

## Comparative Regional Cooperation: A Case Study of ASEAN and SAARC ความร่วมมือระดับภูมิภาคเชิงเปรียบเทียบ: กรณีศึกษาอาเซียนและชาาร์ก

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### บทคัดย่อ

อาเซียน (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: ASEAN) และชาาร์ก (The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: SAARC) เป็นองค์กรระหว่างประเทศระดับภูมิภาค ของกลุ่มประเทศใหญ่ที่สาม ซึ่งจัดตั้งในช่วงสหภาพเย็น และยังคงดำเนินงานจนกระทั่งปัจจุบัน จากการที่ประเทศสมาชิกของทั้งสององค์กรนี้ตั้งอยู่ในพื้นที่บริเวณใกล้เคียงกัน กล่าวคือ ประเทศในกลุ่มอาเซียนตั้งอยู่ในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ และประเทศในกลุ่มชาาร์กตั้งอยู่ในภูมิภาคเอเชียใต้ รวมทั้งประวัติความเป็นมาและวัตถุประสงค์ของทั้งสองกลุ่มนี้มีความคล้ายคลึงกัน ด้วยสาเหตุต่าง ๆ ดังกล่าว จึงนำมาสู่การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบความร่วมมือระดับภูมิภาคของทั้งสององค์กรในบทความครั้งนี้ บทความนี้นำเสนอว่า ความเข้มแข็งของความร่วมมือทางการเมืองและความมั่นคง ถือเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่กำหนดความสำเร็จของความร่วมมือทางเศรษฐกิจในการบูรณาการเชิงภูมิภาค ทั้งนี้ ในส่วนแรก บทความนี้นำเสนอด้วยมูลพื้นฐานทั่วไปของอาเซียนและชาาร์ก ส่วนที่สองของบทความเป็นการเปรียบเทียบบทบาทของทั้งคู่จากสามเสาหลัก ได้แก่ ความร่วมมือทางการเมืองและความมั่นคง ความร่วมมือทางเศรษฐกิจ และความร่วมมือทางสังคม บทความนี้ค้นพบว่าองค์กรระหว่างประเทศอย่างอาเซียนดูเหมือนว่าจะประสบความสำเร็จในการรักษาสันติภาพและเสถียรภาพในภูมิภาค ซึ่งถือเป็นคุณลักษณะที่สำคัญสำหรับความร่วมมือทางเศรษฐกิจระหว่างประเทศสมาชิก ส่วนหนึ่งของความร่วมมือดังกล่าว เกิดขึ้นมาจากการใช้

แนวทางแบบวิถีอาเซียน ยังเป็นรูปแบบของความร่วมมือที่ให้ความสำคัญกับอธิปไตยของชาติสมาชิก และผลประโยชน์ของตนเองในภูมิภาคนี้ ในท้ายที่สุด ลักษณะดังกล่าวก็ได้สร้างความยึดหยุ่นในการรักษาสันติภาพ เสถียรภาพ และสมัครสมานทางการทูต ท่ามกลางความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเมือง เศรษฐกิจ และสังคมที่สำคัญทั่วทั้งภูมิภาค ในทางกลับกัน ชาวกะพยาภยามที่จะสร้างความร่วมมือทางด้านสาธารณสุข ระหว่างกันในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของโรคโควิด-19 ในขณะที่ความร่วมมือด้านความมั่นคงและเศรษฐกิจยังเป็นสิ่งที่ต้องดำเนินการต่อไป

**คำสำคัญ:** อาเซียน, ชาวกะ, ความร่วมมือระดับภูมิภาค, การบูรณาการระดับภูมิภาค, องค์กรระหว่างประเทศ

## Abstract

ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SAARC (The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) are “Third World” regional and international organizations that emerged during the Cold War and still exist today. As the member countries of these associations are located nearby – Southeast Asia in the case of ASEAN and South Asia in the case of SAARC – and their profiles and objectives are similar, it is worth studying the comparative regional cooperation of these two organizations. This paper suggests that the stability of political-security cooperation is a crucial factor that determines the success of economic cooperation in regional integration. It firstly provides the general background of ASEAN and SAARC. Secondly, it compares their roles in three main pillars: political-security, economic and social cooperation. The article found that ASEAN seems to achieve in preserving peace and stability in the region, which is an essential attribute for economic collaboration between its member states. The ASEAN Way becomes a form of cooperation that gives priority to national sovereignty and self-interest in this region. It eventually builds resilience for peace, stability and diplomatic cohesion amidst major political, economic and social changes across the region. SAARC, on the other hand, endeavors to boost health cooperation during COVID-19 whereas its security and economic cooperation is still ongoing.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, SAARC, Regional Cooperation, Regional Integration, International Organization

