

Objective of SAARC

Showkat Ahmad Bhat

ABSTRACT

Since 1980, the efforts of the South Asian countries were successful in 1985 when the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formally launched in 8th December 1985 with the specific objective of promoting regional economic cooperation among the member countries-Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAARC's headquarter is Kathmandu (Nepal). Afghanistan became 8th member of SAARC on 4th April 2007. The observers of SAARC are Australia, China, Iran, Japan, Myanmar, South Korea, European Union, USA, and Mauritius. Thus, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was designed to serve as an agency or institution for promoting economic and cultural cooperation among the member countries. Besides, SAARC's objective is to promote regional economic cooperation for development.

Key words: SAARC, EU, South Asia, China, USA and Myanmar etc.

Introduction

SAARC was born as a genuine collective response to a desire for a regional organization that could facilitate the much-awaited cooperation and promote economic interaction among the regional countries. While the member-countries had accepted the prevailing stark realities facing the region, this took four decades to accelerate the speed of incumbent march towards collective efforts for prevent the decline and to attempt improvement. Admittedly, SAARC officially came into being in 1985 following the Dhaka Summit of seven regional countries but its evolution as a regional organization had began much earlier. Unlike many regional organizations SAARC was not the result of the leading countries in the region. But SAARC came into existence by the joint efforts of smaller countries. In fact, the initiative came for the then President of Bangladesh Ziaur Rahman. It took two years of continuous efforts to institutionalize the idea of South Asian regional organization. Accepting the cultural and ethical commonalities, Ziaur Rahman visited most of the South Asian capitals with a view to ascertain thinking of leaders pertaining to the establishment of a regional organization. Following a series of initial discussions and consultations, the first preparatory meeting of the foreign secretaries of the seven regional countries was held in Colombo that identified four areas out of a 11 areas contained in the working paper which included telecommunication, meteorology, agriculture and rural development for immediate study and also established five study groups.¹ The Colombo meeting was followed by the Kathmandu meeting in November 1981 which discussed the reports of the study groups and endorsed the recommendations.² SAARC was the result of regional efforts unlike SEATO and CENTO because many regional organizations were born in response to the efforts of the interested superpowers and survival under their patronage. SAARC is not only a result of slowly increasing importance attached to the principle of regionalism but more particularly its realization by the regional countries. Yet, the existence of difficult issues in the region, the realization of cooperative undertakings rapidly gained ground in South Asia. The need to cooperative in various non-political fields was acutely felt which in turn gave birth to SAARC.

The Nation-States regard regional associations as essential and very helpful instruments for conducting institutionalized relations and for promoting regional cooperation for development. (ASEAN), European Union (EU), etc European Union, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and several other such institutions/arrangements have been upon the concept of Functionalism³. Functionalism has also given fillip to the establishment of

¹ See Narayan Khadka "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: a Nepalese Perspective" the Round Table, No.309, January 1989, pp.65-87.

² Ibid.

³ **Functionalism** is a theory that advocates a rejection of the power-centric view of the realists and neo-realists and advocates the development step by step, of piecemeal non-political cooperative organizations which not only help in securing of peace, security and development but also render the practice of war obsolete. Functionalism contains the idea of gradual promotion of regional or global level unity and cooperation for development. Functionalism further advocates the dilution of unduly rigid boundaries created and maintained by the nation-states by developing regional and global cooperation for development involving all the people of the world. Gradual development of cooperative organizations; at required level in non-political areas; like economic, technological, educational, scientific, social and cultural centers from the core of Functionalism or Functionalist Approach to international relations. See, Andrew Heywood "Politics" 3rd edition Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.152.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). But the idea of SAARC⁴ was proposed by **Ziaur Rahman** the then President of Bangladesh on May 02, 1980. Thus, SAARC as an organization came as a culmination of the initiative by Bangladesh on May 02; 1980. Admittedly, SAARC officially came into existence in 1985 following the Dhaka Summit of seven regional countries but its evolution as regional organization had started much earlier.⁵ Thus, SAARC was established on 8th December 1985 and headquartered at Kathmandu-Nepal. At present SAARC have eight member countries- **Afghanistan Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**. In the 13th Summit in Dhaka in November 2005 had approved Afghanistan's request for membership. Thus, **Afghanistan** became 8th member of SAARC on 3rd April 2007. Actually, the seven countries met for the first time in April 1981 and then in 1985, they created SAARC charter.

SAARC Charter

The Charter of the SAARC is as follows:

We, the Heads of State or Government of **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**;

1. Desirous 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 all disputes;
2. Conscious that in an increasingly interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity are best achieved in the South Asian region by fostering mutual understanding, good neighborly relations and meaningful cooperation among the Member States which are bound by ties of history and culture;
3. Aware of the common problems, interests and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia and the need for joint action and enhanced cooperation within their respective political and economic systems and cultural traditions;
4. Convinced that regional cooperation among the countries of South Asia is mutually beneficial, desirable and necessary for promoting the welfare and improving the quality of life of the peoples of the region;
5. Convinced further that economic, social and technical cooperation among the countries of South Asia would contribute significantly to national and collective self-reliance;
6. Recognizing that increased cooperation, contacts and exchange among the countries of the region will contribute to the promotion of friendship and understanding among their peoples;
7. Recalling the Declaration signed by their Foreign Ministers in New Delhi on August 2, 1983 and noting the progress achieved in regional cooperation;
8. Reaffirming their determination to promote such cooperation within an institutional framework;

