

CHAPTER – THREE

3.1 South Asia and The Formation of SAARC

In May 1980, the late Ziaur Rehman hinted for summit meeting among the South Asian states to explore the different possibilities regional economic cooperation in South Asia. Though, it was well received by Nepal, Islamabad and New Delhi doubted the viability of such proposal, under the existing political climate and diverse development experiences among South Asian States. (1)

On 19 April, 1981, Nepal's foreign minister, K. B. Shahi had told two visiting journalists from Bangladesh that the idea of regional cooperation was earlier started by King Birendra, who asked for co-operation among countries of the region in making the best use of water resources for the welfare of the area. He welcomed the first regional meeting of foreign secretaries held in April 1981. (2) He report that the organization which might came into existence in meetings would act as a "major pillar" to ventilate the feelings of the countries of the region against interference and subjugation, as it happened in cases of Afghanistan in Kampuchea. He also preconceived that the proposed South Asian Organization should, in the beginning, cover economic and social areas because the question of unanimity or at least consensus was very important for forming such a forum. While briefing Nepal's response to the proposal of regional cooperation, he said: "If a framework grows for economic cooperation to begin with, it will give ample chance to know each other and prove our minds and thus ultimately in a gradual process, we shall be able to achieve our ends. Neither the Pakistan

government nor its press reacted favourably to the call. As has been aptly commented by an Indian analyst, even when the reviews in the Pakistani media is “ostensibly only kill it”. A Pakistani newspaper Dawn, while referring to the proposal to the so-called security threats to the South Asian periphery from the core state, wrote in its editorial, “Regardless of whether or not the authors see in this way, the proposal is capable of promoting new equations between the South Asian states based on equality and reciprocity, rather than the predominance of any one power”. According to the daily “the absence of any bilateral conflicts and the existence of a sense of common political purpose are two essential starting points” for any scheme or regional cooperation and South Asia “evidently lacks both”. The daily further said:

If Bangladesh’s idea is for getting anything other than an informal forum for consultation and if moves are to be made to institutionalize and formalize the arrangement, it is certain to run into snags. In view of difference of foreign policy orientations of some of the countries of South Asia and the unresolved disputes (Kashmir and Farakka) which have impeded closer cooperation between them, it is very premature to think of a regional organization.

While highlighting the economic implications of South Asian cooperation, the editorial summed up as follows:

As for regional economic arrangements, Pakistan’s experience of the RCD has only demonstrated that in absence of complementarity in the economic of the participating countries and fairly identical levels of economic and social development, multilateral arrangement simply fails to get off the ground.

In the conference of the foreign secretaries of seven south Asian states (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) between 20 to 30 April 1981, the differences between Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, on the one hand and that of Pakistan and India, on the other, became very clearly traceable. An Indian journalist, while observing from closer quarters the proceedings of the Foreign Secretaries meet in Colombo, writes:

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and to a lesser extent Nepal would prefer exercises to be undertaken on comprehensive package, which would include intra-regional trade and economic cooperation in such fields as joint ventures, taking the entire region as one integrated market. This would imply liberalized within the region. Such a comprehensive package is not likely constraints. It appears to take the view that cooperation in the region at the moment should not extend to the economic sphere. (3)

At the Colombo meet, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Riaz Pirocha, forewarned the temptation of taking "precipitated steps, when the time and conditions were inopportune". He added, "We must ensure that there is not too much sail or too small a lull." According to him, consultations on "higher planes" meaning a meeting of foreign ministers and summit conference "being pushed by some participants was premature". (4) Further he said that an establishment of an institutional framework was not feasible under the present circumstances. Such a framework should await a development of greater regional understanding and complementarily in the economics of the regional countries.

When Pakistan quite strongly and India in a partially advocated a cautious road without forcing the pace, Nepal and Bangladesh along with

Sri Lanka were prepared to go much further in the direction of regional economic cooperation.(5)

Anyhow, the foreign secretaries arrived at a consensus on certain issues. It was agreed at the end that as an initial step, five study groups may be set up to study the potential and scope for regional cooperation in several fields like agriculture, rural development, telecommunication, meteorology, and health and population activities.(6) Each of the five groups will have a linking country. It was decided that Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Nepal were to be the linking countries for agriculture, rural development, telecommunication, meteorology, health, and family planning respectively. The foreign secretaries also agreed to decide, at the proposed meeting in Kathmandu within six months, whether the stage had been reached to recommend the convening of a meeting at the foreign minister's level.(7)

Bangladesh submitted a working paper which made a firm request for promoting a climate of trust and confidence necessary for greater political understanding among them. The paper asserted that the countries of the region have cooperated with one another both bilaterally and regionally under the umbrella of such forums as the ESCAP, the Nonaligned Movement and the Commonwealth. These efforts have not fully exploited the vast potential of regional cooperation that exists and its fruits collectively and individually, to the countries of the region". (8)The feasibility of such cooperation was informally discussed in various capitals at different times, but until recently no concrete step was taken. President Ziaur Rehman explained the possibility of establishing regional cooperation for the welfare of the peoples of this region in the course of the visits to Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during the period 1977-1980. The initial responses were encouraging. He addressed

letters based on his consultations to the heads of government of the countries of South Asia (namely Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), which were carried by special envoys. In his letter he suggested that the countries of the region should explore the possibility of establishing some institutional arrangements for regional cooperation and for achieving this, a meeting at the summit level are held. (9)

Different South Asian capitals responded favourably and the proposal of the President got a warm welcome. Some stressed that adequate preparatory work would be necessary to ensure the success of the regional summit meeting. It was also pin-pointed that against the backdrop of the history of the region, it would be wise to proceed on the basis of careful and adequate preparations so as to ensure the success of the summit meeting. (10)

