

## **SAARC Summit Diplomacy and Its Impact on Indo–Pakistan Relations (1985–2014)**

**Manzoor Ahmad Naazer**

International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Regional Organizations in the developing World are generally marred due to political problems and bilateral disputes among their member states. However, improved relations among members can have a positive impact on the process of regionalism. Pakistan and India are the two major countries of South Asia and the main members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Generally, they had tense relations and also have fought wars since their independence in 1947. Interactions between their leaders can, however, help improve their bilateral ties. The paper analyzes the impact of SAARC summit diplomacy that enables regional leaders to meet quite often on regular basis, on bilateral relations of the two countries. SAARC summits have generally helped improve bilateral relations of India and Pakistan as they provided the forum and opportunities to the leaders of both countries to discuss mutual problems and concerns directly, both at official or unofficial level. They helped defuse tensions, manage crises, begin or resume parleys and negotiate or sign important bilateral agreements.

**Keywords:** SAARC, India, Pakistan, summit, diplomacy, dialogue, peace, conflicts.

Bilateral ties of India and Pakistan, the two principal powers in South Asia and the main members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), bear far reaching implications for overall political atmosphere and the process of regionalism in South Asia. Both countries mostly have tense relations since their inception in 1947 because of their political problems and bilateral disputes including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, and construction of water reservoirs in India-held Kashmir (IJK). They fought two all-out wars, i.e. in 1965 and 1971; besides three limited ones, i.e. over control of Kashmir in 1948, Siachen Glacier in 1984 and Kargil sector in 1999. Time and again their forces stood eyeball to eyeball across their international border or Line of Control (LoC) that separates IJK from Pakistan-held (Azad) Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). These problems have not only marred their bilateral relations but also had adverse effects on the process of South Asian regionalism. It is widely believed that the bilateral disputes and political problems between India and Pakistan had mostly overshadowed the regional political environment that mainly caused ineffectiveness of SAARC. The organization was created in December 1985 to promote regional cooperation among its members in economic, cultural and scientific fields. It was largely held that fate of South Asian regionalism would mainly depend on the nature of relationship between India and Pakistan. Conversely, it was also believed that success of SAARC would have a positive impact on bilateral relations of all South Asian countries (SACs), chiefly Pakistan and India. In this context, it is significant to explore as to what extent SAARC summit diplomacy has so far helped improve bilateral relations of two main regional players, i.e. India and Pakistan.

This paper aims to study the impact of SAARC summit diplomacy on bilateral relations of India and Pakistan. It will investigate: if, and how the SAARC summit process affected the bilateral ties of two main members of SAARC. The paper has three sections including the first one being introduction that also includes the conceptual framework. The second section surveys the outcomes of SAARC summits with particular reference to their impact on Indo–Pakistan relations. Third section carries the conclusions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

IR literature is highly rich giving insights on the role of international organizations (IOs) in contemporary World politics through diverse standpoints. The proponents of different theoretical perspectives have different arguments on the significance of IOs, both global and regional ones. The realists and neorealists generally underrate their role believing that they are just the instruments in the hands of powerful states to promote their national interests. Moreover, they have no real potential to significantly change the power structure of the anarchic international system. On the other hand liberals, particularly institutionalists strongly believe that IOs can really transform the world politics by inhibiting conflicts and promoting cooperation among states. They argue that IOs provide forum to the states to discuss issues, negotiate and conclude agreements as they provide information, address collective action problem, reduce transaction cost, brings transparency and promote trust among the participants. IOs can help states to conclude treaties with the mechanism to enforce and adjudicate them. Thus, IOs are regarded as highly important means of promoting peace and cooperation among states (Ahmad, 2013).

SAARC members, particularly smaller regional countries (SRCs), had attached high hopes to the organization, principally to its summit diplomacy. It was expected that regular, frequent and direct interactions among the leaders of SACs, at the sidelines of SAARC summits, would help them discuss their bilateral disputes and political problems, but for those that need to be tackled at official level, informally and personally without bureaucratic formalities and hurdles. It was also hoped that such an environment would help remove difficulties in negotiations conducted at the official levels. Thus, it would give them opportunities to address their political disputes and common problems, both regional and bilateral, more effectively and comprehensively. The summit process, it was expected, would ultimately enable leaders of SACs to improve their bilateral relations and help create overall friendly political environment in the region that would lay the foundation of successful cooperation process in South Asia.

