

# India's Foreign Policy and Contemporary Defence Challenges

*Edited by*  
Prof. (Dr.) C. B. Bhange  
Arbind Kumar | Ajay Kumar



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12. Indian Non Align-Movement <i>Sarita Devi</i>	129-137
13. China's Maritime Silk Route & Security Implications for India <i>Aman Bora</i>	138-151
14. Indo-US Relation Vis-a Vis Indian Diaspora in Us <i>Aditya Anshu &amp; Sakshi Bahuguna</i>	152-162
15. India and Ussr: Nehru to Indra Gandhi <i>Prof. (Dr.) C. B. Bhange &amp; Arbind Kumar &amp; Ajay Kumar</i>	163-167
16. Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific Region <i>Poonam Devi</i>	168-179
17. India and United Nations <i>Samadhan Narayanrao Darade</i>	180-188
18. India-Israel Relation <i>Ravi Shekhar</i>	189-195
19. India and Central Asia Relations <i>Hasmin Ahmed</i>	196-205
20. In Looking into India's Transition from 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy': Covering the Journey <i>Sovik Mukherjee &amp; Ushoshi Ganguly</i>	206-213
21. Saarc: Role and Achievements of World <i>Dr. R. K. Kale</i>	214-221
22. India and Brics <i>Kanchan Devi</i>	222-229
23. China-India Relations in Economic Forums <i>Priyanka Biswas &amp; Dr. Priyank Mishra</i>	230-239
24. Perspective on Climate Change <i>Ram S Samant &amp; Vinay Kumar Pandey</i>	240-250
25. India's Foreign Policy in 21St Century <i>Dr. Vandana M. Mahure</i>	251-259
26. Indian Foreign Policy-Its Effect on Daily Lives <i>Kalyani Bhargavi</i>	260-265

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### Introduction

The world today is at a turning point. The changes that we are undergoing are global in scope, revolutionary, fundamental and structural in content. As we have entered the 21st century a sense of optimism prevails for attaining peace and prosperity through effective role-play of regional as well as global organizations. Many view Asia as having a variety of characteristics in common with Europe of the nineteenth century: underdeveloped international institutions, mixed domestic orders, rising nationalism, high but differential growth rates, and bitter, emotional rivalries between insecure neighbors'

### Origin of SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an organization of South Asian nations, established on December 8, 1985. It is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal. The very first proposal for 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: the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in April 1947, the Baguio Conference in the Philippines in May 1950, and the Colombo Powers Conference in April 1954.<sup>iii</sup> The governments of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka formally adopted its charter providing for the promotion of social, economic and cultural development within the South Asian region and also for friendship and cooperation with other developing countries. Its seven founding members were Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh 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 state are usually held on annual basis and meetings of foreign secretaries twice a year.

### **Role and Achievements of SAARC**

In the past twenty six years, SAARC has made tremendous improvement owing to the interaction and cooperative efforts being put in by the member states. The progress and development of SAARC during the recent years can be looked at under the following headings:

#### **1. Substantial Increase in Cooperation**

Since the formation of SAARC in 1985, the level of cooperation among the member countries increased substantially. SAARC was established with the objective of improving the living standards of the people, cultural and regional economic growth and increasing cooperation with other regions of the world. During the recent years, realizing the importance of regional cooperation and development, SAARC members have now created a sense of accelerating regional economic development and they advocate revival of the organization by moving from just the issuance of declarations to practical implementation of the plans and policies to turn this weak region into a potentially developed one. This recognition has led towards increasing the pace of cooperation among the member countries. This cooperation can be witnessed in the establishment and initiation of various programs and forums for mutual benefits.