DO HEREBY AGREE to establish an organization to be known as SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION hereinafter referred to as the ASSOCIATION, with the following objectives, principles, institutional and financial arrangements:

Article I

OBJECTIVES

The Objectives of the Association shall be:

- a. To promote welfare of the people of South Asia and improve quality of their life;
- b. 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;

⁴SAARC :It stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, came as a culmination of the initiative by Bangladesh on May 02,1980. But it was only in August 1983 that Foreign Ministers of the Seven member-countries, meeting at Delhi adopted the " Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation(SARC).Bangladesh undertook a detailed analysis of the geopolitical and formal launching of SAARC in December 1985 at Dhaka and the first summit meeting of the leaders of the seven SAARC member was held with the specific aim of promoting regional economic cooperation among the member countries-**Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**. **Afghanistan became 8th member at the 14th summit of SAARC held at New Delhi in April 2007**. The observer countries of SAARC are China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and the USA. Accessed and viewed from the Department of South Asian,Middle East,African Affairs, December 2013,<http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php/south-asian-association-for-regional-cooperation>.<https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/asia/345/south-asian-association-regional-co-operation-saarcen>accessed on 14-05-2019.

⁵ See Narayan Khadka "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: A Nepalese Perspective" The Round Table, No.309, January 1989, pp.65-87.

- c. To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- d. Contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciations of one another's problems;
- e. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields.
- f. To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- g. To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest;
and
- h. To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.⁶

Article II

PRINCIPLES

- 1. Cooperation within the framework of the ASSOCIATION shall be based on the principles of **sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs of other States and mutual benefit.**
- 2. Such cooperation shall not be a substitute for bilateral and multilateral cooperation but shall complement them.
- 3. Such cooperation shall not be inconsistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations.

Article III

MEETINGS OF THE HEADS OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT

The Heads of State or Government shall meet once a year or more often as and when considered necessary by the Member States.

Article IV

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

- 1. A Council of Minister consisting of the Foreign Ministers of the Member States shall be established with the following functions:
 - a) Formulation of the policies of the ASSOCIATION;
 - b) Review of the progress of cooperation under the ASSOCIATION;
 - c) Decision on new areas of cooperation;
 - d) Establishment of additional mechanism under the ASSOCIATION as deemed necessary;
 - e) Decision on other matters of general interest to the ASSOCAITION.
- 2. The Council of Ministers shall meet twice a year. Extraordinary session of the Council may be held by agreement among the Member States.⁷

Article V

STANDING COMMITTEE

- 1) The Standing Committee consisting of the Foreign Secretaries of the member countries shall have the following functions:
 - a) Overall monitoring and coordination of programme of cooperation;
 - b) Approval of projects and programmes and modalities of their financing
 - c) Determination of the inter-sectoral priorities;
 - d) Mobilization of regional and external resources;
 - e) Identification of new areas of cooperation based on appropriate studies

⁶See, SAARC Charter saarc-sec.org., SAARC Secretariat, G.P.O Box 4222, Tridevi Sadak, Kathmandu, Nepal, phone: (+9771) 4221785, 4226350, 4231334/Fax : (+9771)4227033, 4223991 Email:saarc@saarc-sec.org. , Accessed on 13 June 2022.

⁷ Ibid.

- 2) The Standing Committee shall meet as often as deemed necessary.
- 3) The Standing Committee shall submit periodic reports to the Council of Ministers and make reference to it as and when necessary for decisions on policy matters.

Article VI

TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

1. Technical Committees comprising representatives of Member States shall be responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the programmes in their respective areas of cooperation.
2. They shall have the following terms of reference:
 - a) Determination of the potential and the scope of regional cooperation in agreed areas;
 - b) Formulation of programmes and preparation of projects;
 - c) Determination of financial implications of sectoral programmes;
 - d) Formulation of recommendations regarding apportionment of costs;
 - e) Implementation and coordination of sectoral programmes;
 - f) Monitoring of progress in implementation.
3. The Technical Committees shall submit periodic reports to the Standing Committee.
4. The Chairmanship of the Technical Committees shall normally rotate among Member States in alphabetical order every two years.
5. The technical Committees may, inter-alia, use the following mechanisms and modalities, if and when considered necessary:
 - a) Meetings of heads of national technical agencies;
 - b) Meetings of experts in specific fields;
 - c) Contact amongst recognized centres of excellence in the region.⁸

Article VII

ACTION COMMITTEES

The Standing Committee may set up Action Committees comprising Member States concerned with implementation of projects involving more than two but not all Member States.

Article VIII

SECRETARIAT

There shall be a Secretariat of the ASSOCIATION.

Article IX

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. The contribution of each Member State towards financing of the activities of the ASSOCIATION shall be voluntary.
2. Each Technical Committee shall make recommendations for the apportionment of costs of implementing the programmes proposed by it.
3. In case sufficient financial resources cannot be mobilized within the region for funding activities of the ASSOCIATION, external financing from appropriate sources may be mobilized with the approval of or by the Standing Committee.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Article X

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity.

2. Bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations. IN FAITH WHEREOF We Have Set Our Hands and Seals Hereunto.

Done in DHAKA, Bangladesh, On This The Eight Day Of December Of The Year One Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty Five.

Hussein Muhammad Ershad

PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Jigme Singe Wangchuck

KING OF BHUTAN

Rajiv Gandhi

PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

KING OF NEPAL

Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq

PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN

Junius Richard Jayewardene

PRESIDENT OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA¹⁰

Summits of SAARC and focus

The SAARC has held 18th summits till date and 19th summit was scheduled to 15 to 16 November 2016 at Islamabad (Pakistan) but India postponed owing to Uri attack in Kashmir 2016 where a number of Indian soldiers killed. The Indian postponement supported by Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

First Summit

The first summit of the SAARC was held at Dhaka-Bangladesh on 7-8 December in 1985 and the host leader was Ataur Rahman Khan. This is also called Dhaka Summit held in 1985 and attended by all the seven heads of countries and governments of South Asian countries-**Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**. At the first SAARC Summit in Dhaka, Bangladesh, by adopting its Charter on 8 December 1985. Since then, 08 December every year is commemorated as the SAARC Charter Day.¹¹

The first summit of SAARC accepted the declaration for the creation of SAARC with President H. M. Ershad of Bangladesh as its first chairman. The Declaration stated the objectives of the association and the principles on which these were to be pursued and secured. Development of social, economic, cultural, technical cooperation among the member countries was accepted as the objective and the principles of **sovereign equality, independence, integrity and non-interference** were accepted as the guiding principles. It was stated that decisions at all levels shall be taken on the consensus and the bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations. It was further accepted that regional cooperation shall be complementary and supplementary to bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the member countries. Regarding the organizational set up, the declaration stated that the heads of the states or governments shall meet annually and a Council of Ministers consisting of foreign members of the member states shall be constituted to formulate policies to review the progress of the cooperation, to establish additional mechanisms and to decide on matters of general interest. This Council of Ministers shall be assisted by Committee of the Foreign Secretaries of the member states. It also laid down the setting up of **Technical Committee**, comprising of representatives of member states for implementation, coordinating and monitoring of programmes and **Action Committee** for implementation of projects involving more than two states. It was also affirmed that a Secretariat for the association shall be established at an appropriate time.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See, <https://www.saarc-sec.org/index.php> Accessed on 13-6-2022.

Second SAARC Summit

The summit was held in the Bangalore on 16-17 November in 1986 and attended by all the seven member countries. The then Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi took over as the Chairman of SAARC for 1986-87. While taking over the Chairman ship Rajiv Gandhi reaffirmed the commitment of all the seven countries to make SAARC a success. The summit decided to set up technical committee on women's participation in developmental activities and for the implementation of measures to end drug abuse and drug trafficking, thus formally bringing these two areas under the purview of SAARC. It also agreed to expand the SAARC efforts at cooperation to five new fields-South Asian broadcasting programme, promotion of tourism, providing facilities to students and academicians and harnessing of the idealism of youth. The summit also called upon the member counties not to allow their territories to be used for **terrorist activities** against other countries. The SAARC leaders agreed to cooperative in combating and eliminating terrorism from the region. This summit also urged the great powers to take effective steps for securing environment of peace and respect for International laws. It voiced grave concern over the escalation of the nuclear arms race and the failure of Reykjavik Summit between the USA and the former USSR. Referring to the global economic crisis particularly the mounting debt burden of developing nations, the SAARC leaders agreed to regularly consult and cooperate at international conferences and institutions to achieve the objectives of enlarged concessional assistance. This summit took a major step towards institutionalizing SAARC by **establishing a permanent secretariat** to coordinate the implementation of SAARC programmes. A memorandum of understanding was signed by SAARC Foreign Ministers listing the role, functions and funding of the Secretariat which was to be established at Kathmandu(Nepal). The Secretariat began to function from 16th January 1987 and has been playing an important role in handling SAARC work. **Abdul Ahsan** of Bangladesh was appointed **the first Secretary General of the SAARC**. He heads the Secretariat which has seven Directors of the rank of counselors, one from each of the member countries. However, the term of the Secretary General was allotted a term of two and a half years in view of the preparatory work involved in connection with the establishment of the Secretariat. In future, the Secretary General was to be appointed by the Council of Ministers on nomination by the member counties on the basis of the principle of rotation in the alphabetical order-Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The institutionalization of SAARC can be described as an important success because without proper and efficient organization no regional association can expect to deliver the goods it is designed to deliver.