These preliminary exchange have brought into limelight that regional cooperation should, on the one hand, reflect the spirit of mutual trusts, understanding, and sympathetic appreciation of the political longings existing among the countries of the region and, on the other, such cooperation should be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs of other nations, and mutual benefit. (11)

President Ziaur Rehman in his letter addressed to the heads of governments of the region mentioned the underlying factors which encouraged him to take the initiative. He pointed what while other regions had evolved institutional arrangements for consultation on matters of mutual interest and cooperation; the only region which did not have such arrangements for regional cooperation was South Asia region which comprised one-fifth of the world population.(12) Anyhow, the

remarked that recent positive developments in the region had created a better climate of understanding. For the first time, there were distinct possibilities of regional cooperation from which all South Asian countries would stand to gain. (13)

In his letter Bangladesh President tentatively mentioned economic, technical, scientific, educational, social and cultural fields as possible areas for regional cooperation. Such cooperation doesn't, however, form any new bloc or alliance. (14) The institutional arrangements set up for such co-operation would strictly conform to the principles of nonalignment to which all the countries in the region are firmly committed. (15)

Economic and technical cooperation on regional basis is welcomed at present, by all developing countries as a desirable and necessary strategy within the framework of ECDC and TCDC. In South Asia as in other regions of the world, we have countries at different levels of developments; some are relatively less developed than others. Any proposal for economic cooperation must consequently be formulated with greatest care to ensure the welfare of the poor. The chosen areas should only be those in which cooperation will mutually benefit all the countries irrespective of existing economic disparities so as to make regional cooperation meaningful. (16)

An ultimate solution is that it is only through regional cohesion that South Asia can hope to have an effective voice in international forums. The UN System has today over 150 states. It is only groups of countries – be they big or small-that can aspire to make a decisive impact on the decision-making process in these forums. No doubt, one may go so far as to say that it is only by establishing an institutional arrangement for

consultation and co-ordination that the people of South Asia having nearly one-fifth of the world population can play a role commensurate with their intrinsic global importance.(17)

Shared perceptions and values are core of success of any venture for regional cooperation. The countries of South Asia share many common values that are cemented in their social, ethnic, cultural and historical traditions. In fact, the beginning of cooperation on a regional basis a climate of harmony conducive to a better perception of what the countries in the region have in common and the value of this shared heritage. (18)

The experience in regional cooperation elsewhere in the world proved the possibility of cooperation despite bilateral problems existing among the counties of the region. Even where bilateral disputes crop up, they should not stand in the way of regional cooperation in the economic, social, technical and cultural spheres. This is quite clear from the fact that countries whose bilateral relations may be strained are still prepared to cooperate with one another within a regional framework. (19) As regional cooperation grows, it also tends to generate a climate of mutual understanding, reducing the scope for such disputes.

Regional cooperation in South Asia, as elsewhere in the world, should not interfere in the existing bilateral and multilateral relations of the countries of the region; nor does the proposal envisage either the substitution or the disruption of existing cooperation between or amongst the countries of the region in other forums. ESCAP has organized consultative procedures for cooperation in a wide range of fields in which South Asian countries are closely involved. Regional activities of other bodies such as the WHO regional Centre in Delhi are also engaged in

useful defined fields of operation. (20) Every effort will be made to avoid duplication, which is wasteful of time, energy, and resources, to stress the point that a regional cooperation will boost the activities of the international organizations. As a matter of fact, it is expected that operating under the aegis of a regional framework, these international bodies will be able to contribute more meaningfully to the welfare of this region. (21)

Regional cooperation in South Asia must be pragmatic and realistic in outlook. Such cooperation aims at the development in the economic, social and cultural spheres. A number of possible areas of cooperation have been outlined later in the paper. Undoubtedly, many more areas of cooperation can be found and will be found as we proceed. Regional cooperation is a dynamic process; it will grow; it will widen; and it will strengthen. Just as global interdependence and cooperation have developed, so will regional cooperation all over the world, for there is no better way to cement global cooperation than on the bed-rock of regional cooperation. (22)

The proposal for a South Asian meeting at the summit level has been welcomed by the working paper as a positive and constructive initiative, which could have a catalytic effect on the process of cooperation in region. However, it was argued that summit meetings generate great expectations among people and therefore, a step-by-step approach would be more productive. There is undoubtedly some validity in this argument. Summit meetings need to be carefully prepared prior to ensure their success. (23) At the same time, this point need not be stretched too far. A summit meeting presupposes that there would be serious business for the heads of government and that the head would be able to brood over to those issues which could not be resolved

satisfactorily at other levels. They would have a broader perspective and, what is equally significant, the power of decision to resolve contentious issues.(24) Thus, preparatory work to be undertaken before the summit meeting would include preparation of the agenda, identification of the possible areas of cooperation, and the modalities of cooperation. In the process of evolving a common position on all these aspects of the preparatory work, unanimity is desirable. (25)

Foreign Secretaries' Meet at Kathmandu

The Foreign Secretaries of seven South Asian States had a 3-day conferences in Kathmandu in November (2-4) 1981 to review the progress achieved in the area of regional cooperation since the Colombo meeting and to prepare the ground work for ministerial meeting.(26)

The Nepalese Prime Minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa, who also held the Foreign Affairs portfolio, inaugurated the second official meeting of the South Asian states. While welcoming the delegates and reasserted the need for regional cooperation for the prosperity of the underdeveloped states of the region, he said:

Today, cooperation and a common approach is a must to alleviate poverty and minimize the adverse impact of external factors on our development efforts, such as inflation, market uncertainty, and resource constrains and difficulty in transfer of appropriate technology. In view of the rising expectations of the people and the reluctance of affluent North to appreciate the genuine difficulties of the third world, there is an imperative for closer cooperation among the developing countries and in particular, countries of the South Asian region.(27)

“The picture emerging out of the World Economic Order,” as the Nepalese Premier emphasized” as the mounting pressure from the

developed North on the respond favorably to regional schemes, particularly in sharing their developmental experiences". Although a modest beginning needed to be made in some less controversial areas, the objectives and scope of regional cooperation necessitated a reappraisal from time to time in order "to encompass the pressing problems and the increasing demands of development".

For mutual prosperity, some regional problems in the socio-economic spheres could be solved with the regional initiatives without sacrificing the "principle of peaceful co-existence" he further opined. While summing up his major thrust on the modus operandi of regional cooperation, he concluded:

Our approach can be sectoral and comprehensive, coherent and integrated. The exercise in regional cooperation will consolidate our common desire to live and let live, cement our friendship, and compromise if needed. (28)

Through these remarks, premier Thapa firmly emphasized Kathmandu's enthusiasm in consolidating the attempts made so far on regional cooperation in South Asia.

The Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, H.R. Chowdhury, while presenting his statement on November 2, 1981 expressed satisfaction along with other delegations over the fact that the quest for cooperation was not in vain. In his introductory remarks he said:

Some six months have already passed since the meeting of South Asian Foreign Secretaries in Colombo April this year. Seen in its historic perspective, what is noteworthy? Is the degree of mutual accommodation that was reached despite differences and restrictions in national perceptions and orientation of the individual countries? It can be said

without hesitation that fire foundations were made in encouraging regional cooperation on a formalized basis. (29)

He welcomed the “ground rules” on regional cooperation as commonly accepted in Colombo. He was also quite appreciative of the role of five study groups which made a beginning in the processes of mutually beneficial cooperation in a regional context.

He opined the Kathmandu meeting was “charged with the following four-fold mandate “which is as follows:

1. To Consider and act on the recommendations of the Five Study Groups established in April 1981 in Colombo.
2. To consider and act on the recommendations of the committee of the whole regarding other areas of cooperation.
3. To examine whether the stage has been reached to recommend to the Foreign Minister, the convening of a meeting at their level.
4. To consider and further examine the institutional arrangement for regional cooperation outlined in the Bangladesh paper.

He was delighted by the “positive outcome of the Study Groups, effective participation of all member states and the rule of unanimity while adopting any recommendations.” He also stressed that in each of the Study Groups, concrete recommendation had been made on specific action-programmes, many of which were susceptible to immediate implementation of cooperative efforts not involving substantial capital expenditure or new investments which might not require elaborate institutional mechanisms. Other projects, in his opinion, had been indicated with a larger gestation period and were therefore, fit for long-run investments, allowing time for commitment by member states of

necessary human and financial resources through evolution of appropriate collaborative mechanism. Even concrete recommendations with regard to institutional machinery for implementing these cooperative programmes, had been identified by them. (30)

Regarding other areas of cooperation based on the report of the Committee of the Whole, Chowdhury said that Dacca favoured expansion both “qualitatively and quantitatively”. Nevertheless, he cautioned; “In the context of regional cooperation, we have perforce to be selective for there could be a danger of overstretching ourselves and defusing our efforts with little tangible gain”. On balance, however, he believed that the logic of development in a big way, favoured expansion into more areas of cooperation. (31)

While giving unqualified backing to convening of a Foreign Minister level meeting at an early date to prepare for a Summit meeting, he wanted some necessary ground-works to be made. For instance, he proposed the preparation of a draft agenda, forming up of agreed areas for regional cooperation and chalking out the modalities of such cooperation. (32)

On the institutional framework for regional cooperation although he conceded that it would “depend on the creation of a necessary environment for its receptivity and acceptalulity”, he wanted to give much importance at this stage for either “structured or less formal” arrangement in recognition of the fact that “the process could evolve into a harmonious development over the years.”

The Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Riaz Pirocha, while reflecting a gradual appreciation of his government towards the scheme of regional cooperation in South Asia, stated that “the establishment of adequate

telecommunication links in the region was not only beneficial in itself but was also a must for the growth of cooperation in other areas". He regretted that it was easier for "us to communicate with the countries of Europe and America than among ourselves". That was because of the lack of direct telecommunication links among the South Asian Capital cities. (33)

Pakistan accordingly, felt that it is time to establish efficient and reliable telecommunication links among the South Asian countries. "Thereby", Pirocha further said, "not only the regional countries would come closer, but also their respective developmental programmes could be facilitated and in the long run it would be single contribution to the promotion of regional cooperation".

As the coordinator country for the Study Group on telecommunication, Pakistan had recommended harmonious and quick development of the existing and projected bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

About other agreed areas of cooperation the Pakistan Foreign Secretary emphasized that the most practical approach was to constitute standing technical committee having representatives of all the regional countries, to draw up concerted programmes of cooperation, to arrange their implementation, and to monitor progress on a continuing basis. (34)

Although he welcomed the process of consultations at the bureaucratic level from time "to review the progress of regional cooperation and to take policy decisions", he expressed his reservation on the utility of convening a regional meeting of Foreign Ministers at this stage. (35)

It is interesting to note a press comment in India on Islamabad's stand at Kathmandu. Reportedly although Pakistan was "going along reluctantly with other South Asian states to identify more areas of cooperation".