### **SAARC Summits and Indo–Pak Relations**

Indo–Pak relations have generally been strained over the last seven decades mainly due to their unresolved political problems, bilateral disputes and contentious issues, including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir, Sir Creek, Water disputes, and Siachen glacier etc. Indo–Pak rivalry warranted leadership of both countries to interact quite often in order to bridge the mutual differences and eliminate misunderstandings, cool off tensions and manage conflicts at certain level. SAARC provided leaders of the two hostile neighbours the forum as well as the opportunities to meet regularly both at official and unofficial level in order to understand each other's point of view, accommodate their conflicting opinions and address mutual concerns. The interactions between leadership of both countries during the SAARC summits and their outcomes have been surveyed in the following pages. For the sake of convenience and clarity, the period from 1985 to 2015 has been divided into different phases according to the tenures of different governments in Pakistan.

#### **SAARC Summits during Zia–Junejo Era (1985–88)**

From the very onset, SAARC summits showed their worth as being helpful for improvement of Indo–Pak relations. The first ever SAARC summit took place in Dhaka (December 7–8, 1985), just a year after Indian forces had occupied Siachen glacier and initiated yet another but very costly conflict with Pakistan on the World's highest war theatre. The summit had provided the leadership of both countries to interact at personal level and sort out their problems. President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India discussed several issues in their meeting at the margins of the summit. Zia accepted Gandhi's invitation to visit India. Later on, Zia visited New Delhi on December 17, 1985 which produced a "great optimism" about the future prospects of good neighbourly relations between the two states (Dash, 1996: 91). Zia and Gandhi also decided to begin defence secretaries' level parleys on Siachen glacier. The first round of such talks was held in Rawalpindi on January 10–12, 1986 during which both states had agreed to resolve the issue through negotiations in accordance with Simla agreement (Wirsing, 1998: 26).

Occasionally, meetings between leaders of both countries helped manage the crises between India and Pakistan. For instance, Hussain observed, at the margins of second SAARC summit that took place in Bangalore (November 16-17, 1986), an informal meeting between Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo of Pakistan and Gandhi had helped defuse highly tense situation between the two countries (Hussain, 1996: 18–9). The tension had arisen after India had deployed its troops in the name of a military excise (Operation Brasstacks) near to Pakistani border. However, Dixit claimed, Junejo was probably not aware of “the evolving threat” arising out of Operation Brasstacks and he had not raised or discussed this issue with Gandhi. (Dixit, 2002: 253). In fact, the crises had heightened in the few weeks following the summit and reached to its climax in January 1987. Its management and de-escalation had nothing to do with the meeting between Junejo and Gandhi. Rather, it was Zia’s cricket diplomacy in February 1987 that ultimately paved the way to defuse the crises (Khalid, 2012: 49–50). The success of Zia-Gandhi meeting, however, underscores the significance of direct interactions between the top leadership of the two countries, particularly under highly tense situations. SAARC provides such opportunities quite regularly. Nonetheless, Junejo and Gandhi in their meeting in Bangalore agreed to carry on the process of normalization of India–Pakistan’s relations through dialogue process at level of their home and foreign secretaries and taking measures in order to curb illegal border crossing, to control drug trafficking and smuggling, and to fight terrorism (Hussain, 1996: 19; Dixit, 2002: 253).

Another positive outcome of unofficial talks between Junejo and Gandhi appeared next year, i.e. at the sidelines of third SAARC summit in Katmandu in 1987. During the meeting, both prime ministers discussed bilateral political problems including the issues of Siachen glacier and Sir Creek. They also agreed: to early convene the third meeting of both countries’ defense secretaries to discuss Siachen issue, and; to settle the issue of maritime boundary at Sir Creek in accordance with the respective provisions of international law. They decided to appoint surveyor generals for survey and demarcation of boundaries at Sir Creek. Both prime ministers realized the need of cooperation on security issues, such as illegal border crossing between the two countries and agreed to hold a meeting of both countries’ secretaries of interior to discuss the possible steps to curb illegal crossing on their common border. They decided that both countries’ secretaries of economic affairs should hold an early meeting to explore the prospects of increasing bilateral trade and cooperation in other economic areas. These were unexpected but significant agreements which substantially improved bilateral relations of the two countries. Due to these breakthroughs, Pakistan had reportedly withdrawn its amendment to the draft declaration of the summit which sought to declare South Asia a nuclear-free-zone (Dash, 1996: 98).