Third Summit

This summit was held at Kathmandu (Nepal) on 2-4 November 1987 and all seven Heads of the countries and Governments participated in its deliberations. In this summit, India forwarded the idea of inducting cooperation in the core economic sectors-trade, industry, energy and environment, while Bangladesh proposed the introduction of multi-sector investment facility. However, both these proposals failed to win a support and the final declaration did not mention these. Though bilateral issues were not raised, yet, in off-the-record observations, these did appear. Sri Lanka did not hesitate to voice resentment over the air dropping of food supplies by India over Jaffna. While India sponsored the application of Afghanistan for SAARC membership and Pakistan raised the concept of South Asian nuclear-free zone. Both these moves were again not given a mention in the final declaration. The foreign minister of member-countries signed the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and an agreement to establish a South Asian Food Reserve.¹²

Fourth Summit

This summit was held at Islamabad (Pakistan) on 29-31 December in 1988 and the Summit accepted, in general terms, the idea of extending SAARC cooperation to **core economics issues**. The member counties agreed to identify areas of core interest in their national perspective plans and prepare such plans and consolidate them into a regional plan to be called **SAARC-2000-Basic Needs Perspective** with specific targets to be met by the end of the century. Further, it was agreed to set up a centre for Human Resource Development in Pakistan. This decision had a big potential for the cooperative development of talent, expertise and scientific know-how. The SAARC countries also agreed to allow the Judges of their Supreme Courts and members of their Parliaments to travel freely in all the seven SAARC countries. The decision of the Kathmandu Summit to promote people-to-people cooperation was endorsed and applauded. The Islamabad Summit also agreed to speed up efforts for analyzing the natural disaster management problems in South Asia. Specially, it was agreed to hold joint study on "Green House Effects" and its impact on the region.

Fifth Summit

This summit was scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka in December 1989. However, it could not be held at Colombo due to the internal troubles in Sri Lanka and its inability to hold the Summit. Consequently, it was held on 21-23rd November 1990 at Male-the capital of Maldives. India was represented in this summit by the then Prime Minister Chander Shekhar. In this summit, the SAARC leaders expressed their concern at the drug smuggling, terrorist activities and international weapon trade. They entered into an agreement for curbing illicit drug trade and smuggling in South Asia. This summit decided to establish three institutions- **Human Resources Development Centre at Islamabad (Pakistan), Regional T.V. Centre at Kathmandu (Nepal) and Regional Documentation Centre at New Delhi (India)**. The leaders agreed that the year 1991 was to be observed as **SAARC year of Shelter, 1992 as SAARC year Environment and 1993 as the SAARC year of the Disabled Persons**. The then Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar gave a call to take the SAARC out of the realm of only talks and transform it into a pragmatic association for regional cooperation among the SAARC countries. In November 1991, the 15th session of the Standing Committee of SAARC was held and several important

¹² See, Kathmandu Declaration" (PDF) SAARC Secretariat. Retrieved 16, October 2010.

proposals were agreed upon by the delegates of the SAARC countries .In cooperation among the SAARC nations particularly for lowering the trade barriers. It was felt that the liberalization trends in the SAARC region and the tendency in the world towards regional economic groupings have created objective conditions requiring SAARC to move rapidly towards intensified cooperation. It was agreed that liberalization of trade that India supported the Sri Lankan proposal for the establishment of a **South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement**. India also welcomed the proposal to set up an inter-governmental group of formally seeks agreement on an institution framework for trade liberalization among SAARC countries.

Sixth Summit

This summit was scheduled to be held on 7th November 1991 at Colombo (Sri Lanka).However, this was postponed on 6th November due to the inability of King of Bhutan to visit Sri Lanka on that date. Thereafter, it was held on December 21, 1991 at Colombo. At the one-day 6th SAARC summit, the leaders of the seven member countries expressed their readiness to sink their prejudices and old biases in order to go in for a wide-ranging interaction in economic, social and other issues. It stressed the need for greater regional cooperation in solving pressing problems. The Colombo Declaration adopted after the „**business-like**’ SAARC summit welcomed the general trend towards disarmament. It was hoped that measures in this direction would restrain the pursuit of military weapons in all regions of the world. While welcoming the trend towards safeguarding human rights, the SAARC Declaration observed that this could not be viewed in “**narrow and exclusively political terms.**”**Civil and Political rights**, on the one hand and economic and social rights on the other are inter-dependent and of equal importance, joint declaration noted. With regard to human rights, the declaration underlined the efforts of states to guarantee human rights in their full context, through the pursuit of development for all citizens in conditions of stability which turn guarantees the enjoyment of human rights by all persons. The SAARC leaders expressed hope that peace dividend would be used for promoting further development of the Third World countries. The SAARC Declaration welcomed the trend towards popularity-based democratic governments in different parts of the world including in South Asia. In far-reaching decisions, they approved that the recently set up inter-governmental group (IGG) should seek agreement on an institutional framework under which specific measures for trade liberalization among SAARC member states could be furthered. They also decided to closely examine Sri Lanka proposal to establish a SAARC preferential trade arrangement by 1997.The SAARC leaders decided to establish an independent South Asian committee on poverty alleviation, consisting of eminent persons from SAARC member countries to conduct an in-depth study of diverse experiences of the seven nations of the group. The declaration laying stress on promoting primary education in the region, agreed to share the member countries, expertise and technical know- how so as to achieve total primary education for all children by the year 2000.Recognising that cooperation among SAARC countries was if terrorism was to be stemmed and eliminated from the region, the leaders urged member countries to take all necessary measures to give full effect to the obligations **under the SAARC regional convention on suppression of terrorism**. They particularly stressed the urgent need for expeditious enactment of enabling legislation by those member countries which had not yet done so, for the implementation of the convention. They pointed out the need for a constant dialogue and interaction among the agencies of member countries. While expressing satisfaction at the signing of the SAARC convention on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances at the previous Male summit, the leaders urged the member countries which had not yet done so, to ratify the convention. Regarding environment, the SAARC Summit urged the member countries to promote cooperation among themselves for enhancing their respective disaster management capabilities and undertaking specific work programmes for protection and preservation environment. The SAARC leaders endorsed the decision of the council of ministers to establish a committee on environment to examine regional studies on causes and consequences of natural disasters identify measures for immediate action and decide on modalities for their implementation.

