

SECOND SEMESTER

COURSE-204

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICIES AND
THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

UNIT-IV

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For 20 marks

SAARC: A NEW HORIZON OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION

We live under the umbrella of the world body, the United Nations organization. The UNO is dedicated for the attainment of peace and security. It was established after the horrors of the World War II. In its Preamble it has been stressed as a major aim: “seek to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. In spite of all these, there has developed a tendency on the part of all nations to strive for regional organizations and 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). As a matter of fact, 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.

With the passage of time, 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).**

A cursory glance to the present day world scenario it is 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. Regional organizations have become an essential part of world politics today. It may be referred that there are many regional organizations like: NATO, CENTO, SEATO, ASEAN and many other regional organizations. The 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. The SAARC as a regional organization is dedicated to aim for all out cooperation between and among the south Asian nations in all respects.

As it has happened to the other areas of the world, the region of South Asia is also no exception to this general rule. Several factors may be attributed 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 acquire an equitable share of political power. It is a matter of fact 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)**. It should be mentioned further that 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)**. All these factors taken together have led to a situation for regional organization.

We should make a mention of the fact that the 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.)**

There is no denying the fact that 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 Himalayas. This range forms an 800 mile wall along the northern side of the sub continent. **(Nortan James H.W, 1980.)** So far as international political scenario is concerned, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a late comer on the international scene. **(Prasad Bimal, 1987)**. But in spite of that, it has already gained a ground of prominence within a span of three decades.

So far as the composition of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is concerned, it comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. It

has been categorically said that 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 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.)** The SAARC as a regional Organisation is definitely not detrimental neither to the world body nor other regional organizations.

BIRTH OF SAARC

The South Asian Nations exhibit marked disparities and there are significant and marked differences in many 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 which is very much present among the South Asian nations. At this juncture, 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. Therefore, it is well nigh impossible to deny the fact a unity in diversity is prevalent among the nations of this region.

It is a historical fact 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 these 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 and this definitely paved the way for the establishment of SAARC.

The communication 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 Communiqué at the conclusion of the Fourth Meeting of Foreign Secretaries. Dhaka, March 28-30, 1983).**

FOREIGN SECRETARY LEVEL MEETING: THE FIRST PHASE

The next important 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 Foreign Secretaries met 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).** The meeting definitely made the path in the creation of SAARC smooth and paved the way ahead.

POLITICAL MINISTERIAL MEETING: THE SECOND PHASE

After the first phase was largely successful, it led to the second phase. It witnessed the up gradation 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. In fact, the cherished dream for a regional organisation got a concrete shape.

FORMAL LAUNCHING OF THE SAARC: THE THIRD PHASE

The Dhaka Summit was in fact the occasion of formal launching of the regional organization. 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)**. We must accept the fact that the Dhaka Summit marked the beginning of a significant chapter in the regional politics in the south Asian region.

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

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

No	Date	Country	Host
1st	7–8 December 1985	 Bangladesh	<u>Dhaka</u>
2nd	16–17 November 1986	 India	<u>Bengaluru</u>
3rd	2–4 November 1987	 Nepal	<u>Kathmandu</u>
4th	29–31 December 1988	 Pakistan	<u>Islamabad</u>
5th	21–23 November 1990	 Maldives	<u>Malé</u>
6th	21 December 1991	 Sri Lanka	<u>Colombo</u>
7th	10–11 April 1993	 Bangladesh	<u>Dhaka</u>
8th	2–4 May 1995	 India	<u>New Delhi</u>
9th	12–14 May 1997	 Maldives	<u>Malé</u>
10th	29–31 July 1998	 Sri Lanka	<u>Colombo</u>
11th	4–6 January 2002	 Nepal	<u>Kathmandu</u>
12th	2–6 January 2004	 Pakistan	<u>Islamabad</u>
13th	12–13 November 2005	 Bangladesh	<u>Dhaka</u>

14th	3–4 April 2007	 India	<u>New Delhi</u>
15th	1–3 August 2008	 Sri Lanka	<u>Colombo</u>
16th	28–29 April 2010	 Bhutan	<u>Thimphu</u>
17th	10–11 November 2012	 Maldives	<u>Addu</u>
18th	26–27 November 2014	 Nepal	<u>Kathmandu</u>

CONCLUSION

We may come to the concluding part. 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 and it must be successful for

fulfilling the cherished desires of the people of this region and it will definitely contribute for comprehensive well being of the South Asian nations in all respects.

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