



PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
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Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
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South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

A Milestone in the Institutionalization of Regional Cooperation in South Asia

(Ministry of External Affairs)

December 08, 2022

“As a founding member of SAARC, India is committed to strengthening regional cooperation through various initiatives of development and progress of all countries in the region.”

[-PM Shri Narendra Modi](#)

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was set up as an organization to build a connected and integrated South Asia with the larger aim of promoting the development and progress of all countries in the region. It was established by seven countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as its original members. After the inclusion of Afghanistan at the 13th summit held at Dhaka in 2006, there are now eight members.¹ Its Secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

SAARC Charter Day is observed every year on December 08. On this day in 1985, during the first summit of the group in Dhaka, the SAARC Charter was adopted.² **This year marks the 38th Anniversary of the regional group.**

As enshrined in its Charter, the primary objective of SAARC is to promote the welfare of the people and to improve their quality of life through accelerated social progress and economic development in the region. A forum of eight countries in South Asia that are bound by ties of history and culture, SAARC is a tangible manifestation of the determination of its Member States to promote peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and peaceful settlement of disputes.³



¹ <https://mofa.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Revised-SAARC-Brief.pdf>

² <https://newsonair.gov.in/News?title=SAARC-Charter-Day-being-observed-today&id=431105>

³ [Thirty-sixth Charter Day of SAARC \(saarc-sec.org\)](http://thirty-sixth Charter Day of SAARC (saarc-sec.org))

Genesis

May 1980: The concept of regional cooperation was mooted to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia through consultation and collaboration on matters of mutual interests.

April 1981: Foreign Secretaries of the South Asian countries met in Colombo for the first time and identified five areas of cooperation, viz., Agriculture, Rural Development, Telecommunications, Meteorology, and Health and Population Activities.

December 1985: At the First Summit in Dhaka, the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian countries adopted the Charter establishing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Principles

The principles of SAARC are as follows:⁴

- Cooperation within the framework of the Association shall be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and mutual benefit.
- Such cooperation shall not be a substitute for bilateral and multilateral cooperation but shall complement them
- Such cooperation shall not be inconsistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations.

Objectives

SAARC was established with the following objectives:⁵

- To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life
- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials
- To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia
- To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields
- To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries
- To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes

⁴ [Revised-SAARC-Brief.pdf \(mofa.gov.np\)](#)

⁵ [About SAARC \(saarc-sec.org\)](#)

SAARC at Glance

Observers in SAARC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia • China • European Union • Iran • Japan • The Republic of Korea • Mauritius • Myanmar • The United States of America. <p>Observers are invited to participate in the inaugural and closing Sessions of SAARC Summits.</p> <p>Member States have decided to engage the SAARC Observers into productive, demand-driven and objective project-based cooperation in priority areas as identified by the Member States, i.e. (Communication (ii) Connectivity (iii) Agriculture (iv) Public Health (v) Energy (vi) Environment and (vii) Economic Cooperation.</p>
Area of Co-operation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Human Resource Development and Tourism 2. Agriculture and Rural Development 3. Environment Natural Disaster and Biotechnology 4. Economic Trade and Finance 5. Social Affairs 6. Information and Poverty Alleviation 7. Energy Transport Science and Technology 8. Education Security and Culture
SAARC Secretariat	Kathmandu, Nepal
SAARC Specialized Bodies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. South Asian University (SAU) – India 2. South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO) – Dhaka 3. SAARC Development Fund (SDF) – Bhutan 4. SAARC Arbitration Council (SARCO) – Pakistan
1st Secretary General of SAARC	(Late) Abul Ahsan (Bangladesh)
Current Secretary-General of SAARC	Esala Ruwan Weerakoon (Sri Lanka) –assumed office of the Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on March 01, 2020.
Last Member to Join SAARC	Afghanistan in year 2007
Last SAARC summit	26-27 November, 2014 in Kathmandu. To know more about 18 th SAARC summit, please click here .

