Lessons from ASEAN for SAARC

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- Both SAARC and ASEAN took birth with almost similar aspirations.
\n
- While ASEAN celebrates its 50th year, being largely successful, the SAARC has remained stagnated.
\n

\n\n

Why has SAARC stagnated?

\n\n

\n
- **Cooperation** - The political animosity and military conflict between India and Pakistan have disturbed the regional cooperation.
\n
- This witnessed a new low when India boycotted the 19th SAARC summit in Pakistan, as a result of the Uri terrorist attack.
\n
- Subsequently the summit was cancelled with Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Bhutan following India's stance.
\n
- **Trade** - Trade amongst the SAARC members stands only at 3.5% of their total volume of trade.
\n
- Initiatives under the South Asian Free Trade Association have failed to make much headway.
\n
- Sub-regional initiatives like the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement also have stalled. (Click here to know why)
\n
- **Connectivity** - The SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme allows only certain categories of dignitaries to be exempt from visas.
\n
- Ordinary citizens are excluded from accessing unimpeded travel in the region.

\n
- Free movement of people between India and Pakistan is not that easy.
\n
- It is even difficult to a get visa for citizens of other SAARC countries who have visited either India or Pakistan before and now wish to travel to the other.
\n
- Poor infrastructure in SAARC countries also plagues connectivity.
\n

\n\n

What lessons do ASEAN hold for SAARC?

\n\n

\n
- **Mandates** - ASEAN, in its first two decades, focussed on a limited range of issues.
\n
- Only after securing them, it expanded its mandate over time.
\n
- Resultantly, it now deliberates on varied issues such as climate change, disaster management, counterterrorism, drugs and human trafficking, etc.
\n
- **Cooperation** - ASEAN was able to ensure its sustainability by amicably resolving the disputes and adopting peaceful mechanisms to mitigate opposing claims.
\n
- **Trade** - Trade in ASEAN has grown rapidly.
\n
- It has focussed on promoting rapid economic growth and modernisation.
\n
- It has created the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) for facilitating trade.
\n
- This ensures liberalisation and protection of cross-border investments operations, together with best practices for the treatment of foreign investors and investments.
\n
- **Connectivity** - ASEAN nations are planning to waive entry requirements amongst the member states.
\n
- A feasibility study has been conducted on the development of a rail link from Singapore to Kunming in southern China.
\n

- This boosts intraregional trade and people-to-people connectivity.
  \n
- Projects aimed at promoting the entire region as a tourist destination have also been undertaken.
  \n

\n\n

What lies ahead for SAARC?

\n\n

\n
- SAARC countries should avoid building sub-regional ties at the cost of jeopardising the regional vision for unity.
  \n
- E.g. Attempting to isolate Pakistan by forming sub-regional initiatives like the BIMSTEC.
  \n
- Bilateral power struggle and animosity should not come in the way of keeping open the channels of engagement.
  \n

\n\n

Quick Facts

\n\n

SAARC

\n\n

\n
- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
  \n
- SAARC comprises of eight Member States who are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
  \n

\n\n

ASEAN

\n\n

\n
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967

in Bangkok, Thailand.
\n
- It came in with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding members namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
\n
- Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia joined in the course of time.
\n

\n\n

ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement

\n\n

\n
- ACIA was adopted in 2009 in the context of an integrated economic community.
\n
- It was envisioned as ASEAN’s instrument to create a free and open investment environment to increase global competition and enhance the attractiveness of ASEAN as a single investment destination
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