Seventh Summit

This summit was twice postponed in December 1992 and January 1993.This summit was finally held on 10th -11th April in 1993 at Dhaka (Bangladesh).Once again, in this summit the South Asian leaders tried both to restore confidence and strengthen mutual economic cooperation that was essential for narrowing down sharp political disputes among their countries. The need to pursue vigorously the poverty alleviation programme for nearly one billion people of South Asia, encouraged them to take the shared issues in the right perspective and to attempt a transformation of this regional association from a “ **talking-shop**” into an action-oriented body. After wide-ranging and sustained deliberations, the SAARC Summit unanimously adopted the Dhaka Declaration and the South Asian leaders expressed their resolve to give a dynamic impetus to further economic cooperation among the seven member-countries. In fact, South Asia entered a new era in economic cooperation when **Seventh SAARC Summit adopted the 63-point Dhaka Declaration and endorsed the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA)**, seeking to reduce trade barriers in the region. The SAPTA was signed by SAARC Council of Minister on the concluding session of the Summit, **envisaged a liberalized trade among the member countries**. The **63-point Dhaka Declaration** revealed the association’s determination to strengthen and enrich the powers and restated its commitment to its principles and objectives. It declared,” the time was now opportune to provide a further dynamic impetus to activities in the core areas of economic, social and cultural cooperation in the SAARC region. As part of SAPTA, a minor concession of a 10% reduction in important duty of all seven members was agreed upon. Initially, it was agreed that it would be put into practice” as early as possible”. This change really involved a postponement of the agreement to a future date. But this clause did not prevent other countries from entering into bilateral trade agreements on preferential basis and it thereby created the possibility of meaningful and pragmatic economic cooperation in the region. The declaration endorsed an integrated programme of action (IPA) on the eradication of poverty, trade manufacture and service, environment, population, shelter, children, youth, disabled persons, women development, science and technology, terrorism, drug trafficking, security of small countries, people to people contacts, association of SAARC speakers and parliamentarians and South Asian Development Fund in South Asia. It also touched on international political economic development. The leaders of the SAARC countries once again reiterated their determination to strengthen and enrich SAARC as an instrument endowing it with a clear set of forward-looking goals and objectives as well as requisite institutional capabilities so that it could continue to

work to enrich not only the lives of its own members but also promote peace, progress and stability in South Asia in a larger context. The Summit did well to denounce all those supporting terrorists from neighboring countries. However, it was more a rhetoric and less a reality. Pakistan continues to provide aid and shelter to terrorists in Punjab and Kashmir and Bangladesh continues to shelter the anti-national elements and militants operating in North-East India.

Eighth Summit

This summit was held in New Delhi (India) from 2nd to 4th May 1995. This summit called for an international convention, prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances and strongly deplored the rising wave of terrorism in Asia and elsewhere. The Delhi Declaration was unanimously adopted by the SAARC leaders. It noted that while the international community had successfully created the norm against chemical and biological weapons. Unfortunately, it had been unable to take similar action on the more vital nuclear issue. The summit also stressed the enactment of enabling legislation at the national level to implement the SAARC Regional Convention on Terrorism. It also gave a call for eradication of poverty by 2002 AD, eradication of illiteracy by the end of the century and reiterated the commitment to the global objective of shelter for all. The Summit unanimously resolved that the year 1995 be designed as the “**SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication.**”

Ninth Summit

This summit was held at Male (Maldives) on 12th- 14th May in 1997. The summit leaders discussed several issues and unanimously adopted a declaration at the end. The most important decision taken at this summit was on acceleration **the formation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)** in the SAARC region by 2001. The original target was 2005. SAARC countries also agreed to remove tariff and trade barriers. The Summit decided on the creation of an **Eminent Persons Group (EPG)** consisting of two members from each SAARC country to study the progress made by the Association in economic integration and recommend ways to speed up ways to catch up with the rest of the world by the year 2020. The member-countries also decided to amend their laws to curb trafficking in women. The assurance from SAARC leaders that they would look into the problem urgently followed an initiative from non-governmental women’s groups from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The Summit also discussed the problem of poverty and accepted the objective of eradicating poverty in the region by the year 2000. However, the question: How was it to be achieved was left open.

