

The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first mooted in May 1980. The Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met for the first time in Colombo in April 1981. The Committee of the Whole, which met in Colombo in August 1981, identified five broad areas for regional cooperation. New areas of cooperation were added in the following years.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established when its Charter was formally approved on 8 December 1985 by the Heads of State or Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan became a member of SAARC during the Fourteenth SAARC Summit held in Delhi, India in April 2007.

Until 2009 China, Japan, Republic of Korea, USA, Iran, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union have joined SAARC as Observers.

SAARC provides a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. It aims to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region.

During the Fifteenth Summit, the Heads of State or Government

emphasized the importance of maintaining the momentum through clear links of continuity between the work already underway and future activities and recognized the need for SAARC to further strengthen its focus on developing and implementing regional and sub-regional projects in the agreed areas on a priority basis. They also renewed their resolve for collective regional efforts to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development and emphasized on key issues like telecommunication, energy, climate change, transport, poverty alleviation, science and technology, trade, education, food security and tourism.

Cooperation in SAARC is based on respect for the five principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs of the member states and mutual benefit.

Regional cooperation is seen as a complement to the bilateral and multilateral relations of SAARC Member States.

The **SAARC Secretariat** is based in Katmandu. It coordinates and monitors implementation of activities, prepares for and services meetings, and serves as a channel of communication between the Association and its Member States as well as other regional organizations.

The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General, who is appointed from Member States in alphabetical order for a three-year term by the SAARC Council of Ministers. H.E. Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma of India is the current Secretary General of SAARC.

The Secretary General is assisted by eight Directors on deputation from Member States.

The SAARC Secretariat and Member States observe 8 December as the SAARC Charter Day.

The Objectives of the Association as defined in the Charter are:

- To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
- To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
- To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Decisions are taken on the basis of unanimity. Bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from the deliberations of SAARC.

Preparatory meetings were held prior to the First Summit in Dhaka. The Foreign Secretaries in 1981 in Colombo and the Foreign Ministers in 1983 in New Delhi identified areas to promote regional cooperation. The areas of cooperation under the reconstituted Regional Integrated Program of Action, which is pursued through the Technical Committees, now cover Agriculture and Rural Development; Health and Population Activities; Women, Youth and Children; Environment and Forestry; Science and Technology; Transport; and Human Resource Development.

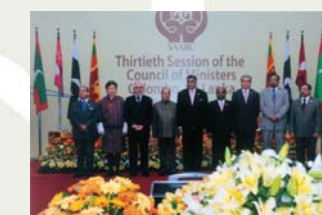
Working Groups have also been established in the areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT); Biotechnology; Tourism; and Energy.

Summits, which are the highest authority in SAARC, are to be held annually. The country hosting the Summit holds the Chair of the Association. Sri Lanka, which hosted the

The Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation was adopted by the Foreign Ministers in 1983 in New Delhi. During the meeting, the Ministers also launched the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) in nine agreed areas, namely, Agriculture; Rural Development; Telecommunications; Meteorology; Health and Population Activities; Transport; Postal Services; Science and Technology; and Sports, Arts and Culture.

Fifteenth Summit in Colombo in August 2008, is the current Chair of the Association. To date Fifteen Summits have been held. The Sixteenth Summit will be hosted by Bhutan in April 2010.

The **Council of Ministers** comprising Foreign Ministers, meets at least twice a year. Its functions include formulating policy, reviewing progress of regional cooperation, identifying new areas of cooperation and establishing additional mechanisms that may be necessary.



The Heads of State or Government during the Ninth SAARC Summit agreed for the first time that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful in promoting peace, stability and amity and accelerated socio-economic cooperation in the region. The Leaders reiterated this intent during their Tenth and Eleventh Summits in Colombo and Kathmandu respectively

The **Standing Committee** comprising Foreign Secretaries, monitors and coordinates SAARC programs of cooperation, approves projects including their financing and mobilizes regional and external resources. It meets as often as necessary and reports to the Council of Ministers. To date, the Committee has held Thirty-six regular and Five Special Sessions.

