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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Abstract

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an association of South Asian countries, which was built up on 8 December 1985 when the legislature of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka formally received its sanction accommodating the advancement of monetary and social advance, social improvement inside the South Asia district and furthermore for kinship and co-operation with other creating nations. It is devoted to financial, mechanical, social and social improvement accentuating aggregate independence. As far as populace, its effective reach is the biggest of any provincial association: very nearly 1.5 billion consolidated populace of its part states. In April 2007, Afghanistan turned into its eighth part. This paper highlights the nature, origin and development of SAARC and presents them in a very comprehensive way for easy understanding.

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Introduction:-

In spite of the breakdown of Afro-Asian movement, India emerged as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the Post Colonial World. Nehru's detection of economic development through industrialization and his mission for world peace sought to be achieved by the ideology of non-alignment gave India's foreign policy an international status. The Indian policy of non-alignment in respect of South Asia was planned to limit the penetration of cold war politics in to the region [1] India's political position in world received a impede in 1960s on account of its defeat in the mortifying war of 1962 in the hands of China. In 1960s India also suffered with starvation and economic gloominess. The economic situation made it obligatory for India to diminish its currency. But later events mainly India's decisive victory against Pakistan in 1971 resulting in creation of Bangladesh, achievement of self-sufficiency in food production and nuclear tests at Pokhran (1974) restored India's reliability and image in international power politics. The year 1971 was thus a spiraling point for South Asia and for India's role in the region. Emergence of India as a regional power in South Asia and failure of the US and China to help Pakistan in 1971 war with India enhanced the fear and doubt of India's neighbours about her behaviour in the region. The Soviet incursion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and western response to this brought the cold war on the doorsteps of India [2].

It was aligned with this background the idea of South Asian Cooperation was proposed by Bangladesh. The idea to set up a regional grouping in South Asia can be traced back to the year 1977 [3]. The idea of South Asian Cooperation was proposed by the Bangladesh President Late Zia-Ur-Rahman in course of his good will visits to several South Asian countries. The issue was broached with the Indian leaders when he (Zia-Ur-Rahman) visited

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however could not be projected that the Janata rule in India was on its way out. Subsequently when Mrs. Gandhi came back to power in January 1980, Bangladesh leader approached her on the issue.

In January 1978 during the visit of King Birendra of Nepal to Bangladesh, President Zia-Ur-Rahman welcomed the King's call for close provincial cooperation made by him a month earlier. He underlined the area of division river waters in particular for such cooperation. It seems that the Bangladesh leader gave a final figure to his proposal after visiting Sri Lanka in November 1979 and having discussions with Lankan President J.R.Jayawardhene. Both the leaders had then referred to ASEAN, which, they thought, could possibly form the basis on which the framework and the pattern of the South Asian Forum would be prepared [4].

Initial disinclination of India and Pakistan

The proposal was promptly endorsed by Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan. But there was some disinclination on the part of both India and Pakistan. When the idea of regional cooperation was first mooted, India showed its disinclination largely due to its past experience of regional pacts in Asia. India feared that sooner or later SAARC might also meet the same fate. India's foreign policy prevents it from these kinds of political and security contract which invite extra-regional powers. Besides, India's dealings with its neighbours have not been very good. So, if India showed any kind of interest its neighbours might view it as a demonstration of its hegemonistic attitude. Moreover, India itself had the apprehensions of 'ganging up' by the neighbours adjacent to it [5]. It also feared that her neighbours may try to mend certain disputes to her disadvantage. India apprehended that the initiative for south asian regional cooperation might be an endeavor to build disguised anti-Soviet and pro-US strategic front.[6]. In India Mrs. Indira Gandhi's new government accepted the proposal in principle but did not want to impulsively support the whole move without proper scrutiny since the proposal had, in reality, been worked out in consultation with the provisional regime of the Janata party. This was also the time when India had experienced seclusion in the region on some of the vital world issues of its concern namely Afghanistan, Kampuchea and the Indian Ocean. On all these issues India's position was opposing to that of its neighbours. Relations between Mrs. Gandhi's government and that of the neighbouring countries particularly of the two Zias on India's east and west were not very pleased. Therefore, there were uncertainties in Delhi that through the proposed regional forum, the neighbours would collectively try to isolate India on global issues and contain India's position in South Asia by putting pressures on it in order to develop their respective bargaining position in relation to bilateral and regional issues with India [7] Inspite of its qualms, it accepted to join the Regional Forum.

