border interconnection to ensure reliability and security of the grids of the Member States.

**Article 11**

**System Operation and Settlement Mechanism**

Member States shall enable the national grid operators to jointly develop coordinated procedures for the secure and reliable operation of the inter-connected grids and to prepare scheduling, dispatch, energy accounting and settlement procedures for cross border trade.

**Article 12**

**Transmission Access**

Member States shall, for the purpose of cross-border trade, enable non-discriminatory access to the respective transmission grids as per the applicable laws, rules, regulations and applicable inter-governmental bilateral trade agreements.

**Article 13**

**Facilitating Buying and Selling Entities**
Member States shall enable Buying and Selling Entities to engage in cross-border electricity trading.

Article 14

Knowledge sharing and joint research in Electricity Sector

Member States shall enable and encourage knowledge sharing and joint research including exchange of experts and professionals related to, inter alia power generation, transmission, distribution, energy efficiency, reduction of transmission and distribution losses, and development and grid integration of renewable energy resources.

Article 15

Regulatory Mechanism

Member States shall develop the structure, functions and institutional mechanisms for regulatory issues related to electricity exchange and trade.

Article 16

Dispute Settlement

Any dispute arising out of interpretation and/or implementation of this Agreement shall be resolved amicably among the Member States. If unresolved, the Member States may choose to refer the dispute to SAARC Arbitration Council.

Article 17

Withdrawal

Any Member State may withdraw from this agreement at any time after its entry into force. Such withdrawal shall be effective six months from the day on which written notice thereof is received from the SAARC Secretariat, the depository of this Agreement.

The rights and obligations of a Member State which has withdrawn from this Agreement shall cease to apply as of that effective date with the exception that ongoing proceedings at the time of termination shall nonetheless be completed in accordance with the provisions of this Agreement.

Article 18

Entry into Force

This Agreement shall enter into force on completion of formalities by all Member States and upon issuance of a notification thereof by the Secretary General of SAARC.
Article 19

Amendment
Any amendment to this Agreement may be submitted by a Member State to the SAARC Secretariat and recommended by consensus to the Meeting of SAARC Energy Ministers. Such amendment(s) will be effective upon deposit of the instruments of acceptance with the Secretary General of SAARC.

Article 20

Review
The Member States shall meet in order to review this Agreement on request or at the end of five years from the date of its entry into force, unless they notify one another in writing that no such review is necessary.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned being duly authorized thereto by their respective Member States have signed this Agreement on SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity).

Done in Kathmandu On November 27, 2014 in the English Language.

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan People’s Republic of Bangladesh

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of External Affairs
Kingdom of Bhutan Republic of India

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Republic of Maldives Nepal

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of External Affairs
Islamic Republic of Pakistan Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Source: Ministry of Energy, Government of Nepal

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(2) Climate Change and ‘National Security’ in South Asia

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Global climate change has in its sights five coastal South Asian nations: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. If climate change materializes in its predicted consequences, these nations – not necessarily in that order – will bear its largest brunt in Asia. Three of them -- Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka – are sitting on the frontline of climate breakdown. India and Pakistan have no less serious threats from rising sea levels, coastal flooding, longer and more intense monsoon seasons, severe droughts and deadly heat waves. Also, landlocked Afghanistan, and mountainous Bhutan and Nepal are threatened by persistent dry conditions that can menace their food security, and destabilize them from within. An allied specter is that of declining water resources, which paradoxically will be accompanied by rising sea levels and flood hazards, further complicating regional food security.

Climate Change and State Security

Since climate hazards loom so close and so large, those who narrowly define national security in military preparedness against foreign aggression need to think again. In the case of South Asia, there is no interstate conflict that lays exclusive claim on a nation’s prime military resources. Instead, it is intrastate conflicts that had national militaries consumed, stretching from the region’s northwestern highlands to southeastern lowlands. Afghanistan is a text-book example of internal contradictions blown up into global chaos; India has defined Naxalite violence as “the biggest threat to internal security;” strategists in Pakistan see it threatened from within; Sri Lanka has barely survived a lethal insurgency; Bangladesh, besides its continuing warts, owes its birth to an intrastate conflict; and Nepal’s blood-dripping tale of regicide caused tremors across the region. Yet realists don’t want intrastate conflicts to sidestep the conventional doctrine of state security; nor do they like the latter distracted by climate hazards. They are infatuated with interstate
balance as the “holy grail” of national security, an infatuation that renders the very concept of “security” (i.e., freedom from want and fear) meaningless.

As this essay sets out to flag climate hazards that challenge South Asian security, engaging the conventional doctrine of state security any further is outside its purview. It will, therefore, confine itself to the national security implications of climate change. Nonetheless, these implications have cost to military preparedness as well. As most of the naval and strategic assets of South Asian nations, including naval and commercial ports, are sited in major coastal cities, climate change presents a direct challenge to national security. As if to amplify this concern, this past October, the Pentagon revealed in a report that climate change poses an immediate threat to national security. [1] If carbon emissions continue as usual, the global mean warming is set to exceed 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the turn of the century. Coastal and Island nations, such as Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, will have a hard time dealing with the aftermath of even a 1.5 degree Celsius rise in world temperature. There are projections that temperature in South Asia could rise two to five degree Celsius above preindustrial levels by the turn of the century. At 5 degree Celsius, the temperature rise will be 250% higher than the expected global mean warming of 2 degree Celsius. Rising temperatures are the motive force that powers tropical cyclones and super-storms in South Asia as elsewhere in the world. The region’s coasts could experience a sea level rise of 18 to 80 centimeters by the end of the 21st century. The likelihood of flooding rises with the rise in sea levels.

**Climate Change Means More Tropical Storms and Cyclones**

This year alone India and Pakistan have seen the formation of Super Cyclone Nilofar, which died down before it could reach its destructive worst. It brushed past their respective coastal states of Gujrat and Sindh. By the time it bent around Karachi, capital city of Sindh, it packed 250km (155 miles) winds, a velocity that was common in all the deadly super-storms in the region, including the world’s most lethal cyclone of all time, the Bhola Cyclone, that flattened then East Pakistan in 1970 with half a million dead. Since the turn of the century, Odisha was the deadliest super-storm that hit the Indian state of Orissa in 1999 and killed more than 10,000 people. The frequency of storms has since risen: India was hit by cyclone Thane in 2011, cyclone Phailin in 2013 and cyclone Hudhud and Nilofar in 2014. Eastern coast of India and Bangladesh have been historically vulnerable to storm surges. Climate change is only exacerbating this vulnerability. Unevolved Superstorm Nilofar bore all the marks of Typhoon Haiyan that tore through the east-central Philippines on November 8, 2013, affecting 14% of its population, and costing $15 billion (5% of Philippine GDP) in economic losses. With the human detritus of 10,000 dead, its lethality matched Odisha that hit Orissa in 1999.
What Can South Asia Learn From the Philippines?

The Philippines mobilized all of its military resources to combat the destructive fury of Haiyan, calling into service 18,177 personnel, 844 vehicles, 44 seagoing vessels and 31 aircraft. The Philippines, in its history, never had to confront a national antagonist with this much combative force. Yet the Philippines’s combat forces alone were no match to their adversary -- Haiyan. They had to be joined by military deployments from Australia, Britain, China, Japan and the United States to engage Haiyan. Of these, the United States committed the largest of all military assets, dispatching the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington with 80 aircraft and 5,000 troops on board, besides four additional navy ships. Britain sent the Illustrious aircraft carrier stocked with transport planes and medical experts. Japan dispatched a naval force of 1,000 troops, which was Tokyo’s largest-ever disaster-relief deployment, with three navy ships, led by the Ise, Japan’s largest warship. Yet Haiyan did not let these forces enter the disaster zone for three days until November 11, when it already had made history as the most powerful storm in the annals of meteorology, and deadliest for the Philippines.

Haiyan’s lesson for South Asia is that military services, the last line of defense in such catastrophic events, have now become the “first-responders,” as the typhoon had leveled the affected areas’ ports, roads, railroads and airfields. The civic infrastructure -- hospitals, school houses, police stations and court buildings -- collapsed even faster. The destruction of material and civic infrastructure explains why the world’s best militaries could not enter the disaster zone for three days. In all, two-thirds of the country (60 out of 80 provinces) was under warning of the typhoon, including metropolis Manila, which accounts for one-third of the Philippine GDP (gross domestic product) of $300 billion. More than 14 million people (around 14% of the national population) were affected, while more than 4.1 million displaced. Above all, 5.6 million people were found in need of food assistance.

Can such disaster replicate itself in South Asia? Sadly, South Asia has experienced even worse when flash floods inundated Pakistan in 2010, displacing 20 million of its residents along the shoreline of the River Indus, and costing $20 billion (one-tenth of Pakistan’s GDP) in economic losses. Pakistan pressed into service all of its military assets – army, navy, and air force. Yet help could reach only a fraction of 20 million displaced, as one-fifth of the country (160,000 square kilometers) was under water. A year after, in 2011, Pakistan again witnessed monsoon-swollen flooding wreak havoc, disgorging another 6 million of its citizens from their homes and hamlets. In 1998, Bangladesh experienced still worse, when a severe flood had submerged 100,000 square kilometers of its landmass and rendered 30 million of its citizens homeless. What makes future even more fraught is the intensity and frequency of such
disasters, and the growing vulnerability of their potential victims, which is of concern to human and national security.

**Surge in Waves of “Climate Refugees”**

In the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is faced with the world's largest population of potential “climate refugees.” If global mean warming exceeds 1.5 degree Celsius, coastal Bangladesh will begin to teem with such refugees. By Bangladesh’s own reckoning, 20 million of its citizens may face climate migration over the next 40 years, for whom it proposes their “managed migration” to western countries. Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), lends his voice to Dacca's call, urging western governments to give the "managed migration" a serious consideration. It is, however, a fantasy to see 20 million Bangladeshis migrate to western nations. Their migration, however, has already begun, instead, to their neighboring countries. The largest of these refugees are housed in India and Pakistan -- in that order. Their future waves, too, will be absorbed by their neighbors, not western governments. These patterns befit the first law of migration: People in times of distress turn to their relatively more secure neighbors, not their distant relations.

Similarly, the rising global average temperature and consequent sea levels rises pose the existential threat to the island nation of Maldives, which is barely 1.5 meters above sea level. It has been given 50 years before it literally goes under. A nation of 1,200 islands, Maldives has already seen 30 of its islands swept away in the tsunami of 2004. Five years after, in 2009, Maldives's then President Mohamed Nasheed called on the world to save his country of 400,000 people: “If the world can’t save the Maldives today, it might be too late to save London, New York or Hong Kong tomorrow.” This test is just as much valid for South Asia, of which Maldives and Sri Lanka are the crown jewel. It is for every South Asian to do their part to preserve these treasured islands. In their security rests the security of South Asia. Although out of power, President Nasheed is the most famous and most vocal South Asian leader on climate justice, who is worldwide revered. The Hollywood Director Jon Shenk honored his work for climate justice in a memorable documentary The Island President.

Like the Maldives, Sri Lanka also is precariously perched in the heart of the Indian Ocean that makes it no less vulnerable. Known for its stunning scenic beauty, this island nation has long been convulsed in self-afflicted wounding. It has just staunched its bleeding, but still has a long way to go to binding up the deep wounds. Yet climate-induced disruptions stare at it as the greatest threat to its survival over the next half century. “Its agriculture, fisheries, and tourism are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels and weather-related disasters.” Climate change will particularly inflict pain on the country by hurting such vital
sectors of its economy as agriculture, water, trade and tourism that make Lankan life hum.

Climate Change Imperils Regional Economic and Food Security

Besides individual nations, climate change imperils the entire region’s economy. The Asian Development Bank (ADP) concluded that climate change is likely to cause huge economic, social and environmental damage to South Asia. According to its estimate, the region could lose 1.8% of its annual gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050. This loss will incrementally rise to 8.8% a year by 2100. In its assessment, Maldives will suffer the most by the middle of the century. The annual losses in GDP will be significant for the remaining nations as well, which include: Bangladesh (2%), Bhutan (1.4%), India (1.8%), Nepal (2.2%) and Sri Lanka (1.2%).

If global mean warming does not rise above 2 degree Celsius or remains under 2 degree Celsius, the region will still lose an average of 1.3% of GDP by 2050, and nearly 2.5% by the turn of the century. The cost of adaptation to the changing climate, at the rate of $73 billion a year, will be $6.27 trillion in 2014-2100. To put these losses in perspective, the region’s annual GDP was $2.35 trillion in 2013 for a population of 1.7 billion, and its Gross National Income (GNI) stood at $1,474 per person. The cost of adaptation is thus close to three times the size of the current GDP of G-8 nations in South Asia. The annual cost of adaptation at $73 billion is more than the size of military spending in Central and South Asia combined, which came to $63.7 billion in 2013. Under extreme scenarios (of temperature hitting close to 5 degree Celsius) the region could lose 25% of its GDP by 2100. Climate Change thus threatens the region’s economic security that defines national security. As such ignoring climate change means imperiling national security.

Threats to the region’s economic security are further amplified in light of the fact that one-third of its population lives below the poverty line. Poverty threatens food security in terms of affordability (i.e., ability to buy food). The region ranks second from bottom, only above sub-Saharan Africa, in food security, as defined in terms of availability, affordability, and quality and safety of food. According to the Economist magazine’s Global Food Security Index (GFSI) for 2014, the Asia-Pacific scored 55.0 points against sub-Saharan Africa’s 36.1 points out of 100. [8] The Economist included Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in its regional cluster of nations for the Asia-Pacific. In all, it has 109 countries, divided into six regions, to assign GFSI scores. It defines food security: “When people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for a healthy and active life.” [9]

Food security is further endangered by dwindling resources of fresh water supplies, whose consumption for agriculture alone has reached up
to 80%. Asia is particularly staring at water drought. According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 40% of the Asian population is faced with water shortages from rapidly melting glaciers. Major rivers such as the Syr Darya, Amu Darya, Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yangtze and Huang He or Yellow River, are at risk of low flow, and as a result 1.3 billion people will be at increased risk of shortage of drinking and irrigation water. In South Asia, melting glaciers are engendering the twin menace of increasing flood hazards and eventual water shortage as well. According to the IPCC’s fourth assessment report, although contested, Himalayan glaciers will melt away by 2035. Because of glacial melt, Bhutan, for instance, is increasingly experiencing GLOF (glacial lake outburst floods), which does not bode well for its economy. Nepal confronts similar issues. Natural shortage of water can be more ominous than technically caused shortages, which are fixable, as witnessed in Maldives in the first week of December, when 100,000 residents of its capital city of Male went without water after a malfunction at its only water treatment plant. Declaring a “state of crisis,” Maldives issued a multinational appeal to India, China, Sri Lanka and the United States for help. Although response was quick, it still foresees weeks of rationed water. If the satiating of thirst of 100,000 people take so much effort, what will happen when tens of millions of people are left without water or food?

One of the key effects of climate change is prolonged droughts that would make life even harder in South Asia, three-fourths of which is already dry and desert. This also implies lack of productive land for food production. In fact, the region is challenged by drastic shortage of arable [i.e., productive farmable] land, which is only less than one-fourth (23.5%) of the total landmass of G-8 South Asian nations. Countries that are already food-short and more vulnerable to climate change are short on arable land too. Among those include Bhutan, Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal, whose respective share of arable land is 2.3%, 12.13%, 13.33%, 13.96%, and 16.07%. Bangladesh has the largest chunk of farmable land at 55.39% followed by India (48.83%) and Pakistan (24.44%). The land advantage of these countries, however, is offset by growing food demand because of their burgeoning populations. All three countries are the most populous in the region with growing middle classes that are placing even greater demand on food production. In order to avert future scarcities of food and water, it is all the more important to blunt the onslaught of climate change. Challenges of food and water security overshadow the conventional threats that are on the retreat.

**Combating Climate Change in South Asia**

As well, world militaries are watching traditional threats recede from the horizon, and nontraditional challenges in “natural disasters,” “insurgent violence,” and “asymmetrical warfare” occupy their defensive and offensive capabilities. With deteriorating climatic change, it is predicted
that more and more national militaries and their resources will be absorbed by combating “natural disasters,” doing the work of “responding, rescuing, recovering, policing and provisioning.” It was in this context that India immediately put the military on alert as the first hint of Nilofar emerged.

The world in general is heeding the dictates of climate change. The Philippines, after Typhoon Haiyan, has appointed Lt. Gen. Gregorio PioCatapang, Jr., a military officer who is better known for combating climate change, as Chief of Staff of the Philippine armed forces. [13] Among his feats includes his leadership on relief operations for the survivors of Tropical Storm Ondoy in 2009. He has since articulated a new vision of security for the Philippines, arguing that “climate change – not the armed conflict – is the greatest threat his country confronts.” [14] The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Samuel Locklear III called “climate change” the biggest long-term security threat in the Pacific region. [15] Only this year, the Pacific Command hosted a special session on climate change and security in the Asia-Pacific as part of Shangri la Dialogue that was held in Singapore in 2014. [16] In October this year, the Pentagon revealed, in a report, that climate change poses an immediate threat to national security. [17] New Zealand’s defense forces have already broken a new path with committing as much as 30% of their resources to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) [18]. In this regard, it should be a welcome signal that the world’s leading Pacific nations – Australia, China, New Zealand and the United States -- conducted joint military exercises in New Zealand in 2013 to simulate humanitarian assistance and disaster response in the Pacific. [19]

National militaries in South Asia will have to address the implications of climate change by retrofitting them with humanitarian assistance missions. Ideally, modeling after Pacific militaries, they should consider joint military drills simulating humanitarian assistance and disaster response in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and the Arabian Sea, especially to safeguard high-risk populations of Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. If the cost of climate adaptation in South Asia is going to be $73 billion a year, national militaries have to set aside significant resources for HADR.

