

Friendship, Cooperation And Prosperity

— Moosa Bin Shamsher

SOUTH Asia was the only tan and Nepal, all the five plimentarity and compatibility region without regionalism until the idea of countries have a colonial legacy, which SARC hopes to nurture. All the countries of SARC among its components. It has SARC was mooted by Bangla- are members of the Non-aligned not been designed to intrude desh in early 1980 ostensibly Movement. A majority of upon multilateral and bilateral for mutual gains on the socio- them are members of the Commonwealth cooperation rather SARC shall economic front, for the peoples monwealth and some are again complement them.

of the region irrespective of members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The SARC countries are also bound by their membership of the world body. Ethnologically and culturally, there is also identity inherent in them. Besides, they have the regional identity which separates them from those of their like elsewhere. Three great religions—Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism flourished here. The region was also a cradle of a great civilisation steeped in history.

Subjective conditions for regional co-operation were always there. But the advent of colonialism and its aftermath caused xenophobic condition unleashed in its wake mutual mistrust and misperception, endemic suspicion and tension and occasional enmities and hostilities. Peace and stability remained a far cry in the region to the chagrin of the people and saner elements in the countries under SARC who thought their hard-won freedom from the thuggery of the domain of colonial yoke will herald a new dawn of peace prosperity and harmony.

Indeed, SARC holds a great promise of fostering a climate of friendship in the region hitherto characterised by rivalry, competition, hatred and tension. Viewed dispassionately, the extra-economic benefits expected to be generated by the interaction and exchanges will be enormous and compounded in course of time.

Cohesion and solidarity are at the core of SARC which explicitly precludes dictate and dominance by any single country. Mutuality and commonality are stipulated to be its guiding principles. The weak are not be dominated and exploited but should be supported through a gradual process of evolution to overcome their existing problems. Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity and not consensus which means that all the countries will stand on an equal footing. To make the atmosphere of regional issue congenial and cordial, it has further been decided that bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from deliberations. But there will always remain the scope of bilateral approach to disputes and differences.

Friendship encompasses com-

patibility and compatibility which SARC hopes to nurture upon multilateral and bilateral cooperation rather SARC shall complement them.

There are examples that when regionalism unfolds, creative interaction and exchanges replace hostility with friendship. Countries initially hostile to each other have subsequently become partners in progress, burying schism and squabbles. SARC holds such a promise: the promise of enduring friendship among the countries of the region. It is believed that the spirit of equality and partnership will accrue mutual benefit and promote and stimulate solidarity through mutual cooperation.

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cio-economic approach to peace and stability.

All the seven countries of the region belong to the acronym the Third World and also the Group of 77. They are still under-developed and together form one of the poorest belts in the world with over 50 per cent of the population below poverty line and 64 per cent illiterate. In respect of resource endowment except manpower and population growth the region can be termed as poor. It has only 3.31 per cent of the land area of the world. They are at varying levels of development, with India better off economically than the rest. The degree of complimentarity in the economies of the region is not very much significant, the present level of inter-regional trade not exceeding 6.7 per cent. Economic linkage or leviel between the South Asian countries is yet to have strong moorings. Global economic constraints, adverse international trade situation tilting towards developed countries and uncertain climate of aid have happily convinced SARC member-states that "regional co-operation in South Asia is beneficial, desirable and necessary and that it will help promote the welfare and improve the quality of life of the peoples of the region."

Promotion and strengthening of collective self-reliance in the region is therefore the objective of SARC. The progress achieved so far in the realm of non-political co-operation is significant. Nine different areas of economics and cultural activity have been identified and an Integrated Programme of Action taken for their implementation. Working groups set up in this regard are monitoring their progress. Never before in the history of South Asian countries such a wide spectrum of areas has been explored for mutually beneficial and desirable cooperation.

There are many more fields in which this co-operation can be stretched to the collective benefit of the region. They can go for complimentarity in production planning, in trade and commerce harnessing of their vast water resources, generating and sharing energy and power and market mechanism. In the infrastructural field, regional co-operation can encompass transport, shipping, tourism, insurance bank, and market mechanism.

Scientific and technical research can be directed towards exploitation of sea-bed, fishery medi-

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care, industry, agriculture and forestry and veterinary. Education, sports and media are other fields where the countries of the region can profitably share their expertise. In fact co-operation can be multidimensional touching all the facets of life of the peoples of the region.

The rationale of this regional co-operation is that "uneven

levels of development should inspire on the one hand the less

developed to catch up with their

more fortunate neighbours while

on the other hand, encourage

the more developed to help narrow the gap existing between

them." It will undoubtedly help

achieve collective self-reliance

for which SARC has been designed.

Besides, through SARC the

countries of the region can hope to have an effective

voice in international forums

and can play a role commensurate with their intrinsic

global importance. Region

to region co-operation can

also be fostered through such

regionalism.

SARC is a product of co-opera-

tive agreements with bright pros-

pects and vast potentials of

widening its horizon of coope-

ration. It has the promise of

developing into the first truly

regional arrangement that has

emerged in South Asia. In the

words of Bangladesh President

Hussain Muhammad Ershad—

"South Asian Regional Co-opera-

tion is a unique programme for

development. It is not in any

way prejudicial to the interest of

any nation or grouping. The

prospects of such co-operation

are wide and bright".