SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme

Prelims – *Current events of international importance.*

Mains (GS II) –*Important International Institutions | India and its Neighbourhood.*

Why in News?

In the aftermath of the terror strike in Pahalgam, the Indian government has announced that Pakistan nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES).

- **Launched in -** 1992.
- **Launched by -** The 4th Summit of SAARC launching the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) in 1992, allowing select individuals to ***travel within the region without visas.***
- **Visa Exemption Sticker -** This travel document is known as the SAARC Visa Exemption Sticker.
- **Eligibility -** It is given to individuals falling under *24 specific categories*, such as dignitaries, judges, parliamentarians, senior officials, business persons, journalists, and sports personalities.
- The Visa Stickers are issued by the ***respective Member states*** to the entitled categories of that particular country.
- **Validity -** 1 year.
- **Administered by** - ***Immigration Authorities of respective Member states.***
- It was to ensure that their travel is not limited to any specific cities and would save them from the hassles like police reporting and filling of extra forms on entry in any of the *8 SAARC countries.*

Other Visas

- In 2015, India decided that citizens of SAARC countries are eligible for a Business Visa to India for a period of up to 5 years, or for a shorter duration based on specific requirements.
    - However, this does not apply to nationals of ***Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan.***
- ***Citizens of Nepal and Bhutan*** did not require a visa to visit India.
- In the case of Pakistani nationals, only certain categories were eligible for a multiple-entry Business Visa, limited to a *maximum duration of one year* and restricted to 10 places within India.
- Later, India issued revised instructions allowing a multiple-entry Business Visa for up to 3 years for special category Pakistani businessmen with verified financial standing and business credentials.
- These visas are restricted to *15 designated places* in India.

- Among SAARC countries, Sri Lankan nationals were eligible for the ***e-Tourist Visa*** facility.
- Indian nationals, in turn, do not require a visa to travel to Nepal and Bhutan, while all other SAARC member states provide Business Visa facilities to Indian citizens.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
• It is an ***economic and political regional organization*** of countries in South Asia. • **Secretariat** - Kathmandu, Nepal, • **Established with -** The signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on December 8, 1985. • **Members (8) -** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. • **Areas of Cooperation -** SAARC focuses on various areas like trade, education, health, and infrastructure development. • **Objectives** - To promote the welfare of the peoples 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. • SAARC also aims to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries and to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

References

1. The Hindu | SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme
2. Business Today | SAARC visa exemption scheme

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering