

**SAARC**  
**(SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR**  
**REGIONAL COOPERATION)**

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# **SAARC**

## **(SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION)**

### **Introduction**

The regional organization South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established on December 8, 1985. There were initially seven member states that are mainly located in South Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In April 2007, at the Association's 14th summit, Afghanistan became its eighth member. The Headquarter of SAARC is in Kathmandu, Nepal. His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa of Bhutan is the present Secretary General of the organization (From March 1, 2014 to present).

### **History**

In the late 1970's, the then President of Bangladesh Ziaur Rahman proposed the creation of a trade bloc consisting of South Asian countries and with this end in view, he wrote communicated with the heads of governments of South Asian countries. The proposal was accepted by India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during a meeting held in Colombo in 1981. In August 1983, the leaders adopted the Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation at a meeting which was held in New Delhi, India.

During the next two years the South Asian nations committed themselves to form this South Asian alliance and the process culminated in the First SAARC Summit held on 7-8 December, 1985 in Dhaka where the Heads of State or Government of the initial seven countries adopted the Charter establishing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

### **SAARC Charter**

SAARC Charter is the constitution of SAARC and Member States are legally bound to follow the provisions of this Charter.

### **Objectives of SAARC**

According to Article I of the SAARC Charter, the Association has the following objectives:

- •□ To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life.
- •□ 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.
- •□ To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia.
- •□ To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciations of one another problem.
- •□ To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields.
- •□ To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries.
- •□ To strengthen cooperation among themselves in International forums on matters of common interest.
- •□ To cooperate with International and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

### **SAARC's Principles**

According to Article II of the SAARC Charter, the Association has the following principles:

- Cooperation within the framework of the ASSOCIATION shall be 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.
- Such cooperation shall not be a substitute for bilateral and multilateral cooperation but shall complement them.
- Such cooperation shall not be inconsistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations.

## **General Provisions**

According to Article X of the SAARC Charter, the Association will function based on the following two general provisions:

- Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity.
- Bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations.

## **SAARC Charter of Democracy**

A SAARC Charter of democracy was drafted by a technical committee in September 2010 and approved by the standing committee comprising of the foreign secretaries of all SAARC nations in February of this year. The idea for a Charter of Democracy was mooted by Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh during the 16th SAARC Summit in Thimphu, Bhutan. The thinking behind the charter was to recognize and reaffirm the commitment of all South Asian nations to democracy.

The SAARC Charter of Democracy contains many important provisions that recognize the supremacy of the respective constitutions, guarantee the independence of the judiciary, and renounce unconstitutional measures adopted in changing the head of a state.

## **Organization Structure**

### **Council of Ministers**

Council of Ministers (COM) comprises of the ministers of foreign/external affairs of the Member States. As provided in Article V of the Charter, the Council undertakes the following functions:

- Formulation of policies of the Association
- Review of progress of cooperation under SAARC
- Decision on new areas of cooperation
- Establishment of additional mechanism under SAARC, is necessary; and
- Decision making on other matters of general interest to SAARC

The Council is mandated to meet twice a year as also to hold its extra-ordinary session (by agreement of among the Member States).

### **Standing Committee**

The Standing Committee comprises of the Foreign Secretaries of the SAARC Member States. As provided in Article V of the SAARC Charter, the functions of standing committee are as follows:

- Overall monitoring and coordination of program of cooperation under different areas
- Approval of projects and programs, including modalities of their financing
- Determination of inter-sectoral priorities
- Mobilization of regional and external resources, and
- Identification of new areas of cooperation based on appropriate studies

Standing Committee is mandated to meet as often as necessary. Generally, they meet prior to the sessions of the Council of Minister, i.e. during the summit, and in between two Summits. The Committee reports to the Council of Ministers on regular matters and asks for specific decision on policy matters from the Council, if needed.

### **Technical Committees**

Technical Committees consist of representatives of Member States are responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the programs in their respective areas of cooperation. Apart from determining the potential and the scope of regional cooperation in agreed areas, Technical Committees are involved in formulation of programs and preparation of projects. They also coordinate the implementation of sectoral programs and assess the implementation regularly.

