

## SAARC: The Sign of Solution of Problems In South Asia

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### Abstract

The South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation comprises of India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Afghanistan. It established with the aim to promote the well being of the population of South Asia and improve their standard of living to speed up economic growth, social progress and cultural development. This Association provides a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. Its aim is to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and solve the problems like food, shelter, education problems, diseases, economic problems, social problems, political problems, terrorism etc. There are a number of problems which no country of the region can solve single-handed and which can be solved only if the countries of the region cooperate. So let us come to the point that the paper is actually about the "SAARC: The Sign of Solution of Problems in South Asia". So I want to examine it and explain how we can find the solution of problems and in what sense we can call it the Sign of Solution.

**Introduction:** The SAARC is an organization of South Asian nations, established on December 8, 1985. Its Headquarter in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The very first proposal for the establishing a framework for regional integration in South Asia was made by the late president of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman, on May 2,1980. Prior to this, the idea of South Asian integration was discussed in at least three Conferences, in New Delhi in April, 1947, the Baguio Conference in the Philippines in May 1950, and the Colombo Powers Conference in April 1954. The government of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives formally adopted its charter providing for the promotion of social, culture and cultural development. With in the South Asia region and also for friendship and cooperation with other developing countries. Its seven founding members India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan while Afghanistan joined the organization in 2007. Observer states include USA, Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, Myanmar, Mauritius, Iran and European Union. Meetings of heads of states are usually held on annual basis and meeting of foreign secretaries twice a year.

The Declaration issued for the creation of the SAARC States the objectives of association as promotion o welfare of people, improvement in the quality of life of the people, acceleration of economic growth; promotion of collective self-reliance; promotion of collaboration in economic; social, culture, technical and scientific fields; strengthening of cooperation with other developing countries and themselves besides cooperation with regional and intentional organizations with similar objectives. This cooperation amongst the members was to be based on respect for principle of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs of other states shall not be a substitute for bilateral and multilateral and obligations. Further, decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of consensus and that bilateral and contention issues shall be excluded from the deliberations. The formation of SAARC was welcomed and a hope was expressed that it would contribute to the economic development of the region as a whole of the size and geographical location of individual countries. Though SAARC is the youngest of the regional grouping, it is biggest in terms of number of people it represents (it represents over one billion people).

### SAARC SUMMITS AND THEIR MOTIVE;

1-The First summit was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 7-8 December 1985 and was attended by government representatives and President of Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri-Lanka, King of Bhutan and Nepal and Prime Minister of India .They signed the SAARC Charter on 8 December 1985, thereby establishing the regional association and established study group on the problems of Terrorism and Drug –Trafficking, as well as planning a ministerial level conference on increasing the participation of women at the regional level. The summit also agreed to establish a SAARC Secretariat and adopted an official SAARC Emblem.

2-The 2<sup>nd</sup> summit was held in November 16-17 at Bangalore, India in 1986.The Heads of member states welcomed the signing of Memorandum of understanding on the establishment of SAARC Secretariat by the Council of Ministers and their decisions to locate the Secretariat in Kathmandu and appoint Ambassador Abdul Ahsan of Bangladesh as the first Secretary General of SAARC. The Heads of states and government of seven countries committed themselves to desire common policies and approach for finding common solution to the shared problems. The summit agreed in principle to extend cooperation among members in five additional fields

viz; launching of South Asian broadcasting programme covering both radio and television; provision of facilities to students and academicians; and harnessing of idealism of youth. Above all the summit upon the member states not to allow their territories to be used for terrorist activities against another state. The leaders agreed to cooperate in combating and eliminating terrorism from the region.

**3-**The 3<sup>rd</sup> summit was held at Kathmandu Nepal from 2-4 November 1987 and was attended by the Heads of member states. 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. The leaders called for increasing orienting SAARC to the people's need and aspiration so that the people of the region are drawn into the mainstream of its activities and contribute to peace, friendship, and cooperation in the area. The leaders of SAARC expressed concern over structural disequilibrium in the world economy and emphasized the urgent need for resumption of North-South Dialogue. They called for equitable participation of the developing countries in the international trade and economic system.

**4-**The 4<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Islamabad, Pakistan from 29-31 December 1988. The leaders arrived at several positive decisions including elimination of drugs and terrorism. They expressed concern at the high incidence of drug production, trafficking and abuse and decided to declare 1989 as the "SAARC Year Against Drug Abuses" in order to focus attention on drug related problems facing the region. They stressed the need of measure at national level to fully implement the Regional Conventional on Suppression of Terrorism. They called for a perspective regional plan with special targets of meeting basic needs to be met by the end of the country in core sectors such as food, clothing, shelter, education, primary health care, population, planning and environmental protection. The summit welcomed the establishment of South Asian Food Security Reserve in August 1988 and described it as a major breakthrough in the common endeavour of the governments of the member countries to assist each other in food emergency situation. They reiterated their determination to accord priority to the needs of children in national development plans and decided to declare 1990 as "SAARC Year of Girl Child". The summit set up a technical committee on education and launched a regional plan called "SAARC-2000-A Basic Needs Perspective" to meet specific targets which are above discussed. It was also agreed to hold regular "South Asian Festivals" with the first being hosted by India.

