CHAPTER – VI

SAARC SUMMITS IN THE NINETIES

This chapter deals with the subsequent SAARC summits since the fourth summit held in Islamabad in December 1988. Although the period of this dissertation spans from 1980 to 1988, an attempt has been made in this chapter to briefly describe the latest developments in SAARC so as to make the work relevant and up-to-date as far as possible. Since this falls beyond the period of my dissertation, these summits have not been analysed in details. In other words, the present dissertation will perhaps remain incomplete if the subsequent summits are not touched upon.

The fifth SAARC summit was held at Male in November 1990. In the history of SAARC, this summit occupies a prominent place mainly because of the signing of the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. This was undoubtedly a major achievement, given the alarming rise in the use of drugs, their baneful effects on the life of the South Asian people and the close nexus between illicit drug-trafficking, international arms trade and terrorist activities. The SAARC leaders truly emphasised the fact that unless the growing menace of drug trafficking and drug abuse were checked in time, masses in the South Asian region would suffer from extreme poverty leading to hunger, malnutrition, criminal offences etc. Consumption of drugs not only ruins the health of the ill-fed people of our region but also has a demoralising effect on an individual. By consuming drugs regularly, people lose their moral value or ethics. They do not take care of their families. Thus, on the whole, the problem of drugs undermine economic development and threaten the stability, security and sovereignty of the states. By signing this agreement, the leaders expressed their farsightedness.

1. For details, see SAARC Convention On Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu 1993.
In view of the untold misery, hardships and suffering borne by the millions of disabled persons living in South Asia, the Male summit placed the problems of disabled persons high on the SAARC agenda. The SAARC Heads of State or Government assembled at Male expressed the opinion that immediate action would be taken to reduce the sufferings of the disabled and improve their quality of life. Hence, they decided to observe 1993 as the ‘SAARC Year of Disabled Persons’.

At Male, the leaders took into account the imperative for providing a better habitat for the masses of South Asia through the best utilisation of indigenous technology, know-how and material. This was duly reflected as they decided in favour of observing 1991 as the ‘SAARC Year of Shelter’.

Tourism was another area which attracted the attention of the leaders at Male. In order to promote tourism throughout the region, the leaders took the decision to launch a ‘Special SAARC Travel Document’ which would exempt its holders from obtaining visas for the purpose of travelling in the region. In view of the profound significance of biotechnology the Summiteers emphasised that SAARC activities should be extended to this field also. An important decision regarding the setting up of SAARC Documentation Centre in India was taken by the leaders at the Male summit.

Further, the SAARC leaders were in favour of adopting a more business-like and functional approach. The Male summit decided that SAARC should have interactive linkages with other regional Organisations like the European Community (EC) and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Nevertheless, the summit at Male should be regarded as nothing more than an annual get-together of SAARC leaders. This is primarily because political relations among the principal actors of the regional association --- namely,

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were marked by several irritants. India accused Pakistan of undermining its territorial integrity by waging a 'proxy-war' through supporting and sponsoring the subversive elements in Punjab and Kashmir. On the other hand, allegations were made by Pakistan that India had sent thousands of RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) agents for creating disorder in that country. Amidst these charges and counter-charges, it was quite natural that the leaders expressed their disagreements on a number of issues. For instance, much to the dismay of India, Pakistan indirectly raised the thorny issue of Kashmir, even making suggestions for the inclusion of contentious bilateral issues in the SAARC Charter. Quite obviously, the Pakistani suggestion was outrightly rejected by India whose argument was that since SAARC was a multilateral forum, there was no room for the discussion of contentious bilateral issues. At the time of the Male summit, the relation between India and Bangladesh too were plagued by the problems of the Chakma refugees and the sharing of the Ganges water. All these jeopardised the prospect of good neighbourly relations in the sub-continent and adversely affected the smooth working of the SAARC.

The sixth SAARC summit scheduled to be held in November, was postponed and later held on 21 December 1991. It was put off due to the inability of the king of Bhutan to attend the summit in view of certain pressing domestic problems. As a result of the sudden cancellation of the original sixth summit and the acrimonious note that followed, it was quite natural that the abridged version of the summit seemed slated for an uneventful take-off from its very inception. However, the controversy that had cropped up in November was left behind and the usual proceedings of the summit went off peacefully.