While South Asia has the least contribution in climate change, it is destined to suffer the most. It is simply unrealistic to expect the region to cope with this global challenge with its unmatched financial, human, and technological resources. The world needs to step in to finance the region’s transition to green energy. Also, it should offer the region technological assistance in carbon capture and storage technologies. Above all, it should be compensated for losses from extreme weather events. It is heartening to watch that climate talks in Lima, Peru, have reached an agreement this week on financing “loss and damage” from extreme climatic events. Besides, the $100 billion-a-year Green Climate
Fund, if materialized, should pay for the cost of adaptation and mitigation in South Asia, which is predicted to suffer the worst consequences of climate change in Asia. The SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Countries) is an ideal organization to engage these issues, and brace the region for a fraught future. Although its 18th summit this year in Kathmandu, Nepal only showed how out of touch its leaders are with present and potential climate challenges, it will serve itself well by designating the next summit in Islamabad, Pakistan, as the Climate Summit to engage the challenges thrown up by climate change.

Between now and 2016, when it will meet for the 19th Summit, the SAARC should start working on setting up a region-wide Climate Corps of a million youth, drawn from each member nation. The primary charge of this Corps should be to “geo-engineer” a benign climate for the region, with massive afforestation in its productive and unproductive lands, as well as in its cities. The members of the Corps, who will serve as the conservation arm of regional forest services, also should train in “response and recovery efforts” and humanitarian assistance in general. Along these lines, high school and college students should be educated in emergency preparedness and disaster response. The region’s students should be given incentives to work as Climate Corps volunteers for a year. As future leaders, the region’s youth should be deployed to secure its climate.

Notes

3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
7. Ibid
9. Ibid, p.5
11. Ibid

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Expansion of SAARC: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Ever since the creation of SAARC in 1985, there has been interest in expanding its membership and outreach for meaningful relations with non-member states/organizations. Expansion comes natural to multilateral/regional organizations. For example, the European Union (EU) has stretched its membership from six to 28 European countries. Similarly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has doubled its membership from five to ten since its formation. Similar, SAARC has expanded its membership to include Afghanistan as a full member along with several observer states. While, the SAARC process is maturing, it is timely to evaluate its process of expansion in connection to opportunities and challenges.

Introduction

The expansion and deepening of the EU, in the 1990s, attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers in other parts of the world.
The European regionalism has managed to breathe new life into many existing regional organisations, such as the Mercosur, ASEAN, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) etc. Previously, excluded members got the opportunity to join in existing regional organisations, such as Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Cambodia in the ASEAN (Schulz, Soderbaum, & Ojendal, 2001:1). Since then, regional organisations have grown in scope by either expanding membership or by establishing working relationships with extra-regional countries and organisations.

Though for different reasons, rich or poor, big or small, all countries have found regionalism beneficial for their socio-economic development, and peace and security in their regions (Tin, 2006:305). In general, countries have realised that they cannot act in isolation, and that the best way to cope with the challenges posed by globalisation is through membership in regional organisations, such as the EU, the African Union, the Arab League, the Organisation of American States, NAFTA, ASEAN and numerous others. With reference to the Asian regionalism vis-à-vis ASEAN, the countries established a regional organisation to manage affairs with extra-regional powers, mainly the US and Europe, for intra-regional affairs. For the ASEAN member states, it has been maintaining balance between their relationships with the extra-regional powers, and with this aim they joined the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), the Asia and the Pacific Council, and now they have their own setup in the form of the ARF (Rathus, 2010:18). As Rathus (2010:18) argued, with the increase in the influence of China in the 1990s, the countries in the Southeast Asian region were forced to readjust their extra-regional balance. In this context, the importance of Asia’s trans-regional institutions, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), established in 1996, is likely to grow. Since its creation, the ASEM has been a forum to consider a range of socio-politic and economic issues, and perhaps most importantly to discuss positions of member states on multilateral forums such as the UN and the G20.
Expansion of SAARC

Expansion comes natural to multilateral/regional organizations. Since, its establishment, the EU has stretched its membership from six to 28 countries covering most of Europe. ASEAN has doubled its membership from five to ten and it has developed meaningful mechanism for interacting with countries outside Southeast Asia. ASEAN has parallel mechanisms for relations with countries having strategic and/or economic importance for Southeast Asia, for example, Australia, Canada, China, India, Pakistan etc. ASEAN also has created forums, such as East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum etc., that bring together countries from around the world for cooperation on a range of issues, especially security. Similarly, SAARC has expanded with Afghanistan’s inclusion as a full member and by granting observer status to the EU and eight non-South Asian countries. In the following sub-sections, an attempt will be made to do an appraisal of the SAARC’s expansion to date.

Afghanistan’s Membership

The structure of SAARC, similar to the case of ASEAN and some other regional organisations, allows for including additional countries in South Asian cooperation. SAARC leaders have a vision to connect with neighbouring regions and to be comprehensive in terms of membership.

There have been debates in SAARC on being more inclusive by including all the countries in the region. Afghanistan and Burma could both claim membership of SAARC but initially they were not in the South Asian group of seven. On the issue of extending membership to Afghanistan, India has been active since the SAARC was founded. In fact, at the third SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in 1987, New Delhi forwarded Afghanistan’s application for membership. The Indian proposal was strongly opposed by Pakistan not merely, because it came from New Delhi but due to concerns that Afghanistan might use the forum to lobby
vis-à-vis its territorial dispute with Pakistan on the issue of Durand Line demarcation. Pakistan was more interested in developing SAARC’s partnership with the neighbouring ASEAN. Ultimately, Afghanistan was not approached to become a SAARC member due to the Soviet invasion in 1989. India did approach Burma in 1987 to discuss its inclusion in SAARC but in vain because of Burma’s lack of interest (Muni, 1991:66), but Burma was also not approached to become a SAARC member.

For most of its history, Afghanistan has been under war. The level of instability became the main reason of Afghanistan not becoming a SAARC member. After the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US, the realities of Afghanistan changed the control of the US-led troops. With this began another era of foreign policy in Afghanistan and this time around its proposal for SAARC membership was accepted by all members. Afghanistan became the eighth member of the SAARC during the fourteenth SAARC Summit held in New Delhi, in April 2007.

Afghanistan, a country that joined SAARC after more than two decades of the Association’s existence, faces challenges of integration in the process of regional cooperation. Therefore, SAARC has established a division its integration. Afghanistan, being the newest SAARC member, has a long way to go to fully integrate itself into the SAARC process. However, some progress has been made in this area as far as commitment of Kabul is concerned. SAARC Division has been established at the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. Prior to 2009, all the communication with SAARC was done through the Afghan Embassy in New Delhi. Afghanistan participates in roughly 82 SAARC meetings per annum. It is still not much considering the fact that SAARC organised over 180 meeting per year, but much better than before as it depicts the increasing interest of Afghanistan in SAARC (Ahmed 2013:52).
For some SAARC member states, it has been hard to financially commit to each and every initiative of the organisation. In 2009, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka had expressed in several meetings that there might be difficulties for them to financially contribute towards the South Asian University. Being a member state of SAARC involves certain financial implications as Afghanistan has to contribute five percent towards the overall budget of SAARC, which is around $280,000-300,000 per annum. This is a lot of money for Afghanistan – country dependent on foreign aid – and now Afghanistan has to pay an additional $9,000 per year towards the SAARC Culture Centre in Colombo. Under such circumstances, when the commitment of a developing country, which is also faced with an ongoing internal war, is at stake due to economic difficulties, there could be possible ways of funding that country’s contribution to regional organisation through the World Bank or the UN. In SAARC, Afghanistan, the youngest member finds it very difficult to fulfil its financial commitments towards SAARC, and similar is the case of the Maldives (Ahmed 2013:60).

To date 18 SAARC Summits have been held. Except for Afghanistan, all other SAARC members have hosted annual summits. Annuals summits are organized on rotational basis after which the hosting country is assigned with the chairmanship of SAARC. If Afghanistan is to hold any such influential position, then it has to manage both financial and human resources for towards SAARC.

There are numerous benefits for Afghanistan after becoming a SAARC member, especially at a time when the SAARC process is in transition to maturity. There are opportunities with regard to becoming a transit country for South Asian trade with Central Asia, but there are benefits for Afghanistan and its people in the form of participation in several SAARC projects. In 2012, there were 31 Afghani students at the South Asian University in New Delhi (University World News, 21 October 2012). Afghanistan has also been able to benefit from welfare and development
projects, for example on maternal and child health, through the SAARC Development Fund. SAARC Food Bank is another worthwhile initiative from which Afghanistan would be able to benefit by drawing food grains in emergencies.

SAARC process has often been constrained due to bilateral relations of its member states. On a few occasions, relations between Sri Lanka and India, and India and Pakistan, led to the postponement of annual summits. Now, with the inclusion of Afghanistan, another bilateral dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan may influence SAARC. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been unfriendly ever since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, when Afghanistan, due to a border dispute, became the only country to oppose the inclusion of Pakistan in the UN (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2007:159). However, on the surface, the tension between the two seems very recent, which happens when we look at it through the prism of ongoing war against terrorism in Afghanistan and the neighbouring tribal areas of Pakistan. But there are three main causes of the existing tension between the two: (1) Pakistan’s u-turn on policy towards Afghanistan in the form of open support for the US war against terror, (2) the controversy over the Durand line demarcation, (3) accusations of cross border terrorism (Ahmed, 2013:23).

Due to a regional level increase in energy demands, a friendly relation with Afghanistan and security in the region is a win-win scenario for the entire region. This environment will give reality to the idea of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to India. Multilateral efforts of this kind are likely to provide a viable solution to bilateral efforts of India and Pakistan, and a regional initiative of the SAARC to eliminate drug trafficking. Transportation of drugs originates from Afghanistan and virtually reaches most parts of the world by initially travelling through Pakistan, India and Bangladesh and enters into Southeast Asia. Actions against drug trafficking also require the actualization of cooperation in police matters, a regional police (Patil,
In matters of security, Afghanistan’s membership also offers SAARC with better opportunities for dealing with issues like terrorism, drug smuggling and human trafficking in South Asia.

Overall, Afghanistan’s membership in SAARC has created both opportunities and challenges for SAARC. There is a need to eliminate challenges that are mostly relating to security in Afghanistan and its troubled relations with Pakistan. There are numerous opportunities, for instance, relating to energy trade between Central and South Asia, and the recent energy deal at SAARC is a step in right direction. Now, the time will tell if that energy deal leads to anything concrete in the region or not.

**SAARC Observers**

For the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to explore how the relationships with the external world are perceived in South Asia. In early deliberations at the SAARC, the issue of linkages with the outside world became a cause of disagreement, due to reservations mainly from India. All member states of the SAARC bear the financial burden of regional cooperation, including India and Pakistan, they being the biggest contributors. Therefore, except for India there was interest among other countries to accept financial aid from not only international development agencies but also from individual countries. Smaller countries wanted SAARC to be a body accepting and channelling funds into regional projects, particularly in their countries. According to Muni (1991:65), the Indian lack of enthusiasm for foreign aid was mainly to avoid any external interference in the internal affairs of South Asia because aid could be used as an instrument to promote the foreign policy of outsiders. Furthermore, there was a risk that the regional organisation could be influenced not only by foreign governments, but also by multilateral corporations and international organisations (Khatri, 1999:212). All of these actors, depending on the parameters of their
roles, may try to influence a regional organisation to further their objectives in a particular region.

As soon as the SAARC was established, the United Nations and the European Economic Community (EEC) showed eagerness for promoting regional cooperation in South Asia, and their interest was welcomed by the SAARC member states. However, at this point in the mid 1980s, there was still uncertainty about accepting offers of funding from Japan, West Germany, Norway, Canada, Australia and the US. At this point, the Soviet Union also offered SAARC to establish economic linkages with communist bloc’s Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), but this proposal was turned down due to suspicion of South Asia countries. Since its beginning, leaders at the SAARC were cautious of formal connections with multilateral organisations and individual states, as they feared those countries/donors might seek observer status. At this juncture, the inclusion of observers was considered premature for SAARC (Muni, 1991:65). However, before long a consensus was reached among the SAARC members to forge collaborations with other regional organisations. In relation to this, at the fourth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 1988, the Secretary General of SAARC was asked to explore possibilities for establishing cooperation with other regional organisations.

SAARC leaders have a vision to connect with neighbouring regions. China, Japan, Republic of Korea, USA, Iran, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union have joined SAARC as Observers. 6 Russia’s interest in becoming a SAARC observer is supported by India and the Indonesian case is endorsed by Sri Lanka, but on both applications, no decision has yet been reached at the SAARC. This depicts greater interest in SAARC from the outside, but the organisation

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has been cautious in issuing either membership or observer status to any country seeking affiliation with SAARC. There is a limited role of observers in the SAARC process. From the point of view of SAARC, the organisation is more interested in looking for financial support from its observers towards its various projects, and maybe it is because the earliest SAARC observer, Japan, has been generously supporting the SAARC.\footnote{Through the SAARC-Japan Fund, Japan gives about US$250,000 per annum for SAARC projects (Basnyat, 2009, pers. comm.).}

From the observers’ point of view, it is clear that they seek greater engagement with South Asia via SAARC. Perhaps that is the key reason they have joined the forum; however, reasons vary from country to country. For example, the US and Australia have been interested in South Asia and thus SAARC due to an increasing South Asian diaspora in their countries. There are different priority areas for the observers when it comes to collaboration with SAARC. Australia is interested in environmental security and sustainable water usage for agriculture; South Korea in human resources development; Japan in human development; China in the SAARC Development Fund; Iran in Energy trade; and the US in cooperation for climate change adaptation (Blake, 2010; Guangya, 2010; McMullan, 2010; Mottaki, 2010; Nishimura, 2010; Win, 2010; Yong-Joon, 2010). All observers, other than Mauritius and the EU, had representatives at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) to share their motives for cooperation with SAARC. There is the Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) division that deals with the issue of SAARC observers. The SAARC is yet to adapt itself to having more Observers around than its member states. However, for SAARC it has been easier to deal with Japan and South Korea, and the association with the former has been continuous since the early 1990s. In 1993, an MoU was signed between the SAARC and Japan. Since the thirteenth
SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 2005), SAARC has formally begun admitting Observers into its process.

Now so many countries are interested in becoming SAARC Observers because the region is a huge market with great potential for investment. SAARC Observers can learn from the association of SAARC and Japan through the SAARC-Japan Special Fund, which has facilitated SAARC activities. For example, the Government of Japan has been funding youth exchange programmes in South Asia and South Korea has been funding short-term training programmes in the areas of Information Technology (IT) and Human Resources (HR). Since guidelines were developed for SAARC Observers in 2008, it should be now easier for them to practically engage in SAARC affairs.8

Now, because SAARC is more active than it was in its past, there has been keen interest shown by some SAARC Observers to support the work of SAARC in the area of agriculture development. In this regard, the move from Australia to fund South Asian projects aimed at improving water management and dry-land agriculture is notable. Australian experience on water management is greatly relevant to South Asia; therefore, the plans have moved ahead with Australia committing technical and financial support to the SAC (Dhaka) via the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR), and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) (McMullan, 2010:2-3). This project has already kicked off at the SAC with an initial two-year phase focusing on capacity-building in cropping systems modelling to promote food security and the sustainable use of water

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8 The Observers from Australia, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, USA and the European Union participated in the sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu, April 2010. This was the first time that representatives of Australia and Myanmar attended the summit. The Guidelines for Cooperation with Observers were adopted by the Fifteenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo (August 2008).
resources in South Asia. In contrast, the US, another SAARC Observer, has not directly been supporting SAARC institutions, which is evident from Washington funding some non-governmental initiatives in South Asia, such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) (Blake, 2010:3). Nonetheless, the support of SAARC observers is crucial for the implementation of some much-needed measures in South Asia.

China, a SAARC observer, convinced of the potential of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), agreed to provide US$300,000 for the fund (Guangya, 2010:2). It is likely that other SAARC observers will learn from the precedent set by Beijing to contribute to SDF funds. However, there is no apparent sign of that happening. Acceptance of funding from China shows the changed attitudes of SAARC members to external funding, especially from states. In particular, this also reflects New Delhi's re-evaluated role within SAARC because India is no more wary, as it used to be in the past, of the influence of outside powers in South Asia.

Conclusion

The expansion of SAARC has been slow due to differences between its member states, mainly India and Pakistan. In roughly three decades of its existence, membership has only been granted to Afghanistan. The inclusion of Afghanistan has opened doors for new opportunities, for example with reference to energy trade with Central Asia, but there are ongoing challenges because the new member has been under war and controlled by foreign countries in many ways. With Afghanistan’s membership, another bilateral dispute has surfaced as far as the relations of SAARC member states are concerned. The troubled Afghanistan-Pakistan relations may also influence SAARC. Granting of observer status to the EU and several countries has been a step in right direction; however, SAARC has to be more effective in maximizing benefits of interaction with non-SAARC countries.
References


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(4) SAARC: DHAKA TO KATHMANDU (1985-2014)

AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

In the present day international society it has perhaps become imperative that the countries of the world have started thinking in the regional context. In fact, regionalism has emerged as a major, if not central, phenomenon in the post-World War II epoch. (Verma S.P. - 1969). The idea behind this philosophy covers many areas like security,
trade and economic development and cooperation. It is since the time of World War II that many regional and sub-regional economic arrangements have come into being in different parts of the world. Their aims and purposes have included providing a forum for regular consultations, making better use of resources and expertise and improving bargaining position of the member states vis-à-vis the outside world. Increasingly, the regional organizations are being perceived as a necessary response to adverse international economic environment which member states are unable to face individually. In the true sense of the term, it refers to intensifying political and/or economic process of cooperation among states and other actors in particular geographic regions. (Martin Griffiths and T.O. Callaghan) It should be stated that in order to undertake any regional cooperation, it is necessary that the absence of serious bilateral conflicts and the existence of a sense of common political purpose are two essential starting points for an undertaking aimed at regional cooperation. (DAWN (Karchi) May 29, 1980).