The following Technical Committees work on their respective areas to provide support to SAARC activities:

- Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
- Technical Committee on Health and Population Activities
- Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children
- Technical Committee on Science and Technology
- Technical Committee on Transport
- Technical Committee on Environment

### **Programming Committees**

Fifth Session of the Standing Committee (Dhaka, December 1985) set up the Programming Committee, to assist the Standing Committee in matters relating to:

- Selection of regional projects, including their location, cost-sharing modalities among the Member States, and mobilization of external resources
- Inter-sectoral priority of work program, and
- Review of the calendar of activities

It generally meets prior to the sessions of the Standing Committee. It is also mandated to convene on stand-alone basis to coordinate implementation of the approved SAARC programs and activities.

More information on Programming Committee can be found [here](#) .

### **5.5. Secretariat**

The SAARC Secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal. It coordinates and monitors implementation of activities, prepares for and services meetings, and serves as a channel of communication between the Association and its member States as well as other regional organizations. The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General, who is appointed by the Council of Ministers from Member States in alphabetical order for a term of three years. His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa from Nepal is the current Secretary General. The Secretary General is assisted by eight Directors on deputation from the Member States.

### **SAARC Agreements**

- Agreement for establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council
- Final Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation
- Final Agreement on Customs Matters
- Charter of SAARC Development Fund
- Agreement on establishing the SAARC food bank
- Agreement on south Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)
- Agreement on the Establishment of South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO)
- Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation

More information on SAARC Agreements can be found [here](#) .

## 7. SAARC Conventions

- ❑ SAARC Convention on Combating and Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution
- ❑ Convention on Promotion of Welfare of Children
- ❑ Convention on Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters, July 2008
- ❑ SAARC Convention Narcotics Drugs
- ❑ SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism
- ❑ Additional Protocol on Terrorism, Jan 2004

### SAARC Summits

The Charter (Article III) provides that the Heads of State or Government "shall meet once a year or more often as and when considered necessary by the Member States". However, the Summit has generally been convened at an interval of one and half year or so. The next i.e. Eighteenth Summit of the Heads of State or Government would be held at Kathmandu on 26-27 November 2014. Summit Declarations provide directives and mandate for regional co-operation. Following are the past SAARC Summits:

- ❑ First SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 1985
- ❑ Second SAARC Summit, Bangalore, 1986
- ❑ Third SAARC Summit, Kathmandu, 1987
- ❑ Fourth Summit, Islamabad, 1988
- ❑ Fifth SAARC Summit, Male', 1990
- ❑ Sixth SAARC Summit, Colombo, 1991
- ❑ Seventh SAARC Summit. Dhaka, 1993
- ❑ Eighth SAARC Summit, New Delhi 1995
- ❑ Ninth SAARC Summit, Male, 1997
- ❑ Tenth SAARC Summit, Colombo, 1998
- ❑ Eleventh SAARC Summit, Kathmandu, 2002
- ❑ Twelfth SAARC Summit, Islamabad, 2004
- ❑ Thirteenth SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 2005
- ❑ Fourteenth SAARC Summit, New Delhi, 2007
- ❑ Fifteenth SAARC Summit, Colombo, 2008
- ❑ Sixteenth SAARC Summit, Thimphu, 2010
- ❑ Seventeenth SAARC Summit, Addu City, 2011
- ❑ Eighteenth SAARC Summit, Kathmandu, 2014

### Areas of cooperation

#### Agriculture and rural development

Regional cooperation on agriculture and rural development has been in the focus of SAARC from its inception. In 1990, two separate technical committees on agriculture and rural development were established and a number of specialized programs and projects were initiated by the member states through these technical committees under the auspices of *SAARC Integrated Programme of Action (SIPA)*. Later, the two technical committees on agriculture and rural development were merged into one. The reconstituted committee which is called 'Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development' started functioning in July, 2000. The reconstituted committee was also mandated to consider livestock and fisheries matters. Functioning of this technical committee has been helpful in bridging knowledge gap, sharing experience and expertise, identifying areas for pursuing regional actions and projects etc.

