CHAPTER-III

THE GENESIS AND THE GROWTH OF SAARC

One of the notable features of South Asian Countries is that they are not included in any of the customs unions, common markets and economic co-operation formed by industrialized nations. The modest beginning made in the formation of Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, has not brought about any economic co-operation. Member countries have not been able to evolve common strategy in terms of development. As such, ASEAN is essentially a common political forum of six nations with a security perception\(^1\). The political objective of the third world countries engaged in regional co-operation is to change the socio-political, economic conditions of their people and to redress the unequal nature of their relationship with the developed countries. Third world integration schemes and co-operative system assign considerable importance to the manner in which the overall external environment can effect integration through the formation of trade investment and aid links between a given system and a third party or parties in the developed world\(^2\). Besides the co-operation among these countries emanate from the fact that they are institutionally associated with one another through a variety of organisations like ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East), the Non-Aligned Movement and the common wealth.

Not withstanding, the vast potential of regional co-operation has not been substantially exploited due to the reason that most of the South Asian Countries are engaged in trivial issues. Actually the South Asian Countries are nine in number namely,
Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Burma. But there was hectic effort from seven countries in integrating the economies through the formation of regional grouping. The idea behind the formation of such regional body was to thwart the sluggish economic growth of these countries.

The idea of regional co-operation among South Asian Countries is not new. However, it acquired significance after World War II, when many countries had to meet new political and economic challenges thrown up by the war.

The South Asian political scenario at the time when the ideas of regional co-operation was still in its embryonic stage was basically the same emerges from the foregoing analysis. The harsh geo-political realities cannot but have their impact on the developing countries including countries in the South-Asian Region. Such co-operation has been taking place both bilaterally, as well as multilaterally, under the umbrella of various fora, such as the ECAFE, Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth. These are, however, broad groupings, which do not touch specially on the needs and potentialities of co-operation in the South-Asian Region.

In order to meet the new economic challenges, the initiative for organising a regional forum by name "South Asian Regional Co-operation", was initiated in the year 1979 by the late President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh who sounded his counterparts with India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during his visits to these countries in the late seventies, about the possibilities of promoting regional co-operation. In the light of these
consultations he addressed letters to the Heads of Governments of these countries suggesting the need to explore the possibility of establishing some institutional arrangement for regional co-operation at the highest level. Thus, the catalytic effects of the formation of regional grouping instigated the South Asian Countries to propose a name for the institutional frame work among the various names proposed were the following:

1. South Asian Association for Co-operation (SARC)
2. Association of South Asia (ASA)
3. Association of South-Asia for Co-operation (ASAC)
4. South Asian for co-operation (SAC)
5. Organisation of South Asian States (OSAS) and
6. South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC)

Finally the idea culminated in the formation of South-Asian Regional Co-operation in the year 1980, and proclaimed the declaration in the year 1983 in New Delhi. The preliminary meetings were held in Colombo in 1981, Islamabad in 1982 and Dhaka in 1983. So the SARC was formally launched in August, 1983.

A landmark development in the direction of South Asian regionalism was the foundation of SARC in New Delhi in August, 1983 at a meeting of the foreign ministers signed a declaration on South-Asian Regional Co-operation arrangements. The members of this group expressed the desire that such co-operation as decided by SARC should be based on respect for the principles of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs of other states and mutual benefit. These
meetings at Secretary and Foreign Ministers level had prepared the ground for regional co-
operation, defined its objectives, identified possible areas of co-operation and recommended
an integrated programme of action in agreed areas.10

SARRC FORMATION

Regional co-operation among South Asian Nations has been institutionalised with
the formation of SAARC at Dhaka on 8th December, 1985. The year book of balance of
payments statistics, 1988, published by the I.M.F. shows that the South-Asian countries
were weak competitors in the world market and neither could they maintain their traditional
market shares nor could they capture any sizeable proportion of new markets emerging in
the Gulf countries and the South-East Asia.11 Now, keeping in view the objective of self-
reliance they are to explore the possibilities of efficient utilization of resources of this region
through greater economic linkages among the developing countries of South Asia so that
they can reduce their dependence on north. To fulfil these objectives (South-Asian
Association for Regional Co-operation) SAARC was formed in 1985, comprising the States
of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives.12 It was therefore
decided that the SAARC should start with co-operation in nine areas like agriculture, rural
development, telecommunications, health and population control, meteorology, transport,
postal services, science and technology, sports, arts and culture. They encouraged and co-
operated for the development of above cited and that the leaders of the seven countries
decided in that conference SARC (South-Asian Regional Co-operation) would be known as
SAARC (South-Asian Association for Regional Co-operation).13
SAARC is primarily meant for co-operation among the South Asian Countries representing one-fifth of the world population. The establishment of SAARC is an attempt to attain an affirmation of faith of the member countries, which has been lacking immensely. The success of SAARC in a region riddled with bilateral disputes, is dependent on the change of outlook of the member countries. The various countries in the association have yet to forge a serious feeling for regional co-operation. India has advocated economic and political emancipation of the entire mankind but it has not been able in arouse the confidence and support of the neighbouring countries. This point has been well illustrated by the president of Sri Lanka J.R. Jayawardane at the summit meeting of SAARC at Dhaka on 8 the December, 1985. He said "India the largest of the seven in any way is required to create the thrust that is the first essential need for regional co-operation, this it should do through deeds and words".

The following are the aims of the SAARC

1. The main aim of SAARC is to establish regional co-operation on a firm foundation, play an important role in accelerating the pace of economic and social development of their countries and promote their objectives in individual and collective self reliance and further the cause of peace, progress and stability in their region and the world;

2. to develop the relationship between developing countries and of the Non-Aligned Movement to get a fair deal in the global dispensations and the importance that was attached to peace and security to promote development;
3. avoiding military involvement with the super power countries;

4. to establish a standing committee, emphasize the need for improvement in the field of air transport among the South Asian Countries and the necessity to link the regional capitals by airline connection; and

5. SAARC has given a much higher priority to economic co-operation than to political\textsuperscript{16}.

The following are the objectives of the SAARC

1. To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and improve their quality of life;

2. to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potential;

3. to promote and strengthen their collective self reliance among the countries of South Asia;

4. to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;

5. to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
6. to strengthen co-operation with other developing countries;

7. to strengthen co-operation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest;

8. to co-operate with international organisation with similar aims and purposes, and

9. to develop self-reliance.