An eleven-page Colombo declaration was adopted by the leaders at the end of the summit. The leaders agreed to liberalise intra-regional trade, combat trans-
border terrorism and drug-trafficking and to arrange shelter for all by 2000 A.D. They expressed profound concern at the degradation of the environment and urged upon the global community to undertake measures for its protection. The declaration commented that the poor in South Asia could constitute a huge and potential resource, provided their basic requirements were met and they were mobilised to create economic growth. The leaders were fully aware of the fact that a great majority of the South Asian people remained below the poverty line. Hence, they showed keen interest in a ‘Dal-Bhaat’ scheme for the satisfaction of the basic needs of the South Asian poor mass. It should be mentioned here that the leaders announced the establishment of an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation consisting of eminent persons from each SAARC member-state. Its main function was to conduct a detailed study of diverse experiences of the member countries on the removal of poverty.

The SAARC Heads of State welcomed the initiative taken by Maldives in drawing global attention to the protection and security of small states. In the Colombo declaration, the leaders emphasised that as the small states were particularly vulnerable to the external threats and interference in their domestic affairs, they deserved special measures of support in safeguarding their independence, territorial integrity and the welfare of their people.

The leaders expressed their happiness over the setting up of the Committee for Economic Cooperation (CEC) as a major outcome of the Regional Study on Trade, Manufactures and Services. In addition to this, they also approved the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) on Trade Liberalisation. They also empowered the newly constituted body (i.e. IGG) to examine the Sri Lankan proposal to establish a SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) by 1997. The SAARC Fund for Regional Projects (SFRP) was

10. For details, see Colombo Summit: Declaration, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, 1991.
established at Colombo in 1991 to make available credit on easy terms for the identification and development of regional projects\textsuperscript{13}.

Although some pious declarations were made at Colombo, yet it cannot be considered as totally successful. This time too, the prevalent bilateral relations were not at all cordial. Mutual relations between India and Pakistan or India and Sri Lanka could hardly be called friendly. Though the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF)\textsuperscript{14} was withdrawn from Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka had an ill-feeling towards India. Furthermore, Sri Lanka believed that the sudden cancellation of the sixth summit, scheduled for November 1991, was simply a part of some sinister plot hatched in New Delhi to embarrass Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{15} The indefinite postponement of the sixth summit just a few hours before the seven Heads of State or Government were scheduled to arrive at the venue was nearly a fatal blow to an organisation that was ailing. While delivering his speech during the opening session of the summit, the President of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa suggested that active intervention should be made by member-states when legitimate governments were threatened by conspiracy, treachery or paid hirelings of external forces. By this he merely hinted at India’s alleged backing of the dissidents in the United National Party (UNP) who had sought to impeach him.\textsuperscript{16} Prime Minister of India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, expressed his astonishment over Sri Lanka’s accusation that India deliberately postponed the summit. As a reply to this India made it clear that it would have been improper to hold the SAARC summit unless all the Heads of State or Government were present.\textsuperscript{17} During the Colombo summit, proxy war was being waged by Pakistan in the valley of Kashmir. India accused Pakistan of providing support to the militants and subversive elements in Punjab and Kashmir. Pakistan, however, turned a deaf ear to the repeated requests made by India to stop aiding and abetting

\textsuperscript{13} SAARC in Brief, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, March 1994, pp. 21 – 29.
\textsuperscript{14} Following the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, India sent a peace-keeping force to ensure that peace returned to the strife-torn Tamil areas.
\textsuperscript{15} India Today, 30 November 1991, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{16} The Telegraph, 22 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{17} The Hindustan Times, 14 November 1991.
secessionists in the valley and even denied, as usual, its involvement in such actions. As a result of this hostility, Pakistan supported Sri Lanka when the latter accused India of sabotaging the summit.\textsuperscript{18}

At the outset, India had explicitly stated that any attempt by a member country to raise controversial bilateral issues at SAARC meetings would be vehemently opposed by it. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, raised the controversial issue of a nuclear-weapon free zone in South Asia, at the summit. Moreover, it was the Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif alone who critically referred to the postponement of the November summit. Because of mutual acrimony, two suggestions brought up by Sri Lanka – that SAARC should have interaction with other regional groups like ASEAN and EC and invite foreign aid for the purpose of development of SAARC countries -- were turned down by India.\textsuperscript{19} India argued that this would simply mean dependence of SAARC on groups or countries outside it. Thus, it is evident that bilateral problems left their negative impact on the summit. Nevertheless, the fact that the aborted summit was not affected by any security-related incident was undoubtedly an index of success in those circumstances, when relations among the major powers of SAARC were embittered.\textsuperscript{20}

