Imagine a New South Asia: 25 Years of SAARC

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Two decades have lapsed since SAARC came into existence with ambitious goals to bring about positive and meaningful changes in the life of South Asian people through regional collaboration and significant cooperation. After 25 years of SAARC, there is widespread frustration and cynicism among the key stakeholders on the progress achieved so far. It is largely believed that the SAARC is not a priority area of its member nations. The state apparatus in all the SAARC countries only take action during the period of summits and then resume an apathetic stance. Many commitments that have been made under the SAARC summit seem unlikely to be implemented in conditions marked by mistrusts, lack of confidence and lack of political will among its members. In addition, there is the view that SAARC’s decisions are often influenced by Indo-Pak bilateral relations.

Almost one-fifth of the world’s population resides in this region and there is huge potential for bilateral, multilateral and regional development models to ensure mutual prosperity. A new and more influential South Asia can emerge on the world map only if development strategies are implemented in a more effective manner. The member states of SAARC must synergize efforts for regional peace and security, food security, rural-urban development, trade, education, public health, social service delivery mechanisms, disaster management, energy, financing mechanisms, culture, tourism, climate change, etc.

Keeping 25 years of SAARC in mind, this panel will discuss whether SAARC as a model failed to deliver or if its member states lack the political will to enter into regional cooperation.

Based on the lessons learnt from SAARC’s performance over the last 25 years, the panelists will also share their views on what they think worked and why and vice versa. They will recommend ways to strengthen SAARC as a forum that seeks to develop and advocate for a common understanding, new interventions and negotiating frameworks to contribute towards the realisation of socio-economic rights, just and democratic governance, and regional cooperation in the wake of possible regional spheres of developments.