The Association also convenes various **Ministerial level**

The Council of Ministers has held Thirty-one Regular Sessions up to July 2009.

The Standing Committee has held Thirty-six Regular Sessions and five Special Sessions up to July 2009.

SAARC Ministerial Meetings held on specific areas:

- Economic – 1986
- Commerce – 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004
- Women – 1986, 1990, 1993, 1995
- Children – 1986, 1992, 1996, 2009
- Environment – 1992, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006
- Disabled Persons – 1993
- Youth – 1994
- Poverty Alleviation – 1994, 1996, 2002, 2006
- Housing – 1996
- Agriculture – 1996, 2002, 2006
- Tourism – 1997, 2006
- Information – 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005
- Communications – 1998, 2004
- Culture – 2003, 2006
- Health – 2003, 2005, 2006
- Home/Interior – 2006, 2007
- SAFTA – 2006, 2007, 2008
- Finance – 2006, 2007, 2009
- Transport – 2007
- Energy – 2005, 2007, 2009
- Science & Technology – 2008
- Climate Change – 2008
- Parliamentary Affairs – 2009
- Education/Higher Education – 2009

meetings to focus attention on specific areas of common interest. These have now become an integral part of the SAARC process.

The Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC) comprising Commerce/Trade Secretaries of Member States oversees cooperation in the economic field. So far, it has held fourteen meetings. The Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was signed on 11 April 1993 during Seventh SAARC Summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh and entered into force on 7 December 1995. Subsequently, with the objective of moving towards a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU), the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) was signed on 6 January 2004 during the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad, Pakistan and entered into force on 1 January 2006. The SAFTA Ministerial Council (SMC) is the highest decision-making body of SAFTA and is responsible for the administration and implementation of Agreement and all decisions and arrangements made within its legal framework.

As directed by the SAARC Finance Ministers, an Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial Issues is developing the roadmap for achieving a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a gradual and phased manner.

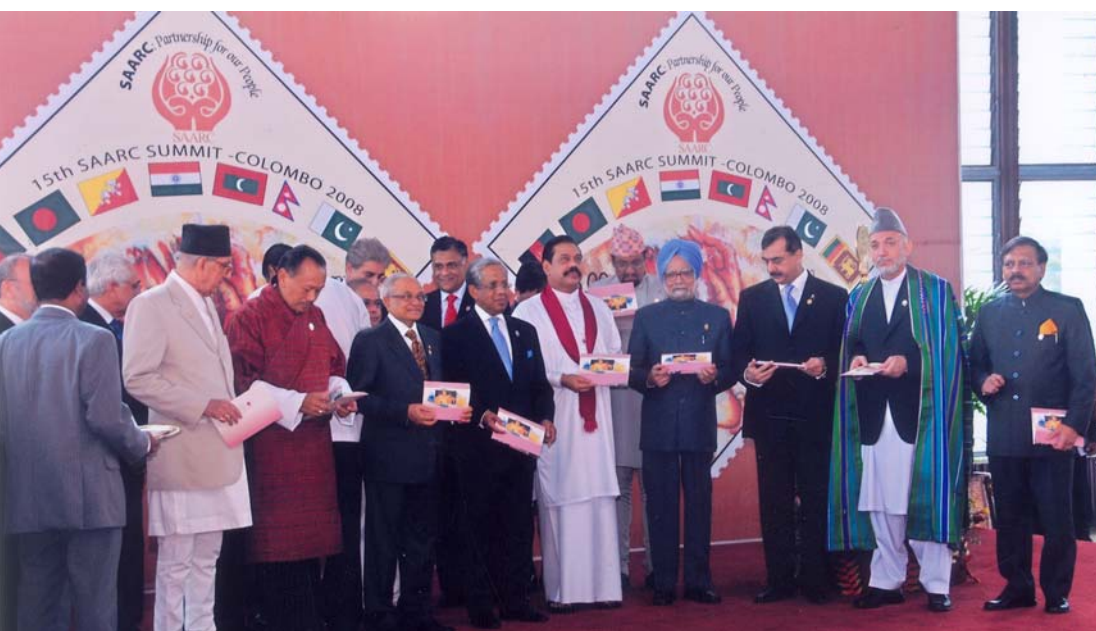
The Governors of the Central Banks of Member States under the auspices of **SAARCFINANCE** meet regularly to pursue cooperation in financial matters.

