

# GNLU SAARC Stakeholder Summit 2017

*Saturday, 23 September 2017*

## International Press - Newsletter



### **An Association Alright But Without So Much the Cooperation**

The **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia. Its member states include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAARC Stakeholder's Summit is essentially a meeting not of SAARC, but of the member states who have vested interests in the region and the issues that affect these countries and SAARC as a whole. SAARC comprises 21% of the world's population, and that is why this organisation assumes great importance in itself.

There were specific issues that this meeting primarily sought to discuss – the establishment of a regional, technically-focused counter-terrorism mechanism; the feasibility of constituting a special court to effectively adjudicate cases of cross-country terrorism; and the impact of this war on terrorism on the civil and human rights of the SAARC countries.

A one-day conference, these issues were pre-decided upon for the countries to actually discuss and actually manage to come up with some substantive solutions. Several important countries were not represented because the delegates failed to show up. The ones present were India, Japan, Russia, Bhutan, Maldives, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and USA; peppered with cameo appearances from delegates of Pakistan and UK.

The opening statements were then made by the delegates of the countries. Creating controversy and attacking the other countries was on everybody's minds from the get-go. In the first session, while it said that it opposes the use of force, China mentioned that it supports the calibrated use of force. The Doklam issue was raised by Russia, China's use of force in the territory questioned but China retorted that Doklam belongs to China and the issue is not related to SAARC in any way. Nobody questioned the delegate on how it's not relevant though, India and Bhutan being the other two parties in the case. Pakistan questioned India's boycott of SAARC for the past two years, to which the Indian delegation replied that SAARC has not been able to come to any concrete solutions. Several statements were made by the countries, what was lacking though was a sense of specificity to deal with the issues at hand. Saudi Arabia, a gross violator of human rights and a country which does

not give its women citizens the right to make their own decisions, was present at the table to discuss human rights violation with other countries. Irony, you say? The delegation from the US said that all sorts of violence and terrorism should be condemned, and we should focus on raising the next generation without the plagues of hatred, fear and terrorism. President Donald Trump might have a lot to say on the issue of hatred, as he goes around America looking to make his 'America great again'. Nobody ever asked him the definition of great though, is it a White nation, or a nation without immigrants, or one where nobody has health insurances? I'd say his answer would be entertaining, if nothing else. Pakistan decided on playing the victim card again, saying that Pakistan is suffering from the problem of terrorism itself and how it has lost billions because of the devil of terrorism. It also said that it has lost a lot of lives because of it, but why not do something about it then? How about not sponsoring the same terrorist organisations that kill their people and stop harbouring them in their own country?

Some substantial discussions and suggestions came from countries like Maldives, India, Bhutan and even Afghanistan. Afghanistan suggested that there should be an 'Aadhaar card for countries', a list of organisations that should be declared as terrorists, and the need to define terrorism for the South Asian region. The country also suggested the temporary suspension of Pakistan, so that the issue about how to deal with terrorism could be discussed in the absence of a perpetrator of terrorism. The delegates, in their working paper, mentioned the condition of suspending Pakistan as their clause. Although the motion was denied with 5 negative votes, Pakistan still decided to walk out of the summit, maintaining that the committee was constantly trying to isolate the state when it wanted to come to a consensus with the other states. The delegate(s) also said that the state would initiate the proceedings to officially withdraw from SAARC. Although it was applauded, isolating a country is not a solution. It's actually provoking the nation and making it more hostile towards the other member states. Instead of trying to kicking the country out, the members present should have focused on coming to a consensus with Pakistan, although the failure to do so in the past is something to think about. The issue of establishing a common regional court was also discussed, but even though the idea was appreciated, the difficulties attached to doing so practically were emphasised upon. Maldives was of the opinion that ICJ can always be approached with inter-state issues, and deciding on a legal framework and trying to substantiate the idea of a common court would unnecessarily take up a lot of time and effort. USA and India, however, supported the idea of a common court, citing the examples of the common court for all European Union nations. But the issues of if and how the laws, the judges and the jurisdiction would be decided made it somewhat of a failed proposal.

