

# SAARC and Evolving Asian Regionalism

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## Main themes of discussion:

- Regionalism: meanings and attractions
- Asian Regionalism
- Phases and Types
- Building an Asian Community
- South Asia, Southeast Asia and Asian Regionalism
- Conclusion: critical factors for regionalism's success

# Regionalism

- Regionalism – defined as state-led initiative to foster cooperation
- Regionalisation – process of cooperation led by markets
- Regional economic integration – elimination of trade barriers leading to customs union
- Regional identity – cognitive regions – imagined communities
- Regional unit – cohesion, supra-nationalism

Regionalism's attractions – balance between nationalism and globalism

# Asian Regionalism

- 'Soft' regionalism – structures are not front-loaded
- Trust building rather than institution building
- Fluid, inclusive and open ended
- Consensus oriented
- Continues to evolve

# Asian Regionalism – Phases

- Regionalism in Asia was initially conceived in broad macro terms: pan-Asian endeavours
- 'Peace area' rather than a regional institution
- Then came the emphasis on economic regionalism – Asian economic cooperation
- Next stage was sub-regionalism – Southeast Asian efforts: ASA, MAPHILINDO, ASEAN
- South Asia – SAARC in 1985

- Post-Cold War era saw a renewed emphasis on regional cooperation
- Primacy of the region or regionalisation of international politics
- Intensified regional integration efforts in ASEAN and South Asia - responses to developments in other regions
- The need of deeper economic integration is recognised but the movement is slow
- According to an ADB study, 'official cooperation is still nascent'

# Asian Regionalism: Types

- ❖ Super-regionalism: APEC, ARF, ASEM
- ❖ Sub-national regionalism – Growth Triangles
- ❖ 1997 economic crisis followed by political crisis in many Southeast Asian countries and its impact on regionalism
- ❖ ASEAN Community – 2003 initiative

# Asian regionalism – Towards Community

## Building

- Asian regionalist efforts now feature countries from Northeast, Southeast and South Asia and include security and economic concerns
- Proposals: ASEAN Economic Community, East Asian Economic Community and Asian Economic Community – ‘a network of bridges’
- No formal inter-regional platform has been created in the region
- But cross-organisational links are palpable because of concurrent/overlapping memberships
- East, Southeast, South and Central Asia
- The various community proposals have resulted in multilateral forums like APT (2003) and EAS (2005)

# ASEAN and Asian Regionalism

- These are ASEAN-anchored forums
- Southeast Asian regionalism has become mature enough to drive such forums
- Regional cooperation in Southeast Asia has been relatively more successful than in South Asia
- It has created a more predictable and orderly regional environment
- ASEAN as a more confident regional level actor seeking to build an Asian community

# SAARC and Asian Regionalism

- SAARC, for obvious reasons, has made no significant contribution to Asia's evolving regionalism
- For the most part, inward-looking
- External linkages are emerging slowly
- Individual members, however, are part of other Asian forums
- South Asian states are involved in the Asian regionalism project by virtue of their presence in some of them

# India and Asian Regionalism

- Of the South Asian states, India is more visible in emerging Asian regionalism
- It is somewhat disenchanted with SAARC's weak progress
- India has been pursuing trans-regional, super-regional, sub-regional, inter-regional and bilateral cooperative arrangements with enthusiasm
- Its role and potential are appreciated more outside its region than within

# Critical factors for regionalism:

- the formal and informal mandates and mechanisms employed by regional organisations to deal with regional issues;
- the extent of shared values and norms among member-states;
- the role of the pre-eminent or pivotal power;
- external actors' impact on the regional organisation;
- Leadership;
- the regional organisation's ability and willingness to learn from its inadequacies and re-tool itself.