#### **Agreement to Not to Attack Each Other’s Nuclear Facilities**

One of the most significant and probably most successful bilateral agreements between India and Pakistan is also a product of talks at the margins of SAARC summits. This agreement forbids both India and Pakistan from attacking each other’s nuclear facilities and installations. Maass (1996: 273) claimed that during the informal discussions between Junejo and Gandhi at the sidelines of Bangalore summit in 1986, both states agreed to not attack each other’s nuclear installations. Hussain (1996: 19) noted that both countries reached on the agreement in an informal meeting between prime ministers of both countries at the sidelines of Kathmandu summit in 1987. In fact, the real break-through was made in Zia-Gandhi meeting during Dhaka summit. Both leaders had a one-on-one meeting after which they publicly declared to not attack each other’s nuclear facilities (Michael, 2013: 42). Makeig observed that Pakistan had long given this proposal to New Delhi but India had some reservations over it. After a brief meeting between Zia and Gandhi in Dhaka, however, India “dramatically set aside its objections” to the proposal. Subsequently, both countries negotiated the agreement. It was expected that both countries would sign it during Gandhi’s visit to Islamabad in the near future. However, Gandhi had cancelled his visit to Islamabad in 1986 in order to underline his country’s “displeasure” over Islamabad’s alleged support to Sikh separatists in Indian Punjab (1987: 291). Later on, both countries signed this much awaited agreement at the eve of Gandhi’s visit to Islamabad where he had arrived to attend the fourth SAARC summit in December 1988 (Hussain, 1996: 18–9).

### **SAARC Summits during Benazir Era (1988–90 and 1993–96)**

Arrival of Rajiv Gandhi to Islamabad in order to attend the fourth SAARC summit was in itself a significant event in the context of history of bilateral relations of the two countries. It was the first ever official tour of an Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan in the last 28 years. It became possible after the venue of the fourth summit was shifted from Colombo to Islamabad because of tension in Indo–Sri Lankan relations. Nevertheless, the meeting between Benazir Bhutto and Gandhi provided both leaders an opportunity to discuss various issues and to recall and share the personal and historical memories of the “spirit” of Simla agreement (Dash, 1996: 98). Both of them were present when their respective parents (Z. A. Bhutto and Indira Gandhi) had inked the agreement after 1971 war between the two countries.

The informal meeting at the eve of the fourth summit provided an opportunity to both leaders to lay the beginning of a peace process between the two countries (Hussain, 1996: 19). Reportedly, both leaders discussed some of the “most important political irritants” in their bilateral relations. They deliberated upon some serious political issues, including Jammu and Kashmir problem, nuclear issue and Pakistan’s alleged support for Sikh uprising in India. On Pakistan’s insistence, India agreed to initiate the “constructive dialogue” process on Kashmir problem. On this occasion, Bhutto had “categorically” announced that Pakistan would no more use “Sikh card.” Previously, Islamabad had always denied the charges of its involvement in Sikh insurgency in Indian Punjab (Dash, 1996: 99). Meanwhile, Pakistan and India also signed bilateral agreements, including the one on not attacking each other’s nuclear facilities. The other agreements included one on “avoidance of double taxation” in the field of civil aviation and another on promotion of cultural cooperation (Hussain, 1996: 18–9).

Interaction between Bhutto and Indian leadership particularly premier Rajiv Gandhi at the eve of SAARC summits was short-lived. Bhutto could never attend SAARC summit again. Fifth summit did not take place in 1989 due to Colombo’s refusal to host it until India withdrew its troops it had deployed in Sri Lanka in 1987. By the time the summit was held after shifting its venue to Male, Maldives (November 21–23, 1990), Benazir government had been dissolved and a new administration led by Premier Nawaz Sharif had come into power in Pakistan. However, just within next three years Bhutto returned to power. During the second Benazir government (1993–96), only a single SAARC summit was convened, i.e. in 1995, during which the then President, Farooq Ahmad Leghari as head of the state, instead of Premier Benazir Bhutto, represented Pakistan. He visited New Delhi to attend the summit (May 2–4, 1995) in a period marked by strained relations between the two countries due to mounting tension on Kashmir issue. The dialogue process initiated in the late 1980s had been suspended in early 1994. President Leghari held a 45 minutes meeting with Indian premier Narasimha Rao, and discussed bilateral disputes including issue of Jammu and Kashmir (Murthy, 1999). Leghari mainly stressed on centrality of the Kashmir issue in the dialogue process. In this background the official or unofficial meetings at the sidelines of the summit did not produce any significant results.

