CHAPTER - 1

REGIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIA: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

The establishment of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in December 1985 was an epoch-making event in the history of South Asian affairs. It heralded the emergence of South Asia, comprising one-fifth of the global population, as a regional entity for the first time within the contemporary international political system. However, the notion of regional cooperation as a means of promoting peace through reduction of tensions and fostering cooperation in pursuit of common interests is not new. Regional associations had already been set up with varying degrees of success in various parts of the globe, viz., Western Europe, Latin America, East Africa and South-east Asia. South Asia, as a matter of fact, was quite late in responding to the need for regional cooperation and understanding. This was mainly due to the existing diversities among the countries of the region in terms of their power potential, levels of economic development, political systems and experiences, strategic perspectives and foreign policy goals, notwithstanding their socio-economic and cultural commonalities and their common commitment to the principles and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

SAARC is the latest among the ventures made by the developing countries to forge collective understanding at the regional sub-systemic level on issues pertaining to security, peace and development. The countries of South Asia form a natural geographic region whose peoples share common values rooted

1. SAARC comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
4. The concept of Non-Alignment emerged on the international scene immediately after the World War II. It aims at keeping away from the Cold War. The architects of the Non-Aligned Movement were Nehru, Tito, Nasser and Sukarno. It was formally set up in 1961. The first summit of Non-Aligned Nations was held in 1961 at Belgrade. Thirteen summits have been held so far.
in their historical, cultural and linguistic heritage, and this largely reflects the underlying unity of South Asia. Moreover, this region – though endowed with substantial natural and human resources – suffers from chronic problems of underdevelopment, poverty and unrestrained population growth, which necessitate a common outlook on socio-economic development for the whole region. All the South Asian countries are engaged in the task of economic and social transformation of their own countries. Thus, while these countries face a multitude of common problems, their grievances and aspirations are similar. It was, therefore, imperative on the part of the countries of South Asia to have formed a regional organisation for promoting economic cooperation, peace and stability in the region and finding out solution to their common problems and aspirations. Never before in history seven independent states of South Asia had set up a regional framework within which they could work together as equal partners to find solution to their myriad common problems in a spirit of trust, friendship and mutual understanding. SAARC today is an established fact of South Asian politics, with a firm institutional base and a set of sound principles and guidelines for its future development.

**India’s Role in Advocating Regional Cooperation in Asia**

Although the idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was given a definite and concrete shape in the 1980s by the late President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman, it was India who played a pioneering role in advocating the spirit of cooperation among the Asian states. India did make a vigorous attempt to promote the idea of Asian unity at the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in March-April 1947.

Even before India’s independence, national leaders visualised an active role for India in Asian affairs. Engaged in prolonged struggle with British imperialism, the Indian leaders realised the need for a wider Asian unity in building a new Asia after the overthrow of the foreign yoke. As the freedom movement continued, there developed a spirit of fellow-feeling among the
citizens of different Asian nations. Gradually, the people of Asia developed a feeling that whatever may be their differences, they must stand in unison against the dominating and the exploitative tendency of the European powers.\(^5\) Moreover, the national movements in various Asian countries, especially the political consolidation and industrial development of Japan, the latter’s victory over Russia in 1905 and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 inspired the Indian leaders and strengthened their sense of a common Asian destiny.

Almost every year, since the end of the First World War, the Indian National Congress referred to the need for an “Asiatic Federation”.\(^6\) In 1920, Mahatma Gandhi wrote of growing solidarity of Asian countries in their crusade against Western colonialism. While presiding over the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1922, Chittaranjan Das emphasised the need for Indian participation in an Asian Federation.\(^7\) In 1928, the Congress directed its Working Committee to convene “the first session of a Pan-Asiatic Federation in 1930 in India”.\(^8\) Thus, it is evident that the concept of Asian Federation continued to haunt the minds of the Indian leaders throughout the pre-independence days. The notion of Asian Federation, though mainly a product of idealistic strain in Indian nationalism, was nevertheless a testimony to the growing awareness on the part of the Indian leaders.\(^9\) In 1940, Jawaharlal Nehru proposed the formation of an Asian Federation as a constituent of the World federation of the future. It was quite in the fitness of things that Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, sought to project Asianism in his foreign policy approach. He convened, on the eve of India’s independence, the