- South Asian University, New Delhi
- SAARC International College, Bangladesh
- Agreement on judicial cooperation on Counter-Terrorism
- Establishment of Food Bank
- Establishment of Development Funds
- Telemedicine Network
- SAARC Writers and Literature Foundation
- South Asia Foundation

#### **2. Economic and Trade Discussions**

For the success of SAARC, economic and trade cooperation is very much important and infect the first thing to be focused on for the development of South Asia. Many years of discussions have at least established the bases of cooperation in this particular area. During the 1990s, SAARC discussed the Preferential Trading Area (SAPTA) among the member countries which was materialized in the shape of

Free Trade Agreement which is now known as South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). According to this agreement, the tariff reduction plan was chalked out and since 2006, this reduction had been carried out in two phases. i.e Pakistan and India pledged to put tariffs on all the goods down to twenty percent within two years and all other countries to thirty percent within three years. v While in the second phase, Pakistan and India decided to put the tariffs on goods down to 0-5 percent within five years and other members of the organization within seven years. Though the initiatives taken to trade freely in the region has encountered a lot of problem but still we cannot ignore that the member countries are proceeding ahead with their plans to improve the regional growth and cooperation.

### **3. Increase in External Support/Cooperation with Observers**

It is worth mentioning that being a poor region, SAARC countries cannot develop each and every aspect of their economies alone. They are in need of support and assistance in capital, resources, education and technology from the more developed regions and individual countries. One of the positive points in the recent years has been the interest of the other developed countries in SAARC who want to provide help in social and economic fields. The member countries have reached the conclusion during the recent years that they would welcome any assistance from the observer countries and being observers, USA, Japan, China, South Korea, Iran and EU are willing to provide support e.g Japan has clearly offered help in social infrastructure development and disaster management, China offered donation to South Asian Development Fund and the recent support has also come from China to run the China-South Asia Business Forum. vii SAARC has established institutionalized arrangements for cooperation with a number of other regional groupings and international and regional organizations. SAARC has also been in the process of making agreements and MOUs with other regional and international organizations like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF).

### **4. Cooperation on Security and Terrorism**

The SAARC Convention on suppression of Terrorism was signed in 1987 and later the Additional Protocol on Terrorism was signed taking

into account the terrorist financing structure. This was in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1373. The Additional Protocol on Terrorism was adopted in 2005 after much debate and discussion on the definition of terrorism. In spite of these two important documents on terrorism, there has not been much enthusiasm to cooperate on issues of terrorist violence and funding between the member countries. Cooperation has been confined to bilateral initiatives.<sup>ix</sup> SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD), Colombo, Sri Lanka SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD), and Colombo, Sri Lanka

### 5. Focus on Youth

It is a fact that in most of the developing countries, youth is ignored. Although youth forms an important part of development for any nation but still they are not consulted to while taking important policy decisions. Given the sensible bracket of age within which young people fall, they are highly risk taking and in case of no opportunities for progress, they even become the cause of governments fall. SAARC members have all an increasing rate of the young population and they must be made the center of attention which SAARC has considered upon.

The SAARC Youth Award is awarded to outstanding individuals from the SAARC region. The award is notable due to the recognition it gives to the Award winner in the SAARC region. The award is based on specific themes which apply to each year. The award recognizes and promotes the commitment and talent of the youth who give back to the world at large through various initiatives such as Inventions,<sup>x</sup> Protection of the Environment and Disaster relief.

### 6. Poverty Eradication

As one of the poorest regions of the world, it is one of the most important priorities of SAARC to give attention to this main objective of poverty alleviation. The total population of SAARC eight members is over 1.6 billion and forty percent of this population is living below the poverty line. The illiteracy rate is about or even more than 50 percent. The task is not very easy but with conviction and vision for stable regional cooperation, this aim can be achieved. The strategies for poverty alleviation were suggested as:

- Social mobilization,
- Access to education, safe drinking water
- Health services



- Nutrition
- Policy of agricultural development
- Labour-intensive industrialization
- Human resource development.

### **7. Integrated Programme of Action (IPA)**

The IPA is an important programme of the SAARC process and includes 12 areas of cooperation, each being covered by a designated Technical Committee. The Secretary-General reports to the Standing Committee on the progress in the enforcement of IPA. The Standing Committee also reviews the institutional mechanisms and the functioning of the Technical Committees, their mandate and also evaluating the role of the Secretariat.

