

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Problems and Prospects



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South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

 Observer Status Countries

 Member Countries

INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an organization of South Asian nations, which was established on 8 December 1985 when the government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka formally adopted its charter providing for the promotion of economic and social progress, cultural development within the South Asia region and also for friendship and cooperation with other developing countries.
- ❖ Afghanistan joined the organization in 2007.
- ❖ It is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- ❖ The meetings of the heads of the states are usually scheduled annually while the meetings of foreign secretaries , twice in a year.

Member States



INDIA



BHUTAN



PAKISTAN



NEPAL



BANGLADESH



MALDIVES



SRI LANKA



AFGANISTAN

Objectives

The objectives of the Association as defined in the Charter are :

- To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential;
- To promote and strengthen selective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;

- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural and technical and scientific fields;
- To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest; and
- To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Principles of SAARC

- Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, political equality and independence of all member states.
- Non- interference in the internal matters is one of its objectives.
- Cooperation for mutual benefit.
- All decisions to be taken unanimously and need a quorum of all eight members.
- All bilateral issues to be kept aside and only multilateral (involving many countries) issues to be discussed without being prejudiced by bilateral issues.

Organizational structure

- Council of Ministers
- Standing Committee
- Technical Committee
- Programming Committee
- Secretariat

Areas of Cooperation



The areas of cooperation are as follows :

- ❖ Agriculture and Rural Development
- ❖ Investment and Commercial Dispute Settlement
- ❖ Biotechnology
- ❖ Culture
- ❖ Economic and Trade
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Energy
- ❖ Environment
- ❖ Finance
- ❖ Food Security and SAARC Food Bank

- ❖ Information and Communication Technology
- ❖ Poverty Alleviation
- ❖ Science and Technology
- ❖ Security Aspects- Drug and Drug related crimes
Terrorism
Police matters
- ❖ Social Development
- ❖ Tourism
- ❖ Funding Mechanism

List of SAARC Summits



- ❖ First summit : 7-8 December, 1985 (Dhaka)
- ❖ Second Summit : 16-17 November, 1986 (Bangalore)
- ❖ Third Summit : 2-4 November, 1987 (Kathmandu)
- ❖ Fourth Summit : 29-31 December, 1988 (Islamabad)
- ❖ Fifth Summit : 21-23 November, 1990 (Male)
- ❖ Sixth Summit : 21 December, 1991 (Colombo)
- ❖ Seventh Summit : 10-11 April, 1993 (Dhaka)
- ❖ Eighth Summit : 2-4 May, 1995 (New Delhi)
- ❖ Ninth Summit : 12-14 May, 1997 (Male)
- ❖ Tenth Summit : 29-31 July, 1998 (Colombo)
- ❖ Eleventh Summit : 4-6 January, 2002 (Kathmandu)

- ❖ Twelfth Summit : 2-6 January, 2004 (Islamabad)
- ❖ Thirteenth Summit : 12-13 November, 2005 (Dhaka)
- ❖ Fourteenth Summit : 3-4 April, 2007 (New Delhi)
- ❖ Fifteenth Summit : 1-3 August, 2008 (Colombo)
- ❖ Sixteenth Summit : 28-29 April, 2010 (Thimphu)
- ❖ Seventeenth Summit : 10-11 November, 2011 (Maldives)
- ❖ Eighteenth Summit : 26-27 November, 2014 (Kathmandu)
- ❖ Nineteenth Summit : 15-19 November, 2016 (Islamabad) – [Cancelled]

SAARC Specialized Bodies

- ❖ SAARC Development Fund (SDF)
- ❖ South Asian University (SAU)
- ❖ SAARC Arbitration Council
- ❖ South Asian Regional Standards Organization

Problems

South Asia continues to be plagued with ongoing disputes among nations, and the countries of the SAARC are grappling with conflicts within their own national territorial boundaries.

Tiffs between India and Pakistan have dominated SAARC since its formation in 1985, and played the central role of failing to boost economic growth and collective self-reliance. Both countries have undermined the bloc to the extent that members do more trade through bilateral partnerships than as a region. As a result, growth gaps in South Asia have been widening sharply.

The various problems faced by the association are as follows :

- Policy of non-interference
- Championed by soft power of India.
- Large variety regional and cultural differences.
- Lack of financial resources and advanced technologies
- Bilateral dispute and differences.
- Political instability
- Geopolitical tensions
- Trust deficit and lack of social cohesion
- Global challenges

- Internal problems constituting social, economic and developmental issues.
- Low level of Intra SAARC trade
- Suffers from an acute resource crunch
- Underdeveloped Infrastructure
- Food Security reserve failed to meet the need during crisis in certain states.
- Lack of effective implication of SAARC programmes.

Prospects

- SAARC, as an organization, reflects the South Asian identity of the countries, historically and contemporarily. This is a naturally made geographical identity. Equally, there is a cultural, linguistic, religious and culinary affinity that defines South Asia.
- South Asia needs increased co-operations among its countries to face challenges posed by hikes in food prices, energy prices, recurrent disasters and climate change due to geographic, economic, cultural and other strategic reasons.
- South Asia has distinct advantages to cooperate in many areas including cross border infrastructure and services.

- South Asia has shown impressive growth in the last decade.
- This growth is reflected in the growth of trade and investment in the region.
- India has been star performer among all South Asian countries.
- More global integration and South Asia's proximity to the growing Asian region (China, ASEAN) are explanatory factors of this growth.
- Large human capital base combined with competition through open economies is playing a crucial role in the growth process.
- Increased remittances and growing middle class with high purchasing power.
- Youth bulge in a perspective possible demographic dividend.
- High growth in services with modern technology.

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

Conclusion

- ❖ It has often been argued that a 'SAARC Parliament could go beyond the bureaucratic-technical parameters of the existing organization and promote new political, moral and cultural dimensions of regionalism in South Asia'.
- ❖ The situation with regard to South Asian regionalism has been beautifully captured by **Lawrence Saez**, "South Asia forms a unique regional security complex that enables certain forms of regional cooperation and bars cooperation on other issue areas".

Thank you...