8. Cited in Jayantanuja Bandopadhyaya, n.6, p.75

9. This awareness of an Asian identity was reflected in India’s strong and imperialist outlook in 1920s. In 1927, the Congress demanded the withdrawal of Indian troops engaged in serving the imperialist powers in China, Mesopotamia and Persia. The resolution described the Chinese people as “the comrades of the Indian people in their joint struggle against imperialism”. In the following year, the Congress sympathised with the four Arab nations, viz., Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq, “in their struggle for emancipation from the grip of Western Imperialism.” See for details, Chanakya Sen, n.5, pp 163 – 164.
Asian Relations Conference in March-April 1947. Regional economic cooperation had always figured prominently in Nehru’s approach to Asian security. Since in his opinion Asia was mostly concerned with human problems, the problems of power politics were not its primary concern. Thus, India took a few important steps under Nehru towards the promotion of regional cooperation among Asian countries. Consequently, the Asian Relations Conference of March-April 1947 emphasised the need for greater cooperation among Asian states. The delegates who attended the conference unanimously observed that Asia which was emerging from long years of Western bondage would not accept the Western tutelage by joining the military alliances or in any other form. In his inaugural address to the Asian Relations Conference on 23 March 1947, Nehru stressed upon the need for Asian Unity. He said: “There was a widespread urge and an awareness that the time had come for us, peoples of Asia, to meet together, to hold together and to advance together. It was not only a vague desire, but the compulsion of events that forced all of us to think along these lines. This conference itself is significant as an expression of that deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination.”

Apart from regional cooperation and Asian Unity, Nehru heralded the emergence of Asia and the role it would play in power politics. Addressing the U. N. General Assembly in Paris in 1948, he declared: “........ the world is something bigger than Europe ... Asia counts in world affairs. Tomorrow it will count much more than today”.

A similar sentiment was echoed at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung on 24 April 1955. In his statement in the Lok Sabha, Nehru summed up the main purposes of the conference: “To promote goodwill and cooperation, To consider social, economic and cultural problems and the problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples

and finally; To view the position of Asia and Africa in the world today and the contribution they could make for the promotion of world peace and cooperation.\textsuperscript{12} 

The second Asian Relations Conference, also held in New Delhi in January 1949, openly appealed for regional integration. It called for cooperation among Asian states within the framework of the United Nations and also focused upon the willingness of the countries of the region to chalk out an institutional base for such cooperation. In his parliamentary speech on 8 March 1949 Nehru stated that India was devising methods of mutual cooperation and expressed the desire to convene another conference to consider possible lines of Asian cooperation.\textsuperscript{13} Nehru, thus vigorously pursued the goal of Asian Unity in the Asian Relations Conferences held in New Delhi in late 1940s.

The first Asian Relations Conference led to the formation of an Asian Relations Organisation, but it ultimately faded away in the mid-1950s. However, the concept of “Asian Unity” became a myth rather than a reality due to the extension of Cold War to Asia which led to the eruption of serious strains in the bilateral relations of different South Asian countries. The mutual antagonism and a feeling of hatred between India and Pakistan and the successive armed conflicts between them, the tension in Indo-Nepalese relations, the discord between India and Sri Lanka over the Tamil problem, the divergent foreign policy perceptions of South Asian countries and the dominant position of India – all these made regional cooperation in South Asia a rather uphill task and also a difficult goal to achieve. Despite these tensions and strains in the bilateral relations of South Asian countries there was cooperation among them in limited areas under the Colombo Plan and in the Commonwealth.

In the 1970s the political scenario in South Asia underwent a radical change with Bangladesh emerging as an independent nation and all the countries in


\textsuperscript{13} see Devendra Kaushik and Satyendra Peerthum, n.7, p.38
the region gradually adhering to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This adherence along with the determination of the NAM to promote economic and technical cooperation among the countries of the region provided a new and better opportunity to explore the possibilities of regional cooperation in South Asia.

**Zia-ur-Rahman’s Initiative**

SAARC is the brain child of the late President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman. Zia made a formal proposal for establishing a regional organisation in his communication on 2 May 1980 to the Heads of Governments of six other South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. The proposal for establishing a regional forum was warmly received by almost all the seven South Asian countries barring the arch-rivals India and Pakistan who had certain initial reservations about the plan for holding a summit.\(^{14}\) The leaders of South Asian countries realised that their aspirations for a better life and an improved standard of living could best be promoted through such a regional association. It might also bring about, they perceived, an accelerated level of social and economic development by ensuring an environment of peace and security. Following Zia-ur-Rahman’s initiative in setting forth the idea of regional cooperation, a comprehensive paper focusing on the rationale, feasibility, areas and mode of forging regional cooperation was prepared and circulated by the Government of Bangladesh. This came to be popularly known as the Bangladesh Working Paper.\(^{15}\) The significant role played by the BWP makes it imperative to throw light on its salient features.