#### Investment and commercial dispute settlement

With a view to creating conditions favourable for fostering greater investment by investors of one-member state in the territory of another member state of SAARC and for providing a regional forum for settlement

of commercial disputes by conciliation and arbitration, Agreement for Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council was signed during the Thirteenth SAARC Summit held in Dhaka on 12-13 November 2005. The Agreement for Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council entered into force on 2 July 2007.

### **Biotechnology**

The need to promote cooperation in the area of biotechnology has been recognized by the heads of States at various SAARC Summits since 1990. A Working Group on Biotechnology was established in 2004 as a part of the restructured SAARC Integrated Program of Action (SIPA) to coordinate regional cooperation in the area of biotechnology. The working group has met several times and in their third meeting, they considered and finalized a Concept Paper on a Program of Cooperation in the field of Biotechnology between SAARC member states. The Program provides for collaboration in the areas of medical biotechnology, agricultural biotechnology, environmental biotechnology, animal biotechnology, marine biotechnology, bioinformatics, plant tissue culture, genetically modified organisms and bio-safety, marker assisted selection, bio-fertilizer and bio-gas, vaccine production, genomics and proteomics, nano-biotechnology, RNA interference technology platform, stem cell research and Industrial biotechnology.

### **Culture**

The heads of states at the thirteenth SAARC Summit held in Dhaka in November 2005 recognized the role of culture in bringing the peoples of South Asia closer. They also realize that culture could play a major role in promoting relations and understanding among South Asian countries. With this backdrop, the Ministers of Culture of the SAARC Member States adopted the SAARC Agenda for Culture in their second meeting on 31st October 2007 with the following activities: Promotion of SAARC culture online, launching of a SAARC website on culture, production of cultural source materials on South Asia, cooperation with other organizations, Establish linkage between Culture and other sectors in attaining social and economic development, cooperation in the field of product development and promotion of cultural products, and SAARC exchange program on culture.

### **Economic and Trade**

The one of the key objectives of SAARC is to accelerate the economic growth and social progress in the region. Keeping this in mind, SAARC leaders adopted the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). The SAFTA Agreement was signed on 6 January 2004 and came into effect on 1 January, 2006. The Agreement on SAPTA was signed on 11 April, 1993 and entered into force on 7 December, 1995. Establishment of South Asian Standard Organization, holding of SAARC trade fair in different venues of SAARC member states, agreements on trade in services, and agreement for avoidance of double taxation are some of the milestone achievements in trade and economic area within SAARC member states.

- a) South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)
- b) South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA)
- c) South Asian Standard Organization
- d) SAARC Trade Fairs
- e) SAARC Agreement on Trade in Service
- f) Avoidance of Double taxation

### **Education**

SAARC countries have been cooperating in the development of various dimensions of human resource. SAARC Human Resource Development Centre in Islamabad undertakes research, imparts training, and disseminates information on HRD issues and advises Member States on HRD related policies and strategies.

At the thirteenth SAARC summit held in November, 2005 in Dhaka, India proposed to create a Centre of Excellence, in the form of a South Asian University, which can provide world class facilities and professional faculty to students and researchers drawn from every country of the region. With this aim, South Asian University (SAU) was established by the eight member nations of SAARC in New Delhi, India. SAU started its operations from the academic year 2010. The university now offers post-graduate and doctoral programs in various disciplines that include Development Economics, Computer

Science, Biotechnology, Mathematics, Sociology, International Relations and Law. SAU attracts students from all member nations and its degrees are recognized by all the eight SAARC countries.

Moreover, the SAARC Chair, Fellowship and Scholarship Scheme were instituted in 1987 which facilitate exchange of ideas through interaction among students, scholars and academics in the SAARC countries.

### **Energy**

The South Asian region is energy deficient as it does not produce enough oil and gas to meet its needs thus depends heavily on imports. Most of the Member States do not have the capacity to generate sufficient electricity to meet their demands. Therefore, securing sustainable energy supplies to meet energy needs at affordable prices has become a major energy policy imperative of Member States of SAARC.

The process of regional cooperation in energy sector began in January, 2000 with the establishment of a Technical Committee on Energy. The Technical Committee on Energy met twice. Thereafter, recognizing that this vital area requires focused attention, the Council of Ministers approved the creation of a specialized Working Group on Energy in January, 2004.