SAARC wants to fulfil the following goals through the above objectives:

1. Problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, which are shared by all the member countries of SAARC.

2. acceleration of social and economic development with a view of improving the quality of life of the people of the region;

3. enhancement of the region's role in the global context and

4. building regional structures to serve as a basis for reducing conflict producing tensions and promoting amity and understanding.

The above goals were adopted by SAARC embrace specially selected areas of economic and cultural activities, there is a clear awareness of the mutually supporting roles
of such co-operation in the political field. As a matter of fact, one of the important objectives that inspired the countries of the region to participate in SAARC was, to create regional co-operation in economic, cultural, political and technical fields.\(^\text{18}\)

In order to strengthen the bonds of mutual relations at the regional and international levels, SAARC established the following committees:

1. Technical committee;
2. Action committee; and
3. Standing committee

**FUNCTIONS OF TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

1. Technical committees comprising representatives of all member states shall be responsible for the implementation, co-ordination and monitoring of the programmes in their respective areas of co-operation;

2. the technical committees shall submit periodic reports to the standing committee;

3. the chairmanship of the technical committees shall normally rotate among member states in alphabetical order for every two years;

4. the technical committees may inter-alia, use the following mechanism and modalities, if and when considered necessary;
a. meetings of heads of national technical agencies;

b. meetings of experts in specific fields; and

c. contacts amongst recognised centres of excellence in the region.

**Action Committee**

The standing committee may set up action committees comprising member states concerned for implementation of projects involving more than two but not all member states.

**FUNCTIONS OF STANDING COMMITTEE**

1. The standing committee comprising the foreign secretaries shall have the following functions:

   a. over all monitoring and co-ordination of programme of co-operation.

   b. mobilisation of regional and external resources; and

   c. identification of new areas of co-operation based on appropriate studies.

2. the standing committee shall meet as often as deemed necessary but at least once a year; and

3. the standing committee shall submit periodic reports to the council of ministers and make reference to it as and when necessary for decisions on policy matters.
FIRST SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The first SAARC Summit Conference was held in Dhaka the capital of Bangladesh on 7th and 8th December, 1985 in a very cordial atmosphere. This meeting resulted in the acceptance at the Dhaka Declaration, enumerating the character of the organisation. This summit decided to establish a temporary secretariat for the organisation at Dhaka for exploration of commercial relations and strengthening of political contacts and SARC was replaced by SAARC. Hence SAARC came into existence. All the leaders talked to one another in a cordial atmosphere and wished the organisation to be groomed on the pattern of the European Economic Community (EEC). The late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi talked to General Zia-Ul-haq on the measures to strengthen mutual relations and with General Ershad about the prevention of infiltration by Chakma tribes into the border state of Mizoram. So was the case with other heads of Governments to have dialogue on bilateral problems. The leaders were found to be concerned about their collective wisdom to face the question of terrorism and drug trafficking. They also discussed the viability of forming a parliament for SAARC on the model of Euro-Parliament of EEC. Some major decisions taken at this summit were to have a common view on the on going discussion on the new international economic order and the improvement of the world trading system through GATT taking particularly into account the interest of the least developed among developing nations. For this purpose it was decided to convene a ministerial level meeting and the standing committee was asked to call a meeting of technical experts to prepare for it. Pakistan offered to host such a meeting and this was accepted.
In order to promote increasing participation of women in activities at the regional level within the framework of the SAARC and device programmes and projects for the purpose, the standing committee was directed to convene a ministerial level conference on the subject to identify areas of activities and plan a programme of action. The leaders accepted India's offer to host such a conference.

The summit reaffirmed its deep conviction in the continuing validity and relevance of the objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement as an important force in international relations. They declared their commitment to the UN character and expressed concern at the deteriorating international political situation and alarmed at the unprecedented expansion of the arms race, particularly nuclear weapons. They called upon nuclear weapon states to negotiate urgently a comprehensive test ban treaty leading to the complete cessation of testing, production and development of nuclear weapons.

The summit also drew attention to the deteriorating economic and social conditions which had retarded development prospects in South Asia. The leaders expressed concern at the diminishing capacity in international financial and technical institutions to respond effectively to the needs of the poorer countries and regretted that the spirit of multilateral co-operation had begun to falter and weaken. They affirmed the need to resume the North-South dialogue and convene an international conference on money and finance for development purpose\textsuperscript{23}. 

\textsuperscript{23}
The late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi described the summit as witnessing of a new dawn and said it was the most populous regional co-operation in the world. He wished the SAARC every success because the inspiration of all countries for regional co-operation evaluated from common aspirations. He expressed gratitude to the heads of State and Government for choosing New Delhi as the venue of the next summit in November, 1986.

SECOND SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The SAARC held its second summit conference in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state in South India on 16th and 17th November, 1986. The seven leaders took a major step forward in institutionalising a permanent secretariat to co-ordinate implementation of SAARC activities. In that summit, the Bangladesh Ambassador, Mr. Abdul Ashan was appointed the first secretary general. The summit decided to set up technical committees on women's participation in the development, drug abuse and drug trafficking, bringing these two areas under the SAARC umbrella.

The two day summit elected the Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as Chairman of the SAARC. The seven leaders called for an offensive against terrorism and drug abuse and expressed their concern over lack of progress towards disarmament.

The summit adopted a "Bangalore Declaration which called upon

1. the super powers to end the nuclear race by agreeing to a nuclear test ban treaty and cessation of their policies of confrontation, intervention and domination;
2. Improvement in international security vitiated by the super power's policies of aggression, occupation, economic coercion and political and military interference;

3. Co-operation among the member countries for the elimination of terrorism from the region;

4. Deep commitment to the principles and objectives of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM);

5. Involvement of the people for successful regional co-operation;

6. Greater contacts among the people of the region through such action as frequent exchange of scholars, academicians, artists, authors, professionals and businessmen;

7. Enhancing public consciousness and building a national political consensus on the rights of the children and early adoption of the U.N. convention on the rights of children; and

8. Reversal of retreat from multilateralism through revival of North-South dialogue.

The seven leaders also decided that, the capital cost of setting up the secretariat will be met by Nepal and the recurring expenses will be shared by member countries on the basis of a formula worked out by the foreign secretaries. India will contribute 32%, Pakistan 25%, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka 11% each and Bhutan and Maldives 5% each.
After the conclusion of the conference, the heads of the seven delegations who met newsmen immediately said, the priority for children should be infused in national policies in an inter-linked manner. Each Government would have to evolve a United National Plan to meet the needs of the whole child and of all children. It should consider health, nutrition, education, sanitation and communication.

The summit also resolved to raise the status of the girl child and give her special nutrition as well as attention as potential mother. One third of the children born in the SAARC countries has a birth weight of 2.5 Kg. So special attention has to be given to their nutrition and development. The summit also adopted a declaration on political and economical issues, calling upon member states, non to allow their territories to be used for terrorist activities against another state.

So, the Bangalore declaration had referred to the U.N.resolution 2625 which, among others, required that each state should refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting and participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State in organised activities within its territory directed towards to commission of such acts.

THIRD SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The SAARC held its third summit in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, on November 2nd to 4th, 1987. Bangladesh (President H.M. Ershad), Bhutan (King Jigma Wangshuk), India (Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi), Maldives (president Manmoon Abdul Gayoom), Nepal (King Birendra), Pakistan (Prime Minister Jonejo) and Sri Lanka (President Jayawardana) and their leaders participated.
They renewed their commitment to the SAARC charter and reiterated their desire for promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the United Nations principles of the charter and Non-Alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and peaceful settlement of disputes. They emphasized that the fundamental goal of SAARC was to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to provide them with the opportunity to live in dignity and realize their full potential. They expressed their faith in and commitment to the principles and purposes enshrined in the U.N. charter. They also reaffirmed their deep commitment had a critical bearing on the development of the economies of the South Asian Region.

The third SAARC summit concluded on November 4th, 1987 with a renewed thrust and direction to the future course of regional co-operation. The summit adopted a "Kathmandu declaration" which called upon:

1. The Seven leaders pledged to refrain from organising, instigating, or participating in civil strife or terrorist acts in member Countries;

2. the summit decided to commission a comprehensive study of the region's environment and the necessary measures for its protection and preservation. The study to be handled by SAARC Secretary General will cover the cause and consequence of natural disasters in a well planned comprehensive frame work;
3. they decided to intensify disaster management capabilities;

4. they decided to establish a food security reserve in the context of natural calamities. The food reserve will begin with a stock of 2,00,000 tonnes of wheat and rice; and

5. the seven leaders resolved to continue contributing towards total nuclear disarmament.

Further, the Heads of State or Government, expressed happiness at the signing of the SAARC regional convention on suppression of terrorism and considered it as a historic step towards the prevention and elimination of terrorism from the region. In this regard they also reiterated their unequivocal condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and expressed adherence at their impact on life and property, socio-economic development, political stability, regional peace and co-operation.

FOURTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The three-day summit meeting of the member nations of SAARC, which started on 29th December, 1988 at Islamabad, came to a colourful close on 31 December, 1988 with the Heads of State and Government making final statements at the plenary session presided over by the chairperson, Pakistan Prime Minister Mrs. Benazir Bhutto. Opening the SAARC summit, Mrs. Bhutto said that, 'the peaceful transition to democracy in Pakistan marks not only the culmination of a peaceful political movement by the democratic forces but also reflects the sense of responsibility and maturity of our people.' She also said that the
South-Asian Region was becoming one of the important world centres of the drug trade.

**ISLAMABAD DECLARATION**

The Islamabad Declaration, issued at the end of the summit, called for

1. Cooperation in promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia and improving their quality of life by eradicating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, unemployment and environmented degradation;

2. Identification of areas of core interest by member states and preparation of their national perspective plans and their consolidation in a regional plan called "SAARC 2000 - A basic needs perspective", with specific targets to be met by the end of the century;

3. To make SAARC activities more action-oriented so as to improve the quality of life of the peoples;

4. to include education as an agreed area of cooperation;

5. Adoption of enabling measures of the SAARC convention on suppression of terrorism by the member states in order to implement convention at their earliest.

6. Completion of expert group study on natural disasters and protection of environment at the shortest time, so that it could provide a basis for member states to draw an action plan for meaningful cooperation;
7. Cooperation in agreed areas of trade, manufactures and services, which would promote the objective of basic needs of the peoples of the region; and


The Heads of State or Government welcomed the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty between USA and USSR, which would eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons in the world. They also expressed satisfaction at the progress so far made in the implementation of the SAARC integrated programme of action. They established the SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC).

The Islamabad Summit provided an opportunity of talks between the Prime Minister of India and Pakistan, and brightened the hopes for a new phase of relations between the two countries.

FIFTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The Fifth SAARC Summit Conference was held in Maldives in November 21st to 23rd, 1990 to provide yet another opportunity to the Heads of State/Government of South Asia to develop personal interaction, to review and consolidate the progress regarding the ongoing research studies and projects under the aegis of SAARC and draw lessons, directions for the betterment of SAARC society as a whole. The focus of this summit should be carefully structured so as to bring the nations in complete cohesion and work for greater understanding, peace and friendship.
The fifth SAARC Summit was originally scheduled to be held in 1989 in Sri Lanks, but Sri Lanka did not agree for the summit on account of foreign troops (IPKF) which were still on its soil. 

The Male's declaration said that the 1990 would be observed as the Year of Girl Child, and 1991 as the Year of Shelter and 1992 as the Year of Environment and 1993 as the Year of Disabled.

Dealing with the issue of terrorism, the draft declaration asked member states to expeditiously enact enabling legislations for the implementation of the SAARC regional convention on suppression of terrorism signed in Kathmandu in 1987. The draft declaration set February 28th as the deadline for the finalisation of the regional study on trade, manufactures and services.

This draft declaration expressed SAARC's support for the banning of chemical weapons and early conclusion of a comprehensive test ban treaty. In this context it welcomed the convening of the United conference in January to consider amendments to the partial test ban treaty. It welcomed the adoption of the convention on the rights of the child and expressed the hope that SAARC member states would give due consideration to becoming parties to it.

SAARC urged the international community to mobilise additional finance and make available appropriate technologies to enable the developing countries to face the new challenges arising from climatic changes and rise in sea level.
The SAARC member countries agreed that they should co-ordinate their position at international fora on this issue.

The following are the highlights of the Male declaration.

1. Afghanistan wanted to be a member in the SAARC with the support of Nepal, but India did not agree:

2. the Pakistan Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif wanted bilateral issues to be discussed in the SAARC without specifically calling for amending the SAARC constitution. Bangladesh was in favour of the Pakistan proposals. But the Prime Minister of India did not favour the raising of bilateral issues in the SAARC summit. The new SAARC Chairman, Mr. Gayoom said, the SAARC leaders had not taken any decision on the Bangladesh and Pakistan proposals;

3. stressing that the Gulf crisis had dealt a severe blow to the South Asian Countries economies, the SAARC declaration called for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq forces from Kuwait;

4. it was decided to launch the special SAARC travel document which would exempt its holder-supreme court judges, members of parliament and Heads of academic institutions and their spouses and dependent children to travel within the region without obtaining visas;
5. the regional study on the causes and consequence of natural disasters, the protection and preservation of the environment and the impact of the "green-house effect" on the region will be completed before the next summit; and

6. on the lines of an existing convention on the suppression of terrorism, the SAARC member states signed a convention on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to deal effectively with the menace of drug abuse and suppression of illicit traffic in the region. Regarding this, the SAARC leaders agreed and approved three important institutions at the summit.

They are:

1. the Human Resources Development Centre at Islamabad;

2. the Regional Tuberculosis Centre at Kathmandu; and

3. the Regional Documentation Centre at New Delhi.

The summit also launched the SAARC Travel Voucher Scheme aimed at promoting organised tourism in the region and people to people contact. They also decided to dedicate the last decade of the century as "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child", aimed at ending discriminatory treatment faced by female children in the region.

The leaders emphasized the importance of co-operation among the SAARC member states in the field of mass media and directed to the Secretary General to facilitate increased
interaction among federation associations of journalists news agencies and mass media of the region.

**SIXTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE**

The Sixth SAARC summit conference was held in Colombo on 21 December 1991. The Colombo declaration, which was issued from the summit, contained several decisions of far reaching significance. Several steps in regional economic cooperation were initiated. In June 1991, a regional study on trade, manufactures and services, first proposed to be undertaken in 1987, was finalised at an expert level meeting in New Delhi. Its recommendations were endorsed "in principle" at the ninth session of the Council of Ministers held in July 1991, in Maldives and it was decided to set up a high-level committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC) to examine the recommendations and identify measures for immediate implementation from out of the study. The CEC, composed of secretary-level officials from member-states, met in Kathmandu on 15 and 16 September 1991. Its most important recommendation, to set up an Inter-Governmental Group (GG) to formulate and seek agreement on an institutional framework under which specific measures for trade liberalisation could be furthered, was approved by the SIXTH SAARC Summit.

Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) hosted on 3 and 4 October 1991, a meeting of national development institutions to decide the modalities of a fund to finance the identification and development of regional projects, an Indian proposal accepted in the Male Declaration. Pursuant to an earlier decision, SAARC member states had prepared national studies on 'Cause and consequences of Natural Disaster and protection and
preservation of Environment’, which were synthesized into a regional study in 1991. The sixth SAARC summit agreed to set up a SAARC Committee on Environment to examine the recommendations of this study comprehensively and to identify measures on its implementation.

Another study under preparation is on the greenhouse effect of global warming, with special reference to its impact on the region. National studies are to be synthesized into a regional study in time for UNCED meeting at RID in June 1992. The Colombo Declaration considered it useful to hold a ministerial meeting to harmonise views of SAARC member states for effective projection at the UNCED meeting. In order to promote people-to-people contact, a visa free travel within the region to members of national parliaments, supreme court judges, heads of national academic institutions, their spouses and dependent children. A landable decision of the Sixth SAARC summit was to set up a South Asian Commission on poverty alleviation consisting of eminent persons from the region who would draw upon the region’s experiences gained in poverty alleviation programmes and present its report to the seventh SAARC summit.

SEVENTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The seventh SAARC summit scheduled to be held at Dhaka (Bangladesh) in December 12th, 1992 has been postponed twice, ostensibly for two reasons. Communal disturbance in India following the vandalisation of the Babri Mosque in Anodhya on the 6 December and threats by Muslim fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh to prevent Narasimha Rao from landing at Dhaka if he came without laying the foundation stone of the
rebuiding of the Babri Masque at the original site. Neither reason was really good enough to justify the Indian Prime Minister's unwillingness to go to Dhaka for a day or two. Later the summit was held at Dhaka on 10th-11th April, 1993. The seventh SAARC Summit called for coordinated action to combat terrorism and signing of South Asian preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) to usher in a new era of economic cooperation in South Asia by liberalising Intra-region trade.

Leaders of India and her six South Asian neighbours adopted the Dhaka declaration proposing gradual liberation of Intra-region trade and said that necessary steps should be taken to begin the first round of negotiation to exchange preferences among the SAARC members. The agreement in SAPTA, envisaging MORE liberalised trade among the seven member nations, was signed by the SAARC Council of Ministers at the concluding session of the summit at the international conference here.

The 15-page declaration endorsed by the summit leaders of India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives called for gradual liberalisation of intra-region trade and said necessary steps should be taken to begin the first round of negotiation to exchange trade preferences among member countries under the newly signed framework of SAPTA. Expressing grave concern over growing threat of terrorism in South Asia, the declaration stressed the need for further entrancing cooperation for a coordinated action to tackle the problem.

The summit leaders reiterated the need to give high priority to the enactment of enabling legislation at the national level to help enforce the SAARC regional convention of
suppression of terrorism and urged the member-states which had not yet done so to settle the matter before the eight summit in 1994. The declaration endorsed an integrated programme of Action (IPA) on eradication of poverty in South - Asia trade, manufacture and services, environment, population, shelter, children, youth disabled persons, women development, science and technology, terrorism, drug trafficking, security of small states, people to people contact, association of SAARC speakers and parliamentarians and South Asian Development Fund (SADF).

The declaration also touched on international political, economic developments. The declaration said an expert group of the member states will examine the various requests for observer status at SAARC meetings. It said India will host the next SAARC summit in 1994. The summiteers, expressed satisfaction over the "positive out come" of the seventh SAARC summit and expressed their conviction that the summit would greatly contribute towards strengthening the policies and cooperative actions of the member states in areas where SAARC has a distinct contribution to make\textsuperscript{42}.

The summiteers reiterated once again their determination to strengthen and enrich SAARC as an instrument, endowing it with a clear set of forward looking goals and objectives as well as requisite institutional capabilities - so that it can continue to work to enrich not only the lives of its own members but also promote peace, progress and stability in South Asia in a large context.

Begum Zia in her speech described the summit as an important chapter in boosting cooperation among the member states. This summit has paved a great opportunity to
determine a common future strategy for cooperation in South Asia. "We have been able to realise our common challenges deeply, which will produce a good sign for future". She said, the SAARC Summit would use a new era of economic cooperation between the member countries and directly benefit millions of people of the Indian sub-continent. Mr. Dinesh Singh said this was the first time that economic cooperation was discussed at the SAARC forum. Describing Pakistan's acceptance of the SAPTA as significant, the Minister said this indicated that SAPTA was moving in the right direction and would eventually succeed in achieving its goal.

EIGHTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The eighth SAARC summit in New Delhi (2-4 May'95) is yet another mile-stone in the topsy-turvy movement for regional integration of the South Asian sub-continent. Inspite of the fact that the intellectuals have considered it as a non-starter from the very outset on the grounds of the over-shadowing dark clouds on the Indo-Pakistan horizons and the occasional ganging up by the South Asian periphery to browbeat the core country, the smoother sailing at the informal and formal meetings of the leaders of the seven sub-continental sister countries have belied the prophesies of the prophets of doom.

The remarkable consensus among the seven summit leaders as reflected from their opening address and informal discussions have clearly revealed some nagging issues. For instance, there is a broad agreement among all that after the launching of SAARC in December, 1985 the people of the region had harboured a lot of expectations from regional grouping, but the leaders have disappointed them. When SAARC is completing a decade
by December '95. Its track record is far from satisfactory. So there is a great urgency to do something on a top priority basis and inject new life to a moribund SAARC. Another point which has emerged crystal clear is that in order to service and overcome its anaemic stage, SAARC has to better recognise the ground realities and cannot afford to bypass the looming political issues confronting the regional leaders. In other words, even if Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, in his press conference, categorically stated that time was not yet opportune to amend the SAARC charter and discuss contentious political issues under its forums, there is a growing realisation among the leaders that there was nothing wrong if political issues were also discussed under the SAARC forums. The New Delhi summit was marked by yet another consensus among the ruling elites that any major political integration in a region should naturally follow the economic and cultural integration. The lessons of such integrations can be learnt from the five decades of development of European Community (EC). The formal launching of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) at the Dhaka summit in 1993 and its ratification by the seven states by now augurs well for the future of SAARC. The eighth summit has cemented that process by further announcing that in each South Asian country, a number of items have been earmarked for tariff concessions. For instance, Bangladesh tops the list with 120 items followed by India with 106 items. For others, the figures stand at Bhutan (7), Nepal (14), Maldives (17), Pakistan (35) and Sri Lanks (31). Besides, in order to operationalize SAPTA by 8 December this year, the council of Ministers in their pre-summit meeting on the 1st May have proposed the creation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAPTA) as early as possible.
In the inaugural addresses of the summit leaders, some soul searching remarks by the leaders need to be reiterated. Interestingly enough, most of them clearly conceded that SAARC was not delivering the goods and was not perceived by the people of the region to be helping them in any way. Prime Minister Rao after being elected as the new chairman of SAARC, in his key-note speech, called for the integration of SAARC economies and the creation of SAARC, economics and the creation of a free market in order to enhance the range, dynamism and collective strength of the member states in a global trading community. He wanted the South Asian states to adopt the successful approach of similar regional bodies in opening their doors to the free flow of goods, services, capital and manpower. He also urged the leaders to give the political impetus necessary to operationalize the SAPTA. Begum Khalida Zia, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the outgoing Chairperson of SAARC had strengthened the concept that "we in South Asia are a family. Sadly, however, we remain to alleviate the sorrows of South Asia and that we must not detract from our purpose". She strongly proposed a SAARC convention against trafficking in women and children, as both these groups were disadvantaged, deprived and exploited in the region.

Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the President of Sri Lanka focussed on the twin phenomena of terrorism and drug-trafficking which continued to pose a grave threat to the stability and security of the member states. In her view, the phenomena of narco-terrorism is inseparably linked to tackle these chronic problems facing almost all the SAARC member states.
Ironically enough, as many as four summit leaders, sounded a pessimistic note on the operational norms of SAARC. Besides these, leaders (Mr. Farooq leghari of Pakistan, Mr. Manmohan Adhikari of Nepal, Mr. J.S. Wangchuk of Bhutan and Mr. Abdul Gayoom of Maldives) had no hesitation to suggest that political issues must be brought under the ambit of SAARC. President leghari of Pakistan, while strongly advocating changes in the SAARC charter to include bilateral and contentious political issues also indirectly hinted at Kashmir as the major issue of "Self-determination", which need to be resolved. He categorically stated that SAARC had not been able to take off because of "the suspicions and insecurity generated by unsettled political issues in our region. "He called for an exercise in stock-taking on the progress made by SAARC in its first decade and said: "We cannot denude ourselves into believing that all is well. The reason is not far to seek". With an obvious hint towards India, the Pak President decried the "Ploy to create international and regional heavy-weights. Who arrogate to themselves the right to decide for others what serves their national interests". Nepalese Prime Minister Manmohan Adhkari while 'Sharing Pak President’s perceptions suggested that SAARC should move to face various challenging problems go beyond economics and create opportunity to discuss bilateral and political issues also. Sounding a slightly different note, the King of Bhutan Jigma Siggye Wangchuk, was of the view that "the SAARC countries should have the political will to make use of the informal bilateral consultations during summits to resolve problems, as a matter of fact, as I have highlighted in my media article during the earlier SAARC summits in Bangalore (1986), Kathmandu (1987), Islamabad (1988) a number of bilateral issues have figured prominently at the informal discussions during the retreat. Any amendment of the SAARC character can certainly take note of these informal discussions on contentious political
issues". The Maldives President Abdul Gayoom warned that mutual suspicions among SAARC members would jeopardize the future of the group unless they were removed. Now practically most of the nations at the South Asian periphery have started feeling that in order to reactivate SAARC there is an imperative need to sort out contentious political issues at the SAARC forums.

At the Retreat

The summit leaders with the exception of Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga spent a day for informal discussions at the picturesque Himachal capital of Shimla. While spending their time at the wonderful and serene surroundings of the "Retreat" - the holiday home of the President of India, they held discussions on the "Delhi Declaration". They also informally discussed on the future functioning of SAARC and the finalisation of the SAFTA. While there was complete unanimity on the imperative need for improving economic relations among them, it was also realised that close economic ties would lead to opening up of avenues in other fields of cooperation. On the SAFTA, the leaders thought that in order to make it fully operational, a number of things had to be done by the member-countries. Although several leaders, including the Pak President Farooq Leghari had emphasized in their inaugural speeches on the need to amend the SAARC charter in order to accommodate bilateral political issues under its jurisdiction, no one really pressed hard about it during informal discussions at the Retreat.
DELHI DECLARATION

At the end of the 3-days summit, the most crucial document which was endorsed by the Heads of State/Government of the SAARC member-state, is known as Delhi Declaration. A close look at 12 page document would lead to the following highlights: It has called for closer coordination among member countries to formulate a collective voice for South Asia at internal forums, denounce creation of trade barriers in the guise of protecting workers' rights and urge for expanded access to global markets. It endorses the establishment of a three-window South Asian development fund with the merger of SAARC fund for regional projects and the SAARC regional fund and a third window for social and infrastructure development. It urges member-state in intensify cooperation to eliminate terrorism from the region and eradicate poverty by the year 2002 AD. It dedicates 1995 as the SAARC year of eradication of Poverty. While proposing the establishment of an "open, equitable, cooperative and mutually beneficial economic, environment and reduction of trade barriers", the declaration stresses the importance of enabling developing countries to take advantages of the new global trading opportunities. With the end of Cold war, it calls for a genuine consensus on a new international order and treats the UN as a control instrument of peace.

At a press conference immediately after the conclusion of the summit, the new SAARC chairman (Narasimha Rao), while conceding that there was lack of consensus for the amendment of the charter so as to include contentious bilateral issues, specially highlighted that as a precondition to that there was a need to enhance mutual confidence among the member countries. While reacting to a question if SAARC was a "poor men's
club" Rao responded that each nation was a small entity but coming together they became a mighty force. In his view, the Delhi Declaration reflected the region's resolve to ensure "peace, stability and prosperity", on the whole, the New Delhi summit while reactivating a moribund SAARC, herald new era of finding a consensus for cooperation on core economic issues. And at the same time, there is a gradual realization among the leaders of the region that sooner than later contentious political issues will have to be accommodated at the SAARC forums. It has to respond to the ground realities in a flexible way.

NINTH SAARC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

The ninth summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held in the Maldives on 12th and 13th May, 1997 was a rare one in one important aspect for the participating leaders had few divergences on the major issues facing the Countries of the region. There was a general mood of consensus and bonhomie at the two days only. The proceedings did not get bogged down, as in the past, in discussions on contentious bilateral issues. This illustrated the improvement in relations between India and neighbouring states. At the eighth SAARC summit, almost all the other countries had some outstanding problem or the other with India.

The most important decision taken in Male was on accelerating the formation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in the SAARC region by 2001. The original target date was 2005. SAARC also agreed to remove tariff and trade barriers.
Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga wanted SAARC leaders to meet more frequently on an informal basis. The only time SAARC leaders could meet in an informal environment was during the annual summits. India had objections to informal political consultations becoming the norm but it relented when Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom clarified that the informal mechanism would not be used to solve bilateral problems between member countries. In a persuasive speech at the opening, Kumaratunga said that frequent consultations would help "clarify doubts and dispel suspicion" among member-countries.

The summit decided on the creation of an eminent persons group consisting of two members from each SAARC country to study the progress made by the Association in economic integration and recommend ways to speed up ways to catch up with the rest of the world by the year 2020.

India's trade formed 10 percent of its total overseas trade. Officials articulated informally the need to increase trade among SAARC members. Kumaratunga expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of trade between member-countries after the SAARC preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) came into force in 1995. She said that though tariff concessions were exchanged on 2,000 items, many of the items had no export potential for member countries. Besides, she said, non-tariff barriers "often negate the benefits promised by tariff concessions."

Kumaratunga's opening speech put SAARC reality in perspective. She said that though there were significant asymmetries in sizes, resources, development and power
among the countries of the region, it was a fact that as the largest SAARC member, India, occupied a "uniquely central and pivotal" position. Keeping in view these realities, all that was needed for meaningful regional cooperation, she said, was to have the "necessary political will". It was in this context that she suggested the need for "frequent, informal and confidential interlocation" among SAARC leaders. At the concluding ceremony, Kumaratunga particularly stressed India's role in promoting the goals of economic integration. She said that the ninth summit would be hailed for two "historic" reasons - for establishing a free trade zone by the year 2001 and signalling to the world that the South Asian countries were firm in their determination to liberalise their economies.

Many of the leaders had waited eagerly for Prime Minister I.K. Gujral's speech at the inaugural session. many expected the speech to echo lofty Nehruvian principles and to broaden the parameters of the "Gujral doctrine" which essentially deals with South Asia. However, Gujral's speech, appeared to lack vision and punch and read like a rewrite of the goals elucidated in the SAARC Chapter. But he retrieved the situation to some extent by giving his speech a personal touch and responding to the sentiments expressed by speakers before him. he said that informal meetings between SAARC leaders were important for its future and referred to India's water sharing treaty with Bangladesh as an example for the region. As did speakers who preceded him, he emphasised that South Asia should develop a distinct and dynamic regional identity in a scenario where "regions are asserting their rightful place the world over."
Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s speech was shorter and more to the point, he did not mention Kashmir even once. He said that the dividends of the success would be enormous not only for Pakistan and India but "for the entire SAARC region". He admitted that the throes of poverty and its vast potential had been squandered by tensions and conflicts. He said that it was time that the "vicious cycle" was broken so that SAARC could face the challenges "that the transformed world of today poses".

These were lofty words but doubts about Pakistan's long-term commitment to SAARC remain. Interestingly, the Pakistan Prime Minister left the summit a day before it ended to attend a meeting in Kyrthystan of ECO, an economic grouping of Central Asian states, including Turkey and Pakistan. With Afghanistan in turmoil and two distinct political camps emerging in the region, Pakistan needs to keep its options open. But many people in Pakistan pretend that their country is part of Central Asia47.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasised that a conflict-free and politically constructive environment was essential for meaningful regional cooperation. She mentioned the Ganga waters treaty with India. Both Sheikh Hasina and Gujral said that relations between the two countries had matured; this was highlighted by the amicable resolution to the problem that arose a few months ago following shortage of water on the Indian side. At the Secretary-level talks that preceded the summit, there was some criticism against sub regional groupings within SAARC. Pakistan, especially, is not too happy with growing economic cooperation among India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. But as Prime Minister Gujral told media persons, no country can justifiably object to such groupings. He said that if India decided to buy power from Pakistan, no third country had the right to
object to it. Pakistan has been viewing these sub-regional groupings as a ploy to isolate it politically in the region.

Another step that member-countries decided to take was to amend their laws to curb trafficking in women. The assurance from SAARC leaders that they would look into the problem urgently followed an initiative from non-governmental women's groups from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. Representatives of the NGOs, who were present in Male, said that the police raiding worthless persons to suppress "immorality" would not be enough. They want governments to address the root causes of trafficking in women and children in the region. A spokes person for the NGOs said that it was a regional issue and that the network of traffickers were active within and beyond the region. They want the focus to be on trafficking and not on "immorality" and prostitution. Most of the women who were so coerced, duped or kidnapped from Nepal and Bangladesh end up in India and Pakistan.

