



SAARC Revival

 drishtias.com/printpdf/saarc-revival

This article is based on “**Reclaiming SAARC from the ashes of 2020**” which was published in The Hindu on 13/01/2021. It talks about the need for the revival of SAARC.

The year 2020 marked the sixth year since the leaders of the eight nations that make up the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** were able to meet.

India’s problems with Pakistan on terrorism, territorial claims, and its role in blocking SAARC initiatives on connectivity and trade are the main reasons that even after thirty-six years of its formation, SAARC appears to be a defunct body.

However, if India aspires to become a global power, it must keep its neighbourhood peaceful, prosperous and supportive. In this context, reviving SAARC becomes very important.

Need For Reviving SAARC

- **Regional Disconnect:** Over the past year, India-Pakistan issues have impacted other meetings of SAARC. This makes it easier for member countries and international agencies, to deal with South Asia as a fragmented group rather than a collective one.
 - No other regional power is as disconnected from its immediate neighbourhood as India.
 - This disconnect is a challenge to India’s economic and security interests.
- **Impact of Covid-19:** The impact of Covid-19, is a growing distaste for ‘globalisation’ and growing preference for nativism, self-dependence and localising supply chains.
 - While it will be impossible for countries to entirely cut themselves off from the global market, regional initiatives will become the golden mean between globalisation and hyper-nationalism.
 - Moreover, reviving SAARC is crucial to countering the common challenges brought about by the pandemic.
 - According to a World Bank report, the South Asian countries are expected to lose nearly about 10.77 million jobs and \$52.32 billion in GDP alone from the impact of the pandemic.

- **Dealing With China:** It is clear that tensions with Pakistan and Nepal amplify the threat perception from China, while other SAARC members (minus Bhutan), all of whom are **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** partners of China will be hard placed to help individually.
 - Also, in the current pandemic, China is sending medicines, personal protective equipment kits, and promising vaccines to most SAARC countries as part of its **“Health Silk Road”** initiative.
 - Therefore, in dealing with China’s challenge, both at India’s borders and in its neighbourhood, a unified South Asian platform remains India’s most potent countermeasure.

Way Forward

- **Engaging With Pakistan:** China’s incursions in Ladakh doesn’t stop India to attend meetings with the Chinese leadership at the SCO, the Russia-India-China trilateral, the G-20.

Therefore, it is misplaced that India applies the same logic, for not engaging with Pakistan. India must understand that engagement with Pakistan is very crucial for the revival of SAARC.
- **Application of Gujral Doctrine:** India’s conduct of foreign relations with immediate neighbours should be guided by the **Gujral Doctrine**.

In this present context of Covid-19 pandemic, India can apply Gujral doctrine by pursuing Vaccine diplomacy with SAARC countries, whereby India can supply vaccines either free or at affordable costs and counter future pandemics.
- **All-of South Asia Approach:** South Asian countries need to work as a collective to set common standards and promote a more intra-regional, transnational approach towards health security, food security, and job security.
 - In this context, India can follow the European model of regional integration.
 - Moreover, India can strengthen its position as an education hub for students from its neighbourhood. This will help to form closer political ties and spread its cultural influence and values to the surrounding region.
- **Regional Development:** Being the biggest economy in South Asia, India can carry out infrastructure projects to improve connectivity, including the laying of new pipelines, building electricity networks, upgrading port, rail, and airport infrastructure, and reinvigorating people-to-people exchanges.

Conclusion

India must find its prism to view its South Asian neighbourhood having a shared future and acting as a force-multiplier for India’s ambitions on the global stage.

Drishti Mains Question

“India must find its prism to view its South Asian neighbourhood having a shared future and acting as a force-multiplier for India’s ambitions on the global stage”. In light of the statement, discuss the need for the revival of SAARC.



Watch Video At:

https://youtu.be/QX_ethKYaCs

This editorial is based on “**Handling the avian flu crisis**” which was published in The Hindustan Times on January 12th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.