In the first place, the BWP points out the rationale of such a cooperative arrangement in South Asia. President Zia-ur-Rahman, in his letter addressed to the Heads of Governments of the six South Asian countries, briefly referred to the factors which really encouraged him to take the initiative. He mentioned that while other regions in the world had set up institutional bodies for

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consultations on matters of identical interest and cooperation in the economic, social and cultural spheres on a regional basis and by doing this they gained a lot, the only region which did not have any such arrangements for regional cooperation was the South Asian region, comprising one-fifth of the global population. However, he pointed out that recent positive developments had created a congenial atmosphere of understanding. This period witnessed distinct possibilities of regional cooperation from which all South Asian countries would benefit. The paper noted that prior to the formation of SAARC, the regional states were cooperating at the trans-regional forums like the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), NAM, Commonwealth etc.

The paper also referred to the fact that in the case of South Asia there are countries at different levels of development, some of them being relatively more developed and, hence, in an advantageous position than the others. Therefore, it was laid down in the paper that any proposal for economic cooperation must be formulated by keeping in mind the fact that the countries are not exploited and dominated by the rich nations. Moreover, as the Working Paper suggests, the areas chosen should only be those in which cooperation will be mutually beneficial to all the seven South Asian Countries irrespective of existing economic inequalities so as to make regional cooperation meaningful and bridge the developmental gaps existing among the countries of the region.

While analysing the rational behind regional cooperation in South Asia, the Working Paper further mentioned that it is only through regional cooperation that South Asia can aspire “to have an effective voice in international forums” like the United Nations. Indeed, in the competitive world of today individual countries are finding it difficult to stand on their own. It is for this reason that in the present day world one can hardly find any country that does not possess the membership of any regional cooperative grouping. Thus, “it is

16. For the full text of Bangladesh Working Paper, see Muhammad Shamsul Haq., n.2, pp. 81–94.
17. Ibid, p.83
only by establishing an institutional arrangement for consultation and coordination that the people of South Asia can play a role commensurate with their intrinsic global importance."\(^{18}\)

In the second place, the Working Paper also noted that cooperative activities in South Asia should begin in the socio-economic sphere which will have, in course of time, a spill-over effect upon the political sphere and thus enable the countries of the region to solve their political problems.

Thirdly, the Working Paper also underlined the fact that political and contentious issues are to be excluded from the purview of such a regional forum.

In the fourth place, it was believed that the SARC experiment in the economic and cultural spheres could reduce gradually the tensions created by strained bilateral relations in the region and ultimately succeed in bringing about an improved political atmosphere.

In the fifth place, the Paper pointed out that the gradual evolution of SARC would be based on a step-by-step approach. And, accordingly, starting with the level of Foreign Secretaries meeting, it has been gradually extended to the Foreign Ministers meeting before a summit finally took place.

Further, the Paper identified eleven areas of possible cooperation such as 1) Telecommunications, 2) Meteorology, 3) Transport, 4) Shipping, 5) Tourism, 6) Agricultural Rural sector, 7) Joint Ventures, 8) Market Promotion, 9) Scientific and Technological Cooperation, 10) Educational and Technical Cooperation and 11) Cultural Cooperation.

Telecommunications, the Paper pointed out constitutes an indispensable part of the economic infrastructure in every society. Telecommunication system is a must. Without an effective and adequate telecommunications network, no country can improve its economy and bring about scientific and technological upliftment. Also, dissemination of knowledge depends heavily upon an

\(^{18}\) Ibid
efficient telecommunication system.

In the sphere of meteorology too, cooperation among the South Asian countries is of utmost importance. Since most of the "South Asian states face the hazards of cyclones and other natural disasters it would be quite appropriate for them to cooperate on the technique of scientific weather forecasting and climatic conditions."\(^{19}\)

Without a well-integrated system of communication, especially in the form of road and rail links, a country cannot attain an all-round development. It is because cooperation in the sphere of transport "would bring the countries closer through increased surface mobility."\(^{20}\)

The significance of shipping in the expansion of global trade can hardly be exaggerated. At present the world shipping market is monopolised by the developed countries. Hence it is quite natural that the conditions imposed by them would be opposed to the aspirations and interests of the developing countries. The frequent hike in the freight charges adversely affects the development needs and the balance of payments scenario of the developing countries. Thus, in order to achieve self-sufficiency in this arena and to further stimulate economic development of this region, shipping is an appropriate field of cooperation on a regional basis.

In the South Asian context tourism is another area wherein lies "a vast potential for intra-regional cooperation."\(^{21}\) The potential of the region to promote tourism is unlimited. By cooperating in this field and putting forth their combined efforts in this area the countries of the region can earn huge profit. The rich and ancient heritage of the sub-continent and the panoramic beauty of various parts of the South Asian region are primary source of attraction for foreign visitors. Besides, intra-regional tourism would be the principal guiding force for forging mutual understanding between and among the countries and peoples of the region. The Working Paper suggests that a

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20. See the text of BWP, cited in Muhammad Shamsul Haq, n.2, p.86
21. Ibid, p.87
common tourist policy with reciprocal package foreign tours at concessional rates would be beneficial.

South Asian countries are mostly agriculture-oriented. A large number of institutions are engaged in research and development in various fields to provide fillip to agricultural production. Regional cooperation in the agricultural-rural sector would therefore, act as an additional stimulus and the agricultural production will increase.

The countries comprising the South Asian subsystem possess large amount of natural and mineral resources, technical know-how, trained manpower and a large market. Despite the fact that these countries are at different levels of development it is possible to identify important areas for joint ventures. Cooperation in joint ventures does not only ensure their optimum utilisation but also obtain exemptions from GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) regulations.

South Asian countries enjoy a lion’s share of the international market for a number of commodities, such as tea, jute and cotton. It is evident that combined efforts of the South Asian countries can reduce the increasing threat from price fluctuations in world markets and availability of substitute products.

Regional cooperation in the field of market promotion in selected commodities will also enable the countries of South Asia “to take full advantage of the liberal measures available under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) in the markets of the developed countries.”

It is well known that the countries of South Asia are characterised by acute poverty. In order to remove this widespread poverty, it is imperative that the South Asian countries must make the most effective use of science and technology. Indeed, there are possibilities for undertaking cooperative programmes in the field of applied science and technology to meet the primary needs of the people of the region. Cooperative activities in this field must be undertaken with regard to both conventional and non-conventional sources of

22. Ibid, p.89
energy. Such cooperation could discover ways and means of reducing dependence on external sources.

The Working Paper also observed that research and action-oriented programmes for eradication and elimination of diseases like Malaria, Cholera etc from which the people of this region suffers a lot can also prove to be an effective and useful area of cooperation.

Cooperation in the sphere of educational activities at global and regional level has also been taken into consideration. A primary objective of educational and technical cooperation in these countries is, for example, how to ensure cost-effective educational services to millions of school-going children in the cities and villages. The countries of this region could share their experiences in the spheres of book production, manufacture of low cost scientific experiment, curriculum formation, examination procedures, teacher training, non-formal education etc.

Moreover, these countries having common problems could secure a lot from the expertise of personnel trained in the region than from that of foreign experts who are trained in an almost different atmosphere and who, as a result, are unable to develop the correct orientation in dealing with regional problems. Regional workshops, seminars, conferences and visits of technical experts are also useful media for exchanging knowledge and experience.

South Asians are very proud of their ancient heritage and rich culture. The impact of the principal religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam on the various countries of the region in different degrees has contributed immensely to "the richness and diversity in the cultural heritages of these countries." Hence this is the field where regional cooperation can be of tremendous benefit in understanding clearly the cultural heritage and, as a consequence, in promoting mutual goodwill among the countries of the region. It was hightime therefore, the Paper suggested, to have regular cultural meets like film festivals and painting exhibitions on a regional basis.

23. Ibid.
24 See Muhammad Shamsul Haq, n.2, p.90
25 Pramod Kumar Mishra, n.15, p.38
South Asian games could also be organised annually to provide a lot of excitement to the people of the region and generate fellow-feeling.

Finally, the Paper suggested four possible names of the proposed organisation, namely (a) South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAAC), (b) Association of South Asia for Cooperation (ASAC), (c) Organisation of South Asian States (OSAS). Of these, the first one, South Asian Association for Cooperation was slightly modified when SAARC was formally launched at the Dhaka summit in 1985.