**5-**The 5<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Male, the capital of Maldives on 21-23 November in 1990 attended by the heads of seven member states. 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 Organized 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, declared various SAARC years (1991-2000 AD) to be the "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child", 1991 to be the "SAARC Year of Shelter", 1992 to be the "SAARC Year of the Environment", 1993 to be the "SAARC Year of Disabled Persons", and decided to set up the SAARC.

**6-**The 6<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Colombo, Sri-Lanka on December 21 in 1991 for one day by the Heads of the seven member states. At this meeting they agreed to liberalize trade in the region and gave a call for greater cooperation and interaction among member states to combat terrorism in the region.

**7-**The 7<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Dhaka, Bangladesh on 10-11 April in 1993, attended by the heads of member states. The summit adopted a Declaration which sought to pull down trade barriers in the region. It also endorsed the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) for the liberalization of trade among the seven member countries of the SAARC. The summit leaders agreed that the time was now opportune to provide a dynamic impetus to activities in the core of economic, social and cultural cooperation in the SAARC regions. The summit endorsed and Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) on eradication of poverty in South Asia, trade, manufacture and services, the environment, population, shelter, children, youth, disabled persons, women's development, science and technology, terrorism, drug trafficking, security of small states, people to people contact etc. The other notable decisions taken by the summit included information of an Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians and establishment of South Asian Development Fund (SADF).

**8-**The 8<sup>th</sup> summit was held in New Delhi, India on 24 May in 1995, and was attended by Heads of the seven member states. It accepted the recommendation of the sub-continental Foreign Ministers meeting of April 1995 which had proposed the launching of the South Asian Preferential Agreement (SAPTA), which would take SAARC closer to an economic role. The members agreed to operationalise (SAPTA) by 8 December, 1995. The summit also decided to establish a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) to promote intra-regional trade. The other important decisions taken by the leaders of SAARC countries included designation of 1995 as the "SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication". The Delhi declaration unequivocally condemned all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and stressed that the highest priority be accorded to enactment of legislation as

the national level to implement the SAARC-Regional Conventional on Suppression of Terrorism. The Declaration also urged the member states to implement the 1993 SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The member states committed themselves to the global objectives of shelter for all 2000 A.D. The summit the importance of international cooperation for building for building up national capabilities, transfer of technology and promotion of multilateral project and research efforts in minimizing natural disasters. The summit reiterated and reaffirmed its resolve to strengthen the UN capital as the central instrument of peace, security, disarmament, government and cooperation in the world. The declaration also welcomed the World Trade Organization (WTO) and hoped that it would expand international trade.

**9-**The 9<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Male from 12-14 May, 1997, and was attended by the seven member countries. At this summit the members unanimously adopted a declaration asserting that the region should be transformed into a free-trade area by 2001 (instead of 2005, as earlier agreed) by removing all the trade barriers and structural impediments. The Declaration asserted that the sub-regional cooperation, instead of being abandoned, should be further extended. They also vowed to combat terrorism and drug trafficking in the region and to launch a war against poverty.

**10-**The 10<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Colombo Sri Lanka on 29-31 July 1998, was attended by the Heads of the member countries. The leaders of SAARC countries reiterated their commitment to the promotion of mutual trust and understanding as a means for solving bilateral and multilateral problems. The summit criticized major nuclear powers for maintaining huge arsenals of nuclear weapons and urged the Geneva based conference on Disarmament to start negotiations for prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons and elimination of such weapons in the existing arsenals. In the economic field the SAARC leaders agreed to accelerate the process for the conclusion of the South Asian Preference Trading Agreement (SAPTA). The other economic measures recommended by the summit included extension of tariff concessions to products actively traded; removal of discriminatory practice and non-tariff barriers on the items covered by the tariff concessions; drafting a treaty to create free trade area; coordination of SAARC position before the WTO; and encouragement of sub regional cooperation.

**11-**The 11<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 4-6 January 2002 and was attended by the Heads of member countries. The members agreed to take speedy measures to “suppress the financing of terrorists, eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists, halt cynical abuse of refugee and asylum status, and enact domestic legislation to deal with extensive international terrorist networks”. The SAARC members reaffirmed their commitment to SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism which recognized seriousness of the problem of terrorism as it effects the security, stability and development of the region.

The Declaration emphasized the need of regional cooperation in economic fields to move quickly towards a SAFTA. The Council of Ministers was directed to finalize the text of the Draft Treaty Framework by the end of 2002. The other principles and issues emphasized by the Declaration related to poverty alleviation, cooperation in social and cultural sectors, women and children, education, international politics and economic environment.