### **Summit Diplomacy during Sharif Era (1990–93 and 1997–99)**

The process of formal and informal meetings between leadership of India and Pakistan at the margins of SAARC summits continued throughout and proved quite productive during both tenures of Nawaz Sharif government (1990–93 and 1997–99). The process that was initiated in the first Nawaz Sharif government got suspended after his ouster from power. However, it was revived soon after his return in 1997. During his first tenure, just three weeks after his coming into power, Sharif met Indian Premier Chandra Shekhar at the margins of fifth summit at Male, Maldives (November 21 – 23, 1990). The meeting was quite successful in several respects. Both leaders agreed to address their bilateral problems through peaceful means and decided to resume the foreign secretaries’ level bilateral talks on a set date (Michael, 2013: 42). Reportedly, Male process had culminated into several breakthroughs in Indo–Pakistan’s bilateral relations such as: resumption of hotline between the two countries; formation of working groups before initiating the composite dialogue process, and; Islamabad’s willingness to adopt an “integrated” approach in its relations with India instead of focusing entirely on Kashmir issue (Singh, 2007: 30). A similar meeting between Sharif and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao at the sidelines of Colombo summit in 1991 also helped

improve bilateral relations of the two countries. It was followed by another meeting between them at Davos, Switzerland in 1992 during which they discussed the ways to stave off an upcoming potential crises that could seriously hurt regional security environment. It could take place due to the call of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) to cross the LoC, later that year. In the meeting, Pakistan agreed to foil the possible move of JKLF from Pakistani side (Dash, 1996: 96). Later on, Pakistan accomplished this task successfully. Sharif and Rao also held a private meeting at the sidelines of seventh summit held in Dhaka in 1993 and discussed the irritants in the bilateral relations. However, the main focus of the meetings at the margin of summit was Indo-Bangladesh relations, particularly the issue of sharing of Ganges basin waters between them (Murthy, 1999).

Sharif's meeting with two successive Indian prime ministers during his second tenure (1997–99) were highly successful. These meetings, held at the sidelines of SAARC summits in 1997 and 1998, were instrumental in help improving relations of the two states. In 1997, Sharif met India's newly elected Prime Minister I. K. Gujral at the sidelines of ninth summit in Male, Maldives, that brought them closer. It generated high hopes for success of SAARC in the coming years. Both leaders exhibited "considerable warmth" in their relations and expressed their resolve to take substantial measures to address the bilateral problems. They also decided to address all differences and issues between the two countries through bilateral talks "in the spirit of Simla agreement" (Dash, 1996: 100–1).

SAARC summit diplomacy further helped improve Indo–Pakistan ties in the following year. The tenth summit that took place in Colombo (July 29–31, 1998) offered an opportunity for an informal meeting between Sharif and India's newly elected prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The latter belonged to right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which ascended to power for the first time and had announced in its election campaign that it would take tough position against Pakistan. As soon as it sworn in, the BJP government initiated an aggressive campaign against Pakistan and also escalated a nuclear arms race in South Asia by detonating 5 atomic bombs on May 12, 1998. In response, Pakistan detonated its nuclear weapon on May 28, 1998. Due to these developments, the regional political environment became highly tense. However, the informal meeting between Sharif and Vajpayee, which took place just a few weeks after the nuclear tests, was quite helpful in defusing the tension. (Sridharan, 2008: 13). The meeting contributed to the resumption of dialogue process between the two countries. The mutual contacts established and goodwill created in the meeting broke the ice in the bilateral relations. It helped increase mutual trust and understanding that ultimately led to the resumption of dialogue and Vajpayee's "famous bus journey to Lahore" in February 1999 (Dash, 1996: 101).