The thirteenth SAARC summit, decided to establish the SAARC Energy Centre in Islamabad to promote development of energy resources, including hydropower; and energy trade in the region; to develop renewable and alternative energy resources; and promote energy efficiency and conservation in the region. The Centre which was established in 2006 has become fully operational.

### **Environment**

Environment has been an area of concern within the SAARC member states. Therefore, the heads of states of SAARC nations have been reiterating the need of cooperation in this area. Some significant headway has also been achieved in this regard over the last two decades. A Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment was commissioned by the leaders in 1987 and the study was completed in 1991. A Technical Committee on Environment was established in 1992 to examine the recommendations of the regional study, identify measures for immediate action, and to decide on modalities for their implementation.

SAARC Environment Ministers have been regularly meeting to further enhance regional cooperation in the area of environment, climate change and natural disasters since 1992. SAARC Environment Action Plan adopted by the Third Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers (Male, 15-16 October 1997) identified some of the key concerns of Member States and set out the parameters and modalities for regional cooperation. Another Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change was held in Dhaka on 3 July 2008 adopted the Dhaka Declaration and SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change.

Establishment of regional centres such as the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre in the Maldives, the SAARC Forestry Centre in Bhutan, the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in India and the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre in Bangladesh constitutes a framework of SAARC Institutions which address diverse aspects of environment, climate change and natural disasters.

### **Finance**

To enhance the cooperation among the SAARC member states regarding financial matters and economic development, the finance ministers of SAARC nations have been regularly meeting. A number of milestones have been accomplished toward greater cooperation in financial issues within SAARC region.

A SAARC-ADB Inception Workshop for the SAARC Studies on Trade, Economics and Finance was held at the SAARC Secretariat on 23-24 June 2011 with regard to the Study on Economic Integration within SAARC countries. Another SAARC workshop on Public Debt Management was held at the SAARC Secretariat on 26 December, 2011. A SAARC Expert Group on Development of Capital Markets in South Asia was also held at the SAARC Secretariat on 27 December, 2011.

With a view to promoting cooperation among central banks and finance ministries in SAARC member countries through staff visits and regular exchange of information, the SAARCFINANCE was established on 9 September, 1998 as a regional network of the SAARC Central Bank Governors and

Finance Secretaries. Harmonizing the banking legislations and practices within the region and establishing a more efficient payment system within the SAARC region are among the primary objectives of SAARCFINANCE. With this end in view, the SAARC Payment Council (SPC) was launched by SAARCFINANCE in 2008.

More information on cooperation in financial issues within SAARC can be found [here](#) .

### **Food Security and SAARC Food Bank**

Establishing a 'Food Reserve' to ensure food security of the region was one of the first regional cooperation mechanisms set up by SAARC. In 1988, the 'Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve' entered into force. However, due to some technical difficulties, the reserve was not been utilized by the member states. In January, 2004, the Council of Ministers recommended establishment of a Regional Food Bank which was endorsed by the twelfth SAARC summit held in Islamabad on 4-6 January 2004. India prepared a Concept Paper for the Food Bank – which was discussed over several rounds of meetings of the Food Security Reserve Board and the Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (TCARD). The thirteenth SAARC summit held in Dhaka on 12-13 November, 2005 reiterated the establishment of the Bank.

The SAARC Food Bank was established initially to provide emergency supply to a nation facing crisis resulting from production shortfall or a natural calamity like cyclone, floods, draught, earthquake and such other factors. The fourteenth SAARC summit in New Delhi in 2007 approved the move to adopt a common approach to collective food security of the region and since then the institutional progress and policy guidelines have much walked ahead to give it a functional character. SAARC Food Bank is now operational and now the question is how to make it broad based and responsive to taking challenges of disaster mitigation that a nation may suffer from any of the calamities.