Pakistan Stand:

After the proposal for regional cooperation in South Asia was made by the late Zia-Ur-Rahman, neither the Pakistan government nor its press reacted positively. Pakistan's media stand has been pertinently commented by an Indian analyst that media is "ostensibly favorable, it places the proposal in a context which can only kill it [8]. Pakistan's approach towards multilateral cooperation in South Asia is perceptible by caution and circumspection. It has strenuous under the apprehension that the SAARC will provide India an opportunity for projecting itself and its policies. By virtue of its size, it is bound to surpass others, and therefore Pakistan, reacting to the proposal put forward by Bangladesh, apathetically accepted the principle of cooperation on a step-by-step basis. Pakistan wanted to make sure that "there was no too much sail on a very diminutive hull"[9]. Lack of passion for the Bangladesh proposal from Pakistan was based on different considerations. Pakistan, perhaps, had an inconsistent perception that the move was prompted by India and that in view of India's greater economic potential and scientific and technological capabilities, the attempt was to ensure regional market for Indian products. Thus, Pakistan thought, this would lead to the consolidation and further intensification of India's economic dominance with its consequent political implications in the region. Accordingly, Pakistan become afraid of trailing its political stance in the subcontinent by joining this move of regional cooperation, without resolving its bilateral issues with India, particularly that of Kashmir, to its advantage.

Pakistan was also concerned that its deeper involvement with the South Asian region, which was to be a natural outcome of Bangladesh proposal, could wane the credibility and drive of its policy option to cultivate and harness mutually profitable relations with the South-West Asian region in the emerging strategic and economic situation there [10]. Not withstanding these reservations, both India and Pakistan attached the move as a damage containing exercise. And for this, both of them insisted on certain pre-conditions like the unanimity in decision-making within the regional forum and evasion of bilateral and controversial issues. They also endeavored to lower the proposed high political profile of the regional forum and required to go slow on its organizational expansion. The pre-conditions preferred by India and Pakistan were also welcomed by others since they gave every person a vote, a

decisive say in what the SAARC could do and what it could not [11]. Therefore, India and Pakistan could not outright reject the proposal. They dissolved their differences on the regional forum in bilateral discussions.

President Zia-Ur-Rahman's Initiative.

The Bangladesh President Zia-Ur-Rahman proposed a medium for regional cooperation during his visits to Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during the period 1977-1980. In the light of his consultations, he addressed letters of matching nature to the Heads of Government of the countries of South Asia (namely Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) which were accepted by special envoys. In his letter he proposed that the countries of the area should explore the leeway of establishing some institutional arrangements for regional cooperation and to this end, a meeting at the Summit level be held. He felt that while other regions had evolved institutional arrangements for session on matters of mutual interest and cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields, the only region which did not have any such arrangement was South Asia which comprised one-fifth of the world population. He noted that modern positive developments in the region had created a better climate of understanding [12].

The responses from different South Asian capitals were positive and the proposal of the President was cordially welcomed. However, it was felt by some countries of region, that summit meetings generate immense expectations among people and therefore, a step by step approach would be more productive. They pointed out that enough preparatory work would be necessary to ensure the success of such meetings. It was also barbed that against the back drop of the history of the region, it would be wise to proceed on the basis of careful and adequate preparations so as to ensure a productive outcome of the summit meeting. The South Asian Foreign Ministers also discussed this subject at the U.N. Headquarters in New York during August-September 1980. The consent that finally emerged among them was to have a meeting at the level of foreign secretaries which could prepare ground for the ministerial meeting that could subsequently lead to a summit. The seven South Asian countries concerned in the exercise were India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. It was determined to keep the bilateral and politically controversial issues out of the purview of the foreign secretaries meeting. Bangladesh was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the sketch of a working paper which could be discussed at the first meeting of the Foreign Secretaries.

