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Indian Council of World Affairs

Sapru House, Barakhamba Road

New Delhi

Report

on

International Conference

on

**“Changing Dynamics In South Asian Association For
Regional Co-Operation : Challenges And Opportunities
In The Region”**

Organised by

**The Dept. of Political Science, National Education Society's
Ratnam College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Bhandup,
Mumbai**

in Collaboration with

Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi

8-9 December 2017

Mumbai

The 2 Day Conference was attended by 61 delegates from all over India. They represented, Jawaharlal University, Aligarh Muslim University, Central University of Gujarat, Central University of Pondicherry, Mumbai University to name a few. Independent Researchers and Activists also participated in the Conference.

Some of the eminent Resource Persons include:

- 1) Dr. Amena Mohsin, Professor, International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- 2) Dr. Nayani Melegoda, Professor, International Relations & Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Colombo, University of Colombo.
- 3) Prof. Dhan Pandit, Professor of Political Science & Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University, Khatmandu.
- 3) Dr. Uddhab Pyakurel, Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, University of Khatmandu, Nepal.
- 4) Dr. Abdul Rasheed, Dean Faculty of Arts, National University of Maldives.
- 5) Prof. P M Kamath, Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies, Mumbai
- 6) Dr. Shriradha Dutta, Distinguished Fellow, Asian Confluence, Meghalaya.
- 7) Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Choudary, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata.
- 9) Dr. A. Subramanyam. Raju, Head, Centre for South Asian Studies, UNESCO Madanjeet Chair, Central University, Pondicherry.
- 10) Tashi Chophel, Faculty of Social Sciences, Asst. Professor, Sherbutse College, Royal University of Bhutan.
- 11) Dr. Ishani Naskar, Professor, International Relations, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata.
- 12) Commodore Kesnur, Director, Maritime Warfare Centre, Mumbai.

Shri Ajaneesh Kumar IFS, Deputy Director General, ICWA, who was the Keynote Speaker, spoke on the relevance of SAARC in today's context and the challenges it needs to encounter. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proactive foreign policy has helped SAARC survive as an important regional corporation. Policies like "Neighbourhood First" by the Indian government has helped SAARC grow and achieve its objectives, said Shri Ajaneesh Kumar.

The first session on MIGRATION/DISPLACEMENT/HUMAN TRAFFICKING & FORCED MIGRATION, began with the theoretical background to regionalism in International Politics. The presentations in this session focused on issues like the intricate relationship between Gender & Environmental Degradation and Poverty in the region. Presentations included India's Soft Power Outreach in South Asia.

The IInd session on Nation Building, Nationalism, Terrorism and Insurgent Movements, began with a presentation on Subregionalism and debates on whether Sub regionalism complemented or competed with Regionalism. The issue of terrorism and how it has weakened SAARC was passionately discussed by the other presenters in the session. **Dr. Ambreen Agha, Research Fellow, Indian Council of World affairs, New Delhi, attributed India-Pakistan hostilities, as the biggest challenge to SAARC's primary aim of delivering and expanding the process of economic integration. She raised the question of alternatives to SAARC in view of its non performance and highlighted the regional and international political implications of such a replacement.** There were emotional pleas for peace in Kashmir where delegates pointed the need to involve stakeholders, that is, the people in the dialogue.

In the IIIrd session on Boundaries, Water &, Energy Disputes, Climate Change & Disaster Preparedness, presenters lamented that the region is least integrated and is a region without regionalism. It was rued that the SAARC which was designed to be an economic bloc leading to greater engagement not only failed to deliver its promise of free trade but has itself become a hostage to the strained relations between India and Pakistan. There was a suggestion to adopt a coordinated strategy by the SAARC countries to fight climate change in the region.

The IVth session on Millenium Development Goals/Poverty Alleviation/Health, Education & Gender Inequality discussed at length the often neglected issue of recruitment of women for Violent Extremism. It was suggested that women should be assigned a significant role in preventing Violent Extremism.

In the Vth session on Trade Markets & Polotical Economies Of South Asia, the weakening trade linkages between South Asian countries was lamented. It was argued that Regional organizations like SAARC can enhance the capacity of developing countries to benefit from Globalisation.

Trust deficit and cross border terrorism were seen as the biggest challenges for SAARC . Speaker after speaker touched on this. The general consensus among all has been that SAARC is bound to remain one main organization in the region that must not only bind all the states together but has also become attractive to big powers such as China & USA. To conclude in the words of Dr. Sreeradha Datta, "Each member state has a stake in ensuring that SAARC not only stays alive but fulfils its promise of an integrated economy. The cost of non cooperation is high, hence the measures to take the SAARC forward will find its way."

Outcome of the Conference:

- 1) A momentum has been built for the revival of regional integration of SAARC.
- 2) Participants from SAARC countries who had face to face discussion with their counterparts from other SAARC nations would work towards creating a conducive environment for psychological unity.

3) The delegates pledged to form an Advocacy Group to strongly advocate frequent and steady growth in linkages and exchanges in the technical and economic sectors. Members registered their names for the same.

4).Creation of a SAARC Academic Forum in Mumbai under the aegis of Ratnam College that will facilitate avenues for people to people contact, through Student Exchange Programmes, Visiting Professors Programme, and Business- Academia exchange visits.

Saraswathi Unni,
Head, Dept. of Political Science,
Conference Convenor.