The next summit will be in Sri Lanka. Kumaratunga wanted it to be held in Colombo to coincide with the golden jubilee of Sri Lankan independence. it is hoped that some tangible progress will be made by then in areas such as free trade. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's suggestion that SAARC countries pool airline services in order at least to link their capitals was welcomed. If this is implemented within a year, those attending the summit in Sri Lanka can catch direct flights from their respective capitals to Colombo. Hence, the ninth SAARC summit provided good platform and created congenial atmosphere for negotiating various issues, particularly in the trade, economic and political fields.
TENSIONS WITHIN THE SAARC COUNTRIES

Regional cooperation among South Asian nations was institutionalised with the formation of SAARC at Dhaka on 8 December, 1985. The salient features of the Dhaka Declaration and Charter adopted on 8 December were that the Heads of States of seven countries realised that SAARC would play an important role in accelerating the pace of economic and social development, promote national and collective self-reliance and further the cause of peace, progress and stability in South Asia and the world.

Right from the beginning SAARC has been plagued by tensions within. These tensions existed before, during and after its formation. Several factors, political, economical, religious and ethnic contributed to these tensions. Like a shadow, the tensions followed SAARC at its summit meeting at Dhaka, Bangalore and Kathmandu, reducing its deliberations to mere paper declarations.

The roots of conflicts in South Asia lie in three broad causes. First there are the legacies of colonialism; secondly, the conflicts which arose as the newly independent countries of the subcontinent sought to develop their national identities and strengthen their security and thirdly, the fact that the lack of an adequate conflict control mechanism allowed disputes between states to escalate.

Geo-political Imbalance

Tension within SAARC can be traced inter alia to geo-political imbalance amongst the constituent countries. No other geographical region is influenced by a single power as
much as South Asia is by India, the latter is not only the largest, strongest and most
developed country in South Asia, it also constitutes the core of the region. Other states of
the region - Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives - show either a peripheral outlook or tend to
look at other regions in search of identities as to Pakistan and to a lesser extent, Sri Lanka
and Bangladesh. The interest of super powers in South Asia (US strategic military
involvement with Pakistan and the consequent Soviet-Indian political support for each
other) further accentuates regional friction.

Indophobia

None of the countries except Pakistan, can pose any military threat to India. They
are all aware of India's potential for establishing them politically by taking advantage of
their ethnic and religious problems. They are also conscious of the fact that bilaterally they
cannot withstand Indian pressure. So they often opt for one of the two strategies: either to
regionalise the problem so as to dilute the Indian pre-eminence or to assert their extra-
regional connections to blunt the edge of Indian superiority 49.

While India wants to the advantage of its strong and diversified structure of
production, most of its neighbours in general and Pakistan in particular fear that expansion
of regional and bilateral trade (with India) may blunt the edge of their anti Indian identity
which is so vital for sustaining the character of the state on the one hand and the conduct of
a profitable foreign policy on the other. Perhaps it was also due to the neighbouring
countries' fear of losing their identity that the Kathmandu Summit could not include
subjects like literacy, improving surface transport linkages in the region, exchange the
books, literature, newspapers and cooperation in the print media in the SAARC activities.

The fear of India in the perception of its small neighbours also found its reflection on the question of foreign funding for SAARC projects. The debate on this question was sparked off by a Bangladesh proposal to establish a multisectoral investment institution to mobilise external assistance for regional development. The enthusiasm shown by some donors in collaborating with SAARC through financial assistance may be due to their politico-economic objectives in the region. The support extended to this proposal by most of the SAARC members, except India, lends evidence to this doubt in view of the fact that foreign economic political presence in the region is welcomed by them in order to counterbalance India's dominance in the region. India could successfully resist the Bangla proposal at Kathmandu, but it is bound to come under collective pressure from its neighbours in future.

Ethnic Tensions

Ethnic tensions in South Asia are Indo-centric. Whether it is a question of ethnic Tamils and Nepalese, Assamese-Bengali tensions, Hindu-Muslim riots or even the Bengali-urdu dichotomy which led eventually to the breakup of Pakistan, India, willingly or unwillingly, by virtue of its core geographic location and ethnic-religious pluralism is involved; Domestic ethnic conflicts have a spillover effect across state boundaries. An ethnic group tends to draw support material as well as moral, from its contiguous ethnic group outside the state and the domestic ethnic conflicts acquire a trans-boundary dimension. These ethnic conflicts can get further exacerbated by the trans-regional dynamics
of the role expatriates and also of extra-regional powers.

In most of the South Asian countries, there has been a clearer emphasis on the particular religious, ethnic and linguistic components of the social fabric than on secular and universal goals. The emphasis has been on Islam and Urdu in Pakistan, on Buddhism and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, on Hinduism in Nepal and on Islam and Bengali in Bangladesh. In India too, despite the emphasis on secularism as a state policy, sectarian (communal, regional and linguistic) forces have become powerful in the political processes. As a consequence of these divergent developments the politics of nation-building in each country has become entangled with the minority-majority dilemma, which owning to the common historical heritage of the region, has reverberated across national boundaries; each country tends to exploit the other's internal tensions and weaknesses through propaganda and other means.

The enormity of South Asia's cross-national ethnic and religious problems makes one pessimistic about the current efforts towards building a regional consciousness. Ethnic minority explosions not only strain bilateral and multilateral relations but some times create interstate crises. In short, ethnic tensions within the region cut at the very roots of regional cooperation.

**Divergent Political Perceptions**

Collective economic benefit has been the main rationale as well as drive behind SAARC, but even economic cooperation is dedicated so heavily by political constraints, that it appears difficult, to exploit the regional potential.
The enterprise of South Asia's political system is the Indo Pakistan relationship. In the absence of satisfactory resolution of conflicts between the two states, mutual distrust and hostility will continue to dominate the SAARC deliberations.

At the Bangalore Summit, India did not succeed in its bid to have the areas of cooperation expanded to include trade, industry, energy, money and finance. Though Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan supported Indian thinking, Pakistan left little doubt about its opposition to any enlargement. Pakistan Prime Minister Junejo's allegation about India's military moves on the border was unwarranted. So was prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's rejoinder denying the allegation at a Press conference. Rajiv Gandhi openly expressed his doubts about Junejo's statement that Pakistan was not making a bomb.

The Bangalore Summit was overshadowed by bilateral issues India-Pakistan relations and the Sri Lankan ethnic problem. The opportunities available at Bangalore were fully utilised what with the Sri Lankan issue engaging the attention of negotiators from India and Sri Lanka almost round the clock despite the SAARC principle that contentious bilateral issues must be kept out of SAARC.

The differing perceptions of the members on what constitutes terrorism prevented them from reaching an agreement on how to combat terrorism. Particularly, sharp was the divergence between India and Sri Lanka about contrary to earlier fears, they did not press their points too hard at Bangalore. The regional convention on the suppression of terrorism adopted at Kathmandu may prove to be a mere paper declaration. This does not make it easier to extradite terrorists in the absence of bilateral extradition treaties and so far as India
is concerned, it has such a treaty only with Nepal. Secondly, the convention can be implemented only after its ratification by the seven member-states which will need an amendment of extradition laws as well as criminal procedural laws. Moreover, even if procedural wrangles are overcome, the convention can hardly solve the problem of terrorism in South Asia, in the absence of an agreement on what constitutes terrorism and on who a terrorist is. As one country's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, conventions on suppressing terrorism are meaningless without agreement on this basis.

Again at Kathmandu, the attempt to throw SAARC's weight behind the Indo-Sri Lanka accord was frustrated by Pakistan's hostility to the idea of India receiving a part on the back. The move backed by India to admit Afghanistan into SAARC as observer or guest floundered on the rock of Indo-Pakistan differences ostensibly over the nature of the regime but, in fact, due to 146 conflicting strategic perceptions. Indian support for Afghanistan's request was retorted to by Pakistan's plea that SAARC should explore possibilities of institutional links with ASEAN. In the dust kicked up by the aforesaid controversies the noble sentiments of making SAARC adopt a people-oriented developmental perspective paled into insignificance.

**Mutual Distrust**

Another major area of tension is the mutual distrust that exists among the member countries of SAARC. In January 1985, when Sri Lanka's National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali said that they did not need any foreign guidance or assistance in settling the ethnic problem, his obvious reference was to India.
In an interview to the Bangladesh Observer published in Dhaka, General Zia is spoke of India's disputes with country of South Asia and its size as two inhibiting factors to cooperation. General Zia's interview in effect amounted to saying that India's disputes with 'every country' of SAARC stood in the way of greater cooperation in the region. The publicity material distributed by the Pakistan Embassy in Dhaka prior to the summit spoke of a 'not to subtle' anti-India media campaign raising the Kashmir issue, defending Pakistan's nuclear programme and depicting India as a 'hegemonist' which was taking a negative attitude on SAARC proposals.

All the seven nations had brought out special stamps on the occasion of the Dhaka Summit and they were to have been rememorially cancelled by the leaders in the concluding day's plenary. But the Pakistani stamp showed the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir as a separate territory and the Maldives stamp showed Sikkim as a separate entity. Rajiv Gandhi told the conference Chairman Ershad that he could not share the same platform where such objectionable stamps were to be released. The proposed ceremony was then given up.

An analysis of the speeches made at the Dhaka Summit shows that several of the principles, like avoidance of reference to bilateral and contentious issues and equality of the participating states, were observed more in the breach than in observance. President Zia in his inaugural speech called for steps to banish nuclear weapons. But this is a contentious issue since India does not favour a regional approach to the nuclear ban issue. India while calling for a comprehensive test ban treaty at the global level, has repeatedly spoken against a regional approach. King Jigme of Bhutan in his speech said 'that in the geo-political
realities of the South Asian region, it would be unrealistic to ignore the primacy of the political factor, and that it may neither be possible nor desirable to limit discussion in the meetings to issues of a non-political nature.

At the concluding plenary of the summit, President Jayawardene compared the launching of SAARC to the launching of a ship and hoped that "there would be no mutiny abroad".

The amount of controversy that the Ershad regime has raised against India's division to fence the Indo-bangladesh border so as to stop the flow of infiltrators to India, has not only underlined the significance of the problem but also highlighted its potential to disturb the bilateral peace. With the Indian side at the border ready to meet the challenge squarely, it is apparent that the fence will continue to create new levels of tension between the neighbours, like the problem posed by the Bangladesh infiltrators, the growing number of Nepali nationals in the bordering districts of northern and north-eastern India also has potential to cause tension in Indo-Nepal relations.

As for trade and industry being not yet identified as an area of cooperation, India right from the point where SAARC cooperation began, has been impressing on priority being given to the economic dimension of the interaction. but Pakistan has so far proved adamant saying that political thrust should precede economic interaction and also expressing fears of being swamped by Indian goods. It seems to be more a case of preventing the entry of Indian goods than any thing else. Import of wheat, iron, ore etc. from outside the region when the same can be obtained from India cheaper, can only lead to such a conclusion.
The creation of the South-Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) was the most realistic approach by the political leadership of South-Asian Countries. The effort towards regional co-operation in South Asia is more recent phenomenon. The Seven South-Asian Countries - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives joined hands for the Regional Co-operation (SAARC) to enlist co-operation of the countries of the region. In 1985, it was decided in the Summit meeting at Dhaka that SAARC would be known as SARC and the members expressed their collective support to make the organisation successful. The members of the SAARC have decided to co-operate not only in the economic sphere but also in the political, agricultural, scientific, educational and literacy fields.

The formation of SAARC is an unique welcome development as it enables to contribute to the economic development of the region as a whole, regardless of the size and geographical locations of individual countries. Though SAARC is the youngest of the regional grouping, it is the biggest in terms of people as it represents over one billion people of which India is the largest. These are many aspects of regional co-operation to be explored. Most of the South and South-East Asian countries are facing a threat of subversion aided and abetted by the outside forces.

The terrorist groups existing in almost all the countries are working under certain ideological and historical frame work. They have not yet been assimilated in the national mainstream. The need for regional co-operation has been expressed by many leaders of the various countries in the region. But in order to develop an outlook for regional co-operation,
here is a need for understanding and collaboration of all the countries in the region. The progress of the region can be assured only through the process of regional co-operation. But the progress in the regard has been quite slow. This slow progress has been attributed to the difference in the approaches, attitudes and perceptions of the countries of the region. India and other countries in the region are fully aware of the dangerous implications and problems mostly caused by the worsening economic crisis which threatened to negate whatever has been done so far. Hence, the SAARC now needs a new awareness, new thinking and new commitment to meet the new challenges and finally it can be said that India the largest of the seven SAARC countries may be required to create the congenial atmosphere that is the first essential need for regional co-operation.
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