## Introduction

ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SAARC (The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) are the 'Third World' regional organizations, which were established in the period of the Cold War, and still be survived at present. 10 Members of ASEAN are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, whereas SAARC has 8 member countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka. Since the objectives of these two associations are very similar, it is worth comparing their operations and progress. However, their degree of achievement is different in many respects in terms of political-security, economic and social cooperation. By arguing that the strengthening of economic cooperation partially depends on the stability of political-security pillar within the regions, this article presents two sections. Firstly, it gives the general background of the two associations. In this section, the internal and external political environment that forced the countries to form the organization will be illustrated. In the second part, it discusses the roles of ASEAN and SAARC in the security issue, economic achievement, and social interaction. As it is necessary to measure and compare the operations of these two organizations, the main principles, aims, growth and progression of ASEAN and SAARC will be analyzed and taken into consideration in this section.

## What are ASEAN and SAARC?

### *The Background and Objective of ASEAN*

Countries in Southeast Asia became independent during the decolonization period after the end of the Second World War. However, there were many intra-regional conflicts between countries; for example, the exclusion of Singapore from the Malaysia Federation, the *konfrontasi* between Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines' claim to the British colony of the North Borneo, and the other ideological and ethnic rivalries. These disputes resulted in the failures of the regional organization such as Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Association of Southeast Asian States, and Asia Pacific Council (Hussey, 1991, p. 87). However, the power shift in Indonesia from Sukarno to Suharto in 1966 brought the opportunities to end the confrontation policy and to start the process of regional cooperation in Indo-pacific region. To this end, ASEAN was established by Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia in 1967. It was believed that one reason

contributing to the foundation of the Association was that ASEAN's founders did not want ASEAN to be misunderstood as a military group of political allies in the same way as some of its predecessors had been. In addition, in realist perspectives, the formation of ASEAN was a response to an advancing communist threat in Indochina and a retreat fear of internal communist insurgencies (Emmers, 2003b, p. 13). According to the Bangkok Declaration, the primary objectives of ASEAN are to promote regional peace and stability, to facilitate intra-regional economic development and mutual assistance, to foster social and cultural progress, and to promote Southeast Asian studies (Bangkok Declaration, 1967). Since the members realized their historically based animosities and their post-independence differences, ASEAN has a loose institutional framework (Hussey, 1991: 88). Under the ASEAN umbrella, cooperation is gradually created as the members learn to trust one another. Therefore, the hostility between countries is reduced and the long stable peace among the members is sustained.

#### *The Background and Objective of SAARC*

The first concrete regional cooperation proposal in South Asia was brought about by the president of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman in 1980. However, SAARC was not formed until 1985. Dash (1996) explains that there are many factors that influenced President Ziaur to establish the Association during 1975-1979: the change in the political leadership in the South Asian countries; Ziaur's need for Indian support of his coup d'état regime; an acute of balance of payment crisis of almost all the South Asian nations which was further worse by the second oil crisis in 1979; the failure of the North-South dialogues and the increasing protectionism by the develop countries; the Committee report on Studies for cooperation in Development in South Asia which identifying many feasible area of cooperation; the assurance of economic assistance for multilateral cooperative projects on sharing water resources of Ganga and Brahmaputra<sup>\*</sup>; the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 causing the security situation in South Asia (Dash, 1996, p. 187). According to these circumstances, President Ziaur took an opportunity to improve their understanding on one another's problem and dealt with conflicts before they turned into crisis.

