

## 'SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC) AND CHINA: AN ANALYSIS'

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### **Abstract**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established in 1985 can be seen as an attempt to enhance cooperation among the countries of South Asia in areas of mutual trust. SAARC has attracted the attention of the rest of the world, by various countries wanting to become observers and observers aspiring to full membership. China has shown its active interest in becoming full member of the SAARC, China is already one of nine observer's states. This paper analyses on beyond China's role in SAARC and factors of India's perception. This paper focuses on both opportunities and challenges that SAARC in China. What would be the opinion of the South Asian countries of China full membership? The expansion of membership and the observers of SAARC along the consolidation and speedy implementation of the programmes of the actions will only help the association to further grow in realizing its objective. There is enough opportunity for the growth of SAARC so are there numerous challenges confronting it.

**Keywords:** Cooperation, Challenges, Opportunity, Membership, Engagement.

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## Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established in 1985 comprising seven countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka with observer nations, Myanmar, China, Iran, the European Union (EU) and the United States to name a few, is a dynamic institutionalized regional cooperation as a role model for examining different forms of political or economic region integration. To accelerate in different fields to improve among themselves like to develop into a conflict resolving institution both on multilateral and bilateral issues. Among the SAARC member countries India is a dominant player, due to its territorial size, population, nuclear power and non-permanent member in United Nations Security Council. India's impressions toward SAARC mark a positive contribution in the development in various areas. The SAARC member nations have a common border bilaterally only with India and not with each other, the economic and quality of life disparities among South Asian nations are also quite wide. The South Asian countries are united by the fact that they today all SAARC countries are being run according to basic democratic principles.

In today's world regional association and global organization has become more effective in bringing peace and prosperity as well as in development perspectives. Regional associations are becoming more effective in a new scene for political and economic interaction in the world. While SAARC has attracted the attention of the rest of the world, by various countries wanting to become observers and observers aspiring to full membership. China has shown its active interest in becoming a full member of the SAARC, China is already one of nine observer states.

The paper analyses the modern China's policy towards South Asia and the theory of multilateralism. It also observes China's objective which is linked with the engagement of SAARC. The analysts draw upon 'China's membership' in SAARC. Finally the paper looks into some future scenario challenges and opportunities of SAARC in China and contains concluding comments.

## Recent Role of China's Policy towards South Asia

Nowadays the role of China in global and regional affair has been changing internal and external environment in order to have a continuous process of interaction. China has played an important in the process of regionalization in the region. In the South Asian region it is more limited successful in their diplomacy, the main reason is China's 'sensitive 'relations with India. It is true that China and India are also competitors for regional power in South Asia. The issue of China's leadership in regional level is obvious that China's potential for regional dominance is growing.

China's South Asia policy is to safeguard for meeting its foreign policy goals:

- Both South Asia and China has to work on the geographical front, South Asia geographically borders and political and security instability of South Asia has split over effects on the Chinese territories.
- China has to maintain the security of the energy trade and the sea lanes of communication around South Asia passing through the Indian Ocean.
- Network manufacturing economy that requires large amount of raw materials, the supply of these resources is necessary for the Chinese economy.
- South Asian region is an important goal for China to access market in the region.
- South Asia also vital to break the US strategy encirclement of China.

The main purpose of China's foreign policy is the promotion of multilateralism and regionalism in the region of Asia, where China's role will be advanced. In SAARC, China's role is limited because of the increased role of India in the area of South Asia as an important regional actor and the evident presence of global power such as USA, as well as because of the weakness of SAARC to be consistent regional. China's increased interest in promoting multilateralism and actively participating in regionalization process by building win-win and prosperous relations with SAARC. This can be estimated the potential of China's involvement in South Asia and leadership in advanced.

While China's current exertion of leadership doesn't seem to be hegemonic, it nonetheless bears certain hegemonic characteristic. However, any further development of those characteristic will

require China to overcome resistance from its regional partners as well as from external power with interest in Asia. Indeed China may need the current discourse would indicates if the middle kingdom is to rise again. China's overall diplomatic strategy and China's strategies interest in South Asia, so as time goes on China would stick to the policy and give more priorities in acquiring a new strategic focus in the China power building dialogue.