The seventh SAARC summit, which was originally scheduled to be held on 12 December 1992, was called off by India, primarily due to political turbulence prevailing across the sub-continent in the wake of demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya and its aftermath.\textsuperscript{21} In fact, the summit had to be postponed twice at the instance of New Delhi. In view of wide spread anti-India sentiments generated in Pakistan and Bangladesh on the above issue and the boiling political cauldron of the region, India decided to put off the summit.\textsuperscript{22} However, the summit was finally held on 10 April in Dhaka. In the

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{India Today}, n. 15.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Telegraph}, 21 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The Hindu}, 23 December 1991.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Indian Express}, 12 January, 1993.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Hindu}, 24 February 1993.
inauguration ceremony all the Heads of State unequivocally committed themselves to lead the regional forum in a way so that the people of the region could be benefitted from it. They wanted to make SAARC a successful regional organisation despite bilateral irritants and tensions which often overshadowed their avowed aspiration: “Together we prosper”.23

At the end of the summit, the leaders of seven SAARC states adopted the 63-point Dhaka declaration in which they resolved to give a dynamic impetus to enhance economic, social and cultural cooperation in the region.24 One landmark achievement of the Dhaka SAARC summit was the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) as it had paved the way for gradual dismantling of trade barriers and expansion of intra-regional trade among the SAARC countries.25 Indeed the signing of the framework agreement on SAPTA26 at Dhaka marked the first major step towards promotion of trade among the member-countries. The SAARC leaders also welcomed the initiative undertaken by the Speakers of Parliaments of SAARC countries to set up an association of SAARC speakers and parliamentarians.27 They also endorsed the recommendation of the Council of Ministers for the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) on South Asian Development Fund (SADF).28 The year 1994 was designated by the leaders as

26. SAPTA is an important landmark in the history of SAARC. It was signed by the SAARC Council of Ministers in Dhaka in 1993 and formally approved at the Eighth SAARC Summit in New Delhi in May 1995. The SAPTA scheme envisages reduction in trade-barriers – both tariff and non-tariff and other positive measures to expand trade. The Agreement provides for a number of approaches to trade negotiations such as product by product basis across-the-board tariff reductions, sectoral agreements and direct trade measures. Its basic objective is to increase intra-regional trade. SAPTA contains provisions giving special and favourable treatment to the least developed countries (LDCs) in SAARC. It is expected to play a catalytic role in bringing tangible benefits of regional cooperation and in enhancing the welfare of the people of the region. For details, see Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, 1993.
27. SAARC in Brief, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, March 1994, p. 32.
28. For a detailed discussion on Dhaka Declaration, see Seventh SAARC Summit Dhaka: Declaration, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, 1993.
the "SAARC Year of the Youth". They welcomed the operationalisation of SAARC Tuberculosis Centre (STC) in Kathmandu from July 1992. 29

Since the summit was held in a conflict-prone atmosphere, expectations from it were almost nil. As a result of Pakistan’s policy of perpetuating low-intensity warfare along the entire Line-of-Control (LOC) and providing material support to the insurgents in Kashmir and Punjab, the relations between India and Pakistan had deteriorated vastly with no sign of improvement in the relations of the two countries. 30 The destruction of Babri Masjid shattered all hopes for a good mutual relations between India and Pakistan. Following the Ayodhya developments, there was an escalation in anti-India rhetoric in Pakistan. Islamabad decided to reduce the strength of the Indian Consulate in Karachi to less than one-third. 31 India, on its part, asked Pakistan to slash the strength of its High Commission in New Delhi by 40 – from 150 to 110. India didn’t like Pakistan’s interference in its internal affairs (Ayodhya) and carrying on tirade against it in Islamic countries. Apart from this, Pakistan exerted pressure on the Gulf countries to stop export of petroleum products to India in the context of the Ayodhya episode. 32 Meanwhile, the Indian intelligence agency unearthed a Pakistan -- aided grand new project of Kashmiri and Sikh terrorists to Balkanise India. 33 Further, Indian troops frustrated an attempt of Pakistani agencies to push arms supplies into Kashmir Valley and recovered the largest ever consignment of ammunitions and hand-grenades near the LOC. 34 Just a month before the Dhaka summit, the strained relations between India and Pakistan suffered a further set-back because of the 12 March incident of terrorist violence in Bombay, which resulted in large-scale human and material losses. 35

