

## India's Role in SAARC of The Dr. Manmohan Singh Government

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**Abstract:** *The SAARC is an economic and geopolitical union of eight member countries that are primarily located in South Asia continent. The organisation was established on 8 December 1985 under the leadership of Ziaur Rahaman of Bangladesh to promote economic and social progress, cultural development, friendship and cooperation with the developing countries emphasising cultural self-reliance. The founder members are Srilanka, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Bangladesh. Afghanistan joined with the organisation in 2007. India is being the largest and development country in SAARC area. Both geographically and economically India occupies 70 percent of the SAARC region. As an industrialised trading partner among the SAARC countries India is recognised as most powerful member and has taken greater responsibility to improve the regional economic cooperation in the South Asia. The present study reveals the India's role in SAARC under the Prime Minister ship of Dr. Manmohan Singh. India has more contributions to the SAARC development Fund. The SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement is the first step in Trade liberalisation.*

**Keywords:** SAARC, Regional, Agreement, Cooperation, Relations.

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**India's Role in SAARC under Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh:** In November 2005, the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit was held in Dhaka. Several issues such as poverty alleviation, economic cooperation, counter terrorism, disaster management, and the implementation of SAARC etc. were dealt in the summit. Afghanistan was welcomed as the eighth member of SAARC. China and Japan were welcomed as observers. By the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit in November 2005 the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan had approved as a member of the SAARC. In this regard Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz declared Afghanistan "a natural and indispensable member" of the SAARC. He also said in his speech that "I am sure that Afghanistan would play its valuable role to enrich and strengthen our organisation".<sup>1</sup> Indian Prime Minister Dr. Singh asserted that the membership of Afghanistan in SAARC has completed the identity of South Asian. India considers Afghanistan a valuable member of the SAARC fraternity. The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh proposed the establishment of a SAARC Museum of Textiles and Handicrafts. It was decided that the museum would be an intergovernmental body on the lines of the SAARC Regional Centres and will be based on Delhi Hat. SAARC Development Fund was established and India is also implementing some projects like telemedicine ( Bhutan and Afghanistan), Shuttle Breeding of pulses (Bhutan) Seed Testing Laboratories ( Bhutan), Rainwater Harvesting ( Bhutan and Srilanka), Rural Solar Energy Electrification Project ( Srilanka) under a hub-a and spoke mechanism with India as the hub. Dr. Singh also proposed the establishment of a South Asian University to provide world class facilities and professional faculty to students and researchers from SAARC member's country. It is an international university sponsored by the eight SAARC members countries and started its journey from 2010, at a temporary campus at Akbar Bhavan of India, at the first academic session of the university started from 2010 with two post-graduate subjects like economic and computer science. Now this university offers post-graduate academic programmes in Biotechnology, computer Science, Computer Application, and Development Economics, Law, Sociology, international relations and Applied Mathematics. India provides 239.930 million dollar for the foundation of the SAU.

The Heads of the State or Government signed the three agreements during the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit.

- i. The Agreements on Mutual Administrative Assistance in customs matters
- ii. The Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration council
- iii. The limited Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax matters.<sup>2</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit was held in New Delhi a 3-4 April 2007. In the summit welcomed the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a fully fledged member of SAARC. China, Japan, European Union, Republic of Korea, USA and Iran were welcomed as observers. Indian Prime Minister Dr. Singh said that “The political transformation is painful, each are of us has to work out for ourselves and within our countries and our governments”. The member states have agreed to make tangible progress in the next six months on four essential issues that affect the daily lives of people such as water, energy, food and environment. The External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said that the SAARC leaders have decided to observe 2008 as the year of Good Governance. Dr. Mukherjee commented about Srilanka and LTTE that “military solution would not ultimately yield results”. Inaugurating the 14<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit, Dr. Singh emphasised that peace was a primary requirement for prosperity in South Asia. Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz proposed a five point roadmap including promoting genuine peace and security in the South Asian region. There is close relation between peace and security to promote a development environment. Srilankan President Mahindra Rajapaksa said in 14<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit that adopting a single currency must become a union among SAARC members which would enhance the productivity of the region and improve trade without barriers. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso said that the government of Japan shall cooperate more with SAARC to achieve better regional connectivity. Japan government has contributed an additional USD 7 million to the SAARC-Japan special Fund for furthering social and cultural exchanges with South Asia. At the inaugural session of the 14<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit in New Delhi, Nepal Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said that “I have gambled 60 years of my political, now situation has calmed down and they (Maoists) have come within the democratic framework”. (<http://www.saarc.org/14summit>) India announced a unilateral liberalisation of visas for students, teachers, professors, journalists and patients from SAARC countries.

