Time for revival of SAARC

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- India did not gain any support form neighboring countries in the ongoing Doklam stand-off.
\n
- India might need to rekindle SAARC in order to secure historical affinity with its neighbours
\n

\n\n

What are the views of the neighbors?

\n\n

\n
- Nepal & Sri Lanka distanced themselves from the issue and called for a consensus settlement.
\n
- Bhutan has blamed China for violating agreements at Doklam, without mentioning India.
\n
- But the public view in Bhutan increasingly calls it to distance itself from the issue without taking sides.
\n

\n\n

What has changed in their views?

\n\n

\n
- Over the past few years, except Bhutan, all the Indian neighbours have slowly but steadily moved away from an ‘India centric’ foreign policy and increased their Chinese tilt.
\n
- **Maldives –** The Indian private infrastructure company, GMR’s contract to

develop the ‘Male airport’ was revoked in 2012
\n
- Today, Chinese companies having bagged contracts to most infrastructure projects in Maldieves.
\n
- **Nepal -** China is building a railwayline to Nepal, Lhasa-Kathmandu road links is also under progress.
\n
- China has also approved a soft loan of over $200 million to construct an airport at Pokhara.
\n
- Chinese investors contributed $8.2 billion to Nepal, more than 60% of the FDI commitments made by the seven countries present.
\n
- **Sri Lanka -** Hambantota port construction project went to the Chinese in 2007 only after India rejected it.
\n
- China has won practically every infrastructure contract from Hambantota to Colombo.
\n
- **Bangladesh -** China committed $24 billion in infrastructure and energy projects.
\n
- Largely state-owned Chinese consortium, Himalaya Energy, won a bid for three gas fields in Bangladesh, which together account for more than half of the country’s total gas output.
\n
- **BRI -** China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is also proving to be attractive.
\n
- Once the investment flows in, it will be harder for the neighboring countires to deter China’s strategic presence .
\n
- If one of the aims of the current actions in Doklam is to save Bhutan from falling into the Chinese ring of influence, India should do a lot more for succeeding.
\n

\n\n

Why SAARC was abandoned?

\n\n

\n

- SAARC has historically been a vital platform for south –Asian diplomacy with 8 members countires that comprehensively constitutes India’s neighbourhood.
\n
- The organisation was abandoned by India about a year ago after Uri attacks.
\n
- There have been no steps taken to restore the SAARC process.
\n

\n\n

Why should it be restored?

\n\n

\n
- India has been the prime mover in SAARC due to its strategic geographical location & sheer economic size within the group.
\n
- It has survived three decades despite rifts like Indo-Pakistan tensions, among others.
\n
- Absence of it will hurt the South Asian construct and further loosen the bonds that tie all these countries together.
\n
- This makes it easier for China to make inroads.
\n
- It should also be remembered that despite China’s repeated requests, SAARC was one club it never gained admittance to.
\n
- Alternate groupings such as South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), BIMSTEC, the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) can come never close to SAARC’s comprehensive cogency.
\n
- Hence, India needs to revive SAARC at he earliest.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering