

COMPARISON BETWEEN SAARC AND ASEAN

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ABSTRACT

The primary objectives behind the establishment of SAARC and ASEAN were promotion of closer cooperation between the member states on economic, political and diplomatic levels while, fostering regional peace and solidarity. Eventually the member states wanted to create zones that would be effective in enhancing regional security and order. Both regional organizations are guided by similar principles. However, when the workings are analyzed, it is realized that ASEAN has by far been more successful than SAARC in achieving its goals. Be it in terms of fostering intra-regional trade or preventing/scaling down of intra-regional conflicts. It is observed that while both regional organizations are circumscribed by sovereignty of their member states, and that regional asymmetries remain, ASEAN has been able to navigate its way through much more tactfully owing to “ASEAN way” and its use of informal mechanisms. Comparatively, SAARC has no set mechanism for resolving disputes and is constantly marred by mutual mistrust among its member states. In this research paper, the focus will be on comparing the performance and workings of SAARC as contrasted from that of ASEAN and finding the factors responsible for the same.

KEYWORDS: SAARC, ASEAN, sovereignty, dispute resolution, South Asia

RESEARCH QUESTION

In seeking to analyse as to why SAARC has not been able to effectively achieve its goals and objectives when compared to ASEAN, this paper focuses on the question- ‘What are the challenges faced by SAARC?’

SAARC was set up to make the region of South Asia as a unified and powerful region of the world. For this the principles and objectives of SAARC are clearly elucidated. However, the pertinent issue is that despite of being decades old, SAARC till date remains rather ineffective. There is no unity in SAARC, with member states continuously being suspicious of one another’s motives and seeking to balance each other via bilateral mechanisms. Thus, the research paper focuses upon the gap between the aspirations and the actual achievement of SAARC. For this a significant portion of the paper enumerates the various problems marring the regional organization, inhibiting it from functioning effectively and efficiently. To better understand these failings and put them into context, the workings and structure of SAARC is compared with that of ASEAN. The comparison is crucial in understanding how; two organizations underpinned by similar principles and having similar socio-economic conditions at the time of their establishment, can perform so differently.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In trying to understand the working and performance of SAARC as contrasted from that of ASEAN, this paper will focus on the official documents and charter of the mentioned organizations. This will help understand not only the principles underlying the formation as well as the objectives of both. The goal of the paper is to understand whether a gap exists between aspirations and actual

implementation and effort and if it does, then why. For this purpose, reference is made to numerous articles and newspaper reports available online. Articles by Professor S.D Muni, Uttara Sahasrabudde, Kripa Sridharan, and Mohammad Razaul Karim are heavily referenced for this purpose as; they explain in detail the major differences between SAARC and ASEAN in terms of their conflict management mechanisms and in/formal channels of communication. The effect of these differences is seen in the performance of the two organizations in terms of important economic, demographic and political indicators. To show these differences, data taken from official World Bank Reports and Human Development report, 2016 are presented in a tabulated form at the end of the paper. Hedley Bull’s 1977 work on the formation of ‘system of states’ in the context of anarchical structure of the international system is used to explain the importance of common norms and perception in facilitating regionalism and effectiveness of regional organizations.

The work of Shaheen Irum is referenced heavily to make an analysis of the major problems plaguing SAARC. His arguments are supplemented by making reference to the works of Sumit Ganguly on Indian Foreign Policy and that of Karen and Mingst on Asian Regionalism.

Since this paper is written in the context of growing importance of regional organization and regionalism; therefore, a brief reference is made to the same by citing an article written by Mura and Consuegra, Karen and Mingst, Karl Deutsch, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan & Ole Weaver. Their arguments are used to explain how regionalism is a process complementary to the dynamics of globalization and that the types, scope and effects of regionalism and

regional organizations are varied. Their arguments substantiate arguments by Ravenhill and Mishra that formation of regional organizations is not natural, but rather requires conscious and continued efforts. It is in this vein that arguments by Severino and Leifer are used to elucidate the fact that such efforts are discernable on the part of ASEAN members, and conspicuously absent in SAARC.

Finally, some recommendations are given at the end of the paper to increase cooperation by citing the works of S.D. Muni and Kenneth Oye's 'Anarchy under Cooperation'. An interview with Singaporean Diplomat Kishore Mahbubdani is also cited here to explain how ASEAN can be a role model for SAARC.

Finally, the paper has cited many research papers, working papers, cross references, newspaper and online articles as well as other secondary sources to substantiate its arguments.

DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

This research paper seeks to analyse the failings of SAARC, in the context of growing global issues and the growing importance of the role of regional organizations. In trying to do so, it compares it with ASEAN. Both are regional organizations in Asia; however, both have different organizational features and rates of success. Thus, the paper compares and contrasts various structural mechanisms within both the organizations responsible for ensuring compliance and facilitating decision-making. Finally, to fully understand the impact of different organizational features, an assessment is made about the various outcomes of the efforts made by the organizations in terms of achieving intra-regional trade, securing a nuclear free zone and conflict management.

Thus, the paper first highlights the increased importance of regional organizations in achieving economic and sustainable development, especially in today's globalized world. It then goes on to throw light on the fact that SAARC was set up to cater to the above and make the region of South Asia as a unified and powerful region of the world. For this the principles and objectives of SAARC are clearly elucidated. However, the pertinent issue is that despite of being decades old, SAARC till date remains rather ineffective. There is no unity in SAARC as member states are continuously suspicious of one another's motives and seek to balance each other via bilateral mechanisms and involving external powers. Thus, the research paper focuses upon the gap between the aspirations and the actual achievement of SAARC. For this, a significant portion of the paper enumerates the various problems marring this regional organization, inhibiting it from functioning effectively and efficiently. To better understand these failings and put them into context, the workings and structure of SAARC is compared with that of ASEAN. Unlike SAARC, ASEAN is a

successful regional organization. ASEAN has not only managed to negotiate sovereignty issues of its member states but has created an important pole of power in South East Asia- diplomatically, economically as well as politically. It is an older organization, created at the height of cold war tensions, but it has been able to adapt itself according to the changing reality. Its organizational set up is such that it allows its member states a degree of flexibility while at the same time having an adequate mechanism of ensuring a minimum degree of compliance and consensus making on important issues.

REGION, REGIONALISM AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Countries occupying a common regional space often feud with one another rather than cooperate. This is clear from the presence of regional conflicts in several parts of the world. Such conflicts not only sap the energy of the conflicting states; they also affect the fortunes of other states in the region and make the entire region unstable and unattractive. This realisation, at least in some cases, has spurred the formation of regional organisations, which are based on the principle of cooperation. Paradoxically, while states jealously guard their sovereignty they are also enthusiastic about forming regional groupings that have the potential to diminish their sovereignty (as argued by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver when writing about regional security complexes). This essentially means two things: that there is some kind of trade-off between sovereignty and cooperation, and more importantly, that the viability of a regional organisation depends on the member states' ability to manage the trade-off (Sridharan, 2008). Regional organizations are essential. States within a given geographical area can more easily and effectively address common problems and are presumed to share some background and approaches. It is essential to realize that the above does not just happen, but rather conscious and deliberate efforts are expended. (Karns & Mingst, 2010)

The triggers for the creation of regional organisations are varied. They include a strong desire for reconciliation and rebuilding after a destructive war; keenness to dampen ongoing intra-regional conflicts; and a need to avoid the embarrassment of being a region devoid of a regional entity. Building a regional organisation under such fraught circumstances may be difficult but not infeasible, as demonstrated by the European states after World War II and the non-communist states of Southeast Asia in the 1960s. The South Asian experiment in regionalism, however, falls under the third category because this was one of the few regions not to have made any attempt to build a regional organisation until the 1980s (Sridharan, 2008).

Although regional organisations have not produced

uniform results across the world, they have been fairly popular as forums for engagement between proximate states. It is even suggested that in present times regionalism has become the 'central concept for organising world politics' and that regional organizations have become an important level in global governance (Katzenstein, 2003). The underlining principle was the potential of the organisations as regional order-builders and their appropriateness for handling conflicts at the formative or nascent stage. Structural, systematized frameworks for collective action at the regional level can offer an escape from the bind between unilateralism at the state level versus multilateralism at the global level. Neither states by themselves nor the UNO as the universal collective form can substitute for regional governance. Regional organizations help create webs of functional links that empower cooperative relations between the member states involved. They also help control some types of conflict between their member states and prevent them from spreading (Thakur & Langenhove, 2006). Former UNSG B. Boutros Ghali echoes these sentiments in the 1992 speech- "An Agenda for Peace".

The motivation for forming regional bodies is thus simple: neighbours are better off if they are friendly and not fractious. Regional cooperation is supposed to create the necessary atmosphere for converting foes into friends. As part of a regional arrangement there is bound to be plenty of interaction among members and, as these links become thicker, the expectation is that the incentive to use force to resolve disputes will decrease. The best illustration of this process is, of course, Europe. The remarkable result of creating a zone of peace and prosperity or 'a pluralistic security community' has acted as a stimulus for other regionalist endeavors (Deutsch, 1957). However, others are usually less enthusiastic about importing the structural or formal features of the European model because they want to retain their sovereignty intact and are therefore reluctant to create institutions with supranational authority¹. In the case of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, an informal approach without any binding legal obligations has been the preferred mode of operation (Severino, 2006).

Regional enterprises in the developing world have been about reinforcing state sovereignty and not diluting it, and therefore the trade-off element works differently in this case. This is especially so for a weaker or smaller state, as was palpable in the case of Singapore when it joined the ASEAN in 1967 and also Brunei when it entered ASEAN in 1984 as the sixth member (Weatherbee, 2005). Their rationale for membership in a regional organisation was that it was likely to provide better protection against any predatory move that might be contemplated by the regional heavyweights and/or external factors² (Leifer, 2005). Inter-

governmentalism rather than supranationalism is the hallmark of such organisations, which has important consequences for conflict resolution and dispute settlement (Sridharan, 2008).

Both ASEAN and the South Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are essentially inter-governmental arrangements, and this influences their ability to address and manage intra-regional conflicts (Sridharan, 2008).

Against this background, this paper aims to identify and explain the significant factors that have helped or hindered the effectiveness of ASEAN and SAARC in achieving their goals.

The paper argues that ASEAN has been more effective than SAARC.

Despite its weak formal mandate, ASEAN's presence has made for a more orderly Southeast Asia.

According to Muthiah Alagappa, "ASEAN facilitated the transformation of a sub-region of turmoil into a more stable and predictable area in which achieving goals is made much easier" (Alagappa, 1998).

In South Asia, on the other hand, the use of military force remains an option, as was evident in 1999 when Pakistan and India fought the Kargil War. Common membership of SAARC has not modified perceptions and behaviour of its members, whose relations are bedeviled by deep mistrust and antagonism (Gonsalves & Jetly, 1999) (Banerjee, 2002).

AN OVERVIEW OF SAARC AND ASEAN

SAARC was established on December 8, 1985 to promote the welfare of people of South Asia, to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development, strengthen collective self-reliance and to promote active collaboration in the various fields. SAARC is an initiative of Bangladesh. Initially it had seven members: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bhutan. In 2007 during the 14th summit, Afghanistan became a member of it while China, Myanmar, The United States and the European Union (EU) got the observer status of this organization (Hafeez, 2016). Within SAARC, India is the largest member state in terms of economy, size, population and military power. It has common land borders with all countries except Afghanistan, and all countries face border dispute with India.

Chakma writes that this power asymmetry breeds 'small state syndrome' among the smaller members, which inhibits formation and acceptance of common threat perception, understanding and norms. This hampers decision-making and complicates conflict management, ultimately rendering SAARC ineffective.

SAARC summit is held annually. Upto 2018, SAARC has held 19 summits and numerous of ministerial and secretarial level meetings. In each summit, the member states simply restate past declarations without actual commitments.

SAARC has got partial progress of its stated goals of enhancing trade and investment with the execution of SAPTA and SAFTA (Siddiqi, 2015).

ASEAN was formed on 8 August 1967 in order to ensure internal political solidity within member countries against both intra-regional and external intervention by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (Acharya, 1998) (Shee, 1997). Later the joining of Brunei, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia has increased the bloc. ASEAN was established in the middle of the Vietnam War (also recognized as the Second Indochina War) in 1967 against the growing potential threat of communist-led insurgency (Ginsberg, 2009). Therefore, in the beginning, ASEAN was seen as an anti-communist block. During

ASEAN's establishment, the region suffered underdevelopment, long-standing instability, and inter-state clashes (Karim, 2019). The original situations is described by Thambipillai & Saravanamutta as follows:

“When the original five members of the organization – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand –signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, they had little in common apart from climate and natural resources and somewhat similar ideological orientation. Apart from diversity in language, religion, and ethnic identity, these nations were isolated from each other politically and economically (linked separately to western metropolis) despite geographical and semblance of cultural bonds.” (Thambipillai & Saravanamutta, 1985)

The key aims of ASEAN are to speed up cooperation in the economic growth, socio-cultural development in the region and to uphold regional peace and solidity through adhering to the values of United Nations Charter, respect for justice and spirit of the rule of law. The ASEAN summit is usually held once in two years (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010).