Tenth Summit

This summit was held in Colombo (Sri Lanka) on 29-31, July in 1998. **The summit was held in the background of the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998.** However the Summit concentrated on such issues like economic development of South Asia, Regional economic integration, cooperation for development and progress from SAPTA to SAFTA.¹³ After the Summit, a joint declaration was made in which it was recorded **that all nuclear powers should work for securing an effective nuclear disarmament and the position of South Asia should not be viewed in isolation.** The fact that the major nuclear powers were merely talking of disarmament even while maintaining huge stockpile of weapons, was strongly criticized. It was held that NPT and CTBT have neither checked nuclear proliferation nor made any progress towards nuclear disarmament. The only way for security nuclear non-proliferation was to adopt a global-level time-bound nuclear disarmament plan. In respect of economic relations, it was declared that special steps should be taken for safeguarding the interests of least developed and land-locked countries which were incapable of securing good economic development. The policy of using economic sanctions as instruments of foreign policy was strongly condemned. It was also declared that the issue of peace, security and stability in South Asia should be viewed in global context and not in isolation. However, except for making the declaration, no concrete steps were taken at the summit. However, India and Pakistan had the satisfaction of holding Prime Ministerial level talks during the course of this summit. Though, the SAARC countries did not make any direct reference to the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan, the strains present in India-Pakistan relations kept the environment of SAARC summit conditioned.¹⁴

Eleventh Summit

This summit was held after a gap of 3 years and 10 months (about 42 months). This summit was held at Kathmandu (Nepal) on 5th and 6th January 2002. This summit was scheduled to be a 3-day summit but had to be cut by one day because Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf could not reach in time on 4th January. He had to come via Beijing (China) as India had banned PIA over flights from its territory and President Musharraf was not interested in getting a special concession from India. On the 5th January 2002, this summit opened in an environment that clearly had remained dominated by the continued India-Pakistan military build-up all along their border and the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir. The opening day witnessed Pakistan’s fresh brinkmanship and President Musharraf’s theatrics. During the inaugural meeting of the summit after delivering his speech in which he offered a sincere and genuine hand of friendship to India, President Musharraf walked up to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for a handshake. Prime Minister Vajpayee responded with all the civility. However, he gave firm, measured and unambiguous response by observing in his speech that President Pervez Musharraf should extend the gesture by eliminating terrorism which was perpetrating mindless violence in India, from his

¹³ Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik “South Asia On A Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament” Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.327.

¹⁴ Rashmi Sharma Forward by Professor R.N.Pal “SAARC Concept, Growth and Development” Regal publications New Delhi, 2007, p.187.

country and the territory under Pakistan's control. In reality, India had to act firmly and effectively for preventing the attempts on the part of Pakistan to hijack the summit and convert it into an India-Pakistan dialogue and exercise. The SAARC Charter clearly holds that this regional forum is not to take up bilateral issues. The attempts of Pakistan amounted to a waste of time. Despite in this summit, the pressure resulting strains in India-Pakistan, tried hard to restart the process which had been stalled since 1998. All the leaders regretted the virtual failure of SAARC to effectively implement its decisions but at the same expressed the resolve to make all-out efforts towards the achievement of the objective of promoting mutual cooperation for development of the region. The summit concluded on 6th January 2002 with the seven member countries adopting the SAARC Declaration. It recorded a clear and firm call for the urgent conclusion of comprehensive convention on combating international terrorism and conducting international cooperation including this scourge in conformity with the UN Charter, International Law and relevant convention. Reiterating support to the UN Security Council Resolution 1373, the SAARC Declaration expressed the determination of the member countries to re-double efforts for **suppressing terrorism in its all forms and manifestations. "The fight against terrorism had to be comprehensive and sustained. Special measures must be initiated for safeguarding independence and territorial integrity of countries."** The SAARC leaders urged the international community to deal effectively with the adverse effect of terrorism in general and to meet the rising insurance and security related costs in particular. They also agreed to accelerate the enactment of an enabling legislation within definite time frame for the full implementation of the convention together with strengthening the groupings terrorist offences and drug offences monitoring desks in an effective manner. This declaration also focused on such common concerns like economic cooperation, poverty alleviation, special attention to the social and cultural sectors and women and children, education, the international political and economic environment, security of small countries and people to people contacts. It gave a call for speeding up cooperation in core areas of trade, finance and investment for realizing the goal of integrated South Asian economy and maximizing the benefits of globalization and liberalization as well as minimizing the negative impacts on the region. The leaders accepted the importance of creating free-trade areas incorporating binding time-frames for freeing trade and measures for ensuring equitable distribution of benefits to all. They gave directions to the SAARC Council of Ministers to finalize the text of the Draft Treaty on SAFTA by the end of 2002. Regarding the steps needed for poverty alleviation, the SAARC Declaration re-affirmed the resolve to combat the problem with a new sense of urgency by promoting partnerships among national governments, international agencies, the private sector and the civil society. It underlined the need to give a fillip to micro credit with special accent on women and the disadvantaged sections of society. All the member countries welcomed the SAARC convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children and promotion of child welfare. The Kathmandu Declaration also called for an intensified coordination among the South Asian countries on all World Trade Organization (WTO) issues. SAARC Missions in Geneva were advised to intensify coordination for promoting common interests of the region at the 5th WTO ministerial conference.