An analysis of these bilateral problems simply points to the fact that the

34. The Hindustan Times, 4 February 1993.
seventh SAARC summit was not going to be an exception. From its very inception, SAARC had been threatened by its own internal contradictions and dissensions. Without focusing on their natural sense of common affinity, member-states had emphasised their mutual animosities.\textsuperscript{36} Bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan had robbed the deliberations of any practical significance. During the course of the summit, India categorically told Pakistan that there was no possibility of bilateral talks between them until the Bombay blast issue was sorted out. India's Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao even told Nawaz Sharif that deportation of Memon brothers – the main culprits in the Bombay blast case – was necessary to build mutual confidence.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, when India put forward the concept of SAPTA, Pakistan did not feel enthusiastic about it. Pakistan's hatred for India was so intense that it expressed its reluctance to grant the most-favoured-nation (MFN) treatment to India.\textsuperscript{38} Because of its unwillingness to promote trade with India, Pakistan purposely kept its tariff walls high in order to keep out Indian products.

Despite these limitations, the Seventh SAARC summit was significant in the sense that, for the first time, instead of political issues, SAARC concentrated its attention on the trade and economic aspects of regional cooperation.\textsuperscript{39} By endorsing SAPTA, the leaders assembled at Dhaka gave SAARC an economic content.\textsuperscript{40} The Dhaka summit had acquired a prominent place in the history of SAARC because of the momentous decision taken by the leaders to sign a framework agreement for the establishment of SAPTA. They truly realised that without economic cooperation, SAARC would not be able to carve out a

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Patriot}, 13 January 1993
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Hindu}, 12 April 1993.
\textsuperscript{38} MFN status implies that the contracting parties should bestow the same tariff and trade restrictions on each other's exports and imports which are given to other countries. Long ago, India accorded MFN status to Pakistan. But Pakistan did not grant the status to India mainly for two reasons - one is economic and the other is political. Pakistan is afraid of the fact that granting of MFN status would result in Indian goods flooding the markets of Pakistan. Politically, Pakistani leaders apprehend that it would be against the interest of Pakistan to normalise relations with India. This is solely due to their fear psychosis that if trade relations are normalised and people-to-people contacts develop, there is every possibility that they would lose their control on domestic politics.
\textsuperscript{39} See \textit{Patriot}, 13 January 1993.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{The Hindu}, 12 April 1993.
niche for itself in a world of successful regional organisations, like the European Union (EU), Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) etc, especially in a sensitive area like South Asia which is torn by three wars and a conflict of more than fifty years between the two principal rivals of the subcontinent – India and Pakistan.

The eighth SAARC summit held in New Delhi during 2 – 4 May 1995, was inaugurated by India’s Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao. The New Delhi summit is memorable because it was at this summit that the operational details of the identification of commodities and the depth of tariff reductions relevant to SAPTA were finalised.\textsuperscript{41} Launching of SAPTA heralded the beginning of a new and significant process of regional cooperation. The leaders argued that in view of the alarming magnitude of unofficial trade among SAARC countries, the launching of SAPTA would indeed benefit the members of SAARC equally. As a natural corollary to this, SAARC Heads of State at the eighth summit proposed the transition from SAPTA to SAFTA (SAARC Free Trade Area) with total elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers by the year 2005.

The New Delhi declaration, adopted at the end of the summit, welcomed the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)\textsuperscript{42} since it would result in the expansion of global trade. The declaration also focused on the known areas of common concern such as terrorism, increasing trade in narcotics,


\textsuperscript{42} World Trade Organisation is the modern version of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. As a result of the conclusion of Marrakesh Agreement in April 1994 by 125 countries, World’s one of longest trade talks in history came to an end. The covered Agreements of the Uruguay Round were incorporated under a new institutional framework, called the WTO. It started functioning from 1 January 1995. The WTO is more comprehensive and has more power, including binding procedure for dispute settlement. “The WTO is the premier legal and institutional foundations of the global multilateral trading system”. Unlike GATT, the WTO has not only a recognised administrative structure, it also incorporated the new issues that were discussed during the Uruguay Round of Negotiations, “The WTO is an agreement among 135 member governments.” It is a rule based organisation which seeks to foster a world where persuasion supercedes coercion and where decisions are taken on the basis of consensus. The organisation is served by a Secretariat answerable to the members.
environmental protection, empowerment and development of women and children, eradication of poverty and the need for global nuclear disarmament. The leaders expressed their resolve to promote and protect human rights and underlined that mutual cooperation was vital if the scourge of terrorism was to be eliminated from the region. On the political front, the declaration reiterated SAARC's commitment to the principles of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and called for revitalising the U. N. It also called for greater interaction with different regional blocs like the ASEAN, the European Union and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The leaders were fully aware of the fact that half of the existing one billion population of SAARC lived below the poverty line and accordingly they designated 1995 as the SAARC Year of the Eradication of Poverty. They endorsed the establishment of a three-window South Asian Development Fund (SADF) with the merger of SAARC Fund for Regional Projects (SFRP) and the SAARC Regional Fund with a third window for social and infrastructural development.

