



SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme

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Why in News?

The [Cabinet Committee on Security \(CCS\)](#) has revoked the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)** for Pakistani nationals following the [Pahalgam terror attack](#).

- 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 SAARC 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 multiple-entry 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)

SAARC

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation



- **Members:** 8
- **Estd. by signing SAARC Charter in Dhaka** (Dec 1985)
- **HQ:** Kathmandu, Nepal
- **9 Permanent Observers to SAARC:** Australia, China, EU, Iran, Japan, S. Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and US
- **Comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% of the global economy**
- **Agreements under SAARC:** SAPTA, SAFTA, SATIS, SAARC University

AFGHANISTAN

- It is India's gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
- Salma Dam in Afghanistan is aka Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam.
- From 2002 to 2021, India spent USD 4 bn in development assistance in Afghanistan, building high-visibility projects (highways, hospitals, Parliament building, rural schools, and electricity transmission lines).
- Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terrorism is direct threat to India's national security.

NEPAL

- Shares border with 5 Indian states (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Bihar)
- Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train connecting India's Ayodhya and Nepal's Janakpur
- Major Issues: Territorial Disputes (Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh)
- Military Exercise: Surya Kiran (Army)

BHUTAN

- India is Bhutan's largest trade partner.
- Mutually Beneficial Hydropower Cooperation: Mangdechhu, Kholongchhu, Chukha hydropower Projects.
- India's grant assistance to Gyalshung Project.
- Integration of Bhutan's DrukRen with India's National Knowledge Network

PAKISTAN

- Indo-Pak diplomatic relations are quite limited with periodic attempts to improve relations often failing.
- India revoked Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status following the Pulwama terrorist attack (2019).
- Indus Water Treaty 1960 is often cited as one of the most successful intl. treaties in South Asia.
- Major issues: Cross-border terrorism, Kashmir issue, CPEC affecting India's Sovereignty

BANGLADESH

- Shares the longest border of over 4,096 km with India.
- Largest trading partner in South Asia.
- Water Sharing Agreements: Kushiara river (2022), Ganga Water Treaty (1996).
- Major Issues: Teesta River Water Dispute.
- Military Exercises: SAMPRITI-X (Military Training), Bongosagar (Naval).

MALDIVES

- India is Maldives 2nd largest trading partner.
- Exercises with India - Ekuverin, Dosti, Ekatha and Operation Shield.
- Greater Male Connectivity Project by an Indian company is the largest-ever infra project in Maldives.
- Major Issues:
 - Maldives an important 'pearl' in China's String of Pearls.
 - Increasingly Maldivian drawn towards Pak-based terrorist groups.
 - India being projected as the bully and a big brother - 'India Out' Campaign

SRI LANKA

- India is Sri Lanka's third largest export destination.
- India is the first country to officially back Sri Lanka's debt restructuring programme at IMF.
- Major Issue: Fishermen crossing maritime boundary.
- Important Exercises: Mitra Shakti (Army), SLINEX (Naval)



Read more: [Pahalgam Terror Attack and Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty](#)

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)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/saarc-visa-exemption-scheme>