On the responses of other South Asian countries like India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, one gets an impression that more or less a broad consensus had emerged on the following lines. First, all of them believed that regional cooperation should be pursued in earnest. Second, future meetings at different levels should be continued. Third, as regards the implementation machinery, it should be put off for a while. Meanwhile, it was felt to be necessary to identify more areas for regional cooperation in economic and cultural fields. However despite such broad agreement, a close perusal of the addresses by the respective delegations in Colombo shows a distinct shift in emphasis in the point of view of some of them. For instance, New Delhi while going along with others emphasized on more exchange of information and pleaded for a common stand by the South Asian states while negotiating with the developed North India's Foreign Secretary, R. D. Sathe also asserted that the committee of the Whole had identified thirteen specific fields for regional cooperation in South Asia. However, these areas had yet been clarified for public consumption. Besides, he opined that, the progress in the five fields already identified, should first be assessed before taking up the question of additional areas. (36)

Sri Lanka while requesting for an early ministerial meeting wanted all the technicalities to be discussed at the official level and leaving only broad initiatives to be taken by the Ministers or the Heads of Government. Bhutan and Maldives, while happily supporting all the measures for regional cooperation, had conformed to contribute their mite

in such ventures by taking on studies on transport and postal services respectively. (37)

At the end of the meeting Foreign Secretaries on November 4, 1981, a Joint Communiqué was signed. It aimed at instituting additional studies in the field of transport, postal services, scientific and technological cooperation. Each of these studies would be coordinated by Maldives, Bhutan and Pakistan respectively. (38)

It was also declared that the existing five Study Groups had been made into Working Groups whose chairmanship would be by rotation. The Foreign Secretaries, during their deliberations in Kathmandu considered and endorsed the recommendations of the Study Groups. They, however, recognized that these recommendations fell into two broad categories, viz. those that were amenable to immediate implementation and those that were long term in nature requiring a longer gestation period. They also gave a thought to establish appropriate machinery for implementation of the recommendations. (39)

As per the rules of the Communiqué, the major task of each Working Group would be to identify the immediate and long-term phases. The urgent programmes included “exchange of data and information, exchange of experts, training facilities and organization of seminars, workshop on a regional basis”. The long-term programme of action included assessment of need and resources, preparation of specific projects of regional nature and modalities for financing the project. (40)

During the endorsement of the report of the Committee of a Whole, the Foreign Secretaries viewed regional cooperation as “an evolutionary process” to be seen in “a long-term perspective” as well as a “flexible

process” which would enable the elaboration of cooperation arrangements in as many field as were mutually agreed upon. (41)

They also agreed that it would be beneficial to promote cooperation among the official planning organization in the South Asian states and their next meeting would focus on the course of action in this direction. The Colombo sentiment was recalled while they reasserted that regional cooperation was “beneficial, desirable and necessary” and agreed to initiate and further steps in accelerating that process. (42)

Meeting of South Asian Foreign Secretaries in Islamabad

The third official meeting of South Asian Foreign Secretaries from 7 nations was conducted in Islamabad at the Foreign Office, 7th to 9th August 1982. It was inaugurated by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Yakub Khan who called upon the concerned countries “to join hands in promoting confidence and cooperation among themselves”. He asserted that such cooperation was imperative at a time when crisis and conflicts ravaged areas in the immediate neighbourhood”. The South Asian countries have “an equal stake in regional cooperation” he said. Pakistan, according to him, stood for consensus on all issues. (43)

Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Niaz A. Naik formally took over the Chairmanship of the official meeting from Nepal’s Foreign Secretary, J.S. Rana. His nomination was proposed by the delegate of Maldives and seconded by the delegate of Bhutan. (44)

There were hardly any differences among the member delegates nor were any contentious issues raised by any one. The Indian Foreign Secretary, M.K. Rasgotra, in his speech at the first working session called for greater cooperation among South Asian nations in the fields of trade, negotiations on international economic matters, tourism, culture, sports

and games. He also said of sharing India's experience on oceanography on a reciprocal basis.

While stressing the point that regional cooperation could not be a substitute for bilateral cooperation between them, the Indian delegate, however, considered it to be an imperative for the achievement of collective self-reliance. India broadly agreed with the recommendations of the eight study Groups (five of which were setup in the Colombo meeting and three more added in the second meeting in Kathmandu). However, it was quintessential to set the modalities and financing arrangements for the proposed programmes. (45)

In the field of trade, the Indian Foreign Secretary proposed a modest beginning to be made on trade preferences and cooperation among state trading agencies and trade related institutions. He also submitted for consideration of limited cooperation in marketing and processing of commodities without drastic changes in the trade regimes. Anyhow, such a proposal should not be misunderstood by other South Asian States on the ground that India was looking for an alternate market to sell its excess goods in the neighbourhood.

Another crucial proposal suggested by Rasgotra and duly reciprocated by his counterparts from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, was the need to exchange views and coordinate the activities of the South Asian states on the North-South dialogues, as all these states were more or less facing identical economic problems.(46)

According to the report of a Dacca daily, the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Ataul Karim, expressed his satisfaction at the outcome of the meeting and told the concluding session that results of deliberations would be of "crucial importance" towards achieving the goal of South

Asian cooperation. According to him, the gains of earlier meeting had been consolidated and further progress would provide and effective impetus to the process of cooperation. About the Foreign Minister level meeting, Dacca was clearly for fixing a date prior to the end of 1982 so that a political thrust is given to the proposed South Asian cooperation. The Nepalese Foreign Secretary, J.S. Rana asserted that a political level meeting could not only be a source of great encouragement and strength to the programme of region cooperation, but also would give a much needed guideline to expedite the process. Although other smaller South Asian states like Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives clearly agreed that it's high time for the convening of a regional meeting of Foreign Ministers, most of their delegations were doubtful about its exact timing. Besides, neither New Delhi nor Islamabad seemed to favour an early ministerial meeting before due preparatory work by the officials and technocrats.