Though South Asian countries share strong cultural similarities between themselves, they're marred by the presence of boundless disparities. The eight countries of SAARC are not equal in terms of status, population, size, and ownership of natural resources and the level of economic growth. Such types contrasts are not favorable to the progress of regional collaboration in South Asia (Grover, 1997). On the other hand, ASEAN members are not marked with such sharp disparities (Karim, 2019).

COMPARING ASEAN AND SAARC

1. PRINCIPLES OF SAARC AND ASEAN

There are no fundamental differences in the guiding principles of the two organizations in question.

ASEAN³: (as taken from the ASEAN website- (ASEAN, n.d.).)

1. ASEAN Member States shall act in accordance with the following fundamental principles, as enclosed in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976:

1. Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and national identity of all nations;
2. Every member state has the right to lead its national existence free from outside intervention, subversion, and oppression;
3. The right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion;
4. Non-interference in the internal matters of ASEAN Member Countries;
5. Dependence on a peaceful settlement of disputes or differences;
6. Renunciation of threat or use of force
7. Effective cooperation among the ASEAN member states (ASEAN, n.d.).

SAARC: (as taken from the SAARC website (SAARC, n.d.))

Like ASEAN, four such rules were enclosed in the first meeting of the foreign secretaries of SAARC member countries-

1. Co-operation within the framework of the SAARC on the basis of respect for the values of sovereign equality, political independence, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal matters of other states and mutual benefits.
2. Decisions at all stages of SAARC to be taken based on unanimity.
3. Bilateral and contentious issues are omitted from the SAARC discussions.
4. Regional co-operation should not be a substitute or inconsistent with bilateral or multilateral obligation but could complement both (SAARC, n.d.).

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

In the SAARC, the decision is based on “unanimity”, which allows any member veto power to refuse any aspect or area that it considers ‘unharmonious’ with its national interest⁴. Moreover, the charter of SAARC has a provision that states that bilateral and contentions issues “are prohibited from being discussed at SAARC summits”. Undoubtedly, bilateral disputes are the main troublesome factor for the

ineffectiveness of SAARC. If the members are not allowed to negotiate their bilateral disputes frankly and widely, the socio-economic objectives will not be achieved (Karim, 2019).

SAARC members are different in power, size, and economic strength and have contentious border disputes with one another. These hamper unanimous decision-making (Shaheen, 2013). Moreover, there have been no initiatives to amend provisions related to discussions on bilateral disputes.

In such circumstances, SAARC cannot run soundly, and can't effectively achieve its objectives.

In ASEAN, decisions are based on "Consensus", which means that cooperation can only progress when it is seen as comfortable to all. Not all members of ASEAN are needed to agree with the proposal under discussion. What is needed is the approval of "most number of member nations" (ASEAN documents do not cite a specific number). It is also required that no member votes against it (Severino, 2006). ASEAN follows "consensus minus X principle as the ASEAN Way" which means a member country is allowed to give up participation in a plan or scheme without impeding others. For instance, ASEAN Free Trade Area was set up by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, whereas comparatively less developed countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam were granted more time to enforce the reforms. In case of a deadlock wherein there is a diversity of opinions and interests among governing leaders, along with unresolved territorial disputes and political differences, members have an option to go for bilateral negotiations (Feraru, 2015). Thus, decisions are reached at via in/formal consultations between governments. Consensus is the critical element in ASEAN's decision-making process. In Diane Mauzy's words:

"Along with the decision making norms are several consensus techniques: First, no issue is put onto the agenda unless all agree to it. Divisive issues that arise anyway are shelved for future discussion if no consensus emerges. Second, the members agree to disagree and present a united front publicly. Third, there is a process of slow deliberations involving consultation, compromise and concessions. Fourth, and important, the member most vitally concerned with an issue is allowed to take the lead, and the views of the 'lead state' carry considerable weight. Finally, although it was originally decided that bilateral conflicts should be resolved in-house through a High Council, the practice of outside third-party mediation has evolved as less risky to ASEAN harmony." (Mauzy, 2000)

INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE

Intra-regional trade in goods in South Asia amounts to USD 23 Billion currently, but, according to the World Bank report, "it could be worth \$67 Billion". This wide gap

between actual and potential trade arises due to discrimination of South Asian Countries among each other (World Bank, 2018). There are many causes for low this; one of the most important reasons is the higher cost of trade within South Asia in comparison to other regions. The average tariff is over and above double in South Asia compared with the world average. The average tariffs were 13.6 percent in South Asia in 2016, whereas the world average tariffs were 6.3 percent (World Bank, 2018). Due to lack of proper transportation system, logistics infrastructure, and complex as well as non-transparent non-tariff measures drives the excessively high costs of trading in South Asia. For instance, Sri Lanka needs to spend more money to trade with Nepal than with Brazil (World Bank, 2018). SAARC countries required average 106 hours for imports within the region whereas ASEAN countries need only average 83 hours (Hasan, Malik, Khan & Anwar, 2017). In spite of the existence of the SAFTA (Free Trade Area), trading within the region is not free. This has happened mainly for the long sensitive lists of products, which were not incorporated under the concessional tariff of SAFTA. In the case of Bangladesh, approximately 46 percent of its imports from the South Asia region flow into sensitive lists (World Bank, 2018). In Sri Lanka, almost 44 percent of imports and 23 percent of its exports to the region falls under the sensitive list. South Asian countries impose high tariffs and para-tariffs, inspite of tariff liberalization under SAFTA (Karim, 2019). Moreover, SAFTA contains Article 14, stating that 'nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to prevent any Contracting State from taking action and adopting measures which it considers necessary for the protection of its national security' while leaving some room in the interpretation of what might constitute an issue of national security (Ahmed, 2011).

Economic cooperation among ASEAN members is an important objective. It launched many policy measures in the 1970's and 1980's- AIP, AIC, AIJV and Preferential Tariff Agreements (1977). 6 members formed AFTA in 1992 (later ratified by the remaining). It follows the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) regime. It has minimum tariffs in the internal market. And has expanded cooperation to services, finance and investment. Under AFTA ASEAN has achieved a high GDP to investment and GDP to export ratios, they are highly technical and skilled economies with elaborate communication and transport infrastructure.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

One of the vital reasons for setting up ASEAN and SAARC was mitigation of conflicts in the respective regions.

SAARC was not able to effectively mitigate conflicts, while ASEAN was more successful (even though in comparison, ASEAN members were faced with more conflicts, as they had to deal with issues related to conglomeration of islands,

nuclear laws and maritime boundaries.). There are many explanations to this: -

1. Some think while ASEAN members faced an external threat i.e., communism, South Asian countries have an internal threat-India.
2. Nevertheless, ASEAN members had boundary disputes with one other, but they decided to “brush them under the carpet. Thus, attitude of relegating such disputes to the backburner is a hallmark of the ASEAN Way. For example, ASEAN consensus was challenged due to the Philippines-Malaysia clash over Sabah, but the founding nations got a peaceful way to lessen opposing claims.

ASEAN members have abstained from displaying visible antagonism against each other and have attempted to resolve discord via cooperation, negotiation, and engagement. While ASEAN was denounced for accepting Myanmar despite its military rule, the organization thought that keeping open channels for communication and engagement with Myanmar was a better way of influencing the regime (Archana, 2017). This is not the case with SAARC countries. The attitude is- ‘conflicts come before cooperation’.

Hoang Anh Tuan (1996) argued ASEAN has succeeded in dispute management as it applies five techniques:

1. Adherence to the basic rules, regulations, and declarations of ASEAN
- 2.They are emphasizing the virtue of will power
3. To resolve disputes sometimes using third party mediation
4. A decision is based on consultation (musyawarah) and consensus (mufakat)
5. Agreeing to defer disagreements for a future settlement.

ASEAN’s conflict-management approach falls in the conflict- prevention category, by which is meant that disputes have not escalated to the level where force is used. One of the main criticisms against ASEAN states is that they are content with sidestepping rather than resolving or settling a conflict. But they see merit in their minimalist approach because it has kept the region free of violent confrontations between member states⁵. The fact that unresolved conflicts have not erupted into wars is attributed to ASEAN’s presence, the intra-regional harmony it has engendered and its unique way of combining formal and informal mechanisms to address regional issues⁶ (Iqbal, 2006) (Sridharan, 2008). The bilateral conflicts mainly involve referring territorial disputes to international bodies⁷.

The ASEAN process is not a typical conflict-resolution mechanism, but it has evolved as a conflict-avoidance technique relying on softer elements like regional understanding and trust rather than on formalised, rules-based instrumentalities⁸ (Karim, 2019).

In SAARC’s case there are no comparable formal or informal methods to prevent or contain violent conflicts. All SAARC decisions are based on unanimity and Article X (2) of the charter expressly excludes bilateral and contentious issues from being discussed in SAARC’ (Sridharan, 2008). Also, SAARC members are more often than not reluctant about approaching third party mechanisms in resolving their disputes⁹. The emphasis lays heavily on resolving disputes within the context of bilateral relations of the countries party to the dispute. This attitude is especially adopted by India, Muni states, as it feels that it can be exploited within a multilateral framework. Smaller states of the region, instead, reiterate the need for having a formal multilateral framework for resolving disputes. For example, the recent abrogation of Article 370 prompted Pakistan to clamor for internationalizing the J&K issue, while India remained firm that the issue must be resolved within a bilateral framework.

It can be said that SAARC is plagued by bilateral unfriendliness and the wicked legacy of partition. Since political issues are inseparable from economic issues, economic cooperation has been stalled due to political frostiness among the SAARC nations (Karim, 2019).

The charter is a minimalist document, and its only virtue is that it makes SAARC a legal entity. The need for conflict management through cooperation is obvious but the commitment is lacking (Sridharan, 2008).

SAARC is a victim of two irreconcilable notions underlying regional cooperation. Some members believe that without achieving peace and security in the region and without providing for any mechanism to resolve bilateral conflicts, it is pointless to expect meaningful progress in regional cooperation. Pakistan adopts this view and would prefer the charter to be amended to correct this shortcoming (Cheema, 1999). To some extent, Sri Lanka also sees merit in this line of thinking¹⁰ (Sridharan, 2008).

In contrast, India is steadfastly against any change in the present arrangement. It sees no reason for amending the charter and is convinced that more harm than good will result from any alteration of the provisions that forbid the inclusion of contentious issues¹¹. Bangladesh is also of the same opinion (The Hindu, 2005).

Despite these strong positions on the charter, SAARC occasionally uses a looser arrangement to discuss bilateral problems. The ‘retreats’ that occur during the annual summits have been used, from time to time, to address some of the differences between member states. Bilateral meetings on the sidelines of summits have also been used for this purpose. They have occasionally helped lower the temperature, such as after the 1998 nuclear explosions, even if no concrete settlement of disputes has occurred in the process. However, thus far the ‘retreats’ have mainly addressed economic or

functional issues only (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010) (Sridharan, 2008).

Nuclear Free Zone

ASEAN five original members met in Malaysia and signed Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) declaration on November 27, 1971, to keep the region free from external interference and broaden cooperation in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's ultimate target was the establishment of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. In 1995, the head of government of 10 ASEAN member states signed the Southeast Asian Nuclear Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaty in Bangkok for establishing a nuclear weapon free region. The Philippines ratified it on June 21, 2001 and after that all nuclear weapons were effectively banned in the region. Therefore, this treaty was a huge step towards the development of peace and harmony in the long run as well towards global nuclear disarmament (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010).

SAARC has been unsuccessful in upholding a balance between political, economic and military interests of member states. Whereas ASEAN declared East Asia is a nuclear-free zone, two South Asian countries are nuclear powers. In May 1998, both India and Pakistan tested their nuclear weapons (in the name of national security), which intensified their hostility and exacerbated regional tension. This was reflected in almost every SAARC summit (Dwivedi, 2003).

ROLE OF PIVOTAL STATE

The role of a region's pre-eminent power in ensuring R. O's effectiveness is very important.

The odd thing about SAARC is that it's an initiative of a smaller state of the region- Bangladesh. At the formative stage, India fretted that the forum could be used by the other states to exert their combined pressure on India on certain pertinent issues (Dixit, 1996). There was also a feeling that behind the regional initiative lurked an unseen external hand, which could prove injurious to Indian interests (Muni, 1996).

India's disenchantment with SAARC continues. This is because its vision of regionalism clashes with that of its rival Pakistan (as explained in the earlier sub-section). Sensing the impossibility of bringing about a change in the situation, India has turned its attention away from SAARC to other trans-regional forums¹².