SAARC Development Fund (SDF) has come into operation with three Windows (Social, Economic and infrastructure) and an initial paid up capital of US\$ 300 million. With its Permanent Secretariat to be established in Thimphu two Regional Projects under Social Window are already under implementation.

| SAARC SUMMITS HELD SINCE 1985 | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| First SAARC Summit | 7 - 8 December 1985 | Dhaka |
| Second SAARC Summit | 16 - 17 November 1986 | Bangalore |
| Third SAARC Summit | 2 - 4 November 1987 | Kathmandu |
| Fourth SAARC Summit | 29 - 31 December 1988 | Islamabad |
| Fifth SAARC Summit | 21 - 23 November 1990 | Male' |
| Sixth SAARC Summit | 21 December 1991 | Colombo |
| Seventh SAARC Summit | 10 - 11 April 1993 | Dhaka |
| Eighth SAARC Summit | 2 - 4 May 1995 | New Delhi |
| Ninth SAARC Summit | 12 - 14 May 1997 | Male' |
| Tenth SAARC Summit | 29 - 31 July 1998 | Colombo |
| Eleventh SAARC Summit | 4 - 6 January 2002 | Kathmandu |
| Twelfth SAARC Summit | 4 - 6 January 2004 | Islamabad |
| Thirteenth SAARC Summit | 12 - 13 November 2005 | Dhaka |
| Fourteenth SAARC Summit | 3 - 4 April 2007 | New Delhi |
| Fifteenth SAARC Summit | 2 - 3 August 2008 | Colombo |

During the Fifteenth Summit (Colombo, 2008) following agreements were signed:

- SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters;
- Protocol of Accession of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA);



- Agreement on the Establishment of South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO); and
- Charter of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF).

Other Agreements and Conventions:

- ♦ SAARC Charter Dhaka, 8 December 1985;
- ♦ Memorandum on the Establishment of the SAARC Secretariat, Bangalore, 16 November 1986;
- ♦ Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve Kathmandu, 4 November 1987;
- ♦ Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism Kathmandu, 4 November 1987;
- ♦ Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances Kathmandu, 23 November 1990;
- ♦ SAPTA Agreement Dhaka, 11 April 1993;
- ♦ SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia, Kathmandu, 5 January 2002;
- ♦ SAARC Convention on Preventing & Combating Trafficking in Women & Children for Prostitution, Kathmandu, 5 January 2002;
- ♦ SAARC Social Charter Islamabad, 6 January 2004;
- ♦ SAFTA Agreement, Islamabad, 6 January 2004;
- ♦ Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, Islamabad, 6 January 2004;
- ♦ Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters, Dhaka, 13 November 2005;
- ♦ Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council Dhaka, 13 November 2005;
- ♦ Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, Dhaka, 13 November 2005;
- ♦ Joint Declaration on the admission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), New Delhi, 3 April 2007;
- ♦ Agreement on the Establishing the SAARC Food Bank, New Delhi, 3 April 2007;
- ♦ Agreement for Establishment of South Asian University, New Delhi, 3 April 2007;

DESIGNATED SAARC YEARS

- 1989 SAARC Year of Combating Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking
- 1990S AARC Year of Girl Child
- 1991 SAARC Year of Shelter
- 1992 SAARC Year of Environment
- 1993 SAARC Year of Disabled Persons
- 1994 SAARC Year of the Youth
- 1995 SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication
- 1996 SAARC Year of Literacy
- 1997 SAARC Year of Participatory Governance
- 1999 SAARC Year of Biodiversity
- 2002-2003 SAARC Years of Contribution of Youth to Environment
- 2004 SAARC Awareness Year for TB and HIV/AIDS
- 2005 South Asia Tourism Year
- 2006 South Asia Tourism Year
- 2007 Green South Asia Year

DESIGNATED SAARC DECADES

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

Member States of SAARC have adopted Conventions on the Suppression of Terrorism (including Additional Protocol signed in January 2004 in Islamabad), Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.