Following the circulation of the BWP, also known as the Bible of SAARC, as many as five meetings at the level of Foreign Secretaries were held during April 1981-July 1983, in Colombo, Kathmandu, Islamabad, Dhaka and New Delhi respectively. These meetings played a very significant role in the evolution of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

**Meetings of the Foreign Secretaries: Colombo Meeting**

In consonance with the suggestions made in the BWP, the Foreign Secretaries of the seven South Asian states formally met in Colombo in April 1981 (21-24 April)\(^{26}\). At this meeting, it was decided to leave aside bilateral and contentious issues from the agenda of SARC deliberations. Emphasis was placed on extending the areas of cooperation among the member-states on the issues of common concern. Besides this, the member-states present at this meeting were unanimous in their view that decisions would be taken on the basis of unanimity. Although the principle of regional cooperation was accepted by all the member countries, the meeting brought into focus sharp differences of opinion between India and Pakistan on the one hand and the smaller countries like Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka on the other. Neither India nor Pakistan was in favour of creating any institutional arrangements at this initial stage.\(^{27}\) Rather they held the view that it was necessary to propose a summit meeting by proving and establishing the fact that regional cooperation

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27. *Ibid*, p. 375
in South Asia was desirable, necessary and beneficial. In other words, the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan advocated more cautious step-by-step approach. In the Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the more cautious approach of India and Pakistan to allow an “institutional framework follow rather than precede functional arrangements was accepted.”

The Colombo Conference also formulated basic principles for further interaction within the South Asian regional framework. Thus, the Colombo meeting did a lot of pioneering work for giving the idea of regional cooperation a practical shape in South Asia. It was at Colombo only that the members of the seven South Asian nations agreed to set up five Study Groups and a coordinator was appointed for each. Five Study Groups, coordinated by Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Nepal respectively, were set up to make detailed studies in order to review the existing arrangements, and assess the feasibility and scope for regional cooperation in the over-all cost-benefit framework. The proposal to set up a Committee of the Whole to consider the possibilities of identifying further areas of cooperation was unanimously agreed upon by the member states. The function of these Study Groups consisted of examining the scope and potential for regional cooperation in their particular fields and of making specific recommendation to the next meeting of Foreign Secretaries.

The principal outcome of the Colombo meeting was the separation of political and economic issues. It is rightly said that the Colombo conference did a lot of pioneering work for implementing the concept of regional cooperation in South Asia.

29. For details, see Bimal Prasad, Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems and Prospects, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p. 63.
30. The Statesman, n.3
### TABLE I

**MAJOR MEETING OF FOREIGN SECRETARIES OF SOUTH ASIAN STATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue &amp; Year</th>
<th>Major Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombo April 1981</td>
<td>RC on basis of unanimity, non-interference &amp; equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step-by-step approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1981</td>
<td>5 SGs on agriculture, transport, rural development,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meteorology, health and population activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathmandu November</td>
<td>5 SGs converted to WGs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1981</td>
<td>3 new SGs on Transport, Post &amp; Tel., Science &amp; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamabad August 1982</td>
<td>Coordination among Planning Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SGs converted to WGs and a new SG on sports, arts and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhaka July 1983</td>
<td>A framework for structured RC agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>SARC idea finalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>RC-Regional Cooperation, F.M. Foreign Ministers, S.G.-Study Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W.G.-Working Groups, SARC-South Asian Regional Cooperation, IPA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrated Programme of Action, Committee-Ctee.</td>
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</table>

**SOURCE**: Final Communiqué’s of the Official Meetings.

**Sri Lanka Working Paper**

A Committee of the Whole was established at the first meeting of Foreign Secretaries held at Colombo. Sri Lanka as the coordinating country for the Committee of the Whole, submitted a detailed report on the various recommendations for favour of discussion in August 1983. That report is better known as Sri Lanka Working Paper (SWP). It was prepared on the basis of a close study of the reports of five Study Groups appointed at the Colombo meeting of Foreign Secretaries. The SWP identified three main tasks for the South Asian states in their endeavours to forge regional cooperation, i.e. i) to prepare an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) in the agreed areas of cooperation, ii) to recommend modalities and mechanisms for implementation, coordination and monitoring of the agreed programme of action, and iii) so far as possible, to “provide indications of the short-term component of the IPA and to recommend funding modalities and arrangements for its long term component”. 31

31. See P.K. Mishra, n.12, p.11.
The SWP suggests that the cooperative activities identified by the Working Groups could be either short term or long term. The first category includes those activities such as exchange of data, exchange of expert services, training, research and holding of seminars/workshops in the countries of the region. The second category of activities includes those functions such as setting up of regional institutions for training and research, creation or strengthening of linkages among existing national institutions in the seven South Asian countries in the agreed areas of cooperation and strengthening of infrastructural facilities such as postal services, telecommunications, railways, shipping, meteorology etc. Regarding the modalities and mechanisms for implementation, coordination and monitoring of regional projects, the SWP gave the following guidelines.