(47)

The Nepalese delegation while richly contributing to the 3-day deliberations in Islamabad stressed on the following themes. According to reports in Rising Nepal, first, it was proposed that for making South Asian cooperation effective, the implementation mechanism must be tentatively decided. In that regard a focal point may be set up in every member country for an overall coordination of the programmes. Second, the South Asian states must examine whether it is time for convening a ministerial meeting. Third, it was emphasized that had tempo of development in the South Asians region had suffered because of population explosion and it was high time to take measures, if possible on a regional basis. Fourth, against the gloomy vision of the New International Economic Order, the concept of regional cooperation was all the more relevant. Fifth, it has been suggested that synchronisation

between the regional cooperation is inevitable. Besides, it was also stressed that the major task of the five groups on agriculture, rural development, telecommunication, meteorology and health and family activities should be to find out a comprehensive programme of action for cooperation in both immediate and long-term phases. (48)

At the conclusion of the three-day closed door parleys among the seven South Asian States (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives) a joint communiqué was issued. The Dawn has quoted a conference spokesman according to whom, there was "complete agreement" among the participating states on the timeframe and sequences of events that would save the way to their fourth meeting in Dacca to prepare for a conference at the political level, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Niaz A. Naik, who chaired the concluding meeting (open to press), opined as following : "Inspired by a spirit of mutual respect and accommodation, the meeting reached certain major resolution that will help enhance progress towards the objectives of mutually beneficial cooperation in the region".

The Joint Communiqué broadly touched upon the following themes. South Asian cooperation had achieved an irreversible momentum and it was agreed to accelerate its pace. (49) It was decided to set up a "Committee of the Whole", with Sri Lanka as its Chairman, to work out an integrated programme of action at its next meeting in January 1983. It was to recommend the funding modalities and arrangements for long-term implementation of agreed regional projects. The reports of the five above mentioned working groups were recognized. The Foreign Secretaries also considered the reports of the three study teams set up at the Kathmandu meeting on transport, postal services and scientific and technical cooperation. For coordinating the activities of the planning

organizations in South Asia, a meeting was decided to be held in New Delhi before the fourth and final meeting of Foreign Secretaries in Dhaka during the first quarter of 1983. The first regional meeting of Ministers was decided to be held between May and September 1983 and the venue was to be decided by mutual consultations. At India's behest, it was agreed that regular consultations should be held among the seven nations of common interest relating to international economic issues. At last, they agreed to set up a study group on regional cooperation in sports, arts and cultures. (50)

With no opposition to the idea of regional cooperation in South Asia, the joint communiqué issued at the end of the fourth meeting in Dhaka during March, 1983, made it explicit that “it was now very urgent framework for structured regional cooperation in South Asia “through formal forum, “An integrated programs of action (IPA) was also welcomed in Dhaka and the New Delhi Meet was expected to give formal political approval and implementation. The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, A.R. Shams-u-ddin in his inaugural address to the Dhaka meeting termed it as “a forum for cooperation, a vital world pressures”. While emphasizing on the imperatives for forming the South Forum, the Bangladesh foreign secretary, AAS Atavi who was elected as the new chairman, said at the end of the three-day conference that the welfare of the peoples stand imperiled by the impact of adverse international economic forces beyond our control. The stability of our region has been shaken by the induction of external resources. This has constituted both a constraint and an impetus to regional cooperation which in essence is as much an exercise in the practical economic plan as it an effort towards boosting up confidence. (51)

The role of India as usual was very constructive at the fourth official meeting. The Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra gave a warm welcome to the unanimous suggestion for India to host the first foreign ministers meeting in early August, 1983. Rasgotra, while addressing the plenary session in Dhaka asserted that “the type of regional cooperation we have in mind is neither inward looking nor exclusive”. Besides according to him bilateral differences among South Asian states need not disturb any regional venture. He also believed that Regional cooperation could go hand in hand with international cooperation.

3.2 Formation of SAARC

The need for regional cooperation in South Asia, as initiated by the late Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh in March 1980 has been given a concrete foundation with the emergence of SAARC (South Asian Regional Co-operation) at the meeting of seven foreign ministers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It was at pleasant surprise that India was called upon unanimously to host the first ever foreign ministerial meeting after the foreign secretaries these sister nations deliberated for enough preparatory work in launching the voyage of regional co-operation in five capital cities (Colombo in April 1981, Kathmandu in November 1981, Islamabad in August 1982, Dhaka in March 1983 and New Delhi in July 1983).

Besides, there was several other meeting at the expert’s level to discuss on various viable modes of cooperation. These official and expert level meetings studied the objectives and several socio-economic areas for co-operation. Nine – working groups with one coordinator country took at the official meetings in Colombo. Kathmandu and Islamabad for detailed and in depth studies on possible areas of cooperation. These

were: (a) agriculture (Bangladesh); (b) rural development (Sri Lanka); (c) telecommunication (Pakistan); (d) meteorology (India); (e) health and population (Nepal); (f) postal services (Bhutan); (g) transport services and technology (Pakistan); and (i) sport, arts and culture (India). Incidentally, the list is only five short of the eleven areas earlier identified by Bangladesh Working Paper, which was circulated among statesmen of these seven countries. Apart from that area identified in the nine- working groups, the Working Paper also included shipping, tourism, joint ventures, market promotion and educational cooperation. A significant from both the list is the promotion of intra-regional trade in South Asia, which was dismally low and constitutes roughly 8 per cent of the regions global imports and exports. (52)

The meeting of Foreign Secretaries in Dhaka clearly welcomed the Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) for all the nine areas identified for cooperation among the South Asian states. Besides this a framework of structured regional cooperation was also agreed upon by them. At their New Delhi meeting, on the eve of the first Foreign Ministers Conference of South Asian states, the Foreign Secretaries formally decided on the SAARC documents. Of course, they made an attempt to harmonies the two draft proposals prepared by host-India and Bangladesh. (53) It was also decided that a South Asian Summit meeting for regional cooperation may be called at an appropriate time. The clever issue of financial modalities was identified in an amicable way by suggesting that all contributions by member-states to regional projects may be according to one's will, and whenever needed external sources of aid may by solicited.