By March, 2007, an Inter-governmental Expert Group (IGEG) finalized the text of the Agreement for the establishment of the Food Bank and the Agreement was signed at the fourteenth SAARC summit in New Delhi in April, 2007. At the time of establishment of the Food Bank, the total quantum of food grain was finalized at 241,580 Metric Tons from the original signatory Member States. At that time, contribution of Afghanistan was left to be added as it was about to join SAARC. At the first meeting of the Food Bank Board held in Colombo in October, 2008, Afghanistan agreed to set their contribution at 1,420 MT of wheat. Thus, the total quantum stood at 243,000 MT. At present 153,000 tons in India, 40,000 tons each in Bangladesh and Pakistan, 4,000 tons each in Nepal and Sri Lanka, 1,200 tons in Afghanistan, 200 tons in Bhutan, and 180 tons in Maldives -- are available with the SAARC Food Bank.

The fourth Board Meeting of the SAARC Food Bank was held in Dhaka on 27-28 October 2011. This was a follow-up of the earlier three meetings, the first and the second of which were held in Colombo in October, 2008 and February, 2009 respectively, and the third one in Kabul in November, 2009.

### **Funding mechanism**

South Asian Development Fund (SADF), a funding mechanism in SAARC was formed in 1996 merging the SAARC Fund for Regional Projects (SFRP) and the SAARC Regional Fund. SADF's objectives were to support industrial development, poverty alleviation, protection of environment, human resource development and promotion of social and infrastructure development projects in the SAARC region.

South Asian Development Fund (SADF) was found to be inadequate when the SAARC Member States considered instituting various sectoral funding mechanisms e.g. Poverty Alleviation Fund, Infrastructure Fund, South Asian Development Bank, Media Development Fund, Voluntary Fund for the Differently Able Persons during 2002-2005. In September, 2005, the SAARC Financial Experts looked at the entire gamut of issues relating to funding of SAARC projects and programs; and, amongst others, agreed that in lieu of proliferating sectoral financing mechanisms, the SADF be reconstituted into the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). Furthermore, SDF would have a permanent Secretariat, with three windows (Social, Economic, and Infrastructure). The thirteenth SAARC summit held in Dhaka on 12-13 November, 2005 finally decided to reconstitute the SADF into SDF to serve as the "umbrella financial mechanism" for all SAARC projects and programs.

### **Information and communication technology**

Communication plays a vital role in building regional cooperation. Hence, the issue of communication has been given proper importance within the SAARC framework. The heads of states of SAARC



countries have stressed the importance of developing infrastructure and adequate communications networks among Member States to reinforce the process of economic cooperation during the ninth SAARC summit held in Male in 1997.

To enhance the collaboration among the member states of SAARC with regard to communication, the communication ministers of SAARC countries have been meeting on a regular basis and a number of programs have been initiated. A plan of Action on telecommunication was adopted in the first conference of SAARC Communication ministers in May, 1998 to promote cooperation among Member States in the field of telecommunication on a sustained basis.

A Revised SAARC Plan of Action on Telecommunications was adopted in 2004 with a view to promoting cooperation in the enhancement of telecommunication links, utilizing information technologies within the SAARC region and minimizing disparities within and among Member States in the telecommunication field. The Working Group on Telecommunications and ICT was established by the Council of Ministers in January, 2004. The working group holds several meeting and discussed various aspects of regional cooperation on communication.

The third meeting of the working group was held in Ghaziabad, India in March, 2009 and the group made deliberations on up-gradation of regional telecom infrastructure and agreed in principle that the capacity of the existing inter country links needs to be increased; that the maximizing the use of terrestrial system such as optical fibre, microwave link and that the growth of telecom traffic, both voice and data meant for SAARC countries will require to remain within the region.

The group also discussed issues like cross-border interference of radio signals, revision of accounting rates and collection charges among SAARC countries, multilateral utilization of terrestrial communications routes among SAARC countries, cyber security etc.

### **Poverty alleviation**

Since the inception of SAARC, its member states have been working together with a view to alleviating poverty in the region. The SAARC leaders at the sixth summit held in Colombo in 1991 established an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) and the commission provided a conceptual framework for poverty alleviation through social mobilization and empowerment in South Asia.

To eradicate poverty from the region through concerted efforts of the Member States of SAARC, a few programs have been undertaken e.g. a three-tier mechanism, a two-tier mechanism, a Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation, and the declaration of SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation (2006-2015). SAARC Development Goals (SDG) has also been introduced to set appropriate targets for the member states and call for attainment of those targets in scheduled timeframe.

### **Science and technology**

At the thirteenth summit held in Dhaka on 13 November 2005, SAARC leaders decided to give priority attention to encourage regional cooperation in the areas of science and technology to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Accordingly, the first meeting of the Ministers of Science and Technology took place in New Delhi on 16 September, 2008. A five-year (2008-2013) SAARC Plan of Action on Science and Technology was finalized during the meeting. The Plan of Action identifies areas of (I) Cooperation in the field of science and technology, (ii) Standardization and laboratory testing, (iii) Themes for cooperation, and (iv) Project development. The Ministers also approved a number of short-term activities to be carried out during the year 2009.

The second meeting of the Ministers of Science and Technology held in Colombo on 24 November, 2009. At this meeting, implementation of the SAARC Action Plan was reviewed and a number of short-term activities were approved for implementation. The Ministers expressed their firm commitment for the prioritization of initiatives in Science and Technology in the region for a prosperous South Asia.

### **Security aspects**

Regional cooperation in the areas security among the SAARC member states has seen significant development. A good number of milestones have been achieved through successful coordination among the SAARC member countries in the fields of drug and drug related crimes, terrorism and police matter.

### **Drug and drug related crimes**

To fight drug and drug related crimes within the region, SAARC Coordination Group of Drug Law Enforcement Agencies was established. The SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) was established in Colombo in 1992 with a view to collating, analysing and disseminating information on drug related offences in the region.

Moreover, SAARC has adopted a convention on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was signed on 23 November, 1990. The convention entered into force on 15 November 1993 following its ratification by all member states.

### **Terrorism**

The SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) was established in Colombo in 1995. The objectives of the Desk are to collate, analyse and disseminate information on terrorist offences, tactics, strategies and methods. For more, visit [here](#) .

The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism which was signed on 4 November, 1987 came into force on 22 August, 1988 following its ratification by all Member States.

During the twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad on 4-6 January, 2004, the Council of Ministers signed the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. The purpose of this Additional Protocol is to strengthen the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, particularly by criminalizing the provision, collection or acquisition of funds for the purpose of committing terrorist acts and taking further measures to prevent and suppress financing of such acts. The Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism came into force on 12 January, 2006 following its ratification by all Member States. For more, visit [here](#) .

### **Police matters**

A series of conferences have been held under the auspices of “SAARC Conference on Cooperation in Police Matters.” In these conferences, participants have deliberated on a number of important matters relating to networking arrangements among the police authorities in the Member States, Concept Paper on the establishment of “SAARCPOL,” prevention of organized crimes, combating corruption, drug abuse, drug trafficking and money laundering and training requirements of police officers and networking among the police authorities. For more, visit [here](#) .

Moreover, the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (MACM) was signed during the fifteenth SAARC summit held in Colombo in August, 2008.

### **Social development**

Acceleration of social progress through active collaboration and mutual assistance amongst Member States was a primary objective of SAARC. SAARC promotes social agenda in the region mainly through cooperation in the following areas:

- ❖ Gender Related Issues
- ❖ Children
- ❖ Youth
- ❖ Health and population
- ❖ SAARC Social Charter

### **Tourism**

Regional cooperation in tourism industry is one of the innovations of SAARC. The heads of states of SAARC countries during the second summit held at Bangalore in 1986 underlined that concrete steps should be taken to facilitate tourism in the region. A Technical Committee on Tourism was created in 1991. During the first meeting of the Technical Committee on Tourism held in Colombo in October, 1991, an Action Plan on Tourism was formulated. The twenty-fourth session of the Council of Ministers held in Islamabad on 2-3 January, 2004, approved establishment of the Working Group on Tourism.

The Working Group on Tourism prepared a Plan of Activities which includes promotion of SAARC as a common tourist destination, to encourage private sector in promoting regional cooperation in tourism, human resource development, promotion of South Asia identity through tourism, cultural and eco-tourism development. The Working Group was authorized to periodically review implementation of this Action Plan.