At the eighth summit, the leaders passionately pleaded for the removal of mutual suspicions and prejudices and creation of opportunities for the discussion of political issues. Discussions were held among the SAARC leaders on the sensitive theme of including bilateral issues in the SAARC Charter. Divergent views were expressed by the member countries on this subject. Narasimha Rao outrightly rejected the Pakistani President Farooq Leghari's suggestion to throw open the SAARC forum for a discussion on contentious bilateral issues and argued that the time had not yet come for the regional group to agree to such a change.

43. The Telegraph, 5 May 1995.
44. The Hindu, 4 May 1995
46 India Quarterly, Vol. L11 Nos. 1k2, January – June 1996, p.84
47. See The Hindustan Times, 3 May 1995.
This lack of unanimity among the leaders was clearly a reflection of their bilateral problems. During this time, Pakistan's relentless efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue and its unending support to subversion and terrorism against India vitiated the atmosphere. Consequently, there was no question of any meaningful progress in their bilateral relations. In fact, Pakistan's nuclear weapon-oriented programme, its surreptitious procurement of materials for this purpose and acquisition of sophisticated weapons and arms technology far exceeding its legitimate requirements deteriorated Indo-Pak relations. To check trans-border activities including infiltration and smuggling of arms from across the border, India Government ordered barbed-wire fencing of the 110-km. long international border between India and Pakistan from Kathua to Akhnoor. There was hardly any people-to-people contact between the two countries as a result of the restrictive visa policy followed by Pakistan. Moreover, the Government of Pakistan was not interested in the resumption of a bilateral dialogue. The decision taken by the then Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto of not attending the SAARC summit simply confirmed that she too had reservations about resuming the dialogue. This near-permanent state of cold war between India and Pakistan left an impact on the proceedings of the New Delhi summit.

The New Delhi summit has been criticised on the ground that apart from the agreement to launch SAFTA by 8 December 1985, the summit failed to bring about even a ray of hope in the onward journey of SAARC. Nevertheless, it cannot be branded as a futile attempt. The unanimous declaration adopted by the leaders to observe the year 1995 as the SAARC Year of Eradication of Poverty is a testimony to the fact that they attached utmost importance to this issue. They firmly believed that unless and until poverty was abolished and the poorest of the poor were assured of two-square meals a day, the goal of SAARC would remain unfulfilled. Moreover, the summit succeeded in

49. The Hindustan Times, 12 April 1995.
51. The Hindustan Times, 14 April 1995.
52. The Times of India, 24 February 1995.
injecting a dose of realism to SAARC deliberations and in focusing attention on the difficulties that thwart cooperation among the member-states and elude the avowed objectives of SAARC. 53

The ninth SAARC summit held in Male from 12-14 May 1997 was inaugurated by Maldivian President, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. A number of key proposals including that of informal political dialogue among the members of SAARC were placed at the opening session of the summit. The idea of transforming SAARC into a South Asian economic community was another major theme that dominated the inaugural session of the summit. This was proposed by the Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral and echoed by the king of Bhutan J. S. Wangchuk and other leaders. 54 A noteworthy feature of the Male summit was that it was overshadowed by Indo-Pak talks which started at the highest level after four years with a meeting between I. K. Gujral and his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif to discuss all outstanding issues. 55 As a result of the meeting, both the Prime Ministers decided to release all prisoners and fishermen from their countries and establish a hotline between them. 56

The Male declaration forcefully called for the economic integration of the South Asian region and underlined the need for sub-regional cooperation to harness the tremendous development potential of the member-countries. 57 The declaration set aside the objections which were raised by Pakistan and Sri Lanka on the formation of a ‘Growth Quadrangle’ by India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to exploit their resources in the fields of energy, water, transport, trade and transit and environment for economic benefits of the people of their countries. 58