Indo-Pak rivalry is one of the main reasons behind the sub-standard performance of SAARC. There are several unresolved issues between them such as Kashmir, Nuclear arms race, Siachen Glacier, cross-border terrorism etc. Moreover, India has accused Pakistan of providing support to cross border terrorism (Karim, 2019). The growing mistrust between the two countries has hampered SAARC's activities (Nahar, 1991). From 1985 to 2016, only eighteen Summits

have been held and, fourteen have been postponed because of the rejection of the member countries to join participate. Among these, 8 summits were cancelled due to India-Pakistan tensions (Ahmad, 2017).

On the other hand, Southeast Asia's pivotal power, Indonesia, was keen to create a mechanism through which a process of regional reconciliation could take place after the *Konfrontasi* with Malaysia in 1964 (Leifer, 1983). The ASEAN vehicle made it possible for post-Sukarno Indonesia to be accommodated as an unthreatening regional leader. For this purpose, it was willing to adopt a non-assertive profile and nurture the regional organisation (Weatherbee, 2005). ASEAN figured high in Indonesia's foreign policy and this gradually bolstered the regional organisation's clout.

One might say that even a diminished Indonesia is able to steer the Association in efficient manner. This is highly unlikely in South Asia where India is reluctant to exert itself either because it sees no point in doing so or because it feels that an Indian initiative will not find enough regional support (Sridharan, 2008) (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010).

ASYMMETRY AND ITS EFFECT ON REGIONAL ORGANISATION

Asymmetry is the rule in most regions and is a cause of anxiety among regional states.

But not all asymmetries are alike. The gap in the size and capability of states in some regions may not be as threateningly wide as in others. Occasionally, the physical size of a big state can be offset by the economic strength of a smaller state. For instance, Indonesia is the ASEAN's largest state (Table 1), but it lacks the affluence of its small neighbour, Singapore. So, Indonesia may not appear as threatening as India might in South Asia where the power differential between the largest state and others is wide across all dimensions (Sridharan, 2008).

Asymmetry is a major issue in intra-regional relations in South Asia. India's sheer size is seen as domineering whether or not it behaves so (Chari, 1997). Moreover, India towers over all its neighbours in almost all indicators. India's neighbours feel that its role is critical for the success of regionalism but only if it adopts a benign, low profile style of functioning. India is perceived as a regional bully (Sabur & Kabir, 2000). This is seen as being ultimately harmful to India's own interests because it is felt that without securing the region India's quest for global power status is unachievable (Sridharan, 2008). Additionally, India's neighbours suffer from the 'small state syndrome', wherein each move and decision taken by India is perceived as harmful to their national interests. The recent amendment in Article 370 regarding the status of Jammu and Kashmir was seen as dangerous to the territorial aspirations and interests of

Pakistan. Additionally, India feels that adopting a low profile might come across as a sign of weakness and in such a situation India might be taken advantage of. Moreover, the general sentiment in India is that no matter what decisions it takes, it always will be perceived negatively¹³. Such attitudes naturally diminish the potential of SAARC and make it an irrelevant regional actor (Sridharan, 2008).

LEADERSHIP

Regional organisations are largely elite-driven projects.

As mentioned earlier, Indonesia was the lead state, which placed enormous importance on the success of ASEAN and deliberately adopted a low profile to ensure this. Indonesia sought to project itself as a peaceful, moderate, and responsible partner in the region and beyond (Leifer, 1983). Regional integration was perceived as an instrument to raise peaceful, cooperative dealings with Indonesia's neighbours. Hence, Indonesia was eager to take up the role of a trustworthy regional leader (Iqbal, 2006). Among the ASEAN leaders President Suharto's role and standing had a positive impact. Similarly, smaller states of ASEAN were also willing to mingle and cooperate with Indonesia. For example, in 1968, Singapore hanged two Indonesian commandoes but Indonesia's response was non-aggressive in spite of peoples' demonstration in Jakarta. In turn, as a reconciliatory gesture, Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew visited Indonesia in 1973 (Rahman, 2011).

Even now most of the leaders in the region accord a high place to ASEAN and treat it as their first order foreign policy interest (Ong, 2005).

As against this, SAARC is not a priority for South Asian states and apart from the enthusiasm shown by President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh, who initiated the move towards SAARC, no other leader of consequence has propelled the organisation forward. This is the case even now, and therefore SAARC continues to languish (Falak, 2017). A Nepali scholar on regionalism blames South Asian elites for purposely widening the rift between the member states because of 'xenophobic considerations' and their desperation to 'mobilise their support base or play to the galleries', which harms the environment for cooperation and the success of regionalism (Baral, 2003). The leaders have not yet made a full cost benefit analysis of advantages of cooperating and disadvantages of not cooperating. A lack of political will is fairly visible. There exists red tapism, burgeoning paperwork and bureaucratic hassles at every level due to which time period of work keeps expanding (Irum, 2013).

A recent article, published in 'The Dollar Business' 2016, by Dr. A.K. Sengupta emphasises that- "... a meaningful cooperation can materialise only when there is

mutual trust and willingness among member countries to resolve and overcome bilateral differences and apprehensions for the greater good of their own people."

SHARED PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES

One of the reasons for ASEAN's consolidation in its formative decade was a common threat perception. The concern about the spread of communism acted as a glue to bind the member states and subsequently gave international visibility to the Association when it opposed Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. Over time, there developed a common commitment to ensure a harmonious and peaceful regional order. This formed the bedrock of what is famously called the 'ASEAN way' of handling inter-state relations (Acharya, 2000). This is understood as internalisation of certain behavioural norms and acting in accordance with the ASEAN spirit. The 'ASEAN way' refers to a regional political culture that stresses informality, consensus building and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states (Capie & Evans, 2002). These shared values and the pursuit of harmony, based on an inter-subjective understanding of certain norms at the regional level, have been ASEAN's noteworthy features.

By contrast, South Asian countries hold widely divergent views on many important issues and lack a common political culture. There is no consensus on fundamental norms or values. Despite sharing certain common civilizational links, the member states cannot agree on a common future. For a long time, South Asia was a 'region without regionalism' (Hewitt, 1992)

The pursuit of economic and developmental cooperation as a means to lift the region out of poverty should have been the driving force but there have no substantial efforts. Neither neo-liberal nor neo-realist proclivities are evident in regional thinking, particularly on the part of the political elites. At best they were, and remain, "reluctant regionalists" lacking a common threat perception and shared values (Muni, 1996).

REMARKS ON SAARC'S PROGRESS

"Despite its existence since the 1980s, SAARC has been unable to achieve its objects due to several reasons. It has not been able to increase trade between the member states despite the promulgation of SAFTA. Many of the SAARC members' largest trade partners are not fellow South Asian nations. SAARC has been unable to implement its plans for regional welfare leaving much of the population in adverse socioeconomic conditions. The region is home to the world's 400 million poor people, which means nearly 30 per cent of the region's population lives below the poverty line. More than 350 million people lack safe drinking water. More than 840 million people are without proper sanitation and 400

million people go hungry every day. India and Pakistan spend 30 billion dollars on their defense expenditure and the region is highly militarized. New member country, Afghanistan, has been facing war for years now. It becomes highly difficult for an organization facing all these problems combined to move towards prosperity. All the SAARC countries have a rather low ranking on the human development index (HDI), which according to the Human Development Report 2016 is: Sri Lanka (73), the Maldives (104), India (130), Bhutan (132), Pakistan (147), Bangladesh (142), and Nepal (145). The low HDI ranking reflects poorly on these vital indicators in the region. Tensions between member states leave space for external powers to intervene in South Asian politics. It can be asserted that much of the SAARC's failures are rooted in a variety of reasons." (Falak, 2017) It is clearly evident that there is a lack of common vision to move ahead.

Irum Shaheen in his paper titled- "South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC): Its Roles, Hurdles and Prospects"- lists major challenges facing the organization. Some of them are listed below as follows: -

- **Interstate disputes in South Asia:** They all feel a threat from their neighboring countries in terms of social, political and territorial stability.
- **Unstable Financial Position:** There is a great trade imbalance in the member countries, which is accompanied by weak financial position of the member countries. Most of the member states are financially not very strong and indulge in the export of similar kind of goods. This trade is also dominated mostly by one country i.e., India. Instead of complementing each other, the member states compete with each other on trade and other aspects.
- **Asymmetry between member states and India:** as explained above, India towers over its neighbours in all major aspects which leaves the smaller countries feeling uncomfortable. It is also a common perception that all other countries cannot move ahead without India as it is at the center and forms the connection between all these countries. Also, all the member countries look up to India for trade and other business activities because of its location, enormous size and market. 80% of intra-regional trade in South Asia is either to or from India. This leads to the perception of India as the regional bully. (Muni, 2012)
- **Ignoring Contentious Issues:** such issues have been kept out of the Charter. The charter requires that all the decisions be taken unanimously but how is that possible with member countries carrying their disputes around all the time.
- **Different Political systems:** South Asia has never seen a combined strong proposition for democracy. Most of these countries have remained unstable. One or the other country has some or the other issue with the other SAARC member.

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** The reason that all the member states look for markets globally is because these countries have similar features like cheap labor, low income, low value-added commodities and comparative advantages in similar commodities like tea and garments etc.

ANALYSIS

According to Hurrell, many political, security and economic factors lie behind the formation and functioning of regional organizations.

1. The first factor that can be analyzed here is 'Identity' (both internal and external). Historical experience can create a shared identity. However due to many factors such as cold war divisions, multiple wars, Partitions, different religions, this shared identity has not been able to solidify in SAARC.
2. Another factor that can be analyzed here is the shared sense of threats- both internal and external. As discussed above SAARC does not discuss bilateral issues as a result no shared understanding and agreement can effectively emerge on what and who, in what capacity constitutes a threat.
3. Domestic politics and regional organizations affect one another. As seen above SAARC remains handicapped because the domestic politics of member countries either see SAARC as useless or see it as a vested organization. Thus, cooperation never emerges.
4. Leadership is also important and as seen, there is not much enthusiasm about SAARC in any of the member states' leaders, who are ready to boycott SAARC due to bilateral and vested reasons.
5. As far as economic integration goes, SAFTA has majorly been a failure not only due to many loopholes, but also because SAARC is under serious resource crunch. (Gunasinghe & Abesinghe, 2017).

Ravenhill, clears the picture here by saying that "no clear correlation exists between levels of interdependence between economies, measured by relative importance of bilateral trade flows, and the emergence of economic regionalism...no critical threshold of regional economic interdependence exists below which regionalism never occurs and above which such collaboration takes place. Growing interdependence may generate increased pressures for governments to collaborate, but such collaboration doesn't result automatically". This clearly sums up the situation with SAARC. (Ravenhill, 2001)

In general it can be said that SAARC's suffers from the same maladies and symptoms that Asian regionalism in particular suffers from (as stated by Karns and Mingst): -

1. Cold war divisions eg. Pakistan was a part of CENTO and formally aligned with USA, however, India had signed a

friendship treaty with USSR. This led to intense hostilities in the Indian Subcontinent and prohibited the development of any shared strategic or diplomatic understanding and perspective in South Asia

2. There is immense cultural diversity e.g. While Sri Lanka is a Buddhist state, Nepal was a Hindu Kingdom, Pakistan was an Islamic country and India was secular. Moreover, Bangladesh was created in 1971 due to the difference of culture between East and West Pakistan. Bhutan remains till date a monarchy. In such diversity dialogue gets difficult.
3. South Asian diversity is also extending to the levels of development in each country and thus they have different needs and priorities which complicates consensus decision making, which, is one of the cornerstones of SAARC
4. The circumstances under which the countries came into existence or rather gained independence. Thus, these countries lack an experience of cooperation. Rather they continue to view each other on relative footing.
5. The presence of external power. This has always been the case. During the cold war it was the USA and USSR whereas now it is China. Eg Nepal is very skillfully using China to constrain India's hegemony in the region and to get India to work in a manner favorable to Nepal.

Adding on to this is the fact that many Asian countries were in fact European colonies and got independence only after WW2. This has left them strongly attached to state sovereignty and suspicious of new forms of dependency or perceived domination. (Karns & Mingst, 2010) This is the reason why for the most part regional institutions in the Asian region tend to be informal with few specific rules, no binding commitments, small secretariats and an emphasis on consensus. (Woods, 1993)