Bangladesh working paper was quite sanguine regarding the ultimate emergence of a regional organization in South Asia. It suggested four possible names for the proposed institutional framework. They are [13-16]

- 1) South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAAC)
- 2) Association of South Asia (ASA)
- 3) Association of South Asia for Cooperation (ASAC)
- 4) Organization of South Asian States (OSAS).

Finally out of the four names suggested by it, the first one i.e., South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAAC), has been slightly customized as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). When it formally launched at Dhaka in 1985.

First Foreign Secretaries Meeting - Colombo (1981)

For the first time unceremonious consultation begun at the level of Foreign Secretaries in Colombo from 21st to 23rd April 1981. It was attended by Foreign Secretaries of seven countries namely Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. It was called in order to converse the Bangladesh's proposal. It decided to ensue in the direction of establishing linkages in various fields, such as institutional, sharing of technology, mutual investment, improvement of human resources etc. It was settled that the main concern of South Asian Regional Cooperation should be on the growth of the collective self-reliance, striving for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) through self-adequacy within the region and solving disputes through mutual understanding [17].

As a first step, the Foreign Secretaries agreed to set up Five Study Groups and each of these groups would have a Coordinator country. They are [18].

- 1) Agriculture - Bangladesh
- 2) Rural Development - Sri Lanka
- 3) Telecommunications - Pakistan
- 4) Meteorology - India
- 5) Health & Population Activities - Nepal

It also agreed to set up a 'Committee of the Whole' comprising of senior officials of the seven countries to identify and report on the other areas of possible cooperation for contemplation at their next meeting. The meeting also deal

with eleven fields mentioned in the Bangladesh Working Paper. They accepted the regional cooperation in South Asia in principle as useful, desirable and necessary, A step-by step approach which was proposed by Bangladesh was accepted by all. It was determined that Sri Lanka would be Coordinator country for the Committee of the Whole. The Foreign Secretaries decided that Kathmandu, Nepal will be the venue for their next meeting.

AN INDIAN NOTE REGARDING AREAS OF CORPORATION

The Indian views in regard to possible areas of regional cooperation were spelt out in the proclamation made by Foreign Secretary, Shri R.D. Sathe, in the Colombo meeting of the Foreign Secretaries held in April 1981. He had then stated the exercise of identifying areas to relate to functional cooperation in areas which are most relevant for the socio-economic development of our peoples in the region is of prime importance and the need to involve the academic community, and the non-governmental organizations, in this exercise is also very enviable. India felt that the scope of the work of the accessible study group on telecommunications should be widened so as to include cooperation in the sector of postal services. It is also recommended that the two existing study groups on agriculture and rural development may be combined as one study group [19]. Apart from the above amendments, possibility of setting up new study groups on following promising areas of regional cooperation may be examined. Indian Foreign Secretary in his statement to the Colombo meeting, observed that the artistic cooperation can cover sports, education, films, theatres, production of text books, organization of seminars and exhibition, regional film festivals etc. In order to ensure an efficient flow of movement of goods and also to facilitate interregional traffic a well integrated system of communications especially in the form of road and rail lines would be invaluable for economic development of the region. In order to bring about a degree of self sufficiency and to give an additional tonic to economic development of the countries in this region, shipping was natural area for cooperation on a regional basis. India observed that there exists a enormous potential intraregional cooperation in the field of tourism in South Asia. The revolutionary development of air transportation in recent times has made tourism the second largest export industry in the world. It is essential that the countries of South Asia get a bigger share of the world market in tourist traffic.

