

# **SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme**

**Source: TH** 

#### Why in News?

The <u>Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)</u> has revoked the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)** for Pakistani nationals following the <u>Pahalgam terror attack</u>.

• This marks a firm diplomatic response to Pakistan's continued support for cross-border terrorism.

## What is the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme?

- SVES: Launched in 1992, based on the decision of the 4th <u>SAARC</u> Summit in 1988 held in Islamabad. It is designed to facilitate people-to-people contact and regional cooperation among SAARC nations.
- Purpose: It permits select individuals from member countries to travel without a visa using a Special Travel Document.
  - It covers 24 categories, including dignitaries, judges, parliamentarians, officials, businesspersons, journalists, and sportspersons.
- Validity: Visa Stickers are issued by each SAARC member state to eligible individuals from their country, typically valid for one year and reviewed regularly by immigration authorities.
- India Specific Provisions: Citizens of Nepal and Bhutan do not need a visa to enter India. For Pakistani nationals, only select categories were eligible for a multiple-entry Business Visa—initially valid for one year and limited to 10 locations.
  - In 2015, India revised the rules, allowing special-category Pakistani businessmen a multipleentry visa valid for up to three years, restricted to 15 designated places.
  - Among SAARC countries, Sri Lankan nationals were eligible for the e-Tourist Visa facility.
  - Indian nationals do not need a visa to visit Nepal and Bhutan, while other SAARC countries offer Business Visa facilities to Indian citizens.
- India's Revocation of SVES for Pakistan: The CCS notified that all SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) visas issued to Pakistani nationals are now void, and those currently in India under this scheme must leave the country

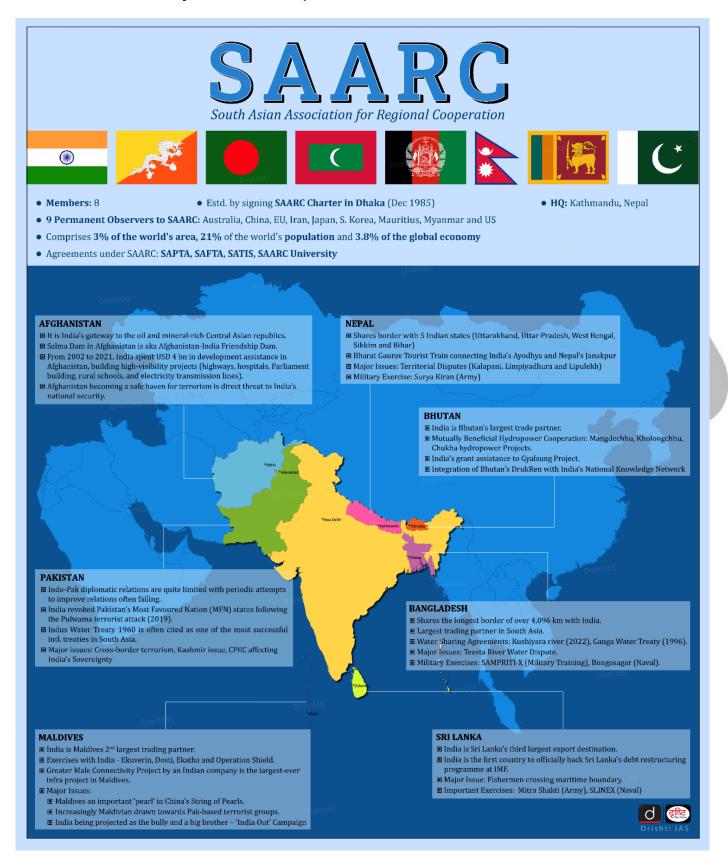
**Note:** India signed an agreement with Pakistan in 2019, outlining the modalities for operationalizing the **Shri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor**, which allowed visa-free pilgrimage for Indian Sikhs to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.

#### **Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)**

- CCS headed by the **Prime Minister**, it includes ministers from Finance, Defence, Home Affairs, and External Affairs. Other members may include defence chiefs and senior bureaucrats.
  - It plays a pivotal role in India's national security framework, dealing with critical matters related to **defense**, **law and order**, **and foreign affairs**.
- CCS was first convened during the Indo-Pak War of 1947-48, chaired by then Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru. After the 1999 Kargil War, it adopted a formal structure, becoming India's apex decision-making body for defense and national security.

The CCS has met during critical events like the 1971 India-Pakistan War and the 1999
IC 814 hijack (Kandahar hijack)



### **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

#### Mains:

**Q.** "Increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in India and growing interference in the internal affairs of several member-states by Pakistan are not conducive for the future of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)." Explain with suitable examples. **(2016)** 