According to a report by World Bank, South Asia is one of the world's politically and economically least integrated regimes, as well as the most violent. The recent Pulwama attack and Balatkot strikes show how the SAARC has been rendered impotent in such debilitating circumstances. As stated above regional cooperation is not natural; conscious efforts and policies along with strong political leadership are required. South Asian leaders recognise regionalism's mediating effect on the tenor of intra-regional relations. They are well aware that ASEAN's presence has done wonders for that region and hence they admire ASEAN. They want to benefit from ASEAN's lessons. But so far, their efforts show very little in common with the experience in Southeast Asia. A stable regional environment is desired by all of them, but there is no commitment to observe the basic neighborly courtesies without which such an environment cannot be created. The countries need to stop viewing each other in zero sum game terms and instead all must take a leap forward. Increasing people to people contacts and compulsory regular meetings

and conferences with strict rules in place can facilitate this. Otherwise, Freidman's sentiment of South Asia being a "self-contained" island will continue to hold true.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The difference between the South Asian and Southeast Asian regional enterprises is similar to the distinction drawn by Hedley Bull between a "system of states" and a "society of states" in the international realm. ASEAN is society-like, whereas SAARC retains all the sharp edges of a *system of states* despite two decades of organisational life. SAARC members are unwilling to embrace the practices of a society of states in terms of subscribing to certain essential norms, rules, agreements and common interests leading to a more secure regional environment. Here ASEAN scores much above SAARC and has been relatively effective as a regional society of states and a *de facto* security community (Sridharan, 2008). The main reason for this, as explained above, is that unlike ASEAN member states, SAARC countries are products of colonial rule and a bloody partition. Additionally, India, as the pivotal state in the region towers above the rest of the states in all respects. This fuels the 'small state syndrome'. However, S.D Muni states that unlike Indonesia, India didn't adopt a low profile to allay the fears of neighboring states. India subscribes to what he calls the 'Marwari psyche' i.e. an equal give and take relationship. This, however, is not possible as the rest of the countries lag behind India in all respects. India's stress on a bilateral framework leads to the perception among the rest of the countries that it wants them to remain indebted to India and that it could become a channel for India to interfere in their domestic affairs. The recent blockade by India due to Nepal's stance towards the Madheshi people is a case in this point. As a result, the countries are reluctant of adopting norms that are endorsed by India and tend to go the opposite way. India on the other hand feels that a multilateral framework and common norms as endorsed by smaller states will become a mechanism of 'entrapping and exploiting it'. Regionalism in South Asia has thus, neither contributed to creating a security framework nor has it contributed to creating developmental complementarities. South Asia remains a peripheral region (Sahasrabudde, 2010). In contrast, ASEAN Way has contributed towards ASEAN's success of creating a viable security community in Southeast Asia. It has emerged as a more coherent region as the flexible and informal mechanisms in ASEAN has made it possible for the member states to adapt themselves to post-Cold-War era politics circumscribed by globalization.

SAARC members on the other hand lack a coherent vision to navigate themselves in the contemporary era as a unified bloc. This because they all lack common perceptions, hence, their understanding of issues is quite different from

each other; often contradictory to each other. Intra-regional trade, in the region, it can be argued, has not flourished, not only because that the economies have the same needs and resource crunch, but because their understanding of the de/merits of intra-regional trade are very different from each other. Smaller states in the region, especially, Pakistan views it as a way for India to dominate the region, whereas India takes a neo-liberal view of the issue.

Sumit Ganguly aptly points that the SAARC member states are built on mutually exclusive identities, wherein, the commonality of language, religion and civilizational links are either negated or made an issue of deep-rooted suspicion and conflict. As a result, SAARC has not been able to achieve much, while, ASEAN has grown and progressed since its inception. ASEAN members present a unified front in the international fora and do not view each other in zero-sum games. This is aided by the fact that they all have a common external enemy- communism in Cold War era and now, China. SAARC states on the other hand lack a common enemy. Instead, they involve external players in regional affairs to hedge against India. Nepal and Pakistan, for example, have effectively used China to counter-balance India in a region where it considers itself as the regional hegemon.

This lack of unity shows across various indicators in all reports. South Asia as a region lags behind Southeast Asia on all accounts.

CONCLUSION

Kenneth Oye in his work "Explaining cooperation under anarchy" (1986) has given many strategies for increasing cooperation in the international arena in the context of absence of trust among countries. These strategies are highly useful when one seeks to come up with recommendations to increase cooperation among member states of SAARC. Oye suggests that the risks of defection (he applied the principles of Prisoner's Dilemma, Stag Hunt and Chicken) should be increased so that the option of defecting upon commitments and promises becomes unattractive. The global nature of issues facing the world at present already rule out individual solutions. Thus, it has become imperative for the member states to co-operate despite their mutual suspicions. Confidence building measures and mutual arbitration should therefore become the rule of the thumb to facilitate co-operation.

For this to happen a serious change of attitude is required by all member states. However, the onus falls on India more than any other state and India is not only the most powerful country in the region, but also one of the most powerful countries in the world. Realization thus, must set in that; a shift is required from bilateral strategies to increased focus on multilateralism. (Oye, 1986)

"SAARC, as a regional forum, has great potential, but this potential of regional cooperation cannot be realised without strong bilateral linkages. Given the asymmetry inherent in the geographical, economic and strategic dimensions of the eight member countries, meaningful cooperation can materialise only when there is mutual trust and willingness among member countries to resolve and overcome bilateral differences and apprehensions for the greater good of their own people." (Sengupta, 2016). "A variety of issues have led to an undermining of its effectiveness and performance. It is vital for the region that the organisation is strengthened. Whatever the flaws of the SAARC so far maybe it is the only platform where the local leaders meet and discuss issues of a region containing 1.6 billion people. It is up to the SAARC leaders to work together for a developed, peaceful and prosperous South Asia." (Falak, 2017) Regional awareness rarely exists naturally, however, and even if it does, may not lead to regional cooperation unless states work to make the best of their regional environment. (Fawcett & Hurrell, 1995)

ASEAN can be a good example for SAARC.

The ASEAN Regional Forum was created in 1994 to foster dialogue, promote confidence building, and adopt preventive diplomacy. A similar forum for SAARC will not only create room for deliberations but also bolster the fragile diplomatic relations. Taking cue from ASEAN, SAARC must first capitalize on less contentious issues. Short-term success will create the momentum to work on long-term goals of regional connectivity, resource sharing, and investment. A good start can be adopting a 'South Asia First' policy; making SAARC countries import products first from within the region. For example, major garment-manufacturing countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka import more than 80% of raw materials from outside SAARC, even though India and Pakistan are net exporters in this sector (Khasru, 2014).

In an interview with Suhasini Haider, Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani said that SAARC could learn from ASEAN's experience: ".....the one big lesson from ASEAN is that having regular meetings makes a huge difference to trust levels. I attended the initial ASEAN meetings with five countries in 1971, and the level of distrust was very high. Twenty years of meetings later, there was a world of difference. SAARC should consciously study ASEAN and build a habit of regular meetings at all levels. ASEAN has 1000 meetings a year on all kinds of issues. Health, infections, pandemics, are a common problem, for example. SAARC must build on these common areas.... countries can change their behaviour because they become part of a regional coalition.... they have a massive trade and investment relationship.... This is what India must do with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives etc. Integrate them so closely economically, that they will always have to consider

India's views...it is important for leaders and officials of countries to spend time together, because that is an important way to understand our commonalities and to break down the animosities that two countries feel. In addition, as the biggest country in the region, India should study Indonesia's role in ASEAN. President Suharto was wise enough to say, we will let the smaller countries of ASEAN run the group, and took a backseat, and that is something India could try to do. Maybe sometimes that group will take decisions you don't like, but eventually the group will come closer together." (Mahbubdani, 2018)

Indeed, leaders will need Himalayan heights of vision and courage to make SAARC a success (Khasru, 2014).