India views that market endorsement in selected commodities of common interest, as another richest area for regional cooperation. Joint initiatives in the region can diminish the costs and have greater impact in the export markets of a number of communities. The countries of the region command a momentous share of the world market for commodities such as tea, jute and cotton [20]. Cooperation related to international economic conciliation is being suggested with a view to present a common approach with respect to the development aid, trade concessions etc. It would mean adopting a common stand, to the extent possible, as a group at the North-South Dialogue in the (UNCTAD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and ESCAP sessions and in the World Bank and other U.N. forums allied with aid to developing countries and other aspects of development cooperation. The common strategy will be directed towards the achievement of the objectives of NIEO involving reforms in the international monetary system, stabilization of prices of commodities of common interest for their joint marketing and measures for facing competition from amalgamation in the world market.

India recognized countries of South Asian region have a unique need to develop effective use of science and technology for alleviating the widespread poverty that is a common characteristic of the area assistance in this field is particularly significant in view of the fact that experience gained by the South Asian countries in this area can be shared with greater advantage than the technology borrowed from the industrialized countries of the developed world. This cooperation can be particularly beneficial in the field of conservation of energy, improvement of competence in one of the existing sources of energy through development of low-energy technology, and aspects of new and renewable sources of energy. India feels that the Committee of the whole should also give concentration to the following paths along which, development of regional cooperation in South Asia can be promoted and thus are significant for consideration by each of the study groups: [21]

- (1) Interchange of experience;
- (2) Cooperative development; and
- (3) Expanding economic relations

South Asian countries can study from one another in a great variety of ways, for illustration, through exchange of teachers and students, through visiting delegations drawn from different walks of life, through grouping among scholars and research institutions, and through various forms of cultural and scientific cooperation. Second Foreign Secretaries Meeting - Kathmandu: The second regional meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of the countries of South Asia took place in Kathmandu from 2nd to 4th November 1981. The Secretaries decided to endorse the

recommendations of the five study groups and convert these into working groups. It was determined to form three study groups on the following three additional areas of cooperation: [22]

Conclusion

The idea of South Asian Regional Cooperation was for the first time, proposed by Bangladesh President late Zia-ur-Rahman. But primarily the move of Bangladesh is not endorsed by India and Pakistan, because of their mutual suspicion. At last both India and Pakistan tied the move as a damage containing exercise. The President of Bangladesh, Knowing the friendly atmosphere for the establishment regional organization wrote identical letters and sends them to all capitals of South Asian countries through his special envoys. In the mean time, the Foreign Ministers of these countries at U.N Headquarters discussed the issue. Encouraged by the positive response from the countries of the region the Foreign Ministry of Bangladesh formulated and disseminated Working Paper on regional cooperation. The Working Paper suggested for possible names for the proposed institutional framework and one among them was accepted with trivial modification. The first informal consultations in the way of formation of SAARC started at Foreign Secretaries meeting held in April 1983. In this meeting India noted that South Asian countries can learn one another in a great diversity of ways with the formation of regional cooperation. The second meeting of the Foreign Secretaries held in Kathmandu in November 1981, in this meeting it was determined to form three study groups on three areas of cooperation. The third meeting of Foreign Secretaries was held in August in 1982. In this meeting it was decided to carry out the first regional meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers to discuss the mutual concerns. In the meantime the Committee of the Whole submitted its report. The fourth meeting of Foreign Secretaries was held in March 1983 at Dhaka. It acknowledged the Integrated Programme of Action for all the identified areas of cooperation. The first ever meeting of Foreign Ministers of the region was held in August 1983 at New Delhi. They asked to meet once a year to appraise the progress of South Asian Regional Cooperation. The second and third meetings of Foreign Ministers were held in July 1984 and May 1985 respectively. The third meeting is considered as the preparatory meeting for the launching of SAARC in December 1985.

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