The 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit meeting of the SAARC held in Colombo, Srilanka on August 2-3, 2008. Representative from china, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Republic of Korea and USA were participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit as observers. In the 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit agreed the leaders on several key issues for the benefit of the region and singed a 41 point declaration. The 15<sup>th</sup> summit adopted a 41 point Colombo Declaration to implementing the SAFTA. At Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall focused on collective regional efforts on several key issues such as food, energy, security, trade, combating terrorism, partnership for growth for the people of the region, environment, water resources, poverty alleviation, SDF, transport, ICT Development, SAFTA and Trade Facilitation

and SAARC social charter. "Colombo Declaration Partnership for growth for our people" was signed by the foreign minister of the eight members in the 15<sup>th</sup> summit of SAARC. Prime Minister Dr. Singh by his inaugural session of the 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit in Colombo extended his hand with the member countries for improvement of economic development consonance with globalisation. He said that India is ready to destroy the terrorism. He has mentioned in the 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC about the recent attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul and the serial blasts in Bangalore and Ahmadabad. India must defend the values of pluralism, peaceful coexistence and the rule of law. He said that economic cooperation, connectivity and integration will be the cornerstone of SAARC in the years ahead. Dr. Singh also said that India's FTA with Srilanka is working satisfactorily bringing benefits to both our economies. To improve physical connectivity India has upgraded its railway connection to broad gauge at the Raxaul-Birganj and Jagbani- Biratnagar borders, the Dhaka- Kolkata rail service with other neighbours. Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee had observed "the expansion of the SAARC and developing external linkages are indicative of the high level of maturity that the SAARC has reached as an organisation".<sup>3</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit was held in Thimpu on 28-29 April 2010. The theme of the summit was climate change. This was marked the silver jubilee celebration of SAARC that was formed in Dhaka in December 1985. The core issue of the summit was climate change with theme "Towards a Green and Happy South Asia". India proposed setting up of climate innovation centres in South Asia to develop sustainable energy technologies. India offered services of India's mission on sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system to the SAARC members. India announced "India endowment for climate change" in South Asia to help SAARC members meet their urgent adaption and capacity building need posed by the climate change. Foreign secretary Nirupama Rao said "valuable progress has been achieved in developing a regional framework of cooperation in areas such as environment, energy, agriculture and rural development, food security, health, trade and transportation". The two agreements were signed by the SAARC members. The first agreement stated that any global agreement on climate change should be based upon the UN frameworks convention and Bali action plan. The second agreement was on trade in services aimed at marketing SAFTA more advantageously. Indian Prime Minister Dr. Singh promised that "India would play its part in the resurgence of South Asia". He also said that if "we, as South Asians work together, there is nothing we cannot achieve".<sup>4</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit was held in Maldives on 10-11 November 2011 to discuss the South Asian regional issues. The 20 point 'Addu- Declaration' adopted by the

head of the government. The theme of the summit was 'Building Bridges'. The summit focussed on connectivity among SAARC countries through the expansion of railways, airways, and others line sides. At the summit some key agreement were made by the members such as establishment of a SAARC SEED Bank, Multilateral Agreement on Reconstruction of conformity Assessment Rapid Response to National Disaster and Implementation of Regional Standard etc. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh pledged to improve fair trade in the region. He pointed out that many sectors including trade, transport, health and education have benefited from it.<sup>5</sup> He also announced at the summit that the government of India has issued a notification to reduce Sensitive List for the Least Development countries under the south Asian Free Trade Area Agreement from 480 tariff lines to just 25 tariff lines. India is committed to the idea of free and balanced growth of trade of South Asia.<sup>6</sup>

**Conclusion:** India is an active member from the very beginning of SAARC and has been played a crucial role to improve the healthy and cordial relation among the SAARC countries. The problem has risen before India because of Kashmir disputes with Pakistan. This is the prime cause of ineffectiveness of SAARC in integrating South Asian countries. The SAARC members could benefit if there was a healthy relation between India and Pakistan. The SAARC has already been failed to improve the regional cooperation and to solve disputes which have given rise to economics and political problems in South Asia. India has become more superior power among the SAARC countries and other members had been feeling fear of dominance from India to growth economic cooperation. The feeling of Nepal is that India may take over its world trade because of its geographical suitability. Besides, the tension between India and Srilanka that prevailed over Indian military trying to curb the revolution by the liberation Tigers of Tamil E Elam resulting trade violations are enough to prove that SAARC has failed to achieve its objectives and purposes. India has accepted SAARC as a voluntarily organised association of sovereign equal states for consolidating and expanding regional cooperation for development India believes that SAARC can help the South Asian countries and may resolve their bilateral problems.

**Note and References:**

1. Prime Minister Speeches at the Inaugural Session of 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit held in November, 2005, Dhaka.
2. Ghai, New Delhi, K.K; "International Relations: Theory and Practice of International Politics", Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, Revised Edition, 2011. P.316.

3. Ibid. P. 317
4. Prime Minister Speeches at the Inaugural Session of 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit held on 28-29 April, 2010, Bhutan, Thimpu.
5. Prime Minister Speeches at the Inaugural Session of 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit held on 10-11 November, 2011, Addu City, Maldives.
6. <http://www.saarc-sec.org/data/summit17>