57. The Times of India, 14 May 1997.
Besides this, the declaration dealt with various issues like eradication of poverty, acceleration of economic cooperation, women in development, environment, terrorism and drug trafficking, science and technology, tourism, security of small states and international political developments. The leaders also proposed the formation of a Group of Eminent Persons (GEPs) comprising one person from each member country for speedily achieving the goals of this organisation. They also argued that private sector should be given encouragement so that they could contribute increasingly towards the strengthening of intra-SAARC links in key areas of trade, investment and finance. The talks held at Male envisaged the setting up of a hotline between the Prime Minister of India and Pakistan, a Joint Working Group and an exchange of prisoners. The decision taken by SAARC leaders at Male to implement SAFTA by 2001 was a welcome move by the SAARC. That the members of SAARC have developed a certain amount of faith in each other was reflected in their decision to herald the free trade area four years before the proposed time of 2005. Social issues such as empowerment of women and children including problems of girl child received special importance at Male.

The Male summit too, was vitiated by the hostile Indo-Pak relations. It was seen that in spite of Pakistan’s willingness to mend ties with Islamabad through the resumption of bilateral talks stalled since 1994, the Kashmir issue remained high on Pakistan’s agenda. India also did not like Pakistan’s continuing insistence on a referendum by the Kashmiri people. While India announced a unilateral relaxation of visa restrictions for Pakistani citizens wishing to visit India for commercial and other purposes, Pakistan refused visas to a group of Indian journalists desiring to visit Islamabad to cover the

60. Aabha Dixit, n.58
64. *Indian Express*, 28 March 1997.
Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit. Moreover, the Prime Minister of India I. K. Gujral ruled out any possibility of converting the Line of Control into a permanent border between India and Pakistan, as a solution to the thorny Kashmir issue. As a result of these differences, it was quite natural that Pakistan strongly objected to the formation of a sub-regional group proposed by India. Objections were raised by Sri Lanka too as it did not enjoy cordial relations with India. Thus, both of them argued that the Growth Quadrangle was an attempt by their bigger neighbour India to isolate them from the rest of the group.

However, this divergence of opinion should not make us blind to the positive aspects of the Male summit. First, Male summit succeeded in resuming the bilateral talks between India and Pakistan at the highest level after a gap of four years. It is worth mentioning here that the meeting between I. K. Gujral and Nawaz Sharif had been able to clear the cloudy sky of the sub-continent. In the second place, the strong appeal made by the SAARC leaders for economic integration of the South Asian region is regarded as a major achievement. Third, considering the plight of women and children, specially the problems of the girl child, the leaders agreed on the need for the adoption of a SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. Finally, the leaders gave proof of their farsightedness by deciding to set up a Group of Eminent Persons for a comprehensive appraisal of SAARC.

The tenth summit of the SAARC nations was held in Colombo from 29 – 31 July, 1998. Its significance lies in the fact that it was not postponed despite sharp deterioration of relations between the two major powers – namely, India and Pakistan, following a series of nuclear tests conducted by them in May 1998. Indeed, the Indo-Pak hostility cast a long shadow over the tenth
summit. From the very beginning, the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif tried to regionalise the dispute with India. On the contrary, other member countries appealed to both India and Pakistan to resolve their differences for the future of South Asia. 70 Owing to the unprecedented developments in South Asia following the nuclearisation of the sub-continent, the entire focus of the Colombo summit was on bilateral relations. Although on the eve of the tenth summit, a widespread concern among the countries of South Asia was noticed, the preliminary focus of the SAARC meet was on trade and economic issues. 71 No worthwhile discussions could take place for improving bilateral economic relations between India and Pakistan due to the accentuation of political tensions between them. Other member countries paid no attention to the persistent pleas made by Pakistan to introduce South Asia’s nuclear tests into the Colombo declaration. 72 In fact, the other six members resisted the efforts by Pakistan to drag SAARC into bilateral issues as it violated its Charter. 73 On the last day of the three-day summit, leaders of the seven countries asked all nuclear-weapon states to negotiate “effective” disarmament and argued that the situation in South Asia could not be considered in isolation of the world security and environment.

The Colombo declaration issued by the SAARC Heads of States did not directly refer to the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan but criticised major nuclear powers for maintaining huge arsenals of nuclear weapons. 74 It also took note of the fact that although some SAARC members were signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), it had neither resulted in any progress towards nuclear disarmament nor prevented proliferation. 75 The leaders expressed their concern about “the shortcomings of the international monetary and financial system and its tardiness in anticipating impending financial market crises.

