



SAARC and CICA Meetings

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Why in News

Recently, the Foreign Ministers' meetings of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) took place in a virtual manner.

Key Points

- **India-Pakistan Tussle:**

- India called the SAARC countries to collectively resolve to defeat the scourge of **terrorism**, including the forces that nurture, support and encourage an environment of terror and conflict.

This was a **clear criticism of Pakistan** who has been involved in crossborder terrorism.

- Pakistan also made a detailed statement on the resolution of “long-standing disputes”, a veiled reference to Jammu and Kashmir and India’s move to **withdraw Article 370**.

- **Background:**

- Recently, **India said** that the degree of seriousness of each SAARC member-nation in collectively fighting the **Covid-19 pandemic** can be gauged by their behaviour. The statement was in clear reference to **Pakistan’s opposition to India’s leadership** in dealing with the crisis in the region.
- The National Security Advisor of India had walked off from a virtual meeting of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** in September, 2020 after his Pakistani counterpart appeared with a **Pakistani version of its map that included Indian territories**.
- In 2019, at the SAARC Foreign Ministers’ meeting, Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan had **boycotted** each other’s speeches.
- The Prime Minister of India had also refused to attend the 19th edition of the SAARC summit, due to be held in Islamabad in 2016, over the issue of Pakistan’s continued support to terror groups in light of **Uri attacks**.

- **Covid-19:** All SAARC nations built a common stand on the need to cooperate in battling the **coronavirus pandemic**.

- **SAARC initiatives to combat Covid-19:** SAARC Covid-19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX), SAARC Food Bank mechanism, SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund.
- **India’s Contribution:** India has contributed 10 million USD to **SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund** and manufactured essential drugs, Covid protection and testing kits, for countries in the SAARC region (**Eg. Operation Sanjeevani** for Maldives).

- **Relevance of SAARC:** SAARC has not been very effective since 2016 as its biennial summits have not taken place since the last one in Kathmandu (Nepal) in 2014.
 - India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan also declined to participate in the Islamabad meet planned in 2016.
- **The reasons for a dysfunctional SAARC:**
 - Bilateral issues cannot be discussed in SAARC but since the organisation relies on the **principle of unanimity** for all major decisions, Pakistan has often vetoed the major initiatives proposed at SAARC. For example, **SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement proposed at Kathmandu summit, 2014.**
 - **India-Pakistan** conflict has undermined SAARC. For India, Pakistan's use of terror as an instrument of foreign policy has made normal business impossible.
 - **Dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan** over the Durand line, is also a reason.
 - Also, **India's economic position** vis-a vis other SAARC countries, creates an impression of India being a big brother rather than a strategic partner.
 - SAARC has become almost marginal to the regions' collective consciousness and other organisations such as the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** came into the forefront.
- **CICA Meeting:**

India underlined its commitment to a pluralistic cooperative security order in Asia through CICA. It also reaffirmed its support for **Afghan peace process**.
- **About CICA:**
 - **Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia** (CICA) is a **multi-national forum** for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in **Asia**.
 - The idea of convening the CICA was first proposed by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 5th October 1992, at the 47th Session of the **United Nations General Assembly**.
 - The First Ministerial Meeting of CICA took place in September, 1999.
 - It consists of **27 member nations** from Asia including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India etc. Japan, Indonesia, USA etc. are some of its **Observer Nations**.
 - Republic of Tajikistan is the CICA Chairman for the period 2018-2020.

Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

- A multinational forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia
- Proposed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's first president, at the 47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on October 5, 1992

Member states (27):

- | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| ● Afghanistan | ● Egypt | ● Kazakhstan | ● Republic of Korea |
| ● Azerbaijan | ● India | ● Kyrgyzstan | ● Russian Federation |
| ● Bahrain | ● Iran | ● Mongolia | ● Sri Lanka |
| ● Bangladesh | ● Iraq | ● Pakistan | ● Tajikistan |
| ● Cambodia | ● Israel | ● Palestine | ● Thailand |
| ● China | ● Jordan | ● Qatar | ● Turkey |
| ● United Arab Emirates | ● Uzbekistan | ● Vietnam | |

Summits:



Way Forward

Keeping SAARC in deep-freeze because of Pakistan was not serving anybody's interest. Despite the recent ineffectiveness of SAARC, its revival will facilitate India's **neighbourhood first policy** in meeting the challenge of regional strategic encroachment by China through its **Belt and Road Initiative**.

Source: IE