India's Contribution to the SAARC

India, as one of the founding members, supports various initiatives in the SAARC framework to achieve closer cooperation in diverse areas. Out of the eighteen SAARC Summits held so far, India has hosted three, viz. the second (Bengaluru, November 1986), the eighth (New Delhi, May 1995) and the fourteenth (New Delhi, April 2007).⁶

India has enhanced its engagement with all SAARC countries both bilaterally and through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It has increased efforts for enhancing trade and connectivity links through land, air and sea for accelerating regional integration and greater people-to-people contacts. India continues its efforts to build peaceful cooperative ties with Pakistan to address the outstanding issues through peaceful bilateral dialogue.⁷



❖ India has signed 13 Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs)/Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries of SAARC on July 20, 2022.⁸

❖ India has been steadfast in its commitment towards sharing the fruits of technological advances with like-minded countries in its neighbourhood. In this context, India's initiative of extending its [National Knowledge Network \(NKN\)](#) to the countries of South Asia has been extended to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The Prime Minister of India inaugurated the extension to Bhutan in August 2019. For more information about it, [click here](#).

❖ India launched a [South Asian Satellite \(SAS\) in May 2017](#) from Sriharikota. Demonstration terminals of SAS have been installed in Bhutan, Maldives, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.⁹

❖ In January 2019, the Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had given ex-post facto approval for amendment to the 'Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC Member Countries' to incorporate a 'Standby



⁶ https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_SAARC_2020.pdf

⁷ <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=124900>

⁸ <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1843902>

⁹ https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_SAARC_2020.pdf

Swap' amounting to USD 400 million operated within the overall size of the Facility of USD 2 billion and build in flexibility with respect to modalities of its operation.¹⁰

- ❖ India also hosted the Interim Unit of [SAARC Disaster Management Center \(IU\)](#) at the Gujarat Institute of Disaster Management (GIDM), Gandhinagar. It has been operational since November 2016, serving the needs of all SAARC member states through policy advice, technical support on system development, capacity building services and training for holistic management of disaster risk in the SAARC region.
- ❖ India is home to [South Asian University \(SAU\)](#). It was established through an Inter-Governmental Agreement at the 14th SAARC Summit (April 2008) to provide world class educational facilities & professional faculty to students and researchers from SAARC countries.

India-SAARC & Covid-19

- At the initiative of the Prime Minister, a Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on combating COVID-19 was held on March 15, 2020. **India created a COVID-19 Emergency Fund with an initial offer of USD 10 million to meet the costs of immediate actions.** India's humanitarian relief in the region included supply of essential drugs, antibiotics, medical consumables, COVID protection and testing kits, and other laboratory and hospital equipment.
- **SAARC Disaster Management Centre** (Interim Unit) in Gandhinagar, with the assistance of [Ministry of External Affairs](#) (MEA), [Ministry of Health & Family Welfare](#) (MoHFW) and other Missions, had set up a dedicated website on Covid-19 (<http://www.covid19-sdmc.org/>) for use by SAARC countries. A video conference of health professionals representing all SAARC countries at the level of Director General of Health Services (DGHS) was held in March 2020. A video conference of trade officials of SAARC countries was held in April 2020 to discuss the impact of travel restrictions and the larger COVID-19 situation on intra-regional trade.
- India developed a '**SAARC COVID19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX)**' platform for use by all SAARC countries to facilitate exchange of specialized information and tools on COVID-19 among designated health professionals.
- Under India's e-ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme) network, training of healthcare personnel in the neighbourhood was conducted with content delivery by super specialty medical institutes like All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) and Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research (PGIMER) Chandigarh. AIIMS New Delhi also separately held a series of three video-conferencing sessions in May 2020 on COVID-19 for practising medical professionals in SAARC countries

¹⁰ https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/cabinet-approvesamendment-to-the-framework-on-currency-swap-arrangement-for-saarc/?tag_term=saarc&comment=disable



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Important Links

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Twitter Links

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