In today's world politics, one aspect is clearly discernible that although there is the presence of the world body, the United Nations Organisation, but it is the zeal of all nations that they crave for the regional organizations. We find the existence of NATO, CENTO, SEATO, ASEAN and other regional organizations. SAARC is the regional organization of the South East Asian nations. The main purpose is perhaps the security and development of the nations concerned. Again, like human beings, the States also have to exist and progress in association with other nations. (Sudhakar E, 1994). This is perhaps the reason of the birth of regional organizations.

Like other areas of the world, the region of South Asia is also no exception to this general rule. We may focus to several factors which are responsible for impeding the growth of a regional identity in South Asia. Firstly, it is evident that there was the bitter historical legacy of the
freedom struggle as it pitted different competing group and forces against one another with a view to acquires an equitable share of political power. It should be stated that the memory of this struggle vitiated the post-colonial inter-state relationship to a large extent. Secondly, there was a common or similar political security or strategic perception on the part of the regional states which served as catalysts to the creation of regional grouping, which condition did not exist in South Asia. Thirdly, in view of the wide disparity in size and population as well as differences in political systems and stages of economic development, cooperation among the regional countries was a difficult venture. Fourthly, the aspects of colonial legacy displaced ethnic and religious minorities and mass poverty was also responsible for aggravation of tension and conflict among various states of the region. All these left a great impact. Finally, absence of political will for cooperation was conspicuous by its absence. Apart from that the zone of South Asia suffers from some perennial problems. An overall picture of the South Asian region which has emerged in course of time since the independence of its states, appear to be very disturbing. Poverty, population explosion, unemployment, political instability, slow economic growth rate, heavy dependence on external assistance are some of the common problems of the region. (Verma S.P. 1969). The region represents one of the poorest parts of the world. The low levels of economic well being are under further strain from high rates of population growth. In every possible index of development including health and nutrition, education, housing, per capita income transport and communication, agriculture, the seven south Asian States fall amongst the bottom layer of the less developed states of the Third world. (Ahmad Samina-1990.) The South Asian States face the problem of underdevelopment, political order and national integration, though their intensity and extent varies from state to state. Further, Parochialism, ethnic, regional and linguistic identities pose challenges to the national political order and national identity. (Rizvi, Hassan Ashari -1983).
But at the same time, South Asian countries share strong cultural ties and linkages going back to antiquity. (Gupta, Anshuman, 2002). The countries of the region not only have common cultural ties, rooted in history, but also many common socio-economic problems affecting the whole region. (Gupta, Anshuman, 2002). In this context, SAARC represents as a viable forum in South Asia, which has the potential to enable the member states to generate greater socio-economic interactions. (Verma S.P. 1969). Peace and welfare, are critical inputs of such order, and regional integration paths sliding away from such traditional operations, are one means by which the less developed countries can move in the direction of realizing them. (Rana A.P., 1990)

The countries of the region show wide difference in the level of their economies. (Qureshi M.L., 1984.) As the economies of the countries of the region have not been sufficiently complementary with one another to provide basis for large scale cooperation, the level of trade among them has been insignificant. (Rajan, M. 1991.)

But South Asia is clearly a distinct geographical area. Enclosed on the South by the Indian Ocean, it is set rest apart from the rest of Asia to the North by the Himalays. This range forms an 800 mile wall along the northern side of the sub continent. (Nortan James H.W, 1980.) It must be said that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a late comer on the international scene. (Prasad Bimal, 1987).

The SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. SAARC is a manifestation of the determination of the peoples of South Asia to work together towards finding solutions to their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding and to create an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits. The main goal of the Association is to accelerate the process of economic and social development in member
states, through joint action in the agreed areas of cooperation. Since all the seven South Asian States fall in the category of less developed states of Third World. (Qureshi M.L. 1981) it was intended that the regional cooperation yields tangible benefits to the peoples of the region. (Frontier Post (Peshwar) December 30, 1988). Therefore, the main purpose of SAARC, as it stands is: socio-economic development, cooperation with all and to find out solutions to common problems with which all the countries are confronted with. One of the major important focuses of SAARC was that it was also to be consistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations and will not prevent member states from joining other International forums. (Indian Express, August 4, 1983.)

EVOLUTION

In spite of the fact that there were significant and marked disparities in different dimensions, the relations among the South Asian countries were rooted in geography, shared history, traditions and also the intrinsic humanity of the region. Equally important, are other common areas like common national resources of the rivers and eco-systems, minerals, as well as complementary nature of the South Asian economy provided a basis for mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic, commercial and other fields. We may refer to an equally important area of interaction. It is cultural cross currents and socio-economic interactions. The million dollar question as to why the idea of SAARC came up to the countries of this region. It is so because the South Asian States face the problems of underdevelopment, political order and national integration, though their intensity and extent varies from State to State. The several maladies that have engulfed the area are: parochialism, ethnic, regional and linguistic identities pose challenges to the national, political order and national identity. (Modi Ranjan, 2004) It has significantly contributed and shaped the values, perceptions and the common affinities of the people of South Asia.
There is no doubt that the countries of the region had cooperated with one another both bilaterally and regionally under the umbrella of such forums as the ESCAP, and the Commonwealth. But it should be stated that these efforts could not fully exploit the vast potential of regional cooperation. It was against this backdrop that Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman proposed a forum for regional cooperation during his visits to Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during the period 1977-1980. It was in the light of this consultations, he addressed letters to the Heads of Governments of the countries of South Asia (namely, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), which were carried by special Envoys to the respective countries.

In the communication, it was proposed that the countries of the area should explore the possibility to establish some institutional arrangements for regional cooperation. Accordingly, a meeting at the Summit level should be arranged in order to give a shape to this idea. He felt that the other regions had evolved institutional arrangements for consultations on different matters of mutual interest and cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields. Because it is the only region of South Asia which is devoid of any such arrangement and which comprised one-fifth of the world population. It was categorically pointed out that recent positive developments in the region had created a better climate of peace and understanding. Under the circumstances, it is imperative for the South Asian countries to move for a regional organization. All the South Asian nations warmly welcomed the proposal and reflected a positive attitude. It was recognized at the very outset that while regional cooperation was “beneficial, desirable and necessary,” given the historical perspective and legacy not deep-rooted cleavages and prejudices, there was need for making adequate preparations and setting a deliberately measured pace to yield optimum results in the long run. It was in pursuance of the recognition of such imperatives that the essential ground rules of future deliberations emphasized the principle of unanimity for decisions at all levels and scrupulous exclusion of all
bilateral and contentious issues. Accordingly, after making thorough consultations, the Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met for the first time in Colombo, in April 1981 to give a shape to this regional organisation. Five broad areas were identified which should get priority for regional cooperation. The Foreign Ministers, at their first meeting in New Delhi, in August 1983, formally launched the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) through the adoption of the Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation. The Foreign secretaries endorsed the IPA and agreed to launch it formally at the ministerial meet, which was to be preceded by a Foreign Secretaries meeting in New Delhi in July, 1983. 
(Joint Communique at the conclusion of the Fourth Meeting of Foreign Secretaries. Dhaka, March 28-30, 1983).

FIRST PHASE IN SAARC’S EVOLUTION: FOREIGN SECRETARY LEVEL MEETING

The next step in the formation of SAARC was informal consultations at the level of Foreign Secretaries. The Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives met in Colombo for the first time in April 1981. The Foreign Secretaries thereafter, met in Kathmandu in 1981 and in Islamabad and Dhaka in 1982 and 1983 respectively to give a final shape to the regional organization. There appeared a marked consensus in the speeches of Foreign Secretaries of the seven states with regard to the need for consolidating cooperation among them. (Meeting of South Asian Foreign Secretaries. April 21-24, 1981. Verbatim Records).

The meeting of the Foreign Secretaries was held in Islamabad (Pakistan) in August 1982. The meeting endorsed the recommendations of the Five Working Groups and converted the three study groups, which has been set at Kathmandu meet, into the Working Groups. Two more Study Groups were decided to be set up- one in Sports, Art and Culture and the other in Planning and Development. (Rising Nepal. Kathmandu. August 11, 1982.) The fourth round took place in Dhaka in March 1983. The
Foreign Secretaries promptly agreed on the required modalities for launching regional cooperation and the dates, venue and agenda of the Foreign Ministers meet. It considered the report of the Committee of whole on an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) for regional cooperation. In the Fifth round of their talks at New Delhi in July 1983, they finalized a document called ‘New Delhi Declaration’ that was based on and intended to lay down the implementation framework of the Integrated Programme in the nine agreed areas. *(Times of India, New Delhi. July 28, 1983)*

**SECOND PHASE: POLITICAL MINISTERIAL MEETING**

The second phase witnessed the upgradation of the discussion from the Secretary to the Ministerial level. The first meeting of the Foreign Ministers took place in New Delhi during 1 – 2 August 1983. The Meeting launched the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA). It covered nine broad areas of cooperation through the adoption of the Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The Ministers elaborated a set of objectives and principles, specified institutional arrangements, laid down the procedure for decision making as well as the financial arrangements governing such cooperation, most of which were subsequently incorporated in the SAARC Charter. The second meeting of the Foreign Ministers held in Male in July 1984 decided that a Summit level meeting of the regional countries should be held in Dhaka in 1985 which paved the way for the establishment of the regional organization.

**THIRD PHASE - FORMAL LAUNCHING OF THE SAARC**

The third phase may be said to have begun with the Dhaka Summit. The meeting brought the Heads of State or Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka together in Dhaka during 7 – 8 December 1985. It was for the first time that the seven leaders met in a regional context. The Summit formally launched the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Finally SAARC was born in 1985. The formal launching of the SAARC at Dhaka marked the beginning of a new phase of cooperation among the members of the south Asian Community on the basis of equality. Their call for a
comprehensive nuclear test ban confirmed the commitment of these states and the SAARC objectives to the UN Charter. (Chopra V.D. 1985).

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and geopolitical organization of eight countries belonging to the South Asia region. The SAARC secretariat is based in Kathmandu in Nepal. The Charter establishing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was adopted. It should be stated that SAARC is the first major step of a long journey towards the regional integration. (Kahol, Yudhistar, 2003). The SAARC is a manifestation of the determination of the peoples of South Asia to work together towards finding solutions to their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding and to create an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefit. Therefore, there is no denying the fact that the SAARC though small, yet a significant organization bears its own importance in the new world order. (Kahol, Yudhistar, 2003).

**OBJECTIVES OF SAARC**

We may lay down the major objectives, principles and general provisions of SAARC as laid down in Art.1 of the SAARC Charter. They are as follows:

1. To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
2. To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potentials;
3. To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
4. To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
5. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
6. To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
7. To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
8. To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

**PRINCIPLES OF SAARC**

The following are the major principles of SAARC:

1. Cooperation within the framework of the Association is based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and mutual benefit.
2. Such cooperation is to complement and not to substitute bilateral or multilateral cooperation.
3. Such cooperation should be consistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations of the member states.
4. Decisions at all levels in SAARC are taken on the basis of unanimity.
5. Bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from its deliberations.

We may note a list of the SAARC Summits held so far after its formal birth in 1985.

**LIST OF SAARC SUMMITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Host</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>7–8 December 1985</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>16–17 November 1986</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bengaluru</td>
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<td>3rd</td>
<td>2–4 November 1987</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>29–31 December 1988</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Islamabad</td>
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<td>5th</td>
<td>21–23 November 1990</td>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Malé</td>
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<td>6th</td>
<td>21 December 1991</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
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<td>7th</td>
<td>10–11 April 1993</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
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<td>8th</td>
<td>2–4 May 1995</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>12–14 May 1997</td>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Malé</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>4–6 January 2002</td>
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<td>12th</td>
<td>2–6 January 2004</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
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<td>13th</td>
<td>12–13 November 2005</td>
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<td>14th</td>
<td>3–4 April 2007</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td>15th</td>
<td>1–3 August 2008</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
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<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>28–29 April 2010</td>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Thimphu</td>
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It would be proper if we take up the eighteen SAARC summits and their outcomes in brief.

THE FIRST SAARC SUMMIT

The first SAARC summit was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh during 7–8 December, 1985. The President of Bangladesh, the King of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of India, the President of Maldives, the King of Nepal, the President of Pakistan and the President of Sri Lanka met in Dhaka. They signed the SAARC Charter on 8 December 1985, thereby establishing the regional association which is known as SAARC.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

The Heads of State or Governments underscored the historic significance of their first ever South Asian Summit meeting. They considered it to be a tangible manifestation of their determination to cooperate regionally, to work together towards finding solutions towards their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual understanding and to the creation of an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits.

They reaffirmed that their fundamental goal was to accelerate the process of economic and social development in their respective countries through the optimum utilization of their human and material resources, so as to promote the welfare and prosperity of their peoples and to improve their quality of life. They were conscious that peace and security was an essential prerequisite for the realization of this objective.
One of the most important areas that SAARC covered was that the leaders of the South Asian countries reaffirmed their commitment to the UN Charter and the principles governing sovereign equality of States, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs and non-use of threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of other States. They also reaffirmed their deep conviction in the continuing validity and relevance of the objectives of the Non-aligned movement as an important force in international relations.

Further, they acknowledged that the countries of South Asia, who constituted one-fifth of humanity, were faced with the formidable challenges posed by poverty, underdevelopment, low levels of production, unemployment and pressure of population compounded by exploitation of the past and other adverse legacies. They were confident that with effective regional cooperation, they could make optimum use of these capacities for the benefit of their peoples, accelerate the pace of their economic development and enhance their national and collective self-reliance. The leaders were convinced that they could effectively pursue their individual and collective objectives and improve the quality of life of their peoples only in an atmosphere of peace and security.

Another significant aspect which was highlighted was that the Heads of State or Government expressed their deep concern at the continuing crises in the global economy. They underscored that deteriorating economic and social conditions had seriously retarded developing countries. They strongly urged that determined efforts should be made by the international community towards realization of the goals and targets of the International Development Strategy as well as the Substantial New Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

**THE SECOND SAARC SUMMIT**

The Second SAARC summit was held during 16-17 November 1986, at Bangalore, India. The President of Bangladesh, the King of Bhutan, the
Prime Minister of India, the President of Maldives, the King of Nepal, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the President of Sri Lanka assembled at the second SAARC Summit at Bangalore.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

One significant aspect of this Summit was that the Heads of State or Government welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the SAARC Secretariat by the Council of Ministers and their decision to locate the Secretariat in Kathmandu and appoint Ambassador Abul Ahsan of Bangladesh as the first Secretary-General of SAARC. It was reiterated on the principles that their desire of promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and peaceful settlement of disputes was ranked as utmost priority.

Further, it was reaffirmed that the will of their peoples and Governments to work together in accordance with the SAARC Charter to devise common policies and approaches for finding common solutions to the shared problems that all of them face. They stressed that mutual trust, goodwill and understanding must animate their cooperative effort under SAARC. Progress and prosperity in each country would redound to the benefit of others. This was what constituted the SAARC spirit. The leaders reaffirmed that the principal goal of SAARC was to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia, to improve their quality of life, to accelerate economic growth, social programmes and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential.

It was reiterated and given due recognition to the great importance of the increasing involvement of the people for ensuring the success of
regional co-operation. They emphasized the need for promoting greater contacts among the peoples of the region through such action as regular and frequent interchange of scholars, academics, artists, authors, professionals and businessmen as well as facilitation of tourism.

The aspect of terrorism received a prime importance in the Second SAARC Summit. The Heads of State or Government agreed that co-operation among SAARC States was vital if terrorism was to be prevented and eliminated from the region. They unequivocally condemned all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and deplored their impact on life and property, social economic development, political stability, regional and international peace and co-operation. They recognized the importance of the principles laid down in UN Resolution 2625 which among others, required that each State should refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State or allowing in organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts.

THE THIRD SAARC SUMMIT

The Third SAARC summit was held in Nepal during 2–4 November 1987, and was attended by the Presidents of Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, and the Kings of Bhutan and Nepal.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

One of the important outcomes of the Third SAARC summit was that the Foreign Ministers of the member states signed the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and an agreement to establish a South Asian Food Reserve.

Once again, the Heads of State or Government expressed their faith in and commitment to the principles and purposes enshrined in the
United Nation Charter. They also reaffirmed their deep commitment to the principles and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement. The South Asian leaders noted that the world economy had long suffered from a structural disequilibrium. Economic expansion and development was another important highlighted area. The Heads of State or Government reiterated the urgent need for resumption of North-South Dialogue with a view to promoting coordinated actions by developed and developing countries to channel trade surpluses for development, revive growth in flagging economies, overcome debt difficulties, expand export access to the developing countries and stabilise commodity prices, regulate capital flows and exchange rates more closely, and provide emergency relief and assistance to the poorest countries. All these were decided in order to revamp the economic structure of the member states.

The issue of environment was also one of the major concerns of this Summit. The Heads of State or Government expressed their deep concern at the fast and continuing degradation of the environment, including extensive destruction of forests, in the South Asian region. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction at the launching of the SAARC Audio Visual Exchange programme coinciding with the opening of the Third SAARC Summit in Kathmandu. While taking note of the dates for the institution of the SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships and the commencement of Organised Tourism among SAARC member countries, they directed that the schemes for the SAARC Documentation Centre and the SAARC Youth Volunteer Programme be implemented at the earliest.

THE FOURTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Fourth SAARC summit was held in Islamabad, Pakistan during 29–31 December 1988. The President of Bangladesh, the King of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of India, the President of Maldives, the King of Nepal, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the President of Sri Lanka met at the Fourth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.
MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

Major areas that were covered in this Summit was: condemnation of the coup attempt on 3rd November 1988, declared 1989 to be the "SAARC Year Against Drug Abuse", declared 1990 to be the "SAARC Year of the Girl Child", set up a technical committee on education, and launched a regional plan called "SAARC-2000- A Basic Needs Perspective" to meet specific targets by the end of the twentieth century in areas such as food, shelter, education and environmental protection. It was also agreed to hold regular "South Asian Festivals" with the first being hosted by India.