In the first place, at the sectoral level, Working Groups would be substituted by Technical Committees. Besides this, focal points have also been set up in various national institutions. Secondly, at the national level, the respective ministries of Foreign Affairs are supposed to be the focal points. Finally, at the regional level, a Standing or Review Committee would be set up a) to review the progress of Integrated Programme of Action (IPA), b) to approve projects, c) to find the modalities of financing, d) to review the progress of implementation of sectoral Programmes of Action, and e) to identify new areas of cooperation based on appropriate studies.  

The SWP pointed out to the governments concerned about the imperative need for regular budget allocations for SARC projects and mutual assistance in the form of scholarships, concessional airfares, accommodation etc. According to the recommendations made by the SWP, the Committee of the Whole is expected to take its decisions on the basis of consensus rather than insisting on majority or unanimity formula.  


33. See P.K. Mishra, n.12, p.12.
The second meeting of the Foreign Secretaries was held at Kathmandu. Here also, differences prevailed between India and Pakistan on the one hand and the smaller South Asian states on the other hand with regard to the issues of an early summit meeting and the institutionalising of SARC. The Foreign Secretaries “considered and endorsed the recommendations of the five Study Groups. They also worked out appropriate modalities for implementing the recommendations.” The Foreign Secretaries who attended the meeting decided to transform the Study Groups into Working Groups with rotating chairmanships. This meeting agreed that the major tasks of each Working Group would be to draw up comprehensive programme of action for cooperation in both the immediate and long-term phases. There additional studies were initiated during the course of this meeting: 1) Transport, 2) Postal Services and 3) Scientific and Technological Cooperation. Maldives, Bhutan and Pakistan were made coordinators of these committees respectively. The report of the Committee of the Whole was presented and endorsed by the Foreign Secretaries who also agreed to hold a “meeting of the foreign ministers before the end of 1982 and to hold the next foreign secretaries meeting in about six months in the Maldives or Pakistan”. The Foreign Secretaries pointed out the utility of holding regular consultations among the member countries on matters of common concern relating to international economic issues. Besides this, a meeting of the official planning organisation of the member countries was recommended to exchange ideas and experiences in the formulation of development strategies and methods of plan implementation. The Joint Communique said that the Foreign Secretaries reiterated that regional cooperation in South Asia was beneficial, desirable and necessary and reaffirmed the determination of their countries to cooperate with each other in developing and accelerating the process of such cooperation.

34. See Imtiaz H. Bokhari, n.26, p. 377
35. Ibid
36. Ibid.
37. The Hindustan Times, 5 November 1981.
The Islamabad Meeting (7–9 August 1982)

Islamabad was the venue for the third meeting at the Foreign Secretaries level. The meeting endorsed the recommendations of the five Working Groups. After studying and approving reports from the additional three Study Groups set up at Kathmandu, "the foreign secretaries converted then into Working Groups". The meeting also decided in favour of constituting two more Study Groups – one in sports, arts and culture and the other in planning and development. In the Islamabad meeting, an important decision to raise the level of consultations among the regional countries was taken. This meeting took a major step forward by recommending a meeting of the Foreign Ministers. In order to ensure adequate preparation for the ministerial meeting, it decided to set up a Committee of the Whole under the chairmanship of Sri Lanka.

Dhaka Meeting (28–30 March 1983)

The fourth meeting of the Foreign Secretaries was held in Dhaka in March 1983 to consider the report of the Committee of the whole adopted at Islamabad. The report recommended on Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) with short-term and long-term activities of cooperation and also the mechanism for its implementation. The immediate outcome of these meetings was the identification of the possible areas of cooperation and the formulation of the principles and guidelines, which were vital for implementing the goal of regional cooperation. At the Dhaka meeting of Foreign Secretaries, held in March 1983, it was decided that efforts should now be made for expeditious implementation of the IPA and also that SARC being an evolutionary process, studies should be initiated in due course to identify additional areas of cooperation. The Dhaka meeting also "called for a meeting at Foreign Ministerial level with a view to launching the Integrated