The Bangladesh proposal was supported by Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bhutan while India and Pakistan were skeptical initially. One the one hand, India's apprehension on the

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\* In 1978 the British Prime Minister Callaghan and President Carter encouraged South Asia leaders to initiate cooperation on water issues, irrigation and hydropower projects. Their interests were overlapped.

Bangladeshi idea was that it would be turned into an instrument of collective pressure on India. The forum would become a ganging up of South Asian neighbors against India on the issues affecting each of the neighbors individually (Muni, 2000: 113). On the other hand, Pakistan did not want to be a part of any India-led regional move. Pakistan assumed that it might be an Indian strategy to organize the other South Asian countries against Pakistan and to ensure a regional market for Indian products and further to strengthen India's economic dominance in the region (Dash, 1996, p. 187). Although India and Pakistan felt doubtful about the initiative, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan brought about the external factor; that is, the U.S. involving in the forming of regional institution. Washington called upon India and Pakistan to adopt a regional approach toward a fundamentally changed situation under the Carter Doctrine, which had urged the South and Southwest Asian countries to establish a cooperative regional security (Muni, 2000, p. 112). From these compulsive situations, SAARC was eventually founded in 1985. The members of SAARC are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The objectives of the Organization, according to the Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, are to promote economic growth in the region, to strengthen collective self-reliance among members, to contribute to mutual trust of one another's problem, and to improve their people's quality of life (Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, 2020).

### The Role of the Associations in its Region

According to SAARC's and ASEAN's objectives, it is obvious that there are three main pillars that the Organization aims to achieve. Those are political-security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. In this section, this paper will compare the success of ASEAN to SAARC point by point. In the political objectives, the issues about promoting peace and managing conflicts in the region will be presented. In the economic development topic, it will examine the organizations' role in supporting both intra-regional and extra-regional trades. In the socio-cultural aspect, the Associations' success in creating regional identity and the intra-regional assistance will be analyzed.

#### *Political-security perspective*

Regarding the political-security community as one of the Associations' aims, the organizations' role on conflict resolution in the region is the vital tool to evaluate the achievement of ASEAN and SAARC. Based on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, both ASEAN and SAARC have a limitation on intra-state disputes. Therefore, the conflict management in this paper will fall within the scope of state-level confrontations.

There are many situations that present the achievement of ASEAN role in managing conflicts in the region. After the foundation of ASEAN, there was no bilateral war between the member states. However, the war between Vietnam and Cambodia occurred in 1978, while they had not been a member of the Association yet. To play its role on conflict management in the region, ASEAN firstly condemned the recent aggression against Cambodia and the presence of foreign forces on Cambodia territory. After that, ASEAN had successfully lobbied the General Assembly of the United Nations to maintain the seat of the DK government (Democratic Kampuchea - Cambodia). The resulting resolution 34/22 called for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea and called upon all States to refrain from all acts or threats of aggression and all forms of interference in the states' internal affairs in Southeast Asia (Antolik, 1990). This achievement transformed the institution into a well-known regional association in the international diplomatic community.

Although ASEAN indirectly played its role in the conflicts in the region because of its non-intervention principle, it does not mean that ASEAN ignored the regional conflicts. This can be seen in the case of the members' concern in East Timor. The Association supported the negotiations that Indonesia and Portugal conducted under the UN auspices on the future of East Timor. ASEAN also offered humanitarian aid after the conflicts had been settled down. Considering the intra-national disputes, ASEAN has always placed itself within the framework of the United Nations and its Charter, invoking its practices and precedents, measuring itself against its norm (Severino, 2001, pp. 52–53). The ways ASEAN tried to receive the support from the international community could be counted as ASEAN's success.