The Heads of State of Government expressed grave concern over the growing magnitude and the serious effects of drug abuse, particularly among young people, and drug trafficking. They recognised the need for urgent and effective measures to eradicate this evil and decided to declare the year 1989 as the "SAARC Year for Combating Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking". They agreed to launch a concerted campaign, as suited to the situation in their respective countries, to significantly augment SAARC efforts to eliminate drug abuse and drug trafficking. These included closer cooperation in creating a greater awareness of the hazards of drug abuse, exchange of expertise, sharing of intelligence information, stringent measures to stop trafficking in drugs and introduction of more effective laws. They directed that the Technical Committee concerned should examine the possibility of a Regional Convention on Drug Control.

THE FIFTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Fifth SAARC Summit was held in Malé, Maldives during 21–23 November 1990. The President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency Mr. Hussain Muhammad Ershad, the King of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. Chandra Shekhar, the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,
the Prime Minister of Nepal, The Right Honourable Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Dingiri Banda Wijetunga met at the Fifth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation at Male'.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

The leaders signed the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, launched the Special SAARC Travel Document (providing visa-exemptions for national judges, Parliamentarians and academics and their immediate families), launched a Scheme for the Promotion of Organised Tourism, authorized the SAARC Secretariat to share information and exchange reports, studies and publications with the European Community and the Association of South East Asian Nations. Further, a declaration was made to observe various 'years'.

1. SAARC years (1991-2000 AD) to be the "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child".
2. 1991: "SAARC Year of Shelter",
3. 1992: "SAARC Year of the Environment",
4. 1993: "SAARC Year of Disabled Persons",

Again, it was decided to set up the SAARC Tuberculosis Centre in Nepal and the SAARC Documentation Centre in India.

**THE SIXTH SAARC SUMMIT**

The Sixth SAARC Summit was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 21 December 1991. The Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia; the King of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Shri Narasimha Rao; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Rt. Hon. Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mian
Mohammed Nawaz Sharif and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Ranasinghe Premadasa met at the Sixth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at Colombo, Sri Lanka.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

The Heads of State or Government emphasised the vital importance of assessing the nature and extent of international economic interdependence and of the need for reviving the North/South dialogue. They noted the recent developments that had radically transformed the international development relationship deeply affecting the prospects for the economies of the seven SAARC countries. The Heads of State or Government emphasised the need for vigorously promoting South-South economic cooperation to offset the negative consequences of international economic developments. Further, the Heads of State or Government while reaffirming their commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, emphasised the need to ensure that development remains at the centre of international attention.

**THE SEVENTH SAARC SUMMIT**

The Seventh SAARC Summit was held in Dhaka, during 10–11 April 1993. The Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia, the King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Rt. Hon. Girija Prasad Koirala, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Nawaz Sharif and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa met at the Seventh Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at Dhaka, Bangladesh.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

**PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE DISABLED PERSONS**
It was reiterated that the disabled persons should get due opportunity in the society for their fullest development. Accordingly, the Heads of State or Government while recalling their decision at the Male' Summit to observe 1993 as the "SAARC Year of Disabled Persons", adopted the Regional Plan of Action for the Disabled Persons. They urged Member States to take concrete steps to implement the Plan. They welcomed the offer of Pakistan to host a Ministerial Conference on Disabled persons in September, 1993.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Taking into account the position of women in the society, the issue of women development got prominence at the Summit. While reviewing the situation of women in the region, it was noted with satisfaction that over a period of time, the content of regional cooperation which addresses the issue of development, gender and equality for women has steadily grown in SAARC. The Heads of State or Government hoped that the cooperation thus developed will enable Member States to achieve the ultimate goal of bringing women into the mainstream of development with independence and equality. The Heads of State or Government recalled that in pursuance of their collective will expressed in the Male' Summit to observe the 1990s as the "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child",

TERRORISM

Like other parts of the world, terrorism is a major problem in the region of South Asia and many a times it has been a victim of terrorist attacks. In order to get rid of the situation, the Heads of State or Government reiterated their unequivocal condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal. They strongly deplored the adverse consequences of terrorism.

DRUG TRAFFICKING AND DRUG ABUSE

Drug trafficking and drug abuse is also a major problem of this region and it has caused many social problems. The SAARC Summit took into account this aspect with serious attention. The Heads of State or
Government reiterated their grave concern at the growing menace of drug trafficking in the region and the aggravation of the problem of drug abuse among the South Asian population, particularly the youth. Accordingly, it was decided that a collective measure has to be undertaken to fight this menace and it should be the objective of all members to fight seriously against drug trafficking and drug abuse which has engulfed the society like an octopus.

Other important areas that were highlighted in the Summit were: regional cooperation, Integrated Programme of Action (IPA), consensus on eradication of poverty in South Asia, trade, manufactures and services science and technology.

THE EIGHTH SAARC SUMMIT
The Eighth SAARC Summit was held in New Delhi, during 2–4 May 1995. The Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia, the King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Rt. Hon. Manmohan Adhikari, the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the Eighth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at New Delhi,

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT
SAARC DECADE

Since, after the birth of SAARC in 1985, one decade was completed successfully, the Heads of State or Government expressed their satisfaction on the achievements of the First Decade of SAARC and resolved to celebrate its completion of the First Decade both in the individual Member States and collectively.
REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Summit highlighted the issue of regional cooperation in the true sense of the term. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their resolve to intensify regional cooperation in order to accelerate the process of promoting the welfare and improving the quality of life of the peoples of South Asia.

ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN SOUTH ASIA

It was agreed by all that poverty is a major social menace and accordingly, another important area that was given due prominence was the issue of eradication of poverty. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their commitment to the eradication of poverty in South Asia, preferably by the year 2002 A.D. through an Agenda of Action.

THE NINTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Ninth SAARC Summit was held in Malé, during 12–14 May 1997. The Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina; the King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of Kingdom of Nepal, Rt. Hon. Mr. Lokendra Bahadur Chand; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at Malé, Maldives.

THE TENTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Tenth Summit was held in Colombo, during 29–31 July 1998. The Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina; Chairman, Council of Ministers and Head of Government
of the Royal Government of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal, Rt. Hon. Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the Tenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at Colombo.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

**CULTURAL UNITY**

The Heads of State or Government recognized that South Asia, while reflecting a rich, complex and varied plurality of cultural and religious traditions, was heir to a profound common civilizational continuum of great antiquity which constitutes a historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the people of the region. They acknowledged that the SAARC process could draw more deeply from the vitality and strength of South Asia's shared cultural heritage as a source influencing and enhancing creative energies in all fields.

**ENHANCING POLITICAL COOPERATION**

The Heads of State or Government reiterated their commitment to the promotion of mutual trust and understanding and, recognising that the aims of promoting peace, stability and amity and accelerated socio-economic cooperation may best be achieved by fostering good neighbourly relations, relieving tensions and building confidence, agreed that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful in this regard. The Heads of State or Government further recognized that this process would contribute to the appreciation of each other's problems and perceptions as well as for decisive action in agreed areas of regional cooperation.
LINKS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Heads of State or Government noted links initiated between SAARC and other international and regional organizations. They considered the prospects for the development of SAARC projects and programmes in association with such organizations with which SAARC has cooperative arrangements as well as through other forms of cooperation. The Heads of State or Government were of the view that priority needs to be given in establishing contact with those regional groupings which have experience in economic cooperation and functional regional cooperation.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Heads of State or Government taking note of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirmed their commitment to the further promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms by strengthening the respective national institutions in South Asia in this field. The Leaders agreed that tolerance and mutual accommodation, combined with the strengthening of participatory governance, constituted the foundation for the sustainable economic and social development of the SAARC region.

THE ELEVENTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Eleventh Summit was held in Kathmandu, during 4–6 January 2002. The Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia; the Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal, Right Honourable Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba; the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the
Eleventh Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Kathmandu,

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

**POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

The Heads of State or Government acknowledged that investment in poverty alleviation programs contributes to social stability, economic progress and overall prosperity. They were of the view that widespread and debilitating poverty continued to be the most formidable developmental challenge for the region. Conscious of the magnitude of poverty in the region, and recalling also the decision of the UN Millennium Summit 2000 to reduce world poverty in half by 2015, and also recalling the commitments made at the five year review of the World Summit for Social Development to reduce poverty through enhanced social mobilization, the Heads of State or Government made a review of the SAARC activities aimed at poverty alleviation and decided to reinvigorate them in the context of the regional and global commitments to poverty reduction. In addition to this the other areas which were highlighted are: Women and Children, Education, International Political and Economic Environment, Terrorism etc.

**THE TWELFTH SAARC SUMMIT**

The Twelfth Summit was held in Islamabad, during 4–6 January 2004. The Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the President of the Republic of Maldives, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal, Surya Bahadur Thapa, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the Twelfth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Islamabad, Pakistan.
MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

Among the various issues, the major highlights of the Summit were:
Regional economic cooperation, Poverty Alleviation, advancement of Science and Technology, population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilization, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition, and protection of children which are essentially keys to the welfare and well being of all South Asians.

THE THIRTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Thirteenth Summit was held in Dhaka, during 12–13 November 2005. The Prime Minister of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the King of Nepal, His Majesty Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz; and, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the Thirteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

Advancing Economic Cooperation

The Heads of State or Government stressed that accelerating cooperation in the core economic areas was of vital importance for the realization of Charter objectives and also for making South Asia truly vibrant, dynamic and secure in its robust progress. They reaffirmed their commitment to accelerate cooperation in the economic and commercial fields, especially in the energy sector. They noted the progress in the negotiations on outstanding issues and directed early finalization of all the Annexes ensuring entry into force of the SAFTA Agreement as agreed, with effect from 1 January 2006.
THE FOURTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Fourteenth Summit of SAARC was held in New Delhi, India during 3-4 April 2007. The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Chief Adviser of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of Nepal, Rt. Hon’ble Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met at the Fourteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held in New Delhi, India.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

The Heads of State or Government appreciated the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) for its elaboration of the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), which reflect the regional determination to make faster progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Heads of State or Government reiterated their deep concern at the continued degradation of environment and reaffirmed the need to further strengthen cooperation towards protection and conservation of the environment as a priority area.

THE FIFTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT

The Fifteenth Summit of SAARC was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka during 1–3 August 2008. The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Chief Adviser of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India,
His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Rt. Hon’ble Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met at the Fifteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka during 2-3, August 2008.

The issues discussed were regional cooperation, partnership for growth for the peoples of South Asia, connectivity, energy, the environment, water resources, poverty alleviation, the SAARC Development Fund, transport, information and communications technology development, science and technology, tourism, culture, the South Asian Free Trade Area, the SAARC Social Charter, women and children, education, combating terrorism, and the admission of Australia and Myanmar as observers.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

The 15th SAARC Summit took far-reaching decisions on key issues affecting the region such as terrorism, food and fuel security and trade. Among the various issues the major highlights of the Summit were: Environment, Water Resources, Poverty Alleviation, SAARC Development Fund (SDF), Science and Technology, Tourism, Culture, SAFTA and Trade Facilitation, Women and Children, Education, Combating Terrorism etc.

FOOD SECURITY

At the summit, one of the major points of discussion was the global food crisis. The SAARC heads of government made a statement saying "in view of the emerging global situation of reduced food availability and worldwide rise in food prices, we direct that an Extra-ordinary Meeting of the Agriculture Ministers of the SAARC Member States be convened in New Delhi, India in November 2008, to evolve and implement people-centred short to medium term regional strategy and collaborative
projects." They also acknowledged the need to forge greater cooperation with the international community to ensure the food availability and nutrition security. The Heads of State or Government emphasized their commitment to implement SAFTA in letter and in spirit, thereby enabling SAARC to contribute as well to the dynamic process of Asia’s emergence as the power house of the world.

**TERRORISM**

During the Summit, there was clear recognition that terrorism has become a great menace throughout the world, including in our region. South Asia cannot progress, unless there is stability and security throughout the region. It is in recognition of this reality, the member states signed the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. All forms of terrorist violence were condemned.

**THE SIXTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT**

The Sixteenth Summit was held in Thimphu, Bhutan during 28–29 April 2010. Bhutan hosted the SAARC summit for the first time. This was marked as the silver jubilee celebration of SAARC that was formed in Bangladesh in December 1985.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoeser Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Nasheed; the Prime Minister of Nepal, His Excellency Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met in Thimphu, Bhutan, on 28–29 April 2010 for the Sixteenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
Climate change was the central issue of the summit with summit’s theme “Towards a Green and Happy South Asia”. Outcome of Thimpu Summit regarding climate change issue:

- SAARC leaders signed a SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment to tackle the problem of climate change.
- The SAARC nations also pledged to plant 10 million trees over the next 5 years.
- India proposed setting up of climate innovation centres in South Asia to develop sustainable energy technologies.
- India offered services of India’s mission on sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem to the SAARC member states saying that the initiative could serve as a nucleus for regional cooperation in this vital area.
- India announced "India endowment for climate change" in South Asia to help member states meet their urgent adaption and capacity building needs posed by the climate change.
- The seven-page Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration-Towards a Green and Happy South Asia' emphasised the importance of reducing dependence on high-carbon technologies for economic growth and hoped promotion of climate resilience will promote both development and poverty eradication in a sustainable manner.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT
Among the various issues, the major highlights of the Summit were: Enhancing Intra-regional Connectivity in the Decade of 2010-2020, Cooperation in the Energy Sector, Climate Change, Trade, Agriculture and Biodiversity etc.

THE SEVENTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT
The Seventeenth Summit was held during 10-11 of November 2011 in Addu City, Maldives. The Meeting, which was held at the Equatorial Convention Centre, Addu City which was opened by the outgoing Chair of SAARC, Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, H.E.Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley. The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh
Hasina; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoeser Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Nasheed; the Prime Minister of Nepal, His Excellency Dr. Baburam Bhattarai; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa met in Addu City, the Maldives, on 10-11 November 2011 for the Seventeenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

H.E. Mohamed Nasheed was elected as the Chairperson of the 17th SAARC Summit. In his inaugural address President Nasheed highlighted three areas of cooperation in which progress should be made; trade, transport and economic integration; security issues such as piracy and climate change; and good governance. The President also called on the Member States to establish a commission to address issues of gender inequalities in South Asia.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

The Head of States of all the SAARC Member States addressed the Meeting. The inaugural meeting was attended by Foreign/External Ministers of SAARC Member States, the Secretary General of SAARC, the Heads of Observer Delegation, Cabinet Ministers of the Maldives, Ministers in the visiting delegations and other state dignitaries.

In her address, the Secretary General stated that the Summit being held under the theme of “Building Bridges” provides further impetus and momentum to build the many bridges that needs to be built: from bridging the gaps created by uneven economic development and income distribution, the gaps in recognizing and respecting the equality of men and women, the closing of space between intent and implementation.

In this Meeting, the Foreign Ministers of the respective Member States signed four agreements;
SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment, SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards, SAARC Seed Bank Agreement.

**THE EIGHTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT**

The Eighteenth SAARC Summit was held at the Nepalese capital Kathmandu during 26–27 November 2014. The theme of the summit was Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity, focused on enhancing connectivity between the member states for easier transit-transport across the region. The summit took place after an interval of three years as the last summit was held in 2011 in Maldives. The Summit was attended by: The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Ashraf Ghani; the Prime Minister of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Tshering Tobgay; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Narendra Modi; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Yameen; the Prime Minister of Nepal, Rt. Hon’ble Mr. Sushil Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Nawaz Sharif; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met at the Eighteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC).

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT**

Foreign Ministers of the eight member states signed an agreement on energy cooperation namely ‘SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity)’ in the presence of their heads of state and government during the concluding ceremony of the 18th SAARC Summit on 27 November. Although Pakistan stalled, citing insufficient internal preparations, signing of two other agreements on Vehicular Traffic and Railways respectively. Although Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, current SAARC Chair, expressed his hope that the 'Regulation of
Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic amongst SAARC Member States’, and ‘SAARC Regional Agreement on Railways’ would be signed later after the Transport Ministers of these countries reviewed them. It was also decided that Pakistan will host the next summit in 2016. The India-Pakistan stand-off on the first day threatened to jeopardize the entire summit process as Pakistan seemed to be in mood of blocking every India led proposals. But the next day things have changed when the two Prime Ministers met privately at the retreat session which led to Pakistan agreeing one out of three proposed agreements and they also made a shook hands publicly during the closing ceremony and this ‘transient peace’ in the relation was believed to brokered by the Nepalese side as a face-saving measure for the Kathmandu summit. China, which holds an observer status in the group, was represented by Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin seen actively promoting a more active role for itself in the region including infrastructure funding through its proposed ‘Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank’ (AIIB) and extending its ambitious Maritime Silk Road project to South Asian nations. Pakistan, China’s all weather friend, also vouched for a more participatory role for the observer nations in the summit process, indirectly advocating for a more Chinese involvement. Although no such proposal was accepted because of India’s reservation.

CONCLUSION
So far as South Asia is concerned, the aspect of regional cooperation was conspicuous by its absence. No State seriously took into account this aspect. There is no denying the fact that SAARC has definitely contributed a lot for the development of the South East Asia region. It has to move forward a long way to achieve its full dedicated targets but there is no lack of sincerity on the part of the organization and the members of the organization. We have to accept the reality that after the establishment of SAARC, rapid economic progress of the member countries is discernible. In other different fields also success has been achieved to a considerable extent. One of the most important areas that have been covered by SAARC is the Convention on the Suppression of
Terrorism’. The member states have shown a great determination to enforce it by amending their national legislation so as to make the Convention effective. (Dawn. Karachi. December 29, 1988). Thus it is clear that with its potential for effectively defusing tension among the major states, it can be used as a mechanism for ‘crisis management, at the regional level. (Ahmad Basher, 1987). A reasonable understanding of SAARC needs a thorough inquiry into the whole gamut of political, social, cultural and ethnic dynamics of South Asia an imperative. (Sudhakar, 1994). Therefore, we can definitely say that the SAARC is approaching slowly but steadily towards its dedicated goal of showering blessings of peace, development and progress in the South East Asian region.