Twelfth Summit

This summit was held at Islamabad (Pakistan) from 2nd January to 6th January 2004. This was to be held in 2003. The SAARC Declaration adopted at the end of this three-day summit condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and noted that the people of South Asia were facing a serious threat from this scourge. "Terrorism violates the fundamental values of the United Nations and the SAARC Charter and constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. We agree to fully implement the relevant international connections to which we are parties." **SAARC Countries re-affirmed their commitments to the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.** This summit once again accepted and advocated the importance of SAFTA as a major milestone and the SAARC leaders agreed **"to maintain this momentum and move towards further broadening of economic cooperation and to ensure equitable distribution of benefits of trade"**. The need for creating a suitable political and economic environment capable of leading to the birth of South Asian Economic Union was stressed by all the seven South Asian neighbours. The SAARC Summit also finalized the Additional Protocol to the 1987 SAARC convention on terrorism. The signing of SAFTA agreement which was to come into force w.e.f. 15th January 2006, constituted an important outcome on the 12th SAARC summit. It was agreed the developing countries within SAARC will reduce their tariffs to 0.5 in seven years from the date of entry into force of this agreement. The less-developed SAARC countries were however to do this in ten years. Further, each member of SAARC was to maintain its sensitive list of products on which tariffs were not to be reduced. For securing the implementation and administration of SAFTA, a ministerial council consisting of commerce/trade minister of all the seven member countries was to be set up. Further, a committee of experts was to provide help in this direction. This agreement recorded and suggested several steps that the member countries could undertake for securing efficient Intra-SAARC trade and simplification of procedures for business visas. It was suggested that the SAARC members should remove barriers in the way of intra-SAARC investments, harmonize custom facilities, transit facilities and some similar other steps. All disputes in respect of SAFTA provisions were to be resolved through bilateral consultations. Besides, these two agreements, the 12th SAARC summit witnessed the signing of a social charter which re-affirmed the organization's principal goal of promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia in all areas. It was agreed that the aim was to improve the quality of life, accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development as well as to provide to the people of South Asia to live with dignity and realize their full potential. Further, all the SAARC members agreed to provide and encourage a people-centered framework for the social development, cultural cooperation and partnership for development. The 12th SAARC summit was held in the background of emerging India-Pakistan friendship and cooperation for developing all dimensions of their bilateral relations as well as for maintaining the new peace approach. The 12th SAARC summit ended on a very positive note and it constituted an important step towards the promotion and strengthening of SAARC cooperation towards SAFTA as well as for meeting the challenge being posed by the menace of terrorism. However, like all previous summits, this summit used pleasant, rational and sound words in favor of rapid and comprehensive socio-economic-cultural development of the people of South Asia. However, there were initiated no concrete and hard steps for securing SAFTA and eliminating terrorism. Pakistan maintained its policy of not giving Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to India and India-Pakistan trade and economic cooperation continued to remain limited as before.

Thirteenth Summit

This summit was held in Dhaka on November 12-13, 2005 and was attended by the prime ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Pakistan, the presidents of the Maldives and Sri Lanka and the King of Nepal and Bhutan attended the summit peacefully.¹⁵

Fourteenth Summit

This summit was held in New Delhi, 3-4 April 2007 and was attended by Presidents of Afghanistan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka and the prime ministers of Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan and the chief advisor of the government of Bangladesh. The summit is laying stress on improving intra-regional connectivity.

Fifteenth Summit

This was held in Colombo (Sri Lanka) on 1-3 August 2008. The summit discussed the issues of 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. At this 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-countries 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.¹⁶

Sixteenth Summit

This summit was held in Thimphu (Bhutan) on 28-29 April 2010. Bhutan hosted the SAARC summit for the first time. This was marked the silver jubilee celebration of SAARC that was formed in Bangladesh in December 8, 1985. Climate change was the central issue of the summit with the theme “**Towards a Green and Happy South Asia**” Outcome of Thimphu Summit regarding climate change issue: The SAARC countries 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 countries 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 adaptation and capacity building needs posed by the climate change. The seven-page „Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration-Towards a Green and Happy South Asia” emphasized 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.¹⁷

Seventeenth Summit

This summit was held from 10-11 of November 2011 in Addu city, Maldives. The meeting which was held which was held at the Equatorial Convention Centre, Addu City was opened by the outgoing Chair of SAARC, Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, H.E. Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley. 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 the member-countries to establish a commission to address the meeting. The inaugural meeting was attended by Foreign/External Ministers of SAARC member-countries, 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 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 need 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 countries signed four agreements:

1. SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters.
2. SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment.
3. SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards.
4. SAARC Seed Bank Agreement

¹⁵ See, Thirteenth SAARC Summit (PDF). SAARC Secretariat. Retrieved 16, 2010.

¹⁶ See Colombo Statement on Food Security” www.saarc-sec.org/Archived from the original on 2008—8-17.

¹⁷ See, Area of Cooperation: Environment” SAARC. Retrieved 6 July 2010.

In addition, Addu Declaration of the Seventeenth SAARC Summit was adopted.