70. Indian Express, 30 July 1998
74. Indian Express, 1 August 1998.
75. Ibid.
sufficiently. They also called for the establishment of an early free trade regime in South Asia and for eradicating poverty by the year 2002. In a nutshell, the declaration widely dealt with the economic agenda. Following points were covered by the declaration: 1) decision to enhance the progress in the next round of negotiations for the preferential tariff regime – SAPTA, 2) extension of tariff concessions to products actively traded, 3) removal of discriminatory practices and non-tariff barriers on the items covered by tariff concessions, 4) steps for the drafting of a treaty to create a free-trade area, 5) coordination of SAARC positions before the WTO and 6) encouragement of sub-regional cooperation. Thus, it is seen that the SAARC declaration released at the Colombo summit on 31 July, mainly focused on economic cooperation in the region and did not let its attention deflected by political matters or the issues thrown up by the recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. As a result of the nuclear tests conducted both by India and Pakistan in May 1998, the relations between them worsened further. It was quite natural that their hostile relations would influence the outcome of the Colombo summit. The other five members of SAARC were very much worried about the impact of nuclear tests and this is why Pakistan failed in its attempt to get the contentious bilateral issues incorporated in SAARC agenda.

The Colombo summit assumed importance for the fact that the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met for the first time in Colombo after the Pokhran II episode. By devoting itself to issues of economic cooperation between the member-countries and the role of South Asia and SAARC as a

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77. The Hindu, 1 August 1998.
79. On 11 May 1998, India detonated three underground nuclear devices in Pokhran. Since these tests were conducted on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the first nuclear explosion in the same place on the day of ‘Buddha Purnima’ in 1974, it is commonly known as Pokhran II. By conducting three underground nuclear tests simultaneously, India became the sixth country to join the exclusive club of nuclear-weapon states. The West widely condemned India for carrying out these tests. China and Japan sided with the West in criticising the Indian action. Tough sanctions were imposed by the U.S.A. and Japan on India for these nuclear tests. Even in response to these sharp reactions of the West, New Delhi conducted two more tests on 13 May, reflecting determination and obstinacy in its nuclear programme.
whole in the global economy, the Colombo summit proved beyond doubt that it was fundamentally and primarily an economic summit. An analysis of the Colombo declaration demonstrates that at Colombo there was but only a pious reiteration of the resolve to work towards realising the goal of enduring economic integration of South Asia. The leaders were justified in pointing out that though political and bilateral problems could not be totally overlooked, the South Asian grouping must learn to set aside these irritants and focus on economic issues, cooperation and integration. During this summit, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met for nearly 90 minutes in three phases, but failed to break the impasse. It is rightly said that the summit ended without taking SAARC one step forward. Nevertheless, the only glimmer of hope that emerged after the failure of Indo-Pak bilateral negotiations at the SAARC was that, both the countries revealed their willingness to continue their dialogue.

After a long hibernation since 1998, the eleventh SAARC summit at last took place in Kathmandu from 4 – 6 January 2002. Its novelty lies in the fact that in the history of SAARC summits, no other summit was held in an atmosphere of bilateral tension between the two key contending members of the association. Prior to the summit, terrorists first attacked the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly (10 October, 2001) and then the Parliament of India (on 13 December 2001) – the hallowed seats of Indian Democracy. Two Pakistani terrorist outfits – namely, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Laskar-e-Taiba – claimed responsibility for these attacks. This made the Indian government furious and the leaders at once decided to take some retaliatory measures by downgrading diplomatic ties with Pakistan. Harsh diplomatic offensives along with deployment of troops on the border gave rise to speculations that the ensuing SAARC summit might be called off again. However, this time India

considered that it would be very unwise to thwart the holding of the summit once more in the pretext of heightened mutual bickering and animosity between India and Pakistan. Although India tried the best to ensure that its relations with Pakistan should not become the sole issue at the eleventh SAARC summit, yet the entire globe was very much concerned about the bilateral talks between India and Pakistan. The reason behind this was that after the 13 December terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament by the Pakistan based terrorist organisations, India had reiterated its demand that a conducive atmosphere should be created by Pakistan before any bilateral talks could take place.\(^{84}\) Lately we have seen that not only South Asia but the entire globe has been affected by the spectre of terrorism. Thus, it was quite natural that the main issue before the Kathmandu summit was terrorism.\(^{85}\) While India wanted to highlight the issue of terrorism, Pakistani President Pervez Musharaf tried to deflect the attention of the grouping away from it.\(^{86}\) The SAARC leaders outrightly discarded any justification of terrorism on “ideological, political, religious or any other ground” as it has caused much damage to the masses of South Asia.\(^{87}\) When all the SAARC members agreed to launch a global crusade against terrorism, Pakistan demanded that a distinction should be made between legitimate freedom struggle and terrorist activities. Except Bangladesh, which preferred to remain silent on the subject, other SAARC leaders did not accept this view. The final outcome of the summit, however, displayed India’s triumph. As on the concluding day, the Kathmandu declaration strongly advocated India’s stand and pledged to fight the scourge of terrorism in all “its forms and manifestations.” The SAARC leaders at Kathmandu noticed that the earlier convention on terrorism was not so effective and meaningful and hence they felt the need to strengthen it by referring it to legal experts. The declaration urged the member-states to introduce legislation to expedite the enactment of a 1987 convention against terrorism.\(^{88}\) It also called for the implementation of the 1987 SAARC

\(^{84}\) The Statesman, 4 January 2002.
\(^{86}\) The Times of India, 5 January 2002.
\(^{87}\) John Cherian, n.85
\(^{88}\) The Hindustan Times, 7 January 2002.
Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. Moreover, the SAARC leaders at the eleventh summit reiterated their unequivocal support to the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 adopted in the wake of the 11 September terrorist strikes in the U. S. and affirmed their resoluteness to strengthen efforts collectively and individually to wage an all-out war against terrorism. Thus, it is evident that the Kathmandu declaration made an attempt to connect South Asian anti-terrorist laws with a recent U. N. Security Council Resolution making it obligatory on all nations to desist from giving any active or passive support to terrorist groups.89 Besides this, the leaders unitedly recognised the nexus between terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering and other transnational criminal activities and stressed upon the need to coordinate efforts at the national and regional levels.

The leaders also solemnly undertook to join forces and fight cross-border trafficking of women who end up in brothels. They signed the ‘Convention on preventing and combating crime against women and children for prostitution.’90 Under this convention, prostitution is considered to be a serious crime and there are provisions for giving severe punishment to those involved in this illegal trade.91

Despite the fact that terrorism and the latest Indo-Pak stand-off overshadowed the entire proceedings of the summit, the members did not overlook the economic agenda of the summit. In the Kathmandu declaration, the leaders expressed their strong determination to combat the problem of poverty with a renewed imperative by actively promoting the synergetic partnership among national governments, international agencies, private sector and the civil societies.92

They vowed to create SAFTA by the year-end. Leaving aside its reservations on the issue of free trade, Pakistan too agreed to the proposal. At Kathmandu,

89. See *Frontline*, 1 February 2002, p.30
90. Ibid
the leaders did not lose sight of the formidable problem of poverty. In this context, they asked the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, constituted in 1991, to provide concrete suggestions on the eradication of poverty within a specified time-limit.\(^9\) The leaders realised that making some bold declarations and setting up a few committees to look into the matter will not be enough. So they decided to reconvene the Independent Commission on Poverty Alleviation which was constituted during the Colombo summit in 1991. They argued that the Commission should be entrusted with additional responsibility to set up mechanisms to coordinate and monitor progress periodically. The Kathmandu declaration also expressed the willingness of the leaders to enhance cooperation in the core areas of trade, finance and investment. The leaders asked the members to speed up action to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers and structural hindrances to free trade.\(^9\)

That the leaders of India and Pakistan came together to share the same platform in the face of growing Indo-Pak hostility is acknowledged as a major achievement of the summit. Also, at the eleventh summit, the SAARC Heads of State or Government for the first time unanimously agreed upon the need for a comprehensive approach to terrorism. This is indeed a welcome move on the part of the leaders. Under the prevailing circumstances, they have finally realised that unless and until they collectively repudiate terrorism and take some stringent measures to wipe out terrorism, South Asia will continue to lag behind. Because it is terrorism alone that has impeded SAARC from achieving its huge economic potential. The summit has provided India – the worst victim of terrorism for two decades – with a golden opportunity to carry on its diplomatic campaign against terrorism.\(^9\) Terrorism is not merely an irritant in Indo-Pak relations. It has raised its ugly head everywhere and majority of the South Asian countries are adversely affected by it. This is why other SAARC members lent their whole-hearted support to India on the issue of fighting and removing terrorism from the sub-continental soil.

\(^9\) The Hindustan Times, 7 January 2002.