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(5) The EU-SAARC Relations towards Deeper Partnership:
Challenges and Perspectives

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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Writer of 8 research papers and articles published in reputed research and academic journals.
- Written 20 articles in reputed newspaper as freelancer.
- Working on Two research projects: The European Union’s Policy towards the Nuclearization: A Case Study of South Asia and The Role of Western Powers in Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) in the Post Cold War Era.
- Supervising the Ph.D. projects
- Designing, planning and writing curricula for different levels.
- Member Departmental Research Committee (DRC)
- Member Board of Studies of the Department of Political Science
- Member Board of Faculty of Arts, University of Karachi
- Participation in 20 international and national Conferences, Seminars and Workshops and presented papers

ARTICLES

1. The EU and ASEAN Relations: Commercial and Political Aspects,
2. Governance and United Nation.
3. The EU and its relations with Pakistan
4. The EU: Integration And Expanding Role In International Relation
5. Critical Study of Regionalism in South Asia: A Case Study SAARC. Challenges and Perspectives
6. Western Perceptions towards south Asian Nuclear issue’
8. ‘Western Perceptions towards Iranian Nuclear Programme.
9. Accountability Mechanism at Local Governance in Pakistan: Challenges and Perspective’
Introduction:

The world has turned into a “Global Village” mainly characterized by economic liberalization, privatization and globalization. In such a changing global scenario, the economic challenges have become a dynamic policy issue for both developed and developing nations equally. Presently the economic collaboration, whether international, regional or bilateral level, has become vital for the sustainable socioeconomic development. The incredible success of regional organization e.g. ASEAN and the European Union has motivated to other regions of the world to establish economic groups/ cooperation. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was emerged as an intergovernmental economic cooperation by South Asian countries, to promote multi- dimensional regional collaboration with a view to forming conditions for sustained socio-economic progress of the eight member states. Despite its strong ambitious and geo-strategic position, the SAARC is one of the least integrated organizations in the world. Owning to the colonial experience, the Europeans are more aware of social, political and cultural milieu of the subcontinent than of any other region in the world. South Asia’s strategic political, economic and human significance demand greater attention of the EU. So it is imperative that the EU takes an active interest in the region. The purpose of this descriptive study examines the growing role of EU in SAARC - as extra region entities-over the last decade and evaluate its regional impact various dimensional
cooperation and integration arrangements that took place in the SAARC region. On the basis of reviewed literature, this theoretical research paper is organized into three sections. First part focuses on the brief but comprehensive introduction of the EU and SAARC. The second part discussed the efforts made by the EU and SAARC to improve their multi-dimensional relations. A summary of findings and recommendations would be discussed in the last section of the study. It is expected that the results of this work would not only facilitate the scholars and expert of political science and international relations but it would be also a massive contribution for the students in the field of regionalism in South Asia.

1-1. The SAARC

South Asia (successor term to the “Indian sub-continent”) has long been recognized as a distinct, region in the world, though scholars have disagreed on the geographical demarcation of the region. Some are inclined to extend it to include Burma in the East and Afghanistan in the North-West. Nevertheless, South Asia as understood by most includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. (See the map below). The SAARC is an intergovernmental regional cooperation among eight South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. The region has geographical contiguity, and shares socio-cultural commonalities and common historical experience. (Naveed, 2002, 29) The region is full of
diversities in terms of land area, geographical features, population, ethnicity, religion, natural resources. The SAARC countries are among the world's most densely populated regions. Its population of 1.6 billion is growing rapidly of which India has roughly about 75%, followed by Pakistan with 9.5%, Bangladesh 9%, and rest of the population live in remaining five countries. (Upreti, 2004, 3). The average population growth of the region has been 1.8 per cent annually. At the current rate of population growth the population of the region is likely to double by 2039. (Barry, 2008)

The region occupies a potentially critical geo-strategic position; bordered by China, the Indian Ocean. The region is rich in energy resources and it could serve as an engine of world economic growth in the future. Australia, America, China, Mauritius Iran Japan, Myanmar South Korea and the European Union hold observer status in SAARC. (Official site of SAARC). The SAARC is also establishing permanent diplomatic relations as an observer with UNO and EU and other multilateral organization. Myanmar and China has expressed interest in upgrading its status from an observer to a full member of SAARC. Turkey and Russia have applied for observer status membership of SAARC. The region would benefit from these external linkages and help it economic integration with the international community. (SAARC 2014 South Asia- 755)Despite its geo-strategic position and the impressive Gross Domestic Production growth rate during the 1990s, the region is one of the poorest, most socially complex, underdeveloped in terms of human resources and least
integrated in the world. (Rammanoha, 2008,7) It represents almost one-fifth (22%) of the world population and one of the biggest potential market, but it contributed only 2.0% of world GDP. South Asia’s human development index (HDI) has been very low. Three countries in the region (Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal) are classified as Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) by the UN. There is a long history of involvement by outside actors in South Asia. Many have established and maintained a presence there and in the Indian Ocean to ensure their strategic interests. In modern times, the key players include the United States, the former Soviet Union, and more recently, China and European Union.

**Map of SAARC and EU**

1-2. The European Union

The European Union compressing twenty eight member states is the most developed and unique form of regional integration. The term
European Union is comparatively new and has begun to be used only since the implementation of the Treaty of European Union (TEU) in 1993. The earlier nomenclatures were the European Economic Community (EEC) the European Common Market (ECM) and the European Community (EC) in 1957 and 1967 respectively. The activities of the EU are divided into three areas or 'pillars' which cover all aspects of public policy, including agriculture, monetary, economic affairs, foreign and defence policies. (Bomberg, 2008, 5) The EU represents 8.3 percent of the world's population, but has about twenty-two percent of global gross products ($18.124 trillion in 2014, estimated). The EU is the major global trading power. In the global term, it is the largest exporter as well as the second largest importer. It is an undeniable fact that the EU is the biggest economic bloc, and in recent years it significance, as an emerging political player in world affairs, especially since the signing of Maastricht Treaty (1991), is acknowledged worldwide. Together with 28 member states, the EU included approximately one-eighth of total votes in the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) with France and United Kingdom as veto-wielding permanent members of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). Four of its member states (United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy), are also members of influential Group of Eight (G-8). (Naveed, 2003, 9). The Union has also become the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid through European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). The EU now has ambitions to also make a contribution to international peacekeeping. It professes to promote international cooperation, democracy and human rights. (Bomberg,
2008, 6) Many view the EU as an international player which has potential capability of posing a challenge to United States hegemony. Thus, it is a highly important force in global politics. The EU is strongly committed to multilateral and regional cooperation in the world and has expressed the resolve to specially contribute to making such cooperative ventures more successful.

2.1 -EU-SAARC Relations: Towards Deeper Engagement

Owing to the colonial and imperial experience, the Europeans are more aware of social, political and cultural milieu of the subcontinent than of any other region in the world. The history of relations between Europe and South Asia goes as far back as 1498 when the Portuguese explorer-navigator Vasco da Gama reached the coast of India in 1496. Portuguese were the first to establish their trading centers in the coastal areas of Calicut, Goa, Daman and Diu. The Portuguese were followed by Dutch and French. They were also interested in the trade of spices. The British Merchants in the form of East India Company reached the Indian coastal areas in 1600. The Britishers soon began to expand their trade. Their major conflict was with the French. Between 1746-1763 three Anglo-French wars took place. But the French power declined in South Asia after 1763. It had become clear by this time that the Britishers were not merely interested in trade in South Asia but they were gradually preparing to establish their rule over here. The Battle of Plassey (1757) was the turning point towards the establishment of British rule in South Asia.
The subcontinent was a colony of Britain and later formally a part of the British Empire. British domination of the subcontinent lasted for nearly a hundred and fifty years. The decolonization process started around the mid-twentieth century and the subcontinent was partitioned into the two independent states of India and Pakistan in August 1947. The British can be credited with establishing many social and political institutions during their rule of India. Many of these institutions, particularly parliamentary style democracy are still prevalent in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. After independence, aid agencies and experts in various fields from Britain and other European countries were actively involved in development in these countries for several years. Likewise, immigrants from South Asian countries have contributed significantly to the development and the rebuilding of its infrastructure of war battered Europe. This interaction between the two sides has not only helped the Europeans and the South Asians to strengthen their bonds going back into history but the process has also given the Europeans a deeper and better understanding of the of post-colonial South Asia. The economic and military assistance policies of the European countries in the cold war years, considerably influenced developments in South Asia. Present EU's policy on South Asia is basically incorporated in the EU’s “Asia Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013” (EARSP) and the “Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2007-2010”. The paper recommends the following realms:

- A programme to support the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), focused on implementing the new strategy on
South East Asia including issues such as deeper trade integration with EU and anti-terrorism.

- A programme to support the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), focused on trade integration among South Asian countries. (EARSP)

- The efforts made by the EU and South Asia to improve their multi-dimensional relations on the multilateral and the bilateral level.

Earlier, the Commission first produced an overall Asia Strategy paper in 1994 under the title 'Toward a New Asia Strategy'. It was also emphasis on following key points:

- Strengthening the EU's engagement with Asia in the political and security fields;

- Further strengthening mutual trade and investment flows with the region;

- Demonstrating the EU's effectiveness as a partner in reducing poverty in Asia;

- Promoting respect for human rights, democracy, good governance and the rule of law;

- Building global alliances with key Asian partners (to address global challenges and within international organizations);

- Strengthening mutual awareness between the EU and Asia.

(Toward a New Asia Strategy/ EU)
2-2 The EU’s priorities in the SAARC

The EU’s relations with the SAARC countries are primarily governed by economic and business considerations. The main objective of the current and long term policy of both sides is focused on economic interests. However, this main element of the EU’s policy is part of the larger framework of EU policies in the political, strategic and economic realms.

The following are the priorities of the Union in the region:

- To strengthen the Union’s economic presence in South Asia in order to maintain EU’s leading role in the world economy. Establish a significant presence in South Asia which will allow Europe to ensure that its interests are taken fully into account in this key region.

- To contribute to peace and stability in South Asia by promoting international cooperation and understanding. The Union is interested in widening and deepening its political and economic relations with the countries of South Asia.

- To promote economic development of the less prosperous countries and regions in Asia. Given that South Asia for the predictable future will continue to contain the world’s largest concentration of poor people, the Union and its member-states will need to continue to contribute to poverty alleviation.
To contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy, good governance and the rule of law in the region which would eventually help it to gain access to trade and business in the region. (Ramzan, 2004, 21)

Since the observer status in 2006, the EU has greatly valued cooperation and regional integration in South Asia. The EU is strongly committed to multilateral and regional cooperation in the world and has expressed the resolve to specially contribute to making such cooperative ventures more successful. The EU acknowledges that besides cooperation with countries at the bilateral level, dealing with partners at the regional level is of wider and more lasting benefit. Thus the EU has greatly welcomed and encouraged the growing tendency in Asia towards regional cooperative schemes, as long as these are not closed organizations, but are outward-looking. The evolution of SAARC since its inception in 1985 has been watched with great interest by the EU and the latter wants the SAARC project to meet with unalloyed success. It has expressed the conviction that the Association could play a dynamic role in building confidence between member states. This would help the latter to overcome their mutual misunderstandings. However, there are also those in the EU who believe that the South Asian psyche and the existence of strong interest groups in that region may not allow mistrust and hostility to end, instead understanding and trust be established. The EU has at various times expressed readiness to help improve the working of SAARC through technical assistance. Being the most important economic partner of the SAARC countries, the EU has
occasionally tried to exert some moral influence over SAARC member states, by reminding them of its own historical experience of cooperation between sovereign countries, with diverse interests. (Naveed, 2002, 127)

A very slow and modest start was made to direct EC-SAARC relations. Some technical meetings eventually took place between the Commission and the SAARC Secretariat in 1993 and 1994, both in Brussels and Kathmandu respectively. This resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 1996. Under the MoU the European Commission would help the SAARC countries with their special expertise in areas such as the Market from which the process of economic cooperation within SAARC could draw benefit. The MoU listed the following areas for cooperation.

- Facilitating SAARC's access to the Single European Market;
- Implementation of the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Scheme, including cumulative rules of origin;
- Helping evolve common standards and harmonization with international obligations. (Gupwell, 2002, 113)

The EC has made some amendments in its customs regulations to enable SAARC member states to take advantage of the cumulative rules of origin under the Commission's GSP Scheme. The purpose of the MoU was to overcome the lack of political vigor in the SAARC. However, the internal problems of SAARC prevented the implementation of the MoU in an effective manner. The Commission has been making efforts to formulate a new, broader programme of cooperation with SAARC, which would be
aimed at promoting the harmonization of standards; facilitating trade; raising awareness in the South Asian region about the benefits of regional cooperation; and promote networking in the field of business in SAARC. Under the MOU, the EU promised to provide GSP facilities to products from SAARC countries made with raw material from any SAARC country.

The EU is quite aware of the problem that SAARC faces in handling political issues. It also knows that SAARC member states lack of experience in regional integration, even simply cooperation. Keeping in view all these drawbacks, the EU is only entity that has the experience and prestige to help consolidate the ongoing process through its economic influence in the region. The EU countries have a very long experience of dealing with conflicts having gone through innumerable wars and conflicts and know how conflicts can be prevented and resolved. The EU feels that SAARC has the potential to turn into an effective organization for regional cooperation, although SAARC has been held back because of rivalries and long-standing disputes between member states. One of the major goals of SAARC is to create a South Asian Economic Union. In the light of the 12th SAARC Summit held in Islamabad 2004, the EU welcomed the outcome of the summit. It particularly endorsed, the decisions made for a South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) which created a framework for the establishment of a free trade zone covering 1.6 billion people. The adoption of the SAFTA framework treaty was a milestone that should further stimulate
intra-regional trade and integration. The EU expressed willingness to enhance its support to the SAARC and provide it with technical assistance for creating a free trade area in the region. (EU-SAARC Relations).

During the 10th and 12th EU-India Summit in 2009, and 2012 respectively, both sides reaffirmed their strong willingness to strengthen cooperation between the SAARC and the EU. From August 2012, the Head of Delegation of the EU to Nepal has been the officially-appointed EU representative to SAARC. Besides EU’s Observer status in SAARC, dialogue takes place at various levels. The Inter-regional Dialogue on Democracy is one such mechanism at the highest levels of EU and the SAARC Secretariat. The Third High-Level Meeting of the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy was held in May 2013 at the European Commission in Brussels, and was attended by the SAARC Secretary-General. Addressing the meeting, the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso highlighted the importance of partnerships and cooperation with and among regional and international organizations as a way to reinforce inclusive global governance. Addressing a talk program-EU-SAARC Relations: The EU delegation for SAARC - Rensje Teerink has said that the EU is willing to further deepen its partnership with SAARC. The EU envoy urges that the EU plans to continue its cooperation with SAARC during the financial perspectives 2014-20. (Teerink Speech 2014)
2-3 Factors Responsible For Less Progress of SAARC:
SAARC is an organization with strong ambitions, but is constrained by regional politics. Compared to other regional organizations especially the EU or even ASEAN. Its record of achievement is hardly impressive. During the last 29 years of its existence, SAARC has been finding out ways and means to foster development and cooperation in the region. From the start, SAARC’s ability to go forward was hampered by the rule that decision would be taken unanimously, by the complex nature of the procedures, by the decision not to include disputed areas and finally by the absence of a free trade treaty. The tension between India and Pakistan are without any doubt, the greatest hindrance in the success of the SAARC enterprise. For over one half of a century the two neighbors have remained mired in an adversarial position which has been one of neither war nor peace. The responsibility for changing these precarious situation rests on both sides but India being the largest political player obviously carries a greater share of the responsibility for changing a highly volatile situation which can degenerate into hostilities between the two countries which possess nuclear weapons. The most serious hindrance is the asymmetry in nearly all realms between SAARC’s largest member state, India and the other member states. India is nearly thrice the size of all the other states put together in area and population. This preponderance is reflected in its economy technological development and military prowess. Bilateral issues with India have been compounded by the overleaping of ethnicity, language, and religion in India and its South Asian neighbors. Thus, the latter have been seeking
links with other powers and regions to counterbalance overarching influence of India. In this context Pakistan has made serious efforts in developing close relations with west Asia and the gulf region by using its Islamic identity. Bangladesh, also playing up its Islamic roots, has begun to develop its relation with its Muslim neighbors in Southeast Asia – Indonesia and Malaysia. Nepal has also made sporadic attempts resisting Indian pressure by developing closer ties with China. Indian strategists suggested that New Delhi, would be better off in ASEAN then it is in SAARC. (Naveed, 2002, 29)

3- Conclusion /Recommendations

In the new millennium, relations between both EU and SAARC regions are becoming even closer and more important as new ties are formed in areas of trade, investments, technology, security, immigration and culture. Being an influential global power the EU is very keen to have durable relationships with the countries of South Asia. It is particularly eager to maximize its economic and trade links with the region. Its increasing engagement with South Asia could prove very significant in the times to come. South Asia is economically very backward as compared to the EU. Thus considerable efforts are required to redesign the existing policies and to move into new domains where the mutual interests of both would be served. The magnitude of this effort calls for a more efficient use of all available resources. This also calls for a set of clear policy priorities in a manner best suited to the individual circumstances of each country and the region as a whole. It would be
detrimental to the economic interests of South Asia if it fails to act as a single entity. Thus the South Asian countries too need to prioritize the objectives in their relations with the EU. In order to achieve the maximum advantage from their relations with the EU, the South Asian countries must:

- Continue to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations with EU countries and make bilateral and collective efforts to protect their economic and trade interests,
- Strengthen the bargaining position of SAARC through transregional alliances,
- Make efforts for realizing a diversified multi-polar world order based on peace and justice,
- Enhance and strengthen peace and security in the South Asian region which would make the region more attractive for foreign trade and investment.
- Strengthen institutional links with EU countries and encourage them to participate in regional development.
- Public diplomacy is another area where EU and SAARC can work together for more integration in South Asia. As was done in Europe to promote integration, the benefits of integration and the cost of not integrating needs to be further explained to the South Asian public. For that, the experience of European integration can be a relevant tool for SAARC countries to learn lesson from EU (Teerink, 2014)
Thus, both regions have their respective interests and some of these coincide and therefore, enhance the potential for cooperation. The policymakers of the EU and South Asia realize that it would be mutually beneficial to explore new and innovative avenues of cooperation and collaboration in different fields to give the existing relationship a firmer footing. Economic and political instability in South Asia not only acts as a constraint on profitable trade and investment but can also affect areas regarded as critical to global security. There is vast economic potential in the South Asian region, which if tapped in an environment of greater internal harmony and external participation can help eradicate poverty, affecting a fifth of the human race. This, in turn, would provide a vast market for trade and investments for the EU. So it is imperative that the EU takes an active interest in the region.