### **Designated SAARC decades and years**

#### **Designated SAARC decades**

- 1991-2000 SAARC Decade of the Girl Child
- 2001-2010 SAARC Decade of the Rights of the Child
- 2006-2015 SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation
- 2010-2020 SAARC Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity

#### **Designated SAARC years**

- 1989: SAARC Year of Combating Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking
- 1990: SAARC Year of Girl Child
- 1991: SAARC Year of Shelter
- 1992: SAARC Year of Environment
- 1993: SAARC Year of Disabled Persons
- 1994: SAARC Year of the Youth
- 1995: SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication
- 1996: SAARC Year of Literacy
- 1997: SAARC Year of Participatory Governance
- 1999: SAARC Year of Biodiversity
- 2002-2003: SAARC Year of Contribution of Youth to Environment
- 2004: SAARC Awareness Year for TB and HIV/AIDS
- 2006: South Asia Tourism Year
- 2007: Green South Asia Year

### **SAARC Regional Centres**

- SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC), Dhaka
- SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC), Dhaka
- SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre, Kathmandu
- SAARC Documentation Centre (SDC), New Delhi
- SAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC), Islamabad
- SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC), Maldives
- SAARC Information Centre (SIC), Nepal
- SAARC Energy Centre (SEC), Pakistan
- SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC), India
- SAARC Forestry Centre (SFC), Bhutan
- SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC), Sri Lanka

### **SAARC visa exemption scheme**

The SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme was introduced in 1992 with a view to encouraging the people to people contact among the SAARC member states. The leaders at the fourth summit which was held in Islamabad in December, 1988 decided that certain categories of dignitaries should be entitled to a special travel document, which would exempt them from visas while travelling within the region. It was decided that twenty-four categories of entitled persons, which include dignitaries, judges of higher courts, parliamentarians, senior officials, businessmen, journalists, sportsmen, etc. will be entitled to avail this visa exemption facility.

Later in February, 2011, a meeting of the SAARC foreign ministers revisited the scheme approved a proposal to exempt 19 categories of people from visa requirement and agreed on a liberalized scheme under which select journalists, business persons and sportspersons can be given long-term multi-entry visas after prior clearance.

### **Awards and scholarships**

A number of awards have been instituted under the auspices of SAARC to encourage individuals and organizations in furthering the objectives of SAARC.

SAARC Award was instituted at the twelfth SAARC summit held in Islamabad in January, 2004 to recognize and encourage outstanding individuals and organizations within the region. The SAARC Award comprises of a gold medal, a letter of citation and carries a purse of USD 25,000.

The SAARC Youth Awards Scheme was introduced in 1996 with a view to promoting extraordinary young talents and encouraging the overall development of the youth in the region. The Award consists of a citation in English, a Gold Medal, and a cash prize of USD 1500.

SAARC Regional Award for Young Scientists and Senior Scientists was introduced to encourage young and senior scientists of the region working in the field of Meteorology.

## **14. SAARC observer states**

- Australia
- China
- European Union
- Iran
- Japan
- Republic of Korea
- Mauritius
- Myanmar
- USA

## **Relation between SAARC and other international/intergovernmental/regional organizations**

### **UNCTAD**

SAARC-UNCTAD Memorandum of Understanding on the Trade Analysis and Information System (TRAINS) was signed in February, 1993. Under this Agreement, UNCTAD provides the SAARC Secretariat, on a regular basis, an updated copy of TRAINS CD-ROM containing latest data on trade control measures prevailing in developed and developing countries. The SAARC Secretariat in turn updates trade control measures prevailing in the SAARC member states on a regular basis and forwards the same to UNCTAD Secretariat, on computer floppies for incorporation in the updated versions of TRAINS CD-ROM.

### **ESCAP**

A Framework Agreement for cooperation between SAARC and ESCAP was signed in February, 1994. The Agreement provides for cooperation on development issues through joint studies, workshops and seminars and exchange of information and documentation in poverty alleviation, human resource development, trade promotion, foreign direct investment, environmental protection and prevention of drug trafficking, infrastructure development, etc.

### **UNICEF**

A Cooperation Agreement between SAARC and UNICEF was signed on 10 December, 1993. The Agreement envisages cooperation in implementing the relevant SAARC decisions relating to Children through an annual agenda which include joint studies, exchange of documentation and monitoring of implementation.