#### **Summit Process during Musharraf Era (1999–2008)**

The summit process was initially crippled after Kargil war and a military coup in Pakistan in 1999. Once the process resumed, it helped improve bilateral relations of the two countries. The eleventh summit scheduled for November 1999 in Katmandu was cancelled because of India's refusal to participate after Kargil war and military coup in Pakistan. Due to Indo–Pakistan strained relations in the subsequent two years, summit could not take place. However, the Katmandu summit, held in January 2002, helped improve bilateral relations of the two countries. It had provided the opportunity for the "famous handshake" between President Pervez Musharraf and Vajpayee during the proceedings of the summit. The summit was held amid high skepticism because of highly tense relations between Pakistan and India in the wake of a terrorist attack on latter's parliament in December 2001. After the incident, Indo–Pakistan tension had escalated to an unprecedented level and armies of both countries were facing eyeball to eyeball on their mutual borders. The meeting between the leadership of India and Pakistan was highly unexpected but the summit provided Musharraf an opportunity to go, after delivering his speech in the meeting, surprisingly straightforward to the seat of Vajpayee and extend his hand to greet him as a sign of good gesture from Pakistan. Generally, it was interpreted as a sign of movement towards restoration of normal relations and resumption of peace process between the two countries. Unfortunately, Vajpayee took tough position against Pakistan as soon as he went home after the summit. Apparently, he had to do so due to domestic political compulsions, particularly the criticism and the pressure he bore from the opposition parties as well

as some hard-liners in his own BJP. Reportedly, Indian behaviour was also a consequence of its “distrust” towards a military regime in Pakistan which was allegedly insisting on inclusion of Kashmir issue as a core problem in the dialogue process (Dash, 1996: 101). This thaw in bilateral relations of the two countries was short-lived and the world had to wait for another two years for a major breakthrough in Indo-Pak ties.

Twelfth summit held in Islamabad in 2004 offered both states yet another chance to improve their bilateral relations and begin a new chapter in the history of South Asia. Keeping in view the nature of relations and extent of hostility between India and Pakistan from 1999 to 2003, the arrival of Vajpayee to attend fourth summit was in itself a significant development and a big thaw in the bilateral ties of the two countries. The summit provided both Musharraf and Vajpayee a chance to meet at its sidelines and discuss irritants in the bilateral relations. (Ashraf, 2004). These discussions culminated in to the initiation of a peace process with an agreement to start “composite dialogue process” covering these eight areas: “peace and security; Jammu and Kashmir; Siachen; Sir Creek; Wullar Barrage/Talbul navigation project; terrorism and drug trafficking; trade and economic cooperation; and promotion of friendly exchanges” (Ahmad, 2007: 62). Musharraf–Vajpayee meeting resulted into a thaw in the bilateral relations as evidenced in several confidence building measures (CBMs) taken by both states, including those related to: the nuclear issue; opening up of road and railway linkages and facilitation of bilateral trade through some new routes particularly those between the two parts of Kashmir; and enhancement of people-to-people contacts between the two hostile neighbours (Khan, 2007: 51).

Meetings between Pakistani and Indian leaders at the margins of successive SAARC summits had moderate impact since 2005. At the sidelines of the thirteenth SAARC summit in Dhaka (November 12–13, 2005), Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan held a meeting with Indian Premier Manmohan Singh. They reviewed the progress on ongoing dialogue process and proposed “Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) gas pipeline project.” Both leaders decided to pace up the process of opening up of remaining two out of five selected points along the LoC to facilitate the rescue and relief activities in the quake hit areas of Kashmir. Both leaders held a meeting on a retreat organized at the sidelines of the summit and discussed several issues, including Afghanistan’s admission in SAARC (“Aziz discusses peace process.”). The deliberations helped regional leaders to reach to an agreement on admission of a new member and some observers in SAARC. Ultimately, they decided to accept Afghanistan as a new member and China and Japan as observers in the organization. It was the first expansion of SAARC since its inception. The informal discussions helped bridge the differences among the regional countries, particularly, India dropped its opposition to the proposal of SRCs to give China the observer’s status. On Indian demand, SRCs agreed to give Japan also the same status (Haider, 2005).