**SAARC and European Union at a Glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official name</th>
<th>The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)</th>
<th>European Union (EU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motto</strong></td>
<td>Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity.</td>
<td>“United in diversity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member States</strong></td>
<td>eightmembers</td>
<td>Twenty eightmembers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>De-Facto Capital</strong></td>
<td>Kathmandu, Nepal</td>
<td>Brussels (Belgium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Territory</strong></td>
<td>5135602 (Km²)</td>
<td>Total: 4,381,376 km² (7th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>1,622,473 Million est. (2014 estimate)</td>
<td>507,416 Million est. (2014 estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population density</strong></td>
<td>350 persons km²</td>
<td>115.8 persons km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion:</strong></td>
<td>Hinduism, Islam,</td>
<td>Roman Catholic, Protestant,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism</td>
<td>Orthodox, Islam, Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Structure</strong></td>
<td>Inter-Governmental Cooperation Regional Alliance</td>
<td>Inter-Governmental and Supranationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
<td>English (official) Bengali, Dari, Dzongkha, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Nepali Pashto, Punjabi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Sinhala, Tamil, Tibetan, and others</td>
<td>Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish; official languages are listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP (PPP)</strong></td>
<td>$9.052 trillion (2014 estimate)</td>
<td>$18.124 trillion (2014 estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP per capita PPP</strong></td>
<td>$3,993.9 est. (2012-14)</td>
<td>$35,849 est. 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HDI Ranking 2013</strong></td>
<td>0.611 Medium</td>
<td>0.876 very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>De-colonized</strong></td>
<td>Mostly after 1947 from the United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**References**

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(6) **SAARC and China:**

**Emerging Geopolitical and Geostrategic perspective**

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Abstract

Most of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries and the China are close neighbours, thus geopolitically and geo-strategically are intertwined with each other. Most of the strategic scholars are of the opinion that China is not only next door to SAARC rather it is having strong geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the SAARC region. China wanted to elevate its relationship from observer to the full membership of SAARC. Almost members of the SAARC supporting Chinese move except India. In this case, SAARC is the near future is going to face lot of geopolitical upheaval. Similarly, in the post 9/11, US has been engaging per se in the region. After signing Bilateral Security Agreement between US and Afghanistan and SOFA with NATO troops, it is crystal clear that, ISAF and NATO troops are going to leave by the late 2014. In such changing geopolitical and geostrategic scenario, China has huge strategic and security concerns in this region indeed. Against this background, the paper will focus how China is engaging with SAARC for its strategic and security interests in the region? Can cooperation and closeness between China and South Asia will contribute to the strengthening of the organisation after the post 2014 post ISAF withdrawal in the Afghanistan?

Key Words: SAARC, China, India, post 2014 Afghanistan, Terrorism, Pakistan.
Introduction

An organisation that coordinated the South Asian countries in regionalism is celebrated through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The initiative of making a regional forum for cooperation was planned first by Bangladesh President Zia-ur-Rehman in 1980. Nepal and Sri Lanka did not give second thought to the idea of regional cooperation in the terms of SAARC whereas on the other hand India and Pakistan were apprehensive over the idea of SAARC. The hostility over Kashmir issue further made India and Pakistan suspicious over the move (Dash, 1996). India was dominant in South Asia and when the proposal was floated by the neighbour for SAARC, and then it did not take up the idea of SAARC very positively. Indian leadership thought South Asian neighbours under the umbrella of this forum may gang up against it. However, after four years intensive discussion, SAARC was launched at a summit at Dhaka in December 1985.

Geostrategic Significance of SAARC

South Asia is a sub region of the Asian continent. It comprises of the modern states of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka which covers about 4,480,000 km². This region cooperates through the SAARC (Budania 2001: 78) by giving more emphasis on the principal goal of, “to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia, to improve their quality of life, to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential” (Bhasin 2004 : 492). SAACR is one of the most densely-populated regions of the world. Its population comprised of approximately 1.75 billion people living in the region (Human Development Report 2010: 145).

SAARC an organisation of South Asian region is moored in Indian Ocean and on account of that it holds very pivotal position in the geopolitical and geostrategic landscape. It has been remained as the
crossroad for migration of the culture, religion, civilization, language etc. In the ancient time it has been known for its spices and natural wealth. It has attracted the attention of major external powers in the region on account of these riches. It has not only connected South East Asia to Middle East Asia but has also worked as a junction to connect Asia to Europe through Central Asia. This region remained as quite sensitive and strategic on account of its encirclement by the very ambitious powers like China and Russia. It is a bridge between and the Malaccan Strait which are playing very strategic role in geopolitics and geo-economics (Devare 2006: 19). Indian Ocean on its South has remained strategically important throughout the recorded history being arteries of world trade and rich in natural resources. Its geostrategic significance was further increased with the establishment of Diego Garcia base by US, just South of Maldives (Moshaver, Ziba 1991: 52-53).

Given of the enormous size and military technology, India and Pakistan are holding geo-strategically dominant position in the South Asia. India’s central location increased its strength in comparison with its neighbours. It touches territorial and maritime borders of all the South Asian countries (Gopal 1996: 218). Other South Asian countries can only reach one another by crossing through Indian territory. On the other hand, Pakistan is a bridge between South Asia and South West Asia. Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia are rich in energy resources (Lodhi 2012: 31).

With the onset of globalization and liberalization and introduction of economic reforms, India and China’s economies are on high trajectory and to sustain this growth rate they needed sustainable energy supply. On the one hand, both China and India are deficient in energy resources whereas the Middle East and Central Asia are rich sources of energy. However, with the interventions of major powers, stability of in these regions is a distant dream. Pakistan holds a pivotal position being sitting on the energy routes. India, Pakistan and Iran (IPI) and Turkmenistan,
Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) proposed pipe lines corroborate the geo-strategic importance of Pakistan in the region not only for the region but in the adjacent regions also. Pakistan is a short cut route for IPI project. However, India could access to Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian energy sources through the maritime routes using Iran ports but it is proving costlier ones. Hence, Pakistan provides short cut routes for trade and energy from these regions which enhanced its geostrategic significance.

Seeing the strategic significance of these countries all the external and regional countries are interested in developing the relationship with the South Asian region for their vested interests. The regional countries among themselves are engaged in conflicts that results loss of their both men and material and the external powers have been able to realize their geopolitical and geostrategic interests by heightening regional conflicts among them. In order to overcome the hindrance, there is need for strong collaboration so that the obstacles will be prevented and the development of the region occurred. In the recent 18th Summit held in Kathmandu (Nepal), members countries expressed their strong commitment to lighten the regional cooperation by expanding multilateral cooperation in order to achieve peace, stability and prosperity of the entire region. This means that the countries of the region should must develop trust among themselves and see each other as their equal partners not as subordinates just take the example of European Union, ASEAN and other organisation which had achieved landmark success at the international level because of their uniformity and consensus.

Asymmetry of the South Asian: A Big Geopolitical Challenge for SAARC

India is a major country of SAARC. It stands better in many terms such as technology, economy, demography and many more over its neighbours. Even with the entry of Afghanistan, India still alone covers more than 50 per cent area of the SAARC. From strategic point of view,
India is unmatchable in South Asia. Its military strength and military expenditure is exponentially increased over the time which is considered serious security concern for neighbouring countries (Cohen 2001: 8). India’s geostrategic location has made the SAARC region ‘Indo-centric’ region or ‘Indian’ subcontinent (Chakrabarti 2012:4). For these given facts, SAARC’s performance and non-performance is basically determined by India alone which led to the fostering the environment of mutual doubt and suspicion among them.

For the given of these dynamics, its neighbour did not take it up well. All Indian activities are taken with suspicious and doubts. India’s role in Bangladesh, blockade of Nepal, IPKF in Sri Lanka and intervention in Maldives were some of the activities on part of India which had created apprehension in SAARC members. In order to counter Indian influence in SAARC, these neighbouring countries wanted to bring China in this regional organization. Because of these apprehensions, regional cooperation had not been taking place in SAARC. Meanwhile, regional cooperation have started taking place in Europe, North America and many more parts. The SAARC was established with a purpose to work together to ensure the all-round development.9

India alone has been touching and sharing the all SAARC members except Afghanistan and Maldives. The asymmetry in terms of size, population and strategic power of India in the SAARC contributed in heightening the fear among its neighbouring countries. This fear gives birth to geopolitics in the SAARC and this geopolitics has become a major challenge for this regional organization. Against this background, other SAARC members are seeking strategic support of external powers in general and China in particular that was perceived as a means of survival. Exploiting this tense relationships among SAARC members

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extended principled opposition to Indian hegemony. Thus, SAARC members have been developing cordial relations with China as a means of restricting India. This geopolitical conflict is posing major challenges for SAARC, determining its performance and non-performance.

**China and SAARC in the Changing Geopolitical Dynamics**

During the 18th SAARC Summit in Nepal (November 26-27, 2014), China wanted to “elevate its partnership” with SAARC from the current status of observer. A Xinhua report on the grouping said that SAARC’s economic and political organisation now needs to redefine the nine observers’ role and to expand in the future. This statement strongly portrayed that China is much interested in getting the permanent membership of the organisation.10

Since becoming an observer in 2006, China had sent delegations to attend SAARC summits and keep deepening cooperation in various fields. In the current 18th Summit, China was represented by its Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin. He expressed China’s commitment that its leadership would like to maintain beneficial mutual cooperation with SAARC based on peace, stability and prosperity. China has been remained competitive in expanding its strategic footprints in South Asia by providing considerable amount of economic and strategic assistance to these countries.

Asymmetry and tense relations among SAARC countries are providing fertile ground for external powers influence in the SAARC in general and China in particular. India has not been sharing good terms with SAARC countries. For the given dominance of India in SAARC, all members of the SAARC wanted to elevate the Chinese observer status to full membership in order to restrict India. If China becomes a member country, it will pose a serious threat to Indian geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the South Asia. India is seen as an uncrowned

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10 China says it wants to elevate partnership with SAARC. The Times of India, 25 Nov, 2014.
king of South Asia and its influence on the member countries have had a significant bearing in setting their political course. Whenever Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives faced internal problems they looked to India for help. However, with China as a member of the SAARC, India’s position will be seriously challenged and it is quite possible that the most powerful democratic country in the region would be overpowered by Communist China, due to its hawkish diplomacy and growing economic influence across the world.

Columnist Pushpa Ranjan, Editor-in-Chief of Asia News reported that China is silently playing its card to influence the geopolitical environment of South Asia. On one hand, it has engaged Nepali politicians and diplomats to push for getting SAARC membership. While on the other hand, Governments of the region like Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and now, Nepal have been lobbying for membership of China. He has cited February 2014 Summit of SAARC Foreign Ministers where Abdulla Yameen called for an expansion of SAARC and it is likely that Maldives will propose for granting SAARC membership to China.\textsuperscript{11} Over the past decade, Beijing wanted to undertake a proactive role in regional regimes and organisations. Getting a strong diplomatic support from almost SAARC members for its full membership, its confidence has been exponentially grown to play an important role in the SAARC (Lanteigne 2009: 68).

India strongly resisted the Chinese expanding strategic footprints in its backyard and thus, therefore, India is opposing China’s proposal for full membership in SAARC. However, India has been facing lot of pressure from SAARC members in general and Pakistan and Nepal in particular. These countries are supporting Chinese membership for

counter balancing the Indian influence in the SAARC which could be substantiated by Jetly statement,“China is seen by many of India’s smaller neighbours as an effective counterweight to India’s preponderant power” (Jetly 2010: 13). China has also been sending its diplomats to attend the SAARC meetings its geopolitical and geostrategic goals (Frost 2010). These goals gradually can reduce Indian influence in the region.

**Emerging Geostrategic Challenges**

China is on higher trajectory. Sea lanes of communications are important life line of any economy and thus, it wanted safety and security of SLOCs for its growing trade and need of energy. China is deficient in energy. Africa and the Gulf region are the major source for China’s energy requirement. Its trade with Europe, the Middle East, and Africa are exponentially growing. Thus, sea lanes of communications are highly infested by maritime terrorism, sea piracy drug trafficking, small arms trafficking etc. Because of these problems, political and strategic stability are of the South Asian countries are at stake. China is having lot of geo-economic interests in the region. Against this background, the developing good neighbourly relations with SAARC members holds pivotal position in Chinese strategic policy vis-à-vis South Asia.

South Asia region is a dominant factor in China’s foreign policy plan as it facilitates in achieving its geopolitical and geostrategic goals. It has crucial role in stability and development of China in various ways. China shares a long border with five SAARC countries including Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Presently, SAARC members, are highly infested by the internal security by terrorism and thus, South Asia has become one of the most turbulent regions around China. Tibet and Xinjiang are neighbouring to India, Nepal and Pakistan. The political and security instability of these countries are also having spill-over effects on these Chinese volatile territories. In addition to these strategic concerns, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is posing major security concern for China. These anti-China insurgents have been seeking shelter in the Pakistan and Afghanistan tribal regions. India and Nepal are major shelter stations for exiled Tibetans along with their leaders.
The drug trafficking is posing a serious challenge not only for China but SAARC as well (Chouvy 2002).

China and the US are not sharing good terms during the Cold War and even in the post-Cold War the same is going on. China is militarily and economically emerging as a major power. On account of this, India and the US are coming closer and this strategic proximity between these two hostile countries is becoming a major concern for China. In order to over this geostrategic concern, SAARC can help out China from this Indo-US strategic encirclement. US military assistance to Pakistan, its strategic presence in Afghanistan, and Indo-US Nuclear Deal and strategic cooperation are being considered major challenges by China. The US-India strategic proximity has brought the US to its doorsteps. China has already been felt encircled in East Asia. The US expanding strategic footprints in South Asia/SAARC would definitely disliked by China.

For China and SAARC, post-2014 Afghanistan would emerge one of the major strategic challenges. After the signing of the BSA and SOFA, the US and ISAF troops are going to leave Afghanistan by the late 2014. Most of the strategic scholars are of the opinion that there is a possibility of the re-emergence of the Taliban and other terrorist's outfits not only in Afghanistan rather these groups will have spill over effect through in the entire South Asia, Central Asia including China. China and SAARC members have already been highly infested by the terrorism. Keeping Xinajing and Kashmir in perspective, post-2014 Afghanistan would be a serious concern for SAARC as well as for China. China, through the SAARC forum could engage with the member countries to jointly work for stability in Afghanistan.

Post 2014 Afghanistan, its political establishments, economy and social structure would remain highly uncertain. It is considered that post-2014 Afghanistan likely to be suffering from political instability, worsening security situation, weak economy and violence. If the SAARC and China help out Afghanistan in terms of security mechanisms, economic assistance then post-2014, stable political system could be put
in place. The immediate and close neighbours of Afghanistan have geostrategic interests in Afghanistan. China is one of them which is very immediate neighbour having the capacity to help out Afghanistan out of the possible security and economic crisis. In case, the immediate and close neighbour will not come forward, naturally it would be supported by US and its allies. That is not the solution of Afghan problem which could be substantiated from the engagement of US in Iraq and many more regions.

**China- SAARC: Needed Reciprocated Cooperation**

Many regional organizations have proved themselves very successful. They proved their validity of their existence. Intra-trade is experienced very higher in some of the regional organizations such as EU and ASEAN despite their political difference whereas on the other hand, SAARC is standing nowhere in terms of intra-trade. Thus, it has been failed to realize its lofty goals on account of prevailing geopolitical and geostrategic challenges. These problems with geopolitical completion can be sorted out. The problems of the SAARC need holistic approach. On the reciprocation basis, India should support Chinese full membership to SAARC whereas China should support Indian membership in the SCO. Moreover, SAARC needs lot of FDI, which can be provided by China along with India. Similarly, India needs energy from Central Asia and in that way, matured and elevated engagements with SCO could help in many ways. Similarly, China and SAARC are facing many geostrategic problems such as terrorism, secessionism, fundamentalism, drug trafficking, small arms proliferation in general and post-2014 Afghanistan in particular. These problems only could be sorted out with regional and consistent approach. Thus, if China cooperates with SAARC in tackling these problems, it will really prove panacea for many geostrategic challenges. Coming closer, more intra-FDI and trade will increase which ultimately will be helpful in sorting socio-economic backwardness for which SAARC stood
Conclusion

South Asia is playing important role in Chinese foreign policy. With the enhanced strategic proximity of Indo-US, SAARC has inevitable for China. Moreover, SAARC has been plagued by asymmetry as India is dominating it in the terms of size, economy, demography, military and science and technology. This asymmetry is becoming a major challenge for its success. Chinese expanding geostrategic footprints is a major concern of India. Moreover, India’s intervention created apprehension in the neighbouring countries. In order to counter Indian dominance, SAARC members wanted to elevate the Chinese observer status to full membership which is strongly been opposed by India. Out of this crisis, SAARC has been overshadowed by these geopolitical and geostrategic competitions. Thus its become inevitable to cooperate reciprocately. India should support China’s membership to SAARC and similarly, China should support India in the SCO as a full member. By this mutual reciprocation, both the countries can achieve geopolitical and geostrategic goal for which SAARC stand for.

