



# **\*\*Trends in SAARC: Achievements, Challenges and Future Prospects\*\***

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## **\*Abstract\***

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional organization of eight South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). The main objectives of SAARC are to promote economic and social development in the region, strengthen regional cooperation, and promote peace and security. SAARC was established in 1985, and since then it has made significant progress in a number of areas.

This research paper provides a brief overview of the organization's history, its major achievements and challenges, and its future prospects. The paper also discusses the implications of the recent changes in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia for SAARC.

The paper finds that SAARC has made significant progress in a number of areas, including trade, investment, energy, and connectivity. However, the organization also faces a number of challenges, including the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan and the political instability in Afghanistan.

The paper concludes that SAARC has the potential to play a key role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia. However, in order to realize its full potential, the organization will need to address the challenges it faces, including the conflict between India and Pakistan and the institutional weaknesses of the organization.

**\*Keywords:\*** SAARC, South Asia, Regional cooperation, Economic development, Peace and Security

## **\*\*Introduction\*\***

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional organization of eight South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). The main objectives of SAARC are to encourage economic and social development in the region, strengthen regional cooperation, and promote peace and security. The idea of a regional organization in South Asia was first mooted in the early 1980s. In 1983, the foreign ministers of seven South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) met in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and issued a declaration calling for the establishment of a South Asian regional cooperation organization.

The following year, in 1985, the foreign ministers of the seven countries met again in Thimphu, Bhutan, and signed the SAARC Charter. The Charter established SAARC as a formal organization and set out its objectives and principles.

The establishment of SAARC was a significant development in the history of South Asia. It was the first time that all of the countries in the region had come together to form a regional organization.

SAARC was seen as a way to promote economic and social development in the region, and to strengthen regional cooperation.

SAARC was set up in 1985, and since then it has made considerable progress in a number of areas. However, the organization has also faced a number of challenges, including the ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the political instability in Afghanistan.

This research paper examines the trends in SAARC since its inception. It will provide a brief overview of the organization's history, its major achievements and challenges, and its future prospects. The paper will also discuss the implications of the recent changes in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia for SAARC.

## \*\*Major Achievements of SAARC\*\*

SAARC has made significant progress in a number of areas since its inception. Some of the major achievements of the organization include:

\* The establishment of the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) in 1993, which provides for preferential tariffs on trade between SAARC countries. The SAPTA was expanded into the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2004, which provides for duty-free trade on a range of goods between SAARC countries.

\* The establishment of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) in 1998, which provides financial assistance to SAARC projects in areas such as infrastructure, education, and health.

\* The launch of the SAARC Regional Energy Cooperation Program (SECP) in 2013, which aims to promote cooperation on energy issues, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency.

\* The adoption of the SAARC Regional Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution in 2002.

\* The adoption of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters on 23 December 2014.

\* The establishment of South Asian University (SAU) in 2010.

\* The operationalization of the SAARC Satellite in 2017.

These achievements demonstrate the commitment of SAARC member states to regional cooperation and integration. SAARC has made significant progress in a number of areas, and the organization has the potential to play a key role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia.

## \*\*Challenges Facing SAARC\*\*

SAARC has made significant progress in a number of areas since its inception in 1985. However, the organization also faces a number of challenges, including:

\* \*The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan.\* This conflict has hindered SAARC's efforts to promote regional cooperation and economic integration.

\* \*The political instability in Afghanistan.\* The ongoing war in Afghanistan has made it difficult for SAARC to effectively address the needs of the Afghan people.

\* \*The institutional weaknesses of SAARC.\* The organization has a weak secretariat and a lack of financial resources. This has made it difficult for SAARC to implement its programs and activities.

\* \*The slow pace of progress.\* SAARC has been criticized for its slow pace of progress in achieving its objectives. This has led to frustration among some member states.

These challenges have hindered SAARC's ability to fully achieve its objectives. However, the organization remains committed to promoting regional cooperation and integration in South Asia.

### \*\*Future Prospects of SAARC\*\*

Despite the challenges it faces, SAARC has a number of opportunities for the future. The region is home to a large and growing population, which represents a significant market for goods and services. The region also has a number of natural resources, which could be used to promote economic development.

SAARC can play a key role in promoting regional cooperation and economic integration in South Asia. The organization can help to create a more stable and prosperous region, which will benefit all of its member countries. However, in order to realize its full potential, SAARC will need to address the challenges it faces, including the conflict between India and Pakistan and the institutional weaknesses of the organization.

