

The SARC summit

The first summit of the South Asian regional Cooperation, the concept of which was first floated by Bangladesh in 1980 opens in Dhaka today, amidst hopes that the summit will pave the way for greater cooperation between the members of the region. All the seven states of South Asia have great similarity in their past experiences and they also share a common destiny. In the past all these nations were oppressed and exploited by the colonial powers. Consequently their socio-economic development was stunted and only after decades of bitter struggles against imperialism they achieved their independence. But mere political independence could not bring any qualitative change in the lives of the common people of these countries. While direct oppression by colonial powers ceased, indirect domination through the tactics of neocolonialism continued unhindered. The old international economic order which is dominated by the Western industrial nations was fetter in the development of newly independent countries. Hence the developing world known as the South launched heroic campaign for doing away with the old economic order and supplant it with a new international economic order. And in this context the countries of the Third World grasped the importance of cooperation among themselves, which is popularly known as South-South cooperation.

The concept of SARC was mooted mainly in the context of this South-South cooperation where member nations will get immense opportunity of mutual help in various spheres, free from the corrosive influence of rich nations. Already the officials of the seven states of the region have indentified the fields where the collaboration will immediately begin. The fields are agriculture, rural development, telecommunications, meteorology, population control and health, sports and culture, transport, postal services and scientific and technical research.

The foreign ministers of the seven nations in the meetings at New Delhi, Male and Thimpu after threadbare discussion among themselves had unanimously decided that in order to make the SARC a successful institution of collective cooperation, the bilateral or contentious issues would not be included in the agenda of the SARC. Looking from a realistic plane, it appears that the foreign ministers' perception of cooperation is based on objective assessment of the political situation in South Asia and clear understanding of diverse priorities of the nations in the region. It is agreed on all hands that bilateral issues between India on the one hand and smaller nations on the other are so complex and thorny, that if they are stressed too much, the whole forum will automatically crumble. At the same time it has to be borne in mind that if long-term cooperation is sought to be effected through SARC reasonable solutions to the outstanding problems between the member states have to be worked out to the mutual satisfaction of the countries concerned. In other words, the member states have to acknowledge each other as equal partners of progress if the SARC has to take off and flourish in the real sense of the terms. The true basis of cooperation can only be found in the spirit of genuine friendship and not on outmoded practice of expansionism or hegemonism.