**12-**The 12<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Islamabad Pakistan from 4-6 January, 2004. It was attended by the Heads of the state and governments of the member countries. At the end of the summit Islamabad Declaration was adopted. The Declaration condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations because it posed a serious threat to the international peace and security. On this occasion the members signed South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement which would come into force from 1 January 2006. As per the agreement the member-states agreed to reduce their tariffs to 0.5% in seven years from the date the agreement came into force. The Agreement suggested a number of measures which may adopt, viz; removal of barriers to intra-SAARC investment, harmonization of customs facilities, transit facilities for efficient intra SAARC trade and simplification of procedures for business visas. Under the SAFTA agreement provision was made for withdrawal by members. The Declaration also laid emphasis on increasing political cooperation among members. It stated “We envisage South Asia to be a peaceful and stable region where each nation is at peace with itself and its neighbours and where conflicts, differences and disputes are addressed through peaceful means and dialogue”. The summit also adopted a Social Charter for promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia in all fields.

**13-**The 13<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Dhaka in Bangladesh on 12-13 November 2005, and was attended by the Heads of seven countries. The summit appreciated the decision to bring Afghanistan into SAARC fold on account of its long standing note cultural and historical ties with other members of SAARC. The summit Declaration was adopted which took strong note of terrorism in the region and stated that there should be no double standards in the fight against terrorism. At this summit the members signed three agreements viz; Agreements on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters; Agreement on establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council; and Limited Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation, and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters. It

was decided to observe 2006 -2015 as SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation. A special body was to be established for this purpose.

**14-**The 14<sup>th</sup> summit was held at New Delhi in India in April 2007. At this summit Afghanistan was admitted as the 8<sup>th</sup> member. Another notable feature of the summit was that China, Japan, South Korea, United States and European Union participated as observers. Some of the important decisions taken at the SAARC meet included establishment of South Asian University and a Food Bank in India; integrate trade in service within SAFTA; to operationalize 300 m SAARC Development Fund; to set up regional tele-medicine network with two hospitals in each country linked to Indian hospitals; to give priority to issue like water, energy, food, poverty, environment; to rationalize telecom tariff reciprocally; and to move SAARC from declaratory to implementation phase.

**15-**The 15<sup>th</sup> summit was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 1-3 August 2008. The main issues discussed at the summit include terrorism, trade promotion, measures to face the challenges posed by the climate etc. At the summit the leaders reiterated their commitment to strengthen the legal regime against terrorism by implementing all international conventions relating to combating terrorism in which the member states are parties. The summit decided to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Agriculture Ministers to work out a strategy on food security and operationalization of a SAARC Food Bank. The SAARC leaders agreed to create Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism for a coordinated and planned approach under the auspices of the SAARC. Disaster Management Centre to deal with emergencies triggered by natural disasters. At this summit one of the major points of discussion was the global food crises.

**16-**The 16<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Thimpu from April 28-29,2010 in Bhutan hosted the SAARC summit for the first time. This meet organized the silver jubilee celebration of SAARC that was formed in Bangladesh in December 1985. Climate change was the central issue of this summit with theme: "Towards a Green and Happy South Asia". The Thimpu summit decided the following issues regarding the climate change problems:

- \*The SAARC leaders signed a SAARC Convention on cooperation on environment to tackle the problem of climate change.

- \*They pledged to plant 10 million trees over next five years.

- \*India proposed the creation of climate innovation centers in South Asia to develop sustainable energy technologies and also offered services of India's mission on Himalayan Ecosystem to SAARC members.

- \*India announced India Endowment for Climate Change in South Asia to help SAARC members.

**17-**The 17<sup>th</sup> summit was held from November 10-11, 2011 in Addu City, Maldives. It was organized at the Equatorial Convention Centre. It was opened by the outgoing Chair of SAARC Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley. Mohammad Nasheed was elected as Chairperson of this summit. He highlighted three areas of cooperation in which progress should be made:

- \*Trade, transport and economic integration.

- \*Security issue such as piracy and climate change.

- \*Good governance.

The Heads of observer Delegation, Cabinet Ministers of the Maldives, Ministers in the visiting delegations and other state dignitaries. 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 build. The foreign ministers of the member states signed four agreements: Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disaster, Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment, on implementation of Regional Standard and Seed Bank Agreement.

**18-**The 18<sup>th</sup> summit was held at Kathmandu in Nepal from November 26-27, 2014 and was attended by the Heads of member states. The motto was "Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity".

## Conclusion

By this above discussion it is not wrong to say that the formation of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a landmark step taken by the leaders of the region. The main rationale behind its establishment is to develop the relations, to interact peacefully with each other, to cultivate sustainable peace and promote mutual economic well being by harnessing available resources in the region through the peaceful process of economic integration. By using the trends and ways which are already above discussed in the different SAARC summits we can achieve the success in every field and in this sense we can call it "SAARC-The Sign of Solution of Problems in South Asia". If there will be the positive or practical use of these trends the day is not so far when the region will be called the developed region in the world and there will be a unique image on the international sphere.

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