Aziz and Singh again met at the sidelines of fourteenth summit held in New Delhi (April 3–4, 2007). They agreed: to move forward the ongoing composite dialogue process; to allow their respective banks to open branches in each other’s country, and; to enhance air links between the two states. The main point in their bilateral discussion, however, was IPI gas pipeline project. They agreed to decisively pursue the project which was in the interest of all three countries. They decided to proceed as fast as they could to complete its arrangements and to deal with the IPI-related complex issues one by one. Both prime ministers also discussed contentious bilateral issues including Kashmir problem and alleged Indian support for insurgency in Baluchistan province of Pakistan (“Accord to pursue pipeline project.”).

#### **Summit Diplomacy during the Zardari Era (2008–13)**

In 2008, a new government led by President Zardari came into power in Pakistan which was committed to move forward the peace process with India. The government had among its priorities the urge to interact more with Indian leadership and improve bilateral relations with New Delhi. Besides others, SAARC summits provided it the forum and opportunity to interact with Indian leadership. In 2008, Pakistan’s newly elected Prime Minister Yousaf Raaza Gilani met Singh at the sidelines of fifteenth summit in Colombo and discussed several matters of mutual interest. They reviewed the progress on ongoing peace process and pledged to strive that untoward incidents such as those that took place just before the summit, including the

bombing on Indian embassy in Kabul and violations of ceasefire on LoC between both countries, could not “cast shadow” on dialogue process. Earlier, both India and Afghanistan had held Inter–Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan’s premier intelligence agency, responsible for the attack on the embassy that had taken lives of dozens of people including some Indian diplomats. During the meeting, Gilani offered an “independent probe” of the attack and expressed his resolve to go to the “root” of the problem. Both leaders agreed to keep the dialogue process “alive and moving” despite such untoward incidents (Syed, 2008; “Gilani meets Singh.”).

#### **SAARC Summits after Bombay Incident**

The two successive meetings between Gilani and Singh at the margins of sixteenth and seventeenth summits were quite significant due to several reasons. Both of them were held after Bombay attacks of November 26, 2008 that had killed 166 people and left over 300 others wounded. The incident had virtually halted or even reversed the progress in the “peace process” and had brought the two states at the verge of a war. New Delhi had unilaterally suspended the dialogue process and war mongering was quite high in India which alleged that a militant group in Pakistan was responsible for the incident. Later on, India linked resumption of peace process with the condition that the perpetrators must first be brought to justice. However, a meeting between Gilani and Singh at the margins of sixteenth summit in Thimpau, Bhutan in April 2010, helped break the ice. Though, both leaders had also met earlier at Sharam-el-Shaikh in 2009 but the real progress was made at Thimpau. Both leaders agreed to resume the dialogue process which took effect in February 2011. It was a significant progress in the course of their bilateral relations. Gilani and Singh also discussed the issue of cross-border terrorism and alleged Indian intervention in Balochistan (Vasudevan, 2010; Gharekhan, 2010).

Gilani–Manmohan meeting at the sidelines of seventeenth summit in Addu city, Maldives (November 10–11, 2011), was also quite productive for the bilateral ties. Both leaders agreed to further normalize their ties and significantly increase bilateral trade. Reportedly, both leaders also agreed to increase preferential trade arrangements as part of their “shared vision.” The meeting was preceded as well as followed by several steps taken by both countries to remove irritants in the bilateral trade (Naqvi, 2011). After the meeting, both leaders announced to write “a new chapter” in history of bilateral relations of two countries and Singh described Gilani as a “man of peace.” Both leaders agreed to take several steps such as the revival of joint commission, liberalizing visa regime and working for a preferential trade arrangement. Pakistan assured India that it would do its utmost to conclude at the earliest the trial of the accused perpetrators of Bombay incident under its custody. Singh declared that both countries had agreed to resume the dialogue process with “all the sincerity” and to discuss all issues that “bedeviled” bilateral relations with expectations that “our two countries can bring to bear on these talks” (Vasudevan, 2011). Just before the summit, the government of Pakistan announced to considerably open trade with New Delhi. It declared to give India MFN status and alter trade pattern with New Delhi by shifting it from “positive list” – comprising 1958 items – to “negative list” approach operative from 2012, as well as permit import of more than 7000 Indian products (“Pakistan grants India; Khan, 2011). As a follow up of the decision of the Gilani–Manmohan meeting, both countries signed comparatively a “liberal visa regime” predominantly for corporate communities of two countries (“India–Pakistan reach agreement”). Both stated also concluded three more trade related agreements in Islamabad in September 2012, which included: 1) “Agreement on Customs Cooperation;” 2) “Grievances Agreements to address consumer protection” and; 3) “Mutual Recognition Agreement for standardization of quality standards.” (Khan, 2012-b). Earlier, India had withdrawn its obstruction at the “General Council of WTO” to EU plan of extending “tariff concessions” to Pakistani textile goods (Anthony, 2011; Khan, 2012-a).