### **APT**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by SAARC Secretary-General and Executive Director of Asia Pacific Tele community (APT) on 4 February, 1994 to initiate cooperation between the two organizations with a view to accelerating economic and social development in the region through the promotion of telecommunication. SAARC and APT will exchange information, publications and documents on their respective activities in this field. They will also exchange technical and operational details of plans for improvement of national, regional and international telecommunications network.

### **UNDP**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SAARC and UNDP was signed by the SAARC Secretary-General and Administrator of UNDP in July, 1995. The MOU embodies a general agreement for broad-based collaboration with the aims and purposes of promoting sustainable human development for attaining poverty elimination, preservation and protection of environment, regeneration of natural resources, employment creation, and the goals of women in development; undertakes periodic consultation for joint activities, publishing studies on priority concerns, and exchanging relevant reports.

### **UNDCP**

SAARC Secretary-General and United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) Executive Director signed an MOU on 18 August, 1995 to coordinate their efforts in combating drug trafficking and drug abuse in the region. The Memorandum contains provisions for mutual consultation and exchange of information between the two organizations. In addition, the two organizations have agreed to seek each other's technical cooperation in pursuing their respective drug control activities in areas of drug supply and demand reduction to assist in the development and implementation of activities, such as human resource development, improving regional cooperation on drug intelligence through the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk, establishment of a networking arrangement among existing institutions in drug abuse prevention, etc.

### **Colombo Plan**

SAARC has also entered into cooperation arrangement with the Colombo Plan Bureau for promotion on the Role of SAARC NGOs in anti-narcotic activities. In this context, representative of NGOs from seven countries attended a meeting of the SAARC Forum on the role of NGOs in Drug Demand Reduction in Dhaka on 10-13 April, 1995. Efforts are also underway to establish a working relationship between the SAARC Secretariat and the Colombo Plan Bureau on training facilities in the region.

### **ITU**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SAARC and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has been finalized and is to be signed shortly.

## **SAARC NGOs**

### **Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians**

The Speakers of Parliaments of SAARC Countries first met in Sri Lanka in June, 1992 and resolved to set up an Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians. They met in Kathmandu in November, 1992 and The First South Asian Festival held in India (October, 1992) with participation from all Member Countries was a unique event which focused on the rich cultural heritage of South Asia formally launched the "Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians" and adopted the Charter of the Association. The Speakers Council which is the Apex Body of the Association finalized and ratified the draft rules of the Association prepared by the Parliamentary Secretaries-General in January, 1994. Since then they have met periodically and addressed issues of common interest to member countries. The heads of state at their seventh summit held in Dhaka in April, 1993 welcomed the initiative of the Speakers of Parliaments of SAARC Countries in forming the Association.

### **SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI)**

The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) was recognized by SAARC in December, 1992. The establishment of SCCI is a significant development and it will act as a dynamic instrument for the promotion of regional cooperation in the areas of trade and economic relations. SCCI has its headquarters at Karachi and national units in seven SAARC countries.

The SAARC Chamber has been instrumental in disseminating the information about the content, scope, and potential of the Framework Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) among the business community in the region.

In view of expanding activities of the SCCI in the field of promoting trade both within and outside the SAARC region, SAARC has decided to continue its recognition to SCCI for a period of five years.

### **SAARC Law**

SAARCLAW - an Association for persons of the legal communities of the SAARC countries, established in 1991 with its headquarters in Colombo was recognized by SAARC as a regional apex body in July 1994. Established with the twin objectives of bringing together the legal communities within the region for closer cooperation and developing law as a source towards social change for development, SAARCLAW has been convening periodic conferences covering important areas of common interest to member countries.

### **17. Key Documents**

- a) SAARC Charter
- b) SAARC Charter of democracy
- c) SAARC Social Charter
- d) SAARC Convention on Combating and Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution
- e) Convention on Promotion of Welfare of Children
- f) SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters
- g) SAARC Convention on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances
- h) SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism
- i) SAARC Additional Protocol on Terrorism
- j) Agreement for Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council
- k) SAARC Final Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation
- l) SAARC Final Agreement on Customs Matters
- m) Charter of SAARC Development Fund (signed PDF)
- n) Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Bank
- o) Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)
- p) Agreement on the Establishment of South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO)

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