As a result, just before the New Delhi meeting of Foreign Minister several South Asian Countries already declared their initial contributions. These were India (Rs. 50 Lakhs), Pakistan (Rs. 4 millions), Bangladesh

(Taka 5 millions), Nepal (Rs. 1.5 millions N.C) and Maldives (Rs. 81,000). As regards the external sources of aid, the European Economic Community became ready to contribute \$ 1.5 lakhs for trade promotion through aids to projects on transport and telecommunication. Besides, the International Telecommunication Union has offer to give 2,20,000 dollars for a 3 – year period.

On the working of the SAARC, it was decide by the Foreign Secretaries in New Delhi that all the decisions at all the meeting for regional cooperation were to be taken unanimously, rather than taking resources to majority or consensuses. Besides, it was also well accepted that because South Asia were already plagued by a strained bilateralism, it was quite in the fitness of things to keep all bilateral contentious issues out of the ambit of SAARC. (54)

Now with such a broad outlook of the progress made on the path of South Asian cooperation, one can have close up of the Indian Prime Ministers inaugural address and the final declarations gave birth to SAARC.

In her inaugural speech Mrs. Indira Gandhi mentioned the following themes. At the start, she talked of the positive factors linking the South Asian states by a common historical legacy, geography and monsoon, etc. Besides each one of them were facing the common challenge pf alleviating poverty and economic backwardness. In spite of these common elements, she asserted that each one of these countries had a distinct personality and a different political system. Besides, on massacre of Tamils in Sri Lanka she contemplated certain problems in a multi racial region like that of ours. (55)

She made it quite clear that SAARC had no military objectives and was not aimed against anyone. Because of certain complementarities in the economy of South Asian states, it was but natural, to think in terms of sharing of the experiences among them in several economic and cultural field through optimum use of planning and exchange of information. She also emphasized that along with all the areas identified for regional cooperation, more people-to-people contact is quite desirable. (56)

Being Indira the chairperson of the NAM she mentioned time and again to the constructive suggestions made in the Economic Declaration at New Delhi Summit for foreign South-South cooperation in the light of retarded North-South dialogue as disclosed in the UNCTD Conference in Belgrade. NAM's emphasis on collective self-reliance through regional economic cooperation while considering "the needs, resources, exigencies and capacities" of the region was also recalled by her. While focusing on the breakthrough made by regional economic groupings like the EEC, OAU and the ASEAN, she lamented over the late wakening in our region. But with SAARC it was better late, than never. (57)

Now all these sentimental expressions by no less a person than the head of government of the core South Asian state, would make us to think aloud about the peculiarity of SAARC for India. The attitude of New Delhi towards South Asian Cooperation has undergone sea change during the several official deliberations in the last three years. No doubt, it has passed from a stage of indifference to that of playing a positive and leading role in giving a concrete shape to the SAARC proposals.

The document pertaining to the final declarations can be roughly divided into five categories as follows.

In the beginning all the seven foreign ministers expressed their keen interest to foster regional cooperation out of the compulsions of common problems and aspirations of their peoples and the necessity to speed up socio-economic development. Besides, they were quite convinced that SAARC was desirable and necessary for bringing collective self-reliance as asserted by the NAM declarations at the New Delhi Summit.

Second, it explores the following eight broad objectives. They would like to promote welfare of the people in South Asia and improve the quality of life, accelerate socio-economic growth and full potentiality of the individual instill collective self-reliance, mutual trust and understanding, bring mutual assistance and collaboration in many areas, cement co-operation among South Asian states in global forums and with other regional groupings with similar objectives.(58)

Third, the guiding principles of SAARC would be the recognition of sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and mutual benefit. Besides, regional cooperation it would complement rather than substitute cooperation's at the bilateral and multilateral levels. (59) As the procedure of taking decisions at the SARC meeting, the methods of unanimity would be ensured. No bilateral or contentious issues would be raised at the regional forum.

Fourth, the institutional arrangement as foreseen would be mainly three-tiered. In all the nine areas already identified, technical committees would be organized where all the seven countries would be represented. These will be in charge of the implementation and coordination of regional projects in each area. These would also take care of the financial implications for sectoral programmes and to study the progress made

from time to time. The Action Committee would constitute the second category and it would be constituted for projects involving two or more states. Here, representation of all member states will not be necessary and prior approval of the standing committees for all such projects would be taken. At the standing committee, all the Foreign Secretaries would be represented. It would approve regional projects and sort out the modalities for finance. It would meet at least once a year and whenever necessary it might bring those issues before the foreign minister. (60)

At the end, on the financing of the regional projects, it has been decided that contributions of the members-states would be voluntary. Moreover, if internal financial arrangements would be insufficient SAARC may take recourse to external financing. In organizing any scheme or workshop on regional themes, the travel fare and subsistence would be borne by the respective countries. The host country would sponsor such workshops.

A thorough study of all these SAARC provisions would generate the following thoughts in our mind. The first, which indicates more or less the preamble makes one believe that all the seven South Asian states have realized the significant of regional cooperation in right earnest. (61)

About the eight broad objectives it may be said that the seven sister nations, aware of the institutional bottlenecks and a three decade-old legacy of strained bilateralism, have made only a modest beginning. It is quite clear; they would like to improve the quality of life of their impoverished masses. But as Mrs. Gandhi rightly mentioned, a major breakthrough can only be brought out with more people-to-people contact. Apart from that even if they talk of mutual assistance and collective self-reliance there is hardly a word about encouraging mutually

beneficial trade, which has been essential prerequisite of any viable regional economic groupings like the EEC or the ASEAN.