### **8. Financial Cooperation**

The Meetings of the Finance Ministers of SAARC is an important feature of SAARC agenda. Till now, four Meetings of the Finance Ministers of SAARC have been held in Pakistan (July 11, 2006), India (September 15, 2007), Maldives (May 14, 2009) and Bhutan (August 24, 2010). The First Meeting of SAARC Finance Ministers confirmed the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial matters including development of the roadmap for achieving the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased manner. The Member States are in the process of exchanging Concept Papers in the area of finance. A SAARC Expert Group on Development of Capital Markets in South Asia was also held at the SAARC Secretariat on December 27, 2011 as recommended by the SAARC Finance Ministers. Sixth meeting of Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial issues took place at SAARC Secretariat on 23-24 April, 2013. The Seventh informal meeting of SAARC Finance Ministers took place in New Delhi on May 3, 2013 and Progress is being made in the positive direction regarding financial cooperation while considering and opening new doors for cooperation.

## **Challenges before SAARC**

### **1. Clash of Civilizations:**

Prof. Samuel Huntington has mentioned in his book "the clash of civilizations" that SAARC has been a failure because according to him the countries that belong to associations like EU etc they belong to same culture but SAARC belongs to those countries whose cultures are different. India and Pakistan are foes of each other, they fight on

pity things, and then how can these two countries help each other in one association..... The one country does not have feeling of belonging with the other area or state.

## 2). People to People Contact:

The contact of the people with the association is zero and as well as with the people of the member countries. They don't know when was the association made and that was the purpose then how can they join together to help their own state solve their problems.....

## 3). Pathetic Condition of the South Asia:

260 million inhabitants of the south Asia lack basic facilities in south Asia and it is the most deprived region too. 337 million people lack safe drinking water: 830 million are without rudimentary sanitation and 400 million go hungry every day. SAARC is the most militarized place in world; its two countries Pakistan and India are spending \$ 30 billion on their defense expense. Afghanistan, its newly member is facing war from last 30 years. In view of these all major problems how such association can successfully work.

## 4). Trade:

All the south Asian countries look up to India to share its huge markets because of its size and location, where 80% of the of the intra-regional trade in south Asia is to or from India. India blames the failure of SAFTA on Pakistan but it's not true at all because SAFTA requires India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to bring their duties down to 20% in the two year period ending in 2007. The 20% duty in the final phase ending in 2012 will be reduced to zero. During the fiscal period of 2006-2007, the exports of India were in billion dollars but their imports were no more than \$350 million.

## 5). Different Political System:

The different kind of politics in the member states is also the reason of the failure of SAARC. In south Asia there hadn't been a strong democratic region. Like in India there is

**democracy**, in **Pakistan** there is **transitional democracy kingship** in **Nepal** and **presidential** system in **Sri Lanka**. The most countries have remained unstable in the past and the future. The dispute between the two countries India and Pakistan over Kashmir issue has never let these two giant countries of the south Asia to go along well and set aside their differences on the SAARC forum. A part from this the

India has dome disputes with its rest of the member countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and th9is thing also hasn't helped SAARC cause.

### Conclusion

Though the formation of SAARC is a landmark step taken by the leaders of the region, the main rational behind its establishment is to develop a congenial environment through summit diplomacy where all nations may interact peacefully with each other, cultivate sustainable peace and promote mutual economic well being by harnessing available resources in the region through the peaceful process of economic integration. Nevertheless, after 21 years of establishment, neither South Asian nations have been able to push the process of integration into full swing nor the organization itself has become viable enough to promote peace, harmony and economic integration or prevent conflicts in the region. The political tensions and conflicts surrounding the countries of a South Asia pose a question of uncertainty and challenge to the formation of South Asian Union at par with European Union that would allow free movement of people; common currency and common foreign and economic policies which ultimately will sow the seeds of peace. In order to achieve the objectives the SAARC would have to evolve into a full-fledged 'regional entity' that can cultivate peace in the region. The realization of durable peace and the future of economic integration through SAARC depend upon the ability and interest of South Asian leaders to resolve domestic as well as long-standing differences through peaceful deliberations.

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