### **China's Objectives: the Engagement with SAARC**

Since the establishment of SAARC as a regional organization there has been seventeenth summit meeting and the eighteenth SAARC summit was held in Nepal (Kathmandu) during November 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 2014. A number of countries interested in the affair of the region have attended the summit meeting of SAARC and more state has shown their interest in acquiring observer status in SAARC. So, China has shown its interest in joining SAARC. While in the process Pakistan and Bangladesh supported China's candidate, India was more reluctant about the prospect of Chinese membership. But in 2005, China was approved as an 'observer' state of the organization.

During the fourteenth SAARC summit April 2007, China for the first time attended the SAARC summit as an observer, which marked a new beginning of China-SAARC relations and which will further strengthen their friendship with mutual beneficial cooperation with SAARC members. The most South Asian countries share an important neighbour's border with China and it bears a member of intrinsic connection to the South Asian region.

Chinese discourse towards South Asian suggest that that there are some reasons of engagement with the region, firstly China attempt to institutionalized the China-SAARC network, secondly it make efforts to strengthen bilateral ties with the individuals countries of SAARC. Thirdly China explores the possibility of establishing a China-SAARC regular mechanism for cooperation on disaster relief to share experience and infrastructure. The Chinese connections with individual SAARC members are changing rapidly and planning to maximize the linkage with South Asia with regards to capitalise the bilateral ties with select SAARC members. SAARC as an institution has built up a cooperative framework with various countries through regional as well as global level. The Chinese efforts of tying with South Asia through SAARC incorporate two objectives: (a) to facilitate China's as an effective player in the neighbourhood politics and to

minimize its strategic interest by integrating into the region. (b) China took part as an observer meeting in SAARC summit has seen interest in the region with lots of enthusiasm for the cooperation of China and South Asia region.

Nowadays, China's increasing interest in SAARC indicates its environment and have become increasingly interconnected and China as SAARC's observer has made great contribution to the stability of South Asia. The main achievement of Chinese government is to supports the objective and priority areas of SAARC and promotion of economic cooperation, national security, globalization and regional peace.

### **The Analysts of 'China's Membership' in SAARC**

The organisation of eight South Asian nations which have meet for 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit held in Nepal during November 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 2014, have a new framework not only on energy cooperation but also road and rail connectivity across the entire SAARC region to crucial to the realization of its economic integration and the summit has made a declaration calling to engage China and other SAARC observers in enhanced productive cooperation for establishing dialogue partnership with them.

The SAARC initiative to expand its membership and external observer's status to some of the extra-regional power has been taken in response to persistently aired view that these measures would strengthen regional grouping and make it more dynamic and vibrant The status that have been accepted as observers are strategically and economically important actors in the international system. China as an observer as well as the others might energize SAARC towards greater economic cooperation and dynamism within the member states and with the outside world especially with the observers.

When it comes to China membership it is important to analyses for and against with respect to China's capabilities which could contribute towards the progress and functioning of SAARC. The SAARC member nations has fall into different ways of opinion. Likewise numbers of SAARC countries have reportedly supported a full membership for China, including Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. India has not been a supporter of full membership for China in SAARC.

Those in India who supports China membership assert that, through geography and its link with SAARC members, China is a 'South Asian' country, noted that Indo-China relationship could benefit from Chinese membership. Other analysts note that the SAARC is not that relevant and thus there would be little harm in including China. Yet other note that China is already engaging in South Asian countries bilaterally in a way that includes India, this way India could be part of that engagement. And those who oppose Chinese membership including within the Indian government question the inclusion of a non-South Asian countries. Their concerns include China potentially dominating the organization and working against Indian interest within its, Sino-Indian political difficulties limiting SAARC's effectiveness and activities as India-Pakistan ones have done and Sino-Indian interaction within SAARC exacerbating China-India mutual mistrust.

China has contributed a bilaterally relations with most of the SAARC members in different approach to the region. Some policymakers and analysts have drawn an attention towards if China become full member, will its inclusion will advance SAARC's mission. Beyond China's role in SAARC, China is also one of the largest countries in Asia, if it influences its relation towards the neighbourhood then that will be likely to increase in the future.

Sujit Dutta article China in SAARC? To What Effect? Has expressed strong concerned, He deemed China as not being eligible to be a full member of a 'cohesive, secure and integrated, democratic political order in South Asia'. He states 'politically, it is the world's largest authoritarian state: economically, it is not a market economy: and in security terms it is not only have active territorial claims against India and Bhutan but as its power grows it poses increasingly complex security challenges to India and the neighbour as a whole". Dutta's view that China is not ready to join as a full membership, but for different reason, Shen Dingli agrees with criteria Dutta's has based his argument.