Regarding the two principles and two other general provisions, the impression one gets is as follows. There is a doubt in the minds of the small South Asian states about the possibility of being dominated by the so-called “big brother” in the region. Secondly, being quite aware that the scope of regional cooperation in our region is rather limited and that there is very little for “give and take” they would not like to close their options for expanding cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Undoubtedly, all the South Asian states may be grouped as “underdogs” and most of them would like to take upon the “top dogs to deliver them the goods. Naturally to talk of collective self-reliance in the South Asian context looks rather high sounding if not silly about the voting procedure at the SAARC meetings, the method of unanimity, rather than majority or consensus has been adopted considering the weakness of the new born SAARC. (62)

Although they have rightly decided not to create any permanent regional organization at the present, the 3-tier institutional arrangement seems to be adequate for tackling the small regional projects and organizing workshops for experts of our subcontinents. The only suggestion is that to make a solid foundation to the SAARC idea, a high level political organizations must also be constituted sooner or later. (63)

Before concluding, a word about the financial modalities no organization can exit without adequate financial arrangements. The very fact that contributions by member state will remain voluntary; it may not be conducive to the progress of the SAARC. Besides, tapping of external resources would mean inviting outside pressure, however cautious they

might remain. Already the region is badly affected by the intrusion of external powers and the clouds of the new cold war can be seen on our horizon.

3.3 Secretariat of the SAARC

Establishment of the Secretariat:

In pursuance of Article VIII of the SAARC charter the Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have agreed on the following arrangement with regard to the establishment of the SAARC Secretariat.

Location

The secretariat shall be located in Kathamandu, Nepal.

Role of the secretariat

The role of the secretariat shall be to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of SAARC activities and to service the meetings to the association.

Structure

The secretariats shall comprise a secretary general, and professional and general service staff.

Appointment of Secretary General

The secretary general shall be appointed by the council of ministers upon nomination by member state on the basis of the principal of the rotation in alphabetical order.

Appointment of Professional Staff

The secretary general upon nomination by member states shall appoint the professional staff of the secretariat.

A director shall be of the rank of councilor.

Appointment of General Services Staff

The general services shall be national of the members states required through open competition after advertise mint and shall be appointed by the secretary general.

Functions and powers of the Secretary General

The secretary general, as head of the SAARC_ shall:

Be responsible for conducting the work of the secretariat including coordination and monitoring of SAARC activities, submit staff rules and financial regulation to the standing committee for approval of the council of ministers submit the annual budget of the secretariat to the standing committee for approval of the council of ministers.

Act as the custodian of all SAARC documents and publication

Report periodically to the standing committee

Perform such other function as the standing committee and council of misters may assign.

Function of the directors

The director shall perform such functions as may be assigned to them by Secretary General.

Language

English shall be the Working Language of the Secretariat.

Funding and Budget

1. Nepal as the Host country shall provide the following facilities for the Secretariat.
 - i) Accommodation with initial decoration and furnishing and provision of basic utilities and service including power, water, gas, air conditioning, telephone, telex and major maintenance of the same;
 - ii) Machines, equipments and vehicles for the initial stage.
2. The annual Budget of the Secretariat shall contain two components.
 - i) **Capital expenditure**, including all capital costs and such items as procurement of machines equipment and vehicles; and
 - ii) **Recurrent expenditure**, including all expenses associated with the running of the secretariat during the Budget year including payment of salaries allowances and perquisites of all Secretariat personnel utility charge office requisites and stationary minor maintain aces and any other regular expense.
3. **Privileges and Immunities**
 - i) The Secretariat the Secretary General and member of the professional staff of the secretariat shall enjoy such privileges and immunities as are admissible to diplomatic missions/ envoys and as detailed in the Head quarters Agreement to be reached between the Secretariat and the Host country.
 - ii) Other SAARC States will take steps to accord immunities and privileges to the secretary General and other members of the

professional staff when visiting their territories on official duties, consistent with local laws and practices.

Audit and Accounts

The accounts of the secretariat shall be audited annually by a Panel of Auditors comprising three qualified member nominated by three member states by rotation and appointed every year for a contract period of three weeks by the Standing Committee. The report of the Panel of Auditors along with the annual accounts shall be submitted to the Standing Committee for approval of the council of Ministers.

Institutional Structure Summits

(A) Organization Structure

The highest authority of the association rest's with the heads of state or government. During the period 1985 –95 eight meeting of the heads of state or government was held in Dhaka (1985) Bangalor (1986) Katmandu (1987) Dhaka (1993) male (1990) Colombo (1991) and Dhaka (1993) and New Delhi (1995) respectively.

(B) Council of Minster

Compressing the foreign minister of member states is liable for the formulation of politics reviewing progress deciding on new areas of cooperation establishing additional mechanisms are understood necessary and deciding on other matters of general interest to the association. The council meets twice year and may also meet in extraordinary session by agreement of member states.

(C) Standing committee

Comprising the foreign secretaries of member states is entrusted with overall monitoring and coordination of programmers ant the

modalities of financing determining intersect oral priorities mobilizing regional and external resources and identifying new spheres of cooperation based on proper studies it may meet as often as understood necessary but in practices it meets twice a year and submits its report to the council of minister it has held twenty regular sessions and two special sessions till November 1995.

(D) Programming committee

Comprising the senior official meets prior to the standing committee session to scrutinize secretariat budget finals the calendar of activities and take up any other matter assigned to it by the standing committee. This committee has held fifteen sessions till November 1995.

(E) Technical committees

Comprising representatives of member states formulate programmes and prepare projects in their respective fields they are accountable for monitoring the implementation of such activities and report to the standing committee. The chairmanship of each technical committee normally rotates among member countries in alphabetical order every two years presently there are twelve technical committees. However with merger of the technical committees on environment and metrology beginning from 1st January 1996 the number of technical committees will be eleven.