39. Ibid, p. 378
40. The Statesman, n.3
Programme of Action." 

**Integrated Programme of Action (IPA)**

The Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) is the cornerstone of the entire SAARC process. The SAARC leaders deemed it as an indispensable mechanism, which would integrate all the recognised areas of cooperation into one composite framework. At the time of its inception, there were nine agreed areas of cooperation within IPA such as agriculture, rural development, meteorology, telecommunications, scientific and technical cooperation, health and population activities, transport, postal services and sports, arts and culture. The IPA was formally initiated by the first meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the South Asian Region held in New Delhi in August 1983. After reviewing the reports of the Working Groups of all the nine agreed areas of cooperation, the Foreign Ministers decided to integrate them under one umbrella of the IPA - from the point of view of their efficient and effective coordination, monitoring and implementation. Through the instrumentality of IPA, the Foreign Ministers desired to secure "uniformity of approach and style of works under a set pattern of modalities and arrangements." They had conceived that the IPA would be very useful for the promotion of regional cooperation in South Asia.

The origin of the IPA dates back to the third meeting of the Foreign Secretaries held in Islamabad, which decided to establish a "Committee of the Whole" consisting of senior officials of all the seven countries under the chairmanship of Sri Lanka to prepare, on the basis of the reports of the Working Groups, an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA). The Committee of the Whole met in Colombo from 10–13 January 1983 and recommended the integration of all the existing areas of cooperation into a composite whole i.e.

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.
the IPA. The fourth meeting of the Foreign Secretaries, held in Dhaka from 29-30 March 1983, accepted the recommendations of the Committee of the Whole and directed the Foreign Ministers to adopt the IPA.

The IPA is the central focus of the whole spectrum of regional cooperation activities and the Technical Committees comprising technical experts from all the seven countries of the region are primarily responsible for the conception, elaboration, monitoring and implementation of the SAARC activities and events. It is so important that it has been described as the backbone of SAARC46.

Finally, at the fifth meeting of the Foreign Secretaries held in New Delhi in July 1983, the SARC idea was given a concrete shape. The IPA has also been described by some as the kingpin of the entire cooperative effort launched under the aegis of SAARC. It is an ambitious programme, covering nine areas of crucial significance to the member nations and was drawn up after extensive studies by various Technical Committees47.

Meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers

Following the recommendations adopted at the Islamabad Meeting, the first ever meeting of the South Asian Foreign Ministers on regional cooperation took place in New Delhi early in August 1983. The Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation issued at this meeting underlined the keen desire of the people of South Asia to promote regional cooperation in view of their common background, common problems and similar aspirations. Besides this, the SARC document for the first time clearly laid down the eight broad objectives and principles of the association, namely

a) to promote the welfare the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;


b) 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;

c) to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;

d) to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;

e) to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;

f) to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;

g) to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest; and

h) to cooperate with international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes.

The Foreign Ministers of seven South Asian countries met for the second time in Male on 10-11 July 1984. The Joint Communiqué which was adopted at the Male meeting expressed its profound appreciation for the significant preparatory work done by the Foreign Secretaries of these countries at the level of the Standing Committee, especially in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the IPA which was formally launched at the previous Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi. The representatives from the seven SAARC countries who met at Male deeply appreciated the role of the Technical Committees for their significant contribution in carrying out their tasks.

The Foreign Ministers who attended the meeting attached utmost importance to telecommunication and transport links of the capital cities of South Asian countries. And in order to improve the telecommunication and transport links, they endorsed the recommendations of the Standing Committees of telecommunication and transport.
The third ministerial level meeting of the SAARC countries was held in Thimpu, the picturesque capital of Bhutan from 10-14 May 1985. The atmosphere at Thimpu was very congenial. But the congenial atmosphere was spoiled because of Sri Lanka's conspicuous absence from the Foreign Secretaries meeting held on 10 and 11 May. Colombo decided to stay away from the meeting because of its differences with India on the ethnic crisis in the island-state. The absence of Colombo from the meeting created a tense situation for the first time in the history of the evolution of SAARC. Subsequently, however, Colombo modified its previous stand and decided to send a delegation for the ministerial level meeting held from 13-14 May 1985 as a result of top-level interventions by seven members including a telephonic talk between the late Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi and the then President of Sri Lanka, J. R. Jayewardene.

The Thimpu meeting decided to hold a summit meeting of the seven South Asian states in Dhaka (7-8 December) to provide a new direction to the concept of collective self-reliance in the region. The Thimpu meeting also approved the draft Charter to be adopted at Dhaka and decided to keep the agenda for the summit flexible to have a review of all regional and global issues. One of the important upshots of the Thimpu deliberations was the decision to put greater emphasis on the formulation and execution of the specific projects in the nine agreed areas of cooperation. It was decided that the Technical Committees should give greater attention to operational activities so that regional cooperation becomes more beneficial in practical terms.