The human rights issue was a failure to start with, when it became a blame game more than a discussion. And like I said before, Saudi Arabia does not deserve to be speaking on human rights violation. Every country's opening statement comprised of how the other country is violating human rights in their county, with issues from Rohingya crisis to Afghanistan school attacks brought up. Kulbhushan Jhadhava was also brought into the discussion. At this point, Russia said something I agree with, that controversial statements from USA have sort of become a habit. The working paper that was written by India and Afghanistan suggested some measures and redressal mechanisms. It was suggested that an independent investigative agency should be established for SAARC countries, promotion of technical co-operation and training programmes with regional and international organisation, ensuring establishment of regional counter terrorism centres which should have a curriculum ensuring a proper training on human rights issue. But the working paper failed to turn into a declaration, with Bhutan, China, Russia, South Africa and USA voting against it. Although nothing concrete came out of the summit, the discussions were undoubtedly healthy, and hopefully the second edition would see more participation and actually coming up with solutions to deal with various issues.

- Angela Dua (Indian Express)





## 'IT'S A BLAME GAME, BRING OUT THE NAMES!'

On this Saturday, the SAARC (not the whole of it, of course) convened along with its stakeholders to discuss the issue of cross border terrorism. The summit however, did nothing but convince spectators strongly about the utter uselessness of the organization. The drafters of the SAARC charter probably rolled in their graves as the crucial tenets of 'neighborliness' and the 'RC' in SAARC was changed to 'Repeated Complaining', despite prayers by South Africa to behave as 'brotherhood countries' would.

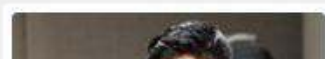
The discussion commenced with the SAARC nations of India, Bhutan and Maldives, stepping out to devise a kind of strategy. However, this is did not seem to materialize. Afghanistan came up with unique yet controversial solutions such as the suspension of Pakistan from the SAARC and devising an 'Aadhaar Card' for refugees. However, the SAARC once again failed to look ahead, and instead dwelled on the same old issues. It was redundant to hear the same old complaints, the infiltration into Indian territory by the Chinese, the interference into Puerto Rico by the USA government, the concerns pertaining to the Taliban regime and the support given to the Assad Regime. Delegates also seemed greatly impressed by the African Union Model of countering terrorism, however certainly not enough to incorporate any of its so called 'creative and innovative' mechanisms into the final working paper.

While delegates seemed well versed on political scenarios, the severe lack of humanitarian understanding seemed enough to tick a sadist off. Maldives seemed clear about the idea that 'terrorists do not deserve human rights' at all. A whole discussion on Human Rights passed while discussing the Kulbhushan Jadhav case and pointing fingers at Pakistan, the summit soon felt like a discussion on a newspaper clipping. Rhetoric nonsense was everywhere with China calling itself a democracy and Saudi Arabia standing strong in the support of human rights. Countries moved into serious discussion about the creation of a database for terrorist identification and such discussion was also repeatedly overshadowed by attempts to show Pakistan out of SAARC by means of an unlimited suspension. Countries, while not in favour of a SAARC court in particular, threw around words like 'arbitration' without understanding the ramifications of having arbitration as a solution to terrorism.

When India and Afghanistan put their heads together and came up with a working paper, Pakistan was flabbergasted to see its suspension as the first clause thereof. The delegates of Pakistan responded by giving the committee exactly what it wanted, and stormed out. The dramatic exit of Pakistan at this point was the only happening thing in the summit and the same also failed to get the delegates out of a slumber they seemed to have fallen into. The working paper presented seemed like something drafted before the summit was ever convened with its provisions clearly contradicting the discussions within the summit. It did not come as a surprise then when the paper failed to garnish popular support within the forum.

It was deeply saddening to see how the SAARC seems to have degraded to a forum where countries merely come (when they do) to point fingers at each other. A serious lack of empathy and enthusiasm was noted today. Delegates like Russia, USA and Turkey as stakeholders seemed to be too busy with their internal conflicts to display any serious interest in resolving the conflict of a foreign region. Meanwhile the SAARC countries consistently forgot their strength, their strength in terms of their diversity and were quick to brand it as a weakness. It can only be hoped that these nations understand and integrate their ties stronger than ever in light of the evil of terrorism and remember the commitment that the SAARC charter demands of them. If the SAARC fails to emerge as a protector of the future, it shall disappear to be nothing but a lost fragment of the past.

- Samidha Mathur (Huffington Post)





## “China is a Democracy” and Other Beautifully Spun Rhetoric

Calling it a SAARC Stakeholder Summit was perhaps a mistake because we certainly missed the delegates from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. No doubt they can be excused for missing the Summit considering the agenda was, after all, related to some random frivolous issue of cross border terrorism in the South Asian region. How can these countries, in any way, be related to this issue?

The opening statement was delivered by Bhutan in a speech about how there is a need for a mechanism, but for precisely what, has left Al Jazeera mystified. The striking speech of the hour was made by Republic of China when the delegate very confidently pronounced that China was indeed a democracy...a minor fact that the international community was probably unaware of. USA started off wonderfully with enough rhetoric spun into the speech to confuse an English professor from Cambridge Uni. and Maldives, speaking at the end of the moderated caucus, suddenly decided to enlighten the council about the history of the Summit.

The first issue was undoubtedly the need for a mechanism to deal with terrorism (so that was what Bhutan meant) and to delineate the possible features that the mechanism would possibly have. There was a healthy debate among delegates supporting the mechanism but uncertain about how to go about it. Afghanistan's originality in suggesting that the SAARC follow the footsteps of the African Union Counter Terrorism Framework flowed like a cascade of musical symphony possibly from the pretty South African delegate sitting beside him. China again stole the show with one of the striking speeches of the hour by throwing in what Prof. Amal Jayawardne had to say in his remarks on the *“Building Stronger Partnerships to Prevent Terrorism,”* Conference Organized by the Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Washington, DC which can be found as a pdf file on the fourth hit when Googled. After which, there was a surprise entry by Pakistan.

The second issue was Pakistan's involvement in battling terrorists. There was good bloc support with Maldives and India attacking Pakistan and China supporting Pakistan. Maldives drew a rather cute analogy of Pakistan's alleged sponsoring of terrorism by comparing it to a bad child at home...whatever that means. At some point, Bhutan declared that Pakistan cannot play a victim card when it comes to terrorism, thereby effectively ripping off Saudi Arabia's speech elucidated a few minutes back. As per the discussions on dispute mechanism resolution that ensued, there was divisive opinion on whether a common SAARC Court, along the lines of EU be installed to tackle terrorism. Quite a unique point was put forward by the delegate of Bhutan for a 'monitoring mechanism' instead of a common court. Interesting, but if only the delegate could substantiate on it further which he clearly failed even during the press conference.

The third issue discussed was human rights violations during combatting terrorism. The delegate of Maldives declared that terrorists have no human rights. Yes, he said that...why? Because they *have no religion, no country and they brutally kill other people.* At this point, United Kingdom decided to enter the forum for reasons, as the delegate pointed out, to steer the discussion to what human rights actually was and how it should ensue further. While the delegate did make a substantial point at what constituted human rights, the other delegates did little to note that down. Instead they went on a beautifully researched and delightfully crafted blame game, each holding the other for the terrorist activities occurring in their own countries, making it an immensely fruitless discussion. No one thought it was important to address the crux of the issue. This fruitless discussion also snatched away the time that could have instead been used to discuss the fourth issue involving Kashmir.

In an attempt to wrap up the discussions in a day, the committee abruptly moved to a working paper, the authors of which were India and Afghanistan. It is therefore, unsurprising the two-member bloc failed to generate consensus on the working paper, and committee was unable to produce a declaration reflecting any viable solution to the problem at hand. While the day ended with a note of disappointment, we believe that there is still hope for SAARC to design more original methods (other than the ones mentioned in the sub-par, non-consensus generating working paper) for tackling terrorism in the region, but we do hope that they are quick in formulating them considering the need of the hour. Nevertheless, Al Jazeera extends a note of congratulations to the delegates for putting up an exceedingly good show. Good luck with future summits.

- Priya Barua (Al Jazeera)



### Best Delegate

The Delegate of India



### High Commendation

The Delegate of Afghanistan



### Special Mention

The Delegate of Maldives

Oh, and the dates for GNLUMUN 2018 are out!



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