But Shen Dingli disagree with Dutta's analysis of conclusion for different reason, politically it is not enough to disqualified China because India and China have somehow different political system. Probably China and India have more in common than China and Pakistan, but Pakistan still qualifies for membership. India's is against full membership for China because it is concerned over a possible competition of leadership to India's disadvantage. Even without China being a full member, India's leadership is SAARC has been challenge by some of the member countries, so what happen if China were to be member? China has not challenged ASEAN

leadership in the EAS and has only shared leadership with Russia in the SCO which it co-initiated.

The South Asian nations should give more important in deepens cooperation among them should resolve internal dispute. When it comes to provide full membership decision has to take wisely after careful consideration of all sides and it has become unavoidable for sure. It's should not be based on the conflict of Indo-China relation which is not at all good for the SAARC members. They have to strengthen their bonds and avoid conflict in time to come and focus more into cooperation and institutionalized the relationship.

### **Challenges and Opportunities to SAARC-China Integration**

The destiny of South Asian nations has shift towards in meeting the challenges of the environment, national security and globalization. So here are some challenges which might influence to overcome SAARC-China integration.

- SAARC should put their rail back to concentrate not to permit the international political changes in affecting the functioning of SAARC in future.
- A vision for change in SAARC political atmosphere and economic setting through a new model of cooperation with China should base on mutual interests, trust and accountability.
- SAARC should develop on conflict institution on bilateral and multilateral political and security problem.
- The fragile of bilateral controversial question should not violate or affect the cooperation among SAARC and China.
- To forge a new partnerships between SAARC-China would attached more collaborative interaction between India and China, in which India have the special responsibility to make SAARC work and their counterparts in neighbouring region.
- SAARC has to resolve the economic cooperation in an increasingly globalized world in which it can achieve through healthy economic cooperation with China.

On the bilateral level, China has promoted its relationship with all countries in South Asia. The relationship between China and South Asian countries has open up opportunities for strengthening cooperation in their relation.

- When China becomes an observer of SAARC they vow to support the region into regional development.
- SAARC countries have to work on common values and shared historical perceptions of the peoples of the region and on addressing the political differences.
- South Asian countries and China has mounted rapidly in the development of trade cooperation in energy and natural resources, infrastructure and communication and people and people relations to ties between them.
- Climate change, poverty, unemployment, national security, border dispute and the spread of global terrorism has to be taken as an emergence concern by both SAARC and China.
- Institutionalized framework upon on already burgeoning network of communicable link between China and South Asia.
- India has common borders with seven SAARC nations, India has the responsibility to make SAARC work so their boundary issue with China should not be an obstacle in the improvement of their relations and promotion of trade in the border areas.
- Academics should evolve gateway strategic for South Asia in respects to its neighbours and environment should build communication bridges through specific project such as SAARC can rallies through Asia.

The states of South Asia could enter a new phase collective and inclusive growth within the region as well as across the countries

## Conclusions

We must value the positive change of China's policies towards India as well as others South Asian countries and not be rigidly focussed on some problems in history. Only when we see and acknowledge these changes can properly deal with the changes in the new situation by using rational attitudes. By truly grasping the new opportunities of historical development of achieve ultimate "win-win" or "win-win-win" objective. Multilateralism has become a pressing point in the Chinese policy dialogue in global affairs, particularly in the relations at regional level with



developing countries. China's association with SAARC stands as a clean testimony to this policy orientation. China has changed their policy and ideological position and follows pragmatic thought and adopted the combination of strategy and economic oriented policy towards South Asia. The concept of mutual and common interest should promote "confidence building measures" and strengthen mutual trust and cooperation to ensure their own security. Regardless of China's full membership of SAARC, it should not be in hurry to seek full membership. It should do when it feels to be necessary to South Asia without India feeling its legitimate interest undermined. The membership decision ought to be positive only if the benefit out weight the costs for South Asia in general, but India in particular. Hence to promote South Asian nations and China integration the whole thing must not be between inter-rivalry between 'two nation' but should look at the larger picture of economic gain that is tied with the success of SAARC.

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