49. Ibid
Table - 2
FOREIGN MINISTERIAL MEETINGS: THE OUTCOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue &amp; Year</th>
<th>Major Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi, July 1983</td>
<td>SARC Declaration with 8 objectives released</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RC imperative for collective self-reliance, socio-economic development, active collaborations &amp; coordination in global forums</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guiding Principles: sovereign equality, non-interference &amp; mutual benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-tier institutional net work suggested (TC, AC &amp; SC)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary financing by member states &amp; external financing on project welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 10-11 July 1984</td>
<td>Coordination &amp; Monitoring of an IPA by S.C. appreciated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No of medium &amp; long-term Projects prepared by TCs lauded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need to improve telecom &amp; transport link among capital cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordination of external economic policies (In UN, NAM, Commonwealth etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unanimous decision 1st Summit in Dhaka in the last quarter of 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thimpu, May 1985</td>
<td>Preparatory works for Dhaka Summit and finalization of Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision on a Ministerial Council as an apex body and a Standing Committee to monitor progress in various areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>RC-Regional Cooperation, TC-Technical committee, AC-Action Committee SC-Standing committee, IPA-Integrated Programme of Action, FS-Foreign Secretaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SARC Declarations and Final Communiques in New Delhi, Male and Thimpu.

Conclusion

The trend for setting up regional associations has become a regular feature of international politics since the days of the Second World War. The desire to cooperate with each other for realising certain common objectives is not a new phenomenon. In fact, if we go through the pages of history, we will find that ancient history is full of such instances of countries aspiring for cooperative endeavours for the fulfilment of certain common goals. The Latin American Free Trade Area (LAFTA), European Economic Community (EEC), Council for Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Organisation of American States (OAS), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other sub-regional groups have proved that regional cooperation can be an instrument of economic development and international understanding.

The region of South Asia could not remain aloof to this general trend and followed the suit. However, the movement for regionalism in South Asia is not
very old. Only in the beginning of the 1980s the idea of regional cooperation received a lot of importance and popularity among the countries of South Asia. The concept of South Asian cooperation was first initiated by the late President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman in 1980. Despite initial reluctance and reservation shown by some of the South Asian governments, the idea gradually evolved and received wider acceptance in the South Asian countries. Following consultations among the countries of the region, Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met in Colombo in April 1981 which resulted in the identification of five broad areas (agriculture, rural development, telecommunication meteorology and health and population activities) for regional cooperation. Subsequently, four additional areas (scientific and technological cooperation, postal services, sports, arts and culture) were further identified for regional cooperation. The Foreign Ministers, at their first meeting in New Delhi in August 1983, unanimously adopted the Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) formally launching the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) in the nine identified areas. After an extensive preparatory work at the level of Foreign Secretarial and Foreign Ministerial meeting, SAARC came into existence at the first South Asian summit held in Dhaka in December 1985. It was mainly formulated with a view to promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve the standard of living of the people inhabiting the South Asian region. It is a regional arrangement to promote and strengthen individual and collective self-reliance in South Asia and to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another’s problems.

Prior to the formation of SARC and even after its formal launching in December 1985, India had been playing a very crucial role in advocating and promoting the spirit of cooperation among the South Asian countries. Although the idea of regional cooperation was first put forward by the late President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman, India had been playing a crucial role in promoting the spirit of regional cooperation through a number of conferences. Of these, the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in March – April 1947, deserves special mention. It was mainly inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru had always attached tremendous importance to
regional economic cooperation. He had realised that without regional economic cooperation, the Asians could not change their lot. The second Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in January 1949, also appealed for regional integration as the sole remedy for the economic backwardness of the South Asian countries. Under India's patronage, the goal of Asian unity was thus vigorously pursued in the Asian Relations Conferences held in New Delhi in late 1940s.

Even after the formation of SAARC, India has been playing a significant role in promoting regional cooperation in South Asia. This has been facilitated by its size and level of development\textsuperscript{50}. As a matter of fact, due to India's gigantic size and higher level of economic development, it is considered to be the cynosure of Asia without whose blessing SAARC can not achieve success\textsuperscript{51}.

\textsuperscript{50} South Asian Studies, Volume 2, No. 2 July 1985, p. 17
\textsuperscript{51} See Bishwa Pradhan, n. 42, p. 180.