Eighteenth Summit

This summit was held at Kathmandu (Nepal) from November 26 to 27, 2014 and was attended by the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan and the Presidents of the Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. The motto was „**Deeper Integration of peace and Prosperity**” The legal permission on SAARC Satellite Scheme in this summit .The scheme will be developed in all member-countries except Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹⁸

Nineteenth Summit

Pakistan was scheduled to host the 19th summit of SAARC in Islamabad on 15-16 November 2016. Following the 2016 Uri terror attack, India cancelled its participation in the 19th SAARC summit, alleging Pakistan’s involvement in the terror attack.^{19,20} Hours after Indian PM Narendra Modi decided to boycott the SAARC summit in Islamabad in the wake of Uri terror attack Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka have pulled out of the summit.²¹ According to sources, Bangladesh believes that growing interference in internal affairs of Bangladesh by one country has created environment not conducive to successful hosting of the 19th SAARC Summit in Islamabad in November 2016. Reportedly, Bangladesh said that it remains steadfast in its commitment to regional co-operation but believes these can only go forward in more congenial atmosphere. Afghanistan stated that” Due to increased level of violence, fighting as a result of imposed terrorism on Afghanistan, President of Afghanistan with his responsibilities as Commander in Chief will be engaged and will not be able to attend the SAARC summit. Also, Bhutan has expressed concern over recent escalation of terrorism in the region which seriously comprises environment for successful holding of the 19th SAARC Summit in Islamabad in November 2016; Bhutan has shared concerns of some of SAARC countries on deterioration of regional peace and security due to terrorism. Sri Lanka decided to pull out of SAARC summit, becoming the 5th country to pull out citing the non-conducive situation in Islamabad. The island nation on September 30, 2016, said in a statement, Sri Lanka condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestation and stresses in this regard, the need to deal with the issue of terrorism in the region in a decisive manner. Maldives on 1 October 2016 joined hands with other five nations and boycott the summit to become 6th nation to do so. India alleged Pakistan for terrorism. SAARC summit in Pakistan was cancelled due to pulling out of 6 SAARC member-countries citing “poor conducive atmosphere” in the South Asia. Nepal is only country that have not pulled out of SAARC Summit 2016. Nepal cannot pull out of SAARC summit because present chairperson is from Nepal. Nepal-the current chair of SAARC, urged that” a favorable environment should be created soon to ensure the participation of all member-countries in the 19th SAARC summit in line with the spirit of the SAARC charter”. This summit was scheduled to be held in Islamabad (Pakistan) in 15-19 November 2016 and cancelled due to Uri attack in Kashmir where Indian soldiers were killed and India pulled out of this SAARC summit cited cross-border terrorism in the region.²²

Conclusion

The very objective and purpose of SAARC has been to promote **regional economic cooperation** among the South Asian countries. The leaders of the SAARC tried to realize this objective by agreeing to remove trade barriers for gradually evolving SAARC into a collective economic system. Such moves are intended **to keep unlimited the SAARC’s objective of increased economic cooperation** in South Asia. The need of the hour is that SAARC countries should come out of their prejudices and biases through bilateral as well as regional level confidence building measures, concrete action plans and only then would emerge a real opportunity for the realization of SAARC objective and spirit. The five basic areas, on which the seven countries of SAARC agreed to be cooperative of are as development of human resources, Meteorology, science, technology and telecommunications, population and health related activities, rural and agricultural development, Transport are milestone in the relations of South Asian countries because these areas will help among the member-countries of SAARC to sink their prejudices and old biases in order to go in for a wide-ranging interaction in economic, social and other issues. These areas will also help for greater regional cooperation in solving their pressing problems.

India being territorially the biggest, populous, developed, and most developed country in the areas of technology, industry in the South Asia. South Asia itself is a peculiar region. Three-quarters of the region has India who has almost 70% of the total regional area, three-fourths of its population and what not. This peculiar geographic factor joined with the assertive and dictating Indian policy often creates fears and tensions among their regional countries. South Asia is an India-centric region because all countries are neighbors of India but none of them are neighbors of each other. Pakistan is medium size country, all others are small countries. In terms of population South Asia accounts for one-fifth of the total population of the world. Compared to India’s population of more than one billion and the total population of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan is not as India has. While Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal are grouped in the category of Least Developed Countries by UN, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are still far from being included in the list of developed countries. The quality of life moves around the word „poor” and ranges from poor to extremely poor.

India has played and continues to play a big role in the successful implementation of SAARC agendas for cooperation and development among the member-countries of SAARC. India has accepted SAARC as a willingly organized association of sovereign equal states for consolidating and

¹⁸ See, Press releases, 18 SAARC Summit Declaration, November 27, 2014.

¹⁹ PM Narendra Modi will not attend SAARC Summit in Pakistan” Retrieved 29, September 2016.

²⁰ See ,3 days After Uri Attack ,India Hands Pakistan Envoy Evidence And a Warning” NDTV News, 21, Septemeber 2016.

²¹ Mishra, Sitakanta “Featured/ will SAARC Reincarnate? Indrastra Global. doi: 6084/m9.figshare. 4029486. ISSN2381-3652.

²² Greater Kashmir “Heart of Asia Conference: Modi for resolute action against terror supporters” December 05, 2016, pp.01-12.

expanding regional cooperation for development. India resolutely believes that SAARC objective and spirit can help the countries of South Asia to develop and to resolve their bilateral issues outside the SAARC platform. Because the SAARC's Charter clearly holds that this regional forum is not to take up bilateral issues. But the existence of bilateral problems among the SAARC countries and their inability to secure a high level of political and economic cooperation among themselves are keeping the progress of SAARC limited like the existence of political differences particularly between the two major SAARC-member countries-India and Pakistan has rendered SAARC limited in conducting its basic agenda and are bound to keep limited the SAARC attempt at increased economic cooperation.