References


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(7) Governance’s primacy in the SAARC region
India's destiny to play the lead role

Bihari Krishna Shrestha
an anthropologist,
former additional secretary in the government of Nepal

(Mr. Shrestha is an anthropologist with an MA from Michigan State University (1967) and a former additional secretary in the government of Nepal. He has published a few research undertakings in anthropology and governance in Nepal. As a practicing anthropologist and a government official, he had the distinct opportunity to transfer the learning from a centuries old traditional irrigation system in western mountains of Nepal to introduce the institution of user groups as the mainstay of local development in the communities.)

SAARC failing to deepen

With the ascent of PM Narendra Modi in India and the interest he has shown its activities in recent days, the SAARC system seems to be headed for a major re-orientation, clearly, a new lease of life. However, the task remains gargantuan in its magnitude as well as creativity and courage that it would take. After all, SAARC would not be making sense unless it establishes itself as an instrument of growth in the region that is more than the sum of the member states achieving them on their own outside of the alliance. In the mean time, China, an observer country in SAARC, too has emerged as a significant factor in the equation with its enhanced bilateral relationship with most of the SAARC members. Therefore, SAARC’s role as a supra national cooperative body has to be both complementary and incremental to national initiatives of member countries that would enable them to benefit in terms of dynamic and inclusive growth from this fast changing scenario. While the South Asian regional alliance has taken a few momentous decisions during its existence of nearly two decades such as SAFTA, they have made little headway to make an impact in the lives of the millions in the subcontinent. Given the peculiar geography of South Asia with the giant country, India, situated right in the middle of the smaller neighbours around it with none of them having contiguous borders between them except between Pakistan and Afghanistan, India’s role in the cooperative organisation is destined to be pivotal. This situation was most eloquently articulated by the then erudite President of Sri Lanka, late Julius Jayawardhane who had simply declared while addressing the third SAARC summit in Kathmandu in early Eighties that "SAARC is India and India is SAARC".)
Furthermore, even as the south Asian countries were going through the motions of regional cooperation, Nepal, for one, had been consistently paying the price of being landlocked which the articulate sections of the Nepalese society understand more as being “India-locked”. In specific terms, Nepal had to go through three historically painful experiences at the hands of its “big-brother” India just during the last quarter century. The first one was the protracted embargo against Nepal lasting for more than a year and half causing untold suffering for the people of the country on the flimsy alibi that Nepal imported some arms from China, apparently to the contravention of the provisions of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship that, however, lacked sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of the Nepali people, firstly because it was exacted from the Rana rulers during the dying days of their oligarchy and secondly, it has been seen as being highly unequal against Nepal. The second atrocity came in 1991 when India trucked some hundred thousand Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin from the borders of Bhutan and dumped them into Nepal, a non-contiguous third country, and studiously failed ever since to help resolve the crisis. And thirdly, had India not hosted the Nepalese Maoist leaders and enabled them to operate their command and control room from the Indian soil, Nepal, by any reckoning, would surely not have lost some 17,000 innocent lives in their senseless killing and would not have been going through the kind of political instability and uncertainty that it is plagued with today. As one observer put it, "New Delhi’s foreign policy behavior in South Asia is dramatically different from its international image as the world’s most populous liberal democracy"; it is designed to keep the neighbouring countries “intrinsically unstable”. In the case of Nepal in particular, " New Delhi’s strategic goal is to exert a de facto dominance over Nepal which it does not enjoy through de jure means, a condition of perpetual disruption serves this end" (Shah, S., 2004). Thus, the profession of good neighbourliness and mutual cordiality in the annual rituals of SAARC summits did little to prevent and make amends for such deliberately tortured relationships. The futility of the regional organization as it exists was once more vividly dramatized in the recent summit in Kathmandu. Even a mere handshake—the only one during the summit--between Indian PM Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaj Sharif, in its final session drew so much applause from the audience as if that was the pinnacle of SAARC’ s achievement. All these constitute the unmistakable sign of the south Asian regional grouping’s failure to deepen mutual cooperation regionally all these years.

By all indications, much remains to be done in order to make SAARC a meaningful entity for regional cooperation in South Asia in the real sense of the term. Clearly, major intractability remains, the foremost being the all too familiar Kashmir problem. However, for the first time in many decades, the Modi government in India has a clear majority in the parliament that could go a long way towards seeking a courageous solution to that long festering problem once and for all. That would go a
long way in re-crafting SAARC as a more meaningful regional cooperation organization and allow India to play its destined role as the permanent SAARC leader.

**SAARC region: predominantly rural, poor and feudal**

One of the defining characteristics of the SAARC region is that a significant proportion of their people live in rural areas and generally mired in poverty which itself is structurally dictated by caste stratification in its various manifestations and feudalistic governance that results from it. To take the instance of Nepal in this case, the World Bank global poverty estimates of 2012 has commended the country for having graduated from being the poorest south Asian country in 1990 to third poorest, ahead of Bangladesh and India. However, this has largely been made possible mainly due to remittance receipts that, according to the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) of 2010-2011, benefit a whopping 56 percent of the families in the country. Otherwise, some 70 percent of the country's workforce remains engaged in subsistence agriculture that contributes only around 30 percent to the national GDP. The sector is characterised by relative dearth of farm land—now standing at 0.1 ha per capita—coupled with chronically low productivity that have resulted in massive rural underemployment (47%) and pronounced rural poverty that, according to the NLSS 2010-11, stood at 27.43 percent as against 15.46 percent for urban Nepal (CBS, 2011). Due mainly to the country’s landlocked position and other limitations in terms of its quality of politics, its non-agricultural sector has remained chronically miniscule, thus, failing to absorb the ever expanding surplus workforce domestically. While India has traditionally been the safety valve for Nepal’s unemployed, today the outmigration of its workforce has turned into an exodus, thus embellishing the remittance intake even as its opportunity for domestic economic development remains severely compromised. So, if Nepal has made gains in poverty reduction, it does not result from its achievements in domestic social and economic development. It stands more as an indicator of the chronic debilitation of the nation’s economy.

**Westminster system in a feudalistic socio-political context, a recipe for bad governance in Nepal**

At the heart of this malaise lay the chronically poor governance conditions in Nepal. Following the end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951, Nepal, for the most part, was first governed under the King-led party-less tiered Panchayat system between 1960-1990 that by all indications had been the adaptation of the tiered structure based on “panchayats” proposed by the then ascetic, erudite and highly respected politician, Jaya Prakash Narayan of India for his own country in early Sixties under
his “Plea for the reformulation of Indian polity” to ensure political accountability structurally tied down all way to the grassroots. He was invited to Kathmandu as the royal guest sometime before the King announced the tiered system for Nepal. The panchayat system which at a later stage went on to adult suffrage for its parliament collapsed in 1990-more as a result of the Indian embargo mentioned above—leading to the restoration of the Westminster style multiparty parliamentary democracy in Nepal. But, upon hindsight, this event happened to be the proverbial jumping from the frying pan into the fire. In either case, the common denominator has been the gross misrule over the country that left the development aspirations of the people largely neglected. While under the Panchayat system, there was some semblance of emphasis on development—necessitated for the most part by the monarchy’s compulsion to be seen as being progressive in the eyes of the world—the restoration of the multiparty system quickly degenerated into a case under which election to public office is taken more as a license for boundless corruption under the stated alibi that they need money for next election and for their own parties. While the political situation had been interrupted by the Maoists’ decade-long strife (1996-2006), these Maoist politicians too behave no differently from others. The country has remained politically unstable ever since the restoration of the multiparty system in the country in 1990. The parties vie all the time for power and for making illicit money. According to the latest Transparency International ranking, Nepal today remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world and the third most corrupt in South Asia. While Nepal too has a few anti-corruption watchdog agencies, the fact remains that, except for a very limited few, no politician has been caught and charged, just the small time government employees. As things stand today, in most cases, a successful politicians in Nepal is necessarily a corrupt man. The socio-economic plight of the people has been worsening with added acceleration, now making the country overwhelmingly dependent on remittance as mentioned above. Should the world order be somehow drastically disrupted forcing the three million odd Nepali migrants back home to its situation of stark joblessness, it will be well nigh impossible for Nepal to hold on to itself as an organized country, with the problem possibly spilling over into neighbouring countries.

The basic problem lies in the inherent incompatibilities between the stubbornly feudalistic nature of Nepalese society and the demands of the Westminster model of democracy for a more rational and secular behavior on the part of the people. Given the fact that orthodox Hinduism has been the basis of state polity and inter-personal relations in Nepal for millennia, there has been a traditionally deriving convergence of high caste status, economic prowess and political power that places the political power in the hands of few feudal elites in the communities. While the country’s ethnic landscape also includes a large number of casteless, generally Tibeto-Burman, ethnic groups—in
contrast to Hindu caste groups being Indo-Aryan—consisting of over sixty different linguistic groups representing some 35 percent of the country’s population, they too behave by the rules of the Hindu caste system due to centuries of what have been called “demographic intermingling” (Hofer, Andreas, 2004). The most significant indicator of this phenomenon has been that they too observe pollution against the traditionally untouchable Hindu caste groups, now referred to as Dalits, and place themselves immediately above the latter in four-tier hierarchy of the Hindu caste system in Nepal. By and large, the high caste status—represented mainly by the Brahmin and Chhetri castes—is generally accompanied by material prosperity mainly in the form of land ownership, although relative to the level of resource endowment of various regions in this geographically diverse country, it is this combination of caste status and economic prowess that characterise the feudal elites in the country in the hills as well as in the Gangetic plains, terai, to the south. These feudal elites ascriptively find themselves in positions of political leadership in the communities from the grassroots up and traditionally thrive on resource extraction from the community without accountability to go with it.

Another aspect of the feudalistic system is that most people remain educationally and economically disadvantaged, existing more as satellites to the mutually competing power centres that comprise this small club of feudal elites. This political formation has remained unchanged irrespective of whatever the form of government, Panchayat or Westminster style of democracy in Nepal. Given the fact that extraction of resources without accountability has been the traditional mainstay of these feudal leaders, corruption in public offices too are accepted as given. The country is thus stuck in a representative system under which the elected politicians face no compulsion to represent the cause of their electors. This has been the main difference between the countries in the West—where Westminster system of democracy has proven to be the basis for their progress and development—and those in south Asia in particular where the political system has for the most part failed to make any difference to its feudal make up and consequent lack of progress. One must not be misled by the glamour and glitter of a few high profile infrastructural facilities here and there—most of which feed the feudals’ penchant for major corruption. Despite them, most people continue to languish in poverty and destitution.

**The innovative region**

Despite many limitations, SAARC countries also remain the major centre of many an innovation in social and economic development, with India and Bangladesh known for major initiatives in this regard. The underlying features of these innovations have basically been the good governance conditions that have assured proper use of resources that
almost automatically guarantees development benefits for the participants. In the case of Nepal too, she has distinguished in two areas in the developing world. The first one has been the restoration of her forest wealth. In order to forfeit the ownership claims by the earlier Rana rulers and their courtiers, the government nationalised all forests in 1957. However, it led to its steady destruction, bring the country to the verge of desertification by mid-Eighties. By that time, the government had already legislated decentralization through an Act in 1982 whose distinctive feature was the provision of User Groups, a concept that comes from the study of centuries old traditional irrigation system in the western mountains of the country. The user groups empower, not the elected officials of the village panchayats, now called village development committee, but the direct users of a given development project in the communities. Based on this concept, the government introduced the institution of Forest User Groups in 1988 and handed over the local forests to such groups of traditional users. The result has been dramatic. By year 2000 the depleted forests had staged a comeback. Today, there are some 18000 FUGs managing one of the best forests in the world that also happens to be more productive than its earlier version. For that reason, Nepal today is known as the Mecca and Medina of community forest in the world. In similar vein, Nepal also empowered the mothers through Mothers’ Groups for taking care of health of women and children in 1988 too that also include one of their own members designated and trained as Female Community Health Volunteer. Today, there are 52000 such Mothers’ Groups and equal number of FCHVs in the country. While this arrangement empowered the mothers to demand services from the government health posts and bring them to the door step of the mothers and children in the communities, this institutional arrangement has enabled the country to rise from the bottom of the pile and rise to the top of the table in world ranking in meeting the MDGs in child survival and maternal mortality rate reduction.

The secret of the success of these institutional innovations lay in the fact that they provide good governance conditions due to the empowerment of the beneficiaries themselves in the management of the services irrespective of their caste, creed, gender, or economic status differences. These organizations have been the forums where the stakeholders get to protect their own stakes because they are entitled to participate in the decision making of those organizations. Thus, the right to participate has more or less nullified the traditionally deriving power of the feudalistic decision making in the communities and has made the feudal elites themselves—who incidentally continue to retain the leadership of these institutions in the communities—directly accountable for their actions to all members of their groups including the poorest and low caste people.

However, the tragedy of the situation has been that while these innovations date back to the Panchayat days, none of the political parties or their leaders have taken any interest in replicating them across other
sectors of development. This is where SAARC can and should come in with a vengeance, particularly in view of the fact that the South Asia region is full of such innovations whose sharing could immensely benefit all the countries in the region. In specific terms SAARC should promote professional exchanges between the member countries and their findings in terms of the cannons of good governance should be promoted for adoption by the member governments in their own countries. This alone would lay the foundation for a development tradition that is effective, sustainable and inclusive at the same time. SAAARC must acknowledge that in south Asia, lack of good governance remains a chronic and major hurdle to achieving dynamic and equitable growth in the region.

References


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SAARC: The trust deficit still conducts the show

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Almost 30 years after its formation, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) continues to survive as merely an attempt to foster cooperation in South Asia. SAARC has often come under criticism for not having achieved what organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations or the European Union have. Created in 1985, SAARC has focused its attention on energy and social and economic matters. When political cooperation has been rightly perceived as unachievable in South Asia and economic cooperation has been sought instead, with the launch of The SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) in 1995 and The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006. The objectives of the SAFTA include elimination of trade barriers, facilitation of free trade, and promoting fair competition. However, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to remind us at the failed 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014 that less than five percent of the region’s global trade takes place between the member states. Even as India continues to invest abroad, less than one percent flows back into India. The internal trade that takes place under the SAFTA stands at less than ten percent. These dismal figures have once again raised the question of the relevance of SAARC. Mistrust and mutual threat perception continue to be hallmarks of the region, making the common regional identity that had been envisaged at the inception of SAARC a distant dream.
SAARC certainly is not without achievements. The fact that it managed to get leaders of India and Pakistan to sit together and discuss cooperation is an achievement by itself. The formation was initiated by Bangladesh’s Ziaur Rahman and taken forward by India’s Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistan’s Benazir Bhutto. The SAARC Charter calls for the member states to be ‘desirous of peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and peaceful settlement of all disputes’. In addition, SAARC has made considerable attempts at addressing some of the region’s concerns such as drug and human trafficking. The SAARC Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002), SAARC Scheme for Promotion of Organized Tourism, the launch of the SAARC Development Fund, the establishment of the South Asian University, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme are all commendable initiatives taken by the SAARC to promote a cohesive regional identity.

Yet, the region is marred by inter-state conflicts and animosity. Many reasons have been identified as why the SAARC is a major letdown. Lack of people to people contact, lack of infrastructure, red tapism etc. have all found their place on the list. It is ironic that a region with many cultural and geographical similarities would have trouble engaging in intra-regional trade and opening up new opportunities through deeper integration. What is always cited as proof that SAARC failed as a regional organization is the Kargil war of 1999. No regional organization can claim to be relevant and hold a candle for hope when two of its member states have engaged each other in a war. One of the primary reasons for SAARC’s failure is the fact that India and Pakistan have been unable to improve their relations, and there cannot be a South Asian Union along the lines of the European Union when two member states continue to be at loggerheads with each other.
The 18th SAARC Summit that concluded less than a month ago is a manifestation of how individual interests and lack of trust continue to hamper the growth of SAARC. Of the three agreements that were to be signed at the Summit: The SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity), The Motor Vehicle Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic, and the SAARC Regional Agreement on Railways, two of them were stalled by Islamabad on the grounds that it has not completed its internal processes yet. Given the present conditions, no SAARC or any other organization can lead Pakistan to let go of its obsessive search for parity with India, even if it entails continuing to ignore its own economic interests or needs. Between an opportunity to hamper Indian growth and foster greater connectivity in South Asia, it is evident which one Pakistan would any day choose.

Pakistan's murky ambitions have persisted since the formation of SAARC. Pakistan viewed the opportunity to engage in multilateralism as the means to prevent Indian hegemony in the subcontinent. Despite the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (1987), Pakistan has persistently shown unwillingness to cooperate on combating terrorism and continues to unleash terror in India. Pakistan has also refused to give India the 'Most Favoured Nation Status', making a mockery of the whole notion of regional integration.

Trust deficit and mutual threat perception are not exclusive to India and Pakistan alone in the region. That discussion of 'contentious issues' have been excluded from the purview of the organization is proof that the member states do not want their national interests or ideological inclinations to be compromised in the interest of the growth of the region. Despite the exclusion, Pakistan has still raised the issue of Kashmir at numerous SAARC Summit and Financial Ministers’ meetings.