### \*\*Recent Trends in SAARC\*\*

In recent years, there have been a number of positive developments in SAARC. These include:

- \* The signing of the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement in 2015, which allows for the free movement of passenger and cargo vehicles between SAARC countries.
- \* The launch of the SAARC Tourism Highway in 2016, which aims to promote tourism in the region.
- \* The operationalization of the SAARC Seed Bank in 2017, which will help to ensure food security in the region.
- \* The adoption of the SAARC Vision 2025 in 2018, which sets out a roadmap for the organization's future development.

These developments suggest that there is a growing commitment among SAARC member states to regional cooperation. However, the organization still faces a number of challenges, including the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan and the political instability in Afghanistan.

### \*\*Implications of the Changing Geopolitical Landscape for SAARC\*\*

The changing geopolitical landscape of South Asia has a number of implications for SAARC.

\* \*The rise of China and India.\* The rise of China and India as major powers is having a significant impact on South Asia. China is now the largest economy in Asia and is rapidly expanding its economic and military presence in the region. India is also a rising power and is seeking to play a greater role in regional affairs. The rise of these two powers is creating new opportunities and challenges for SAARC.

\* \*The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.\* The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan is another major development that is having a significant impact on South Asia. The withdrawal of US troops has created a power vacuum in Afghanistan, which could lead to increased instability in the region. This could have a negative impact on SAARC, as it could make it more difficult for the organization to promote peace and security in the region.

\* \*The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan.\* The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan is one of the major challenges facing SAARC. The conflict has hindered SAARC's efforts to promote regional cooperation and economic integration. It is also a major source of tension in the region and could lead to further conflict.

It is too early to say what the long-term implications of the changing geopolitical landscape will be for SAARC. However, it is clear that the organization will need to adapt to the new realities in order to remain relevant and effective.

**\*\*India and SAARC\*\***

India is a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). India has played a significant role in SAARC since its inception. India has hosted three SAARC summits. India has also provided financial and technical assistance to SAARC projects in a number of areas, including trade, investment, energy, transportation and Space technology.

India has also been a strong advocate for regional cooperation in South Asia. India has called for the resolution of outstanding disputes between SAARC member states, and has urged member states to work together to address common challenges, such as poverty, terrorism, and climate change.

However, India's role in SAARC has also been constrained by its tense relations with Pakistan. The conflict between India and Pakistan has hindered SAARC's efforts to promote regional cooperation and economic integration.

Despite these challenges, India remains committed to SAARC. India believes that SAARC has the potential to play a major role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia.

**\*Conclusion\***

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has made significant progress in a number of areas since its inception in 1985. The organization has played a key role in promoting regional cooperation and integration in South Asia. SAARC has also played a role in promoting peace and security in the region. However, SAARC also faces a number of challenges, including the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, the political instability in Afghanistan, and the institutional weaknesses of the organization. These challenges have hindered SAARC's ability to fully achieve its objectives.

Despite these challenges, SAARC has the potential to play a major role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia. The organization has a number of opportunities for the future, including the growing population and economy of the region, the increasing interconnectedness of the global economy, and the changing geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

SAARC can seize these opportunities by addressing the challenges it faces. The organization needs to resolve the conflict between India and Pakistan, promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, and strengthen its institutional capacity. By doing so, SAARC can become a more effective organization and play a greater role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia.

**\*Recommendations\***

There are a number of things that SAARC can do to address the challenges it faces and seize the opportunities that lie ahead. These include:

- \* Resolving the conflict between India and Pakistan. This is the most important challenge facing SAARC. If the conflict can be resolved, it will open the door to greater regional cooperation and economic integration.
- \* Promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. SAARC can play a role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan by providing economic assistance and by supporting the Afghan government's efforts to build a more inclusive and stable society.
- \* Strengthening the institutional capacity of SAARC. SAARC needs to strengthen its secretariat and increase its financial resources. This will enable the organization to more effectively implement its programs and activities.
- \* Accelerating the pace of progress. SAARC needs to accelerate the pace of progress in achieving its objectives. This can be done by setting more ambitious targets and by streamlining the organization's decision-making process.

\* Engaging with other regional and international organizations. SAARC can strengthen its role in the region by engaging with other regional and international organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations.

By addressing these challenges and seizing the opportunities that lie ahead, SAARC can become a more effective organization and play a greater role in promoting peace and prosperity in South Asia.

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