NOTES

1. Amitav Acharya, a renowned scholar on contemporary regionalism, claims that regionalism can be of two types, 'sovereignty eroding' and 'sovereignty based'. Unlike European Regionalism, which has had sovereignty eroding effects on the region, regionalism in both South Asia and Southeast Asia is sovereignty based. Most states in both regions continue to be wary of all such external factors that are perceived as obviously eroding their own 'sovereignty'. (Acharya Amitav, 2003) (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010)

2. Developing countries see regional organizations as a safety valve, saving them from the rigorous pressures of the global economy as well as furthering development by providing controlled, larger markets. As time has passed, regional fora have become avenues for the emergence of regional leaders of the developing world to coordinate their responses to issues like climate change, nuclear proliferation and what not and come together as a block in the UN General Assembly to challenge the hegemony of the P5 (Mishra, 2016).

3. These principles reiterate the spirit of both the UN Charter and the "Dasa Sala" (Ten Principles) of Asian-African Conference, Bandung. The treaty provides for a ministerial-level High Council which is required to 'take cognizance' of a dispute that cannot be settled through direct negotiations and recommend 'appropriate means of settlement' or measures to prevent the situation from deteriorating (Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), 1976). The Treaty was amended in December 1987 and opened to accession by states outside the region. Another treaty signed in December 1995 called the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty reiterate similar goals (ASEAN, n.d.). In addition to promoting peace and stability in the region, this treaty is ASEAN's contribution to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010).

4. However, there is no explanation about what is meant by national interest. It's a subjective concept with

shifting contours, to be adjusted to the needs and perceptions of the leaders involved. This is a major impediment in reaching unanimity as national interest can be invoked for petty reasons, thereby hampering progress.

5. But it is not as if there are no formal instruments to manage conflict in the ASEAN region. Apart from the founding document (1967 Bangkok Declaration), which was not a charter but only a declaration, there are other agreements and treaties that have a strong bearing on security and regional cooperation. These are the ASEAN Concord, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC, 1976), the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality declaration (ZOPFAN, 1971), the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ, 1995), the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, 1992 (a non-binding code to constrain China's behaviour over rival maritime claims), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF, 1996), the Rules and Procedures of the High Council on the TAC (2001), and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2002). The formal and informal elements present in some of these instruments are intertwined and they cumulate in a network of arrangements aimed at keeping the region safe, stable and peaceful. (Sridharan, 2008) (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010) (Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), 1976)

6. Water treaties Between Singapore and Malaysia, Temasek Holdings' investment in the Thai telcom Shin Corp between Singapore and Thailand, dispute between Thailand and Cambodia over the ownership of the famous Preah Vihear temple- it is observed that conflicts were effectively managed through the informal and quiet diplomacy in the South East Asian region (Rahman, 2011) (Karim, 2019)

7. like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and abiding by its decision. Disputes have also been referred to the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea as Singapore and Malaysia did when they disagreed in 2003 about the former's land reclamation project. Following the Tribunal's award the two countries signed a Settlement agreement in 2005 and the dispute was amicably resolved (Sahasrabuddhe, 2010)

8. The founders of ASEAN did not mention regional security openly, but it was a palpable concern. Even so, no authority structures above the state were envisaged to bring about regional reconciliation or meet the various threats. What these states desired was a non- confrontational regional environment, a greater predictability in inter-state relations and conflict amelioration without having to construct any formal and rigid structures. (Karim, 2019) (Khan, 2012) (Sridharan, 2008)

9. There are some exceptions like the Rann of Kutch dispute between India and Pakistan, which was submitted to arbitration in 1965, and the Indus Water Treaty of 1960, but such processes are unlikely to be repeated now.

10. Expressing reservations about the approach followed in SAARC, President Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka remarked at the Tenth Summit that even though contentious issues must be kept away from SAARC's deliberations, 'regional cooperation without some kind of political consultation will be rather tame' (Hindu- International Edition, August 8, 1998).

11. In early 2005, then Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran candidly outlined India's hopes and fears for the future of South Asian regionalism and emphasised that the economic road to cooperation was the best option given the irreconcilable political and security perceptions within the region (Saran 2005). Through cross-border economic linkages India, he said, wanted to reduce the level of mistrust, but this could not be done if its neighbours used SAARC 'as a vehicle primarily to countervail India or to seek to limit its room for maneuver' (Saran, 2005).

12. Now that it has a vibrant economy, countries outside its region are courting it and India's interest in SAARC has proportionately dropped (Yahoo! India News, 2005). Its growing economic ties with its neighboring Southeast Asian and East Asian regions indicate this (Sridharan, 2008).

13. Amrita Chitalkar discusses at length about how this 'prickly' attitude of India ultimately weakens its negotiating strength across all forums, especially in WTO and NPT regime (Chitalkar & Malone, 2015).

14. SAARC's establishment in 1985 owed much to a failure on the part of some of the South Asian countries to find a berth in their preferred adjacent regions, such as Pakistan in West Asia or Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in Southeast Asia. Since they could not pull this off their attention turned to their own geographical area (Muni, 1996).

15. Even the 2007 targets have been met. The recent Pulwama attack delivered another blow to SAFTA as India withdrew MFN status from Pakistan.

16. In 1977, Bull published his main work, *The Anarchical Society*. In this book, he argues that despite the anarchical character of the international arena, it is characterised by the formation of not only a system of states, but also a society of states. States form a system when they have a sufficient degree of interaction, and impact on each other's decisions, so as they "behave — at least in some measure — as parts of a whole." A system of states can exist without it also being a society of states. A society of states comes into existence "when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions." (Bull, 1977)

17. as can be studied from the 2 Tables given in the end of the paper

18. India is divided into different administrative zones. Northern Zone consists of Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan. North East Zone consists of eight states of North East India, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. Central Zone comprises Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh. Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal falls under Eastern Zone. Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Goa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra come under Western Zone. Southern Zone consists of Southern states of India such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. Although Andaman and Nicobar Island and Lakshadweep do not fall under any zone, they are the special invitees of the South Zone. For further details, see, Second Administrative Reform Commission (2009): *State and District Administration: Fifteenth report*. New Delhi: Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pension, Government of India.

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