(F) Action committees

In accordance with the SAARC charter there is a provision for action committees comprising member states concerned with implementation of projects comprising more than two but not all member states at present there are no such action committees.

(G) Other meetings

During the first decade of SAARC several other important meeting took place in particular contexts a number of SAARC ministerial meeting have been held to focus attention on certain areas of common concern and has become an integral part of consultative structure so far ministerial level meeting have been held on international economic issues- Islamabad (1986), children new Delhi (1986) and Colombo (1992) women in development – Shillong (1986) and Islamabad (1990) environment –new Delhi (1992), women and family health – Katmandu(1993) ,disabled person – Islamabad (1993),youth –male (1994),poverty –Dhaka (1994) and women: towards the fourth world conference on women in Beijing ----Dhaka (1995). So far, six meeting of planners have been held, one in 1983 and five annually from 1987 to 1991. Theses meeting imitated cooperation in Important spheres like trade manufacturers and services; basic needs; human recourses development; database on socio –economic indicators, energy modeling techniques plane modeling techniques and poverty alleviation strategies.

Additionally, a high level committee on economic cooperation (CEC) has been established in 1991 for identifying and implementing programmes in the core area of economic and trade cooperation.

A three –tier mechanism was put in places in 1995, to follow up on the relevant SAARC decisions on poverty eradication .the tiers comprises of secretaries in charge of poverty eradication meeting of finance planning secretaries, and meeting of finance / planning ministers.

3.4 The Economic Background of the SAARC

The Economic Background of the SAARC

The search for economic co-operation with in third world has acquired a special urgency given the current instability of the world economy. The countries of the south can no longer look the advanced industrial countries (AICS) as an open ended market, competitive source of imports or even as the source for invest meant capital of necessity the devolving countries (DCS) must find new markets within the south, cheaper sources of imports and alternative sources of capital and technology.

The flowering of institutional tentative for south – south cooperation is a logical outcome of the changing world environment. The scope for collective action within the south could however only manifest itself through specific countries of the south coming together. As it stand the south is still an abstraction whilst the group of 77 and non-aligned movement (NAM) provide a global forum for the south to the come together and develop a collective perspective on global affairs, the actual instrumentalities of south –south co-operation have evolved with in territorially contiguous grouping of third world countries.(88)

Its geography, history and occasionally rather than just economics which have ten dent to bring groups of third world countries together to seek collective redress of their problems.

It must be noted that until the 1980's south Asia was the only component region of the south, which did not have collective institutional persona. Until emergence of the SAARC as a griping there was no forum where the nations of south Asia could get together as a group to discuss mutual concerns.

In the same way .the Arabs have the Arab league and its offshoot, the council for Arab economic unity (CAEU). These are backup by financial institutions such as The origination of Arab petroleum exporting countries (OAPEC) and the bulb co-operation council provide a further and mea closely knit forum for interaction. In Africa the economic commission for Africa. The organization for African unity (OAU) and the African development bank are important arenas for co-operation. Similar in south East Asia, Asian has emerged as a highly effective forum for co-operation.

This integrated economic framework which remains the remote goal of all the regional grouping of the third world was in the case of south Asia progressively dismantled over the years today each country has a completely segregated economy, with its own currency. Tariff barriers and external linkage within the region is negligible. Nepal was the single exception to this process because of its virtual integration into the Indian economy. But even in the case of Nepal its share of exports to south Asian fell from 76 percent in 1975 to 29 percent in 1982 whilst its share of imports fell from 60 percent in 1975 to 31 percent in 1982. There was a course of time when virtually 100 percent of Nepal's external trade was with India.

Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have as a result effected some structural diversification in their economic, which may never, been feasible within an intergraded Indian union. This has again led to the emergence of a national bourgeoisie with clearly articulated interests of their own. These newly emergence elites in the smaller South Asian countries (SSAC) visualize India as a dominant regional power which has the potential to use its economic and military power to bestride the region. The size and economic dominance of India is indeed a reality

Indian account for 76 percent of the population, 76 percent of the GDP, 79 percent of value added in manufacturers, 80 percent of the total export and 60 percent of the imports of South Asia.

The numerical dimension of this unequal relationship in South Asia conceals the greater depth, diversity and maturity of the Indian economy. Today India is not just an exporter of manufactures competing with the infant industries of South Asia. It is an exporter of capital and intermediate goods as well as technology. In these areas it is in competition not with the entrepreneurs of South Asia but those of the Advanced Industrial countries (AICS) and the other Newly Industrialized Countries (NICS) for meeting the needs of South Asia. Today Bangladesh can buy jute and textile mill machinery from India and to a smaller extent from Pakistan, rather than Great Britain or Japan the traditional sources of supply. A country such as Bangladesh won gets nearly 50 percent of its imports from the South where India is a major potential supplier.

Whilst such NICs as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China remain an important and growing source of diversification for the SSARCs. It is India, which remain in the best position to provide the import need as well as export market for the SSARCs. Today India has the potential to meet most of the needs for capital goods and technology of the SAARCs such as Bangladesh, Sir Lanka and Nepal and indeed many of the needs of Pakistan in the area of less sophisticated capital. India suppliers have the capacity to respond to the needs of their neighbors to service their suppliers by flying in spares and skill at short notice and low cost. They have a shared ethos of doing business, and in some cases of language and culture. They can be sensitive to the local

business and administrative environment and to constantly up date their knowledge of the area with a minimum of investment.

However, for all countries of South Asia, their capacity to build a stable domestic policy rooted in popular support will influence their perspectives on SAARC and determine the out come of regional cooperation. The capacity of national leadership in South Asia to create such a domestic environment or to indeed transcend it in building the edifice of SAARC requires a degree of faith in the future which, given the tortured history of the region, may be hard to sustain.(88)

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