#### **Indo–Pak Ties during the Third Nawaz Sharif Government (2013–18)**

The summit diplomacy has apparently become ineffective since Nawaz Sharif came into power for the third time in June 2013. Since then, a single (eighteenth) summit has been held and even that one after a delay of two years, i.e. in Katmandu on November 26–27, 2014. It took place amid increasingly deteriorating

Indo–Pakistan relations and was unsuccessful in improving their bilateral relations. Their relations got deteriorated after Narinder Modi came into power in India. Initially, it seemed well when on Modi's invitation Sharif attended former's oath-taking ceremony in New Delhi in May 2014. But since then, the relations between the two countries underwent a low-turn. It began after India unilaterally cancelled the secretary level talks scheduled for August 2014 and then recurring exchange of cross-border firing by their security forces at LoC and working boundary between the two countries. It was expected that both prime ministers would meet and help normalize the bilateral relations at the sidelines of eighteenth SAARC summit at Katmandu in December 2014. However, these expectations did not materialize (Inayatullah, 2014; Muni, 2014). The nineteenth summit scheduled for Islamabad in 2016, could not be held because of India irredentist behaviour after a terrorist attack on a Indian military camp in Uri, IHK (Ahmad, 2017: 66-8).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

SAARC summits have generally been quite successful as they provided the leaders of India and Pakistan the much needed opportunity to interact directly, personally and in general regularly. It enabled them to discuss their bilateral problems and political disputes as well as the prospects of cooperation in various fields between the two countries. Due to the talks at official or informal level, occasionally they were able to: diffuse tensions; manage crises; revive or begin negotiations, and; negotiate or conclude agreements. The meetings between the leadership of India and Pakistan at the margins of SAARC summits helped conclude numerous agreements including the one to not attack each other's nuclear facilities as well as address Indian concerns over Pakistan's suspected support for Sikh insurgency in East (Indian) Punjab, initiate talks on Siachen glacier issue that led almost to conclusion of an agreement in 1989 and 1992, normalization of bilateral relations after Operation Brasstacks in 1987, nuclear tests in 1998, terror attacks in India in 2001 and 2008. The summit also enabled leaders of the two countries to initiate or resume peace process in 1990, 1997, 2004 and 2011 as well as to strengthen economic ties and people-to-people contacts between the two countries. Probably due to these successes, unofficial meetings between leaders of India and Pakistan at the sidelines of SAARC summits often got far more focus in media than official meetings of the organization.

The success of summit diplomacy demonstrates that SAARC has great potential to help address regional political problems, members' bilateral conflicts, defuse tensions and generate political goodwill in the region. SAARC as an organization could be efficiently used as a most effective instrument for conflict resolution and crises management in South Asia. It shows that SAARC could have been even far more effective in case it had provided at its platform for formal discussion of and deliberations on regional political problems, bilateral disputes and contentious issues. Had SAARC summits not been delayed or cancelled frequently, and were held as regularly as provided in the SAARC charter, they could have been far more successful in improving bilateral relations of India and Pakistan as well as overall regional political environment in South Asia.

In order to make SAARC summit diplomacy more effective, its members must take certain daring steps. Preferably, SAARC summits must be held twice a year or even on quarterly basis, as it is practiced in the European Union. Moreover, the practice of delaying or postponement of summits on one pretext or another must be brought to an end. Finally, SAARC summits must also provide for discussion of bilateral problems, contentious issues and political and security matters confronted by the regional states in its official meetings at all levels. This would help put SAARC on solid foundation and pave the way for peace, security, progress and development in the region.

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