SAARC has had **Memoranda of Understanding** to promote collaboration with:

- ♦ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 1993;
- ♦ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 1993;
- ♦ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1995;
- ♦ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) 1994;
- ♦ Asia Pacific Telecommunication (APT) 1994;
- ♦ United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) 1995; currently known as United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- ♦ European Commission (EC) 1996;
- ♦ International Telecommunications Union (ITU) 1997;
- ♦ Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) 1997;

- ♦ World Health Organization (WHO) 2000;
- ♦ United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) 2001;
- ♦ Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB) 2003;
- ♦ World Bank (WB) 2004;
- ♦ Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2004;
- ♦ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 2004;
- ♦ South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) 2004;
- ♦ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2004;
- ♦ Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) 2006
- ♦ Japan Special Fund (SJSF) 2006
- ♦ Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) 2007;
- ♦ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2007
- ♦ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) 2008; and
- ♦ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2008.

SAARC has developed collaboration, without a MoU with other organizations such as Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); and International Standards Organization (ISO).

The Association promotes interaction on **multilateral issues** of common concern to its members and has identified areas in which collective positions could be projected at international forums. These include trade, finance, environment, agriculture, women and children, and information and telecommunications.

SAARC Regional Centers have been established in different SAARC capitals covering Agriculture (Dhaka), Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS (Kathmandu), Documentation (New Delhi), Meteorological Research (Dhaka), Human Resources Development (Islamabad), Coastal Zone Management (Male), Information (Kathmandu), Disaster Management (New Delhi), Energy (Islamabad), and forestry (Thimphu). Currently, the Cultural Office is in operation in Colombo and the SAARC Cultural Centre will be established in Matara.

Beyond official linkages, SAARC also encourages and facilitates cooperation in private sector through the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), which is a **SAARC Apex Body**. Other such bodies are SAARCLAW, South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA), South Asia Foundation (SAF) and Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FOSWAL).

In addition, status as **SAARC Recognized Body** has been accorded to professional groups in South Asia including Hindukust Himalayan Grassroots Women Architects, Management Development Institutions, University Women, Dermatologists, Teachers, Media, Women Association, Insurance Organisation, Diploma Engineers, Radiological & Surgical Care Societies Pediatric Surgeons, Federation of Exchange and Oncologists.

The Association of Speakers and Parliamentarians enjoys special recognition by the Heads of State or Government.

The Association has carried out **Studies** in different areas such as:

- ♦ SAARC Study on Trade, Manufactures and Services, 1991;
- ♦ Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of Environment 1992;
- ♦ Study on Greenhouse Effect and Its Impact on the Region, 1992;
- ♦ Meeting the Challenge-Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, 1992;
- ♦ SAARC Study on Implications to Member States on Progression from SAPTA to SAFTA, 2003;
- ♦ Report of the ISACPA-Our Future Our Responsibility;
- ♦ SAARC Study on Customs Matters, 2004;
- ♦ SAARC Regional Poverty Profile 2005;
- ♦ SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study, 2006;
- ♦ SAARC Regional Energy Trade Study, 2008; and
- ♦ SAARC Study on Potential of Trade in Services under SAFTA Agreement, 2008;



SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu

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A BRIEF ON

SAARC

Evolution
Objectives
Summits

SAARC Secretariat
Council of Ministers
Standing Committee

Trade and Economic Cooperation
Agreements and Conventions

Cooperation with Regional/International Orgs
Regional Centres

People-to-People Linkages
SAARC Studies

South Asian Association For
Regional Cooperation.