

The Need for the Next SAARC Summit

 moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/01/the-need-for-the-next-saarc-summit

By Harsh Mahaseth

June 1, 2023



Authors: Harsh Mahaseth and Sanjana Chib*

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) came into existence on the 8th of December, 1985, with eight member states namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, (which became a member-state in the year 2007) Considering the approach followed by other bodies such as that of ASEAN, which might soon start addressing their differences in an “ASEAN way” i.e. resolving their internal matters amicably instead of approaching the courts, SAARC also follows an institutional framework that regularly holds summits to discuss the various alternatives regarding dispute settlement and cooperation amongst its members.

The meetings of the Heads of the States or Governments of the Member States known as the Summit is the highest decision-making forum of SAARC. Generally, SAARC organizes Summits biennially through its Member States in an alphabetical order, and the hosting country of the Summit assumes the Chair of the Association and its importance can be acknowledged by the key outcome of its summit, which takes place in the form of a Declaration and includes decisions/ directives of the leaders to strengthen and consolidate regional cooperation in different areas being pursued under the patronage of SAARC. Moreover, the Summit also considers and approves reports of the Ministerial Meetings.

The 18th SAARC Summit was held in Kathmandu, Nepal and its theme was “Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity.” Ever since then there has been no successful attempt to schedule the next summit, mainly due to lack of consensus between the member-states. As far as India is concerned, the major reason behind its non-participation is the Uri- Terrorist Attack, which was alleged to have Pakistani involvement, and that is the reason why it turned down Pakistan’s proposal to attend the 19th SAARC Summit virtually if it does not want to be physically present in Islamabad.

SAARC has held only 18 Summits since its inception, which is a violation of Article 3 of the SAARC Charter itself. The prevailing political problems and bilateral disputes of respective member-states mainly caused delays. As of now, SAARC has conducted 18 Summits, ten in the first 15 years of its existence (1986 – 2000) and eight in next 15 years (2001 – 2016) which highlight that frequent cancellations have occurred over the last 15 years.

The experience of last 35 years suggests that, SAARC as an institution cannot be a tool for “regional integration” due to Indo-Pak Rivalry as their rivalry is so profound that it cannot be addressed in terms of a regional solution, which happens to be the major reason for not conducting the summit. However, some of other the reasons for not holding the SAARC Summit are also inter-state problems and bilateral tensions.

In the year 2020, Mr. Nilambar Acharya, Nepal’s envoy to India made a statement that “SAARC is alive and there will be a summit in future”, which came as a ray of hope soon after PM Narendra Modi tweeted the leaders about creating a strategy to deal with the situation of covid-19. Later, the organization was all set to conduct a summit in New York next year, which was later cancelled due to the objections of certain member states regarding the participation of Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.

A successful SAARC Summit can be conducted in future if its member states work towards resolving their bilateral disputes and other internal problems such as political instability, general elections, insurgencies, and economic recession, lack of adequate infrastructure and resources on the part of some members to organize the summit, which is why its leaders should consider amending the charter and make it mandatory to hold summits at a permanent venue such as that of the SAARC Secretariat on an annual basis which will make things much convenient for the member states and increase the chances of organizing the summit.

**Sanjana Chib is a Law Student at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India.*

Related Topics:[SAARC](#)



Harsh Mahaseth

Harsh Mahaseth is an Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean (Academic Affairs) at Jindal Global Law School, and a Senior Research Analyst at the Nehginpao Kipgen Center for Southeast Asian Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India.