At the outset of SAARC, India believed that the organization was aimed at giving the smaller states in the region an opportunity to balance against India. This was perhaps stretching it a bit too far, given the one undisputable characteristic of the region - its Indo-centrality. India is SAARC’s largest member, not just in terms of size, but population,
resources, GDP, and added features such as stable government and a successful democracy. India's geographic location is another factor that draws skepticism from the others as it is geographically connected to all the other member states. South Asia as a region would be almost invisible on the map had it not been for India.

However, an analysis would reveal that the smaller members such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka did view the SAARC as an opportunity to keep their autonomies intact. Multilateral ties were preferred over bilateral ties with India and SAARC was the perfect arrangement to ensure cooperation in limiting India's chances of being the dominant power wielding influence over the others. None of the smaller states want SAARC to turn into a platform where India would dictate the terms and settle disputes. That the India-factor is still a concern in the region is evident in the support that China receives from India's smaller neighbours. Pakistan and Nepal have been pushing for turning China into a full member of the SAARC. Maldives and Sri Lanka have indicated that they are on board with China on the Maritime Silk Road when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the two countries earlier this year.

The China factor is looming large in India's neighbourhood. Its bilateral trade with India's other neighbours continues to grow. China's exports to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka have doubled in the last decade, and China has invested in infrastructure projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars in these countries. It aids the construction of roads in Nepal, expressways in Sri Lanka, highways in Bangladesh, and calls Pakistan its 'all-weather friend.' China's strategy around India are driven by two importance factors- the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and the U.S 'pivot' or 'rebalance' to Asia. China imports 80 percent of its energy needs, most of which pass through the Straits of Malacca. That no other country gains control of the critical choke points forms China's strategy in the Indian Ocean. South Asia has, since the formation of Pakistan, through the 1971 War, and during the Cold War shown that external influence in the region can decisively change the course of events in the region. The political hostility
in South Asia offers a plethora of opportunities for external players to wield influence. China offers the smaller countries in the region aid with no strings attached, as long as they provide China with the strategic advantages that it seeks. The growing bilateral relations of these countries with China only add to the skepticism between India and its smaller neighbours.

Why then does India continue to lay emphasis on SAARC? Academic recommendations have many a times asked India to ditch SAARC and focus on more beneficial forms such as the East Asia Summit. But the emphasis laid on cooperation by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi provides a different narrative. India continues to put aside its pressing matters and concerns vis-à-vis its neighbours and calls for greater cooperation, as seen in the new initiatives in areas of business, education, public health, and communication that India proposed at the recent SAARC Summit. It is vitally important to India that it maintains healthy relations with its neighbours, but this can be done outside the framework of SAARC as well. It’s clearly evident who needs whom here; India’s neighbors must get the details in perspective and acknowledge the fact that an integration of the region will only work serve towards the betterment of the people of the region. If Pakistan continues to stall the smooth progression of SAARC, the rest of the member countries will sooner or later learn to side-step the habitual opposition staged by Pakistan. This is the only way SAARC can move ahead with its objectives.

India can certainly engage its neighbours bilaterally - perhaps much more effectively, given the fact that the procedural hassles that form one of SAARC’s shortcomings would be absent – but it is the other members who stand to lose out on the benefits of multilateralism and will instead end up heavily dependent on China whose expansionist history ought not be forgotten. Members of SAARC must either expend more energy towards confidence building and conflict resolution among themselves or risk losing SAARC to the dark pages of history.

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SAARC: Pakistani perspective

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Introduction:

The 18th SAARC summit turned out to one more of those conferences where much of the aftermath commentary felt words like cooperation, integration and development were uttered without much of resonance with the current realities and without any break from the past. Of the three major agreements impending to be signed at the 18th summit, the Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic, the SAARC Regional Agreement on Railways, and the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) only the one on energy cooperation was signed (Ministry of External Affairs India 2014).

The other two agreements were not signed because Pakistan could not complete its ‘internal process’ (Srinivasan 2014). A visibly not so amused Prime Minister Modi very firmly and succinctly articulated that regional integration will happen either through SAARC or without it, effectively implying with some on board or without them (Sharma and Daniel 2014). The agreement on energy cooperation was signed because of hectic diplomacy by Bangladesh which eventually made sure that at least one of the agreements was signed at the summit (Hossain 2014).

Pakistani Perspective :

It is not obscure to people that much of the drag on SAARC comes because of the bilateral equation between India and Pakistan, but it is important to understand the Pakistani perspective and the dynamics that shape India-Pakistan interaction and have come to define the variables that influence their approach towards each other. Traditionally Pakistan had always refused to accede to Indian hegemony in the region and wanted parity in treatment vis-à-vis India. As the realization of India being a bigger economic and military power with more comprehensive national power dawned on Pakistan, it found increasingly difficult to find takers for its pitch on Kashmir in the international arena. Pakistan is skeptical towards Indian sincerity to excavate a meaningful solution to
the Kashmir dispute. Ever since the election of Narendra Modi as Prime minister of India and nationalist BJP coming to power, Pakistan sees a visible shift in the Indian policy, the cancellation of talks on account of the Pakistani ambassador Abdul Basit meeting the separatist leadership, the appointment of Ajit Doval as the national security advisor who has a more hawkish view on Pakistan and the surprise artillery barrage with less care for restraint in the brief exchange of firing and ceasefire violations at the LOC, all these signal a more muscular, intimidating India trying to draw new red lines and unwilling to negotiate on Kashmir or concede anything substantial (Tanzeem 2011). Allowing itself to be dictated by India would be akin to conceding defeat for Pakistan therefore it uses every instrument at its disposal to raise the ‘core issue’ in the India-Pakistan bilateral relationship on international and regional forums including SAARC. Although SAARC charter forbids bilateral issues it is no secret that movement on various agreements is stalled because of the equation between India and Pakistan. The negotiation process finds it difficult to break any common ground because it is in perennial perplexity on whether to resolve the softer issues first to achieve resolution for the harder issues or vice-versa.

Multi-Dimensional Issue:

In 1947 at the time of the partition India-Pakistan bilateral relationship was primarily concerned with issue of resolving a territory dispute and the issue of rehabilitation of the refugees. While the resolution of Kashmir issue has stayed intractable, it has snowballed into something more complex and has acquired newer dimensions. Some of the corollaries of the Kashmir dispute have gone far beyond the region to influence other actors and counter influence the region itself. Now the resolution of Kashmir depends on the resolution of issues like the Siachen and Sir Creek. The speed of trials in Pakistan for the Mumbai attack and terrorist activity directed from Pakistani territory either by actors associated with the state or non-state actors whether in India or Indian personnel and missions in Afghanistan have become an important factor in determining the course of the dialogue process, often negative developments on these fronts bode ill for the dialogue process which is the usual casualty in such events.

On a similar plane the dilemma Pakistan faces is should conflict resolution in the India-Pakistan context happen through SAARC or should conflict resolution itself lead to greater cooperation at SAARC and therefore SAARC should be function of India-Pakistan relations. The recent summit seems to have exhibited the latter case where domestic
exigencies, elections in the Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir for the party in power at the center where Prime Minister Modi was himself addressing rallies, and in Pakistan a deteriorating internal security situation and politically crippling protests against the incumbent government for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, had made regimes in both the countries resort to harder stances and respond to their public opinions which were full of negativity.

**Destined to be Slow:**

The decision making at SAARC as per the charter is based on the 'principal of unanimity' implying that any one country can forestall developments if it deems it inimical to its national interest (Mitra 2014, 4). In the past Pakistan has not allowed transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan, it seeks to forestall integration in the region in a game where everybody loses; Pakistan thanks to its geographical position also makes it impossible for Afghanistan to benefit from such integration. Afghanistan and Border States of India like Punjab, Gujarat and Rajasthan all stand to lose but perhaps Pakistan especially the Pakistani Punjab stands to lose more, the objective however is to bring the intractable issues in focus (Maini and Hamdani 2014).

India will pursue integration either within the framework of SAARC or outside it and if India signs bilateral agreements with its neighbors on connectivity and offers overland transit to all of them, a large part of the subcontinent will automatically get integrated (Mohan 2014). To reach landlocked Afghanistan India has invested in the Chabahar port in Iran, and surpass the impediments created by Pakistan.

Pakistan, however, cannot perennially stonewall the economic synergies which will find their way eventually. Even now a big volume of illegal trade occurs as cross-border informal trade or through third countries, a large chunk of which is through the Mumbai-Dubai-Karachi route (BS Standard 2014). At a tipping point where Pakistan realizes that its competitive bargaining approach at SAARC is failing to elicit any response on Kashmir and the integration in the rest of the sub-continent is going ahead it will have to make a choice to either join the bandwagon or be left behind. At that tipping point a policy change could come about which could help in shifting the gears at SAARC. For this to happen one India must play its cards right by going for multilateral cooperation that does not depend on Pakistan, since the SAARC charter under Article 2 'principles' specifically mentions that SAARC is not a substitute for other forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation (Mitra 2014, 2). Second
India needs to make sure that SAARC is not seen through the prism of India-Pakistan relations the idea should be to completely delink Kashmir issue from SAARC. But importantly Pakistan should be able to develop a domestic consensus especially with a push from Karachi business community, Punjab polity and the army on board that the current state policy is untenable and with no dividends. Until that happens India might not be able to force a change, unfortunately Pakistan feels this policy of stonewalling integration and raising the bogey of Kashmir, is currently serving it well in Afghanistan and thus the ramifications for SAARC are well known.

**Modest achievement or Modest Failure?**

Much of the commentary has not responded kindly to these developments and has been quick to pass the verdict on SAARC summit’s success and its future. But such commentaries fail to take note of the fact that the institution of SAARC was envisioned to promote regional prosperity, integration and development only commensurate with the realities of the sub-continent and perhaps at a sluggish pace only considering the serious political differences that exist in the region.

It is true that the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement and SAARC Regional Railways Agreement were not signed at the Summit but despite that, it was also agreed that transport ministers of all nations would meet within three months in order to finalize the Agreements for approval (Ministry of External Affairs India 2014). Some developments also emerged in other areas of cooperation like agriculture, education and science and technology where India offered its space technology expertise to launch satellites for other SAARC countries which could help in socio-economic development of these countries (SAARC 2014). The impetus and push for integration is coming from other small states like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, etc. Collaboration is increasing and even at the slow pace that it is, and as modest may be the achievements of SAARC, it must not evoke expectations that are over ambitious considering the history of the region, judged only by its own standards rather than compared with other regional forums.

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Today when the world is grappling with new issues and challenges and the “Global South” is taking a lead in engaging with critical issues of security, in an exhaustive study Zahid Shahab Ahmed analyses regionalism and regional security in South Asia with a particular focus on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). An expansion of his doctoral thesis at the University of New England, Australia, the volume on SAARC is a result of historical and contemporary analysis of the SAARC as well as empirical analysis gained from the author’s personal interactions with officials at the SAARC secretariat in Nepal and several interviews with influential people in the SAARC hierarchy.

The central assumption of this research as identified by Ahmed is that regional cooperation through both agreements and actions in areas of human security strengthens regionalism. The analysis on SAARC is carried out based on the functionalist approach to regionalism based on
the hypothesis that cooperation in low politics can provide space for engagement in high politics and towards regional security which is the ultimate goal behind the creation of this South Asian regional identity.

Using the functionalist lens, the book is divided into nine distinct chapters encapsulating the rationale and need for the creation of a South Asian regional entity, its formation and the vast array of issues that the organization deals with including trends in economic, environmental, food, water and energy insecurities as well as transnational crimes in South Asia. As highlighted by the author, the volume aims “to work beyond the India-Pakistan conflict for regionalism in South Asia and attempts to arrive at a more realistic and balanced approach to studying regionalism through the window of SAARC’s actions and challenges.”

The first two chapters titled Introduction to South Asia and SAARC: an overview present the historical and contemporary analyses of intra-state and inter-state conflicts in South Asia and introduces succinctly South Asia as a region with common cultural, historical and political linkages and builds grounds for the rationale behind the creation of the SAARC. The chapter brings to light the bilateral conflicts and attempts at conflict resolution (Indus waters treaty, water sharing treaty between India and Bangladesh) between South Asian states. It also talks about the increasing levels of militarisation as evident from high defence spending in most countries. Moving on, the chapter on SAARC explores the motivations and processes that led to the creation of SAARC and the inspiring factors behind the formation of the association and members’ attitudes towards external linkages – both between countries and with multi-lateral organizations. It also looks at agendas put forth by the SAARC Charter and the different areas of cooperation that were identified as well as the structure and hierarchy of SAARC. It brings to the fore the unique feature of the SAARC charter that makes a provision for sub-regionalism. In addition to sub-regionalism SAARC has also expanded to include Afghanistan and extend observer membership to countries from other regions. Another distinctive feature identified by Ahmed is “informal SAARC which has been significant because it allows for political consensus to emerge on issues outside the official purview of SAARC for instance meetings between heads of states when bilateral relations are soured.”

The following four chapters in the volume deal with South Asian cooperation in economic, environmental, human welfare and traditional security issues. Looking closely at the pace and development of economic integration in South Asia, Ahmed undertakes a critical analysis of the
South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) and its successor the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). He highlights the history of trade relations in South Asia, the apprehensions of smaller economies about India’s economic clout and the inability of the countries and the SAARC mechanisms to rise beyond bilateral differences and realise the benefits of a viable economic partnership through the SAARC/SAFTA framework.

While the economic integration of South Asia remains incomplete, Ahmed postulates that SAARC has had a significant impact on the issues of environmental security. Realising the perils of climate change, deforestation and natural disasters, SAARC countries have taken several initiatives to work together to assure environmental security through initiatives beginning with the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) in 1982 to the more recent SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment signed in 2010. According to Ahmed, while SAARC initiatives on environmental security demonstrate considerable cooperation both at regional and global levels, much more is required to improve South Asian capacity in dealing with issues of the environment which are paramount especially for smaller countries like the Maldives.

The chapter on Human welfare looks at the role of SAARC in promoting regional cooperation in areas of food and health security, education and poverty alleviation – issues that need attention in the developing economies of South Asia. While Initiatives like the setting up of the South Asian University (SAU) are laudable, human development indices continue to be low in South Asia and the SAARC framework remains limited and vastly unimplemented owing to lack of resources.

The chapter that looks at cooperation in security matters is interesting as this is the one agenda that SAARC nations have struggled to keep out of the purview of the regional body. Committed to non-interference in bilateral matters as stipulated in the SAARC charter, the SAARC countries have had to deal with several threats to security including transnational crimes such as terrorism, weapons and drugs smuggling across state borders, human trafficking, illegal migration and illegal trade. While SAARC has attempted to bring about cooperation to jointly tackle these concerns, efforts continue to be stymied by bilateral disputes and individualistic and nationalistic interests.

In the final chapter, Ahmed attempts to compare the SAARC with another example of regional cooperation from the neighbourhood – that is the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Through this
chapter Ahmed attempts to draw lessons from ASEAN in areas of economic cooperation, political and security cooperation and conflict management mechanisms that could also be applied in SAARC making it a more effective regional body. Some of the lessons that the author identifies include: need to integrate professionals into institutions; value of symbolic agreements aimed at trust-building and learning from the ASEAN’s success in promoting intra-regional trade through the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) – an area where ASEAN has been very successful.

By the author’s admission the book attempts to fill an existing gap in literature by encompassing issues of regionalism and regional security in South Asia and by underlining the role and concerns of the smaller South Asian countries. Using the functionalist approach it tackles a vast array of issues that the SAARC has grappled with over the years and the challenges towards achieving a regional consensus. A common strand throughout the study is the inability of the SAARC countries to move beyond bilateral conflicts and their nationalistic goals. India’s dominant position and apprehensions of smaller states and the India-Pakistan conflict in particular continues to be a constant irritant in the successful implementation of many noble initiatives and vitiates the atmosphere hindering mutual trust and understanding. Another crucial challenge to the SAARC is the integration of Afghanistan as a new member owing to its political and economic instability. The argument comes full circle - that is there is a gulf between rhetoric and implementation in the SAARC framework and it lacks the resources and commitments required to be a viable regional entity and continues to be influenced by bilateral disputes and conflicting interests of member-states.

The book presents a very detailed analysis of SAARC history and its engagement with key issues of concern to developing South Asian economies and societies. It brings to light the complex debates that were responsible for the creation of the SAARC and the initiative of member countries to rise above their differences and work together to create a sustainable South Asian identity. One of the foremost positives of the volume is the author’s firsthand experience at SAARC headquarters in Nepal providing insights beyond formal government speeches and proclamations and giving an insider view of the functioning of a complex and evolving regional mechanism. Ahmed also succeeds in critically engaging with complex issues and myriad formal structures set up by the SAARC, both within the region as well as the SAARC’s engagement at the international stage. However, there are certain elements of the book that require more. Though the book is published in 2013, most of the data is limited to 2009-2010 – a more updated version perhaps would have been
more insightful, especially considering the volatility of the political environment in South Asia. In addition, while the author looks at the ASEAN and talks about other regional groupings that the SAARC member states are involved with for instance the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), it does not talk about the BRICS group of which India is an important member and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) where India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are members and how this would impact the SAARC or offer opportunities to further regional cooperation. With India taking the lead through the BRICS and the promulgation of the BRICS Development Bank, its regional position would perhaps become stronger and how this would impact SAARC could be a possible area of study – maybe for another edition of this volume.

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(Stuti Bhatnagar is a Post-Graduate Research Student in Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Adelaide, Australia. Her research is focused on the influence of Think Tanks on Indian Foreign Policy – with a particular focus on India-Pakistan peacebuilding. She holds a M. Phil degree in International Relations and a Masters in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. She is also an Alumni of the Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Non-Violent Conflict, organised by The Fletcher School, Tufts University. She has also worked with WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) - a South Asian Research Initiative in New Delhi from 2003-2007. Here she was involved in their Indo-Pak Conflict Transformation project and was handling the Scholars of Peace Research Fellowship programme.)