The role of ASEAN in the security issue was unlike the situations of SAARC in South Asia. The conflicts between South Asian countries after the establishment of SAARC could be shown in two cases. The first classic confrontation in the region is the disputes over Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Although the legal mandate from the British gave Kashmir to India, Pakistan still believes that Kashmir should have become a part of Pakistan because most of the

state's population, concentrated in the valley of Kashmir, are Muslim. Admittedly, India and Pakistan went into war in October 1947 after Pakistan supported a Muslim insurgency in Kashmir. There were many tensions affecting regional security such as the conducting of the nuclear tests and the arms races between them (BBC, 2023). In response to this crisis, SAARC called for the Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. However, it appears to be doubted that both India and Pakistan were unsuccessful to curtail the movement of terrorists across their borders although SAARC had fully attempted to solve this conflict. International armed conflict between India and Pakistan has continued until the present. The latest territorial disputes between India and Pakistan have been appeared in 2019 when Pakistan's air force shot down an Indian warplane in the Pakistan-administered territory of Kashmir and arrested the pilot in response to an airstrike by Indian aircrafts against Pakistan militants in the northwestern city of Balakot (AP, 2022). This article does not include the situation that three Indian militaries accidentally dismissed an unarmed missile to Pakistan in March 2022. It could be conceived that relations between these two countries have still been strained although after 2019 there have not been military movement risks from any of them.

The second example of SAARC in preserving security and peace in the region is the Sri Lanka Civil War. Since in 1983, the civil war had been an ongoing conflict on the island-nation of Sri Lanka until the speech of Sri Lanka's president to the council in 2009 that the civil war that had lasted 26 years was over. In General, the confrontations were between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam who wants to create an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north-east of the island. Relating to the ethnic kinship, India felt deep sympathy for the discrimination against Sri Lankan Tamils. This caused India in getting involved with this ethnic conflict in 1980s. It is doubtfully believed that India provided the Tamil guerilla group with monetary and training support (Veyret and Goreau-Ponceaud, 2017). In this case, SAARC had never interfered or brought the case to discuss on the possible way to stop the conflicts. Since every SAARC gathering brings about the informal bilateral discussion to the states, it could be conceived that the conflicts in South Asia were not in sight of SAARC agenda. Although there were bilateral conflicts between SAARC members such as the question of Bhutan refugees in Nepal and the question of Kashmir, the SAARC leaders would realize the virtue of keeping bilateral

controversies on the back-burner when developmental cooperation was to be promoted in the region (Muni, 2000, p. 116).

It is obvious that both ASEAN and SAARC bring about the opportunities for softening and easing the tensions in their members' meeting. However, SAARC did not play a significant role in the prevention of conflicts between its members. Accordingly, the trust among the member states was absent. In the Realist perspective on regional integration, one necessary factor of the achievement of integration is symmetrical power. As the nations in South Asia are likely different in terms of economic and military, any reaction from the stronger state easily leads to the misperceptions of the weaker states. It is clear in the case of SAARC that India is the strongest actor in the region, so other states seem to question on India's intention. Thapar (2006) explains that as India realizes its considerable advantage in military and economic power, it has consistently acted in an arrogant and uncompromising manner with its neighbors. Bangladesh is afraid of India exploiting its geographical position to redirect water flows vital to Bangladeshi agricultural production. Nepal and Bhutan are still worried about India's control over their world trade and transit links as their geographical position will always make them dependent on India (Thapar, 2006). These disputes between India and its neighbors have directly affected the leaders' confidence and the progress of SAARC.

### *Economic Development*

In examining the economic development of the regional organization, it is important to consider both intra-regional and extra-regional factors that support trade and investment in the region. After the end of the Cold War, it comes to the capitalist conquest. The 'New Regionalism' idea makes many regions change the states' protectionism policy to create the free trade area.

If infra-regional trade can present how nations in one region rely on each other, we can see clearly that intra-ASEAN economics is much more interdependent than intra-SAARC economics. In Table 1, intra-ASEAN trade share in 1980s was 18.6 per cent, while intra-SAARC trade share in the same period was only 3.9 per cent. In 1998, intra-ASEAN trade was affected by the economic crisis; however, it was still much higher than intra-SAARC trade, and the average over 10 years also increased to 22.5 per cent. In 2010 – 2014, the number of intra-ASEAN and intra-SAARC trade shares went up steadily from 2000s to 2014. During 2010 – 2014, intra-ASEAN trade was 19.2 per cent greater than intra-SAARC trade.

Table 1: Intra-regional Trade Shares 1980 – 2014

	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010 - 2014
ASEAN	18.6	22.5	24.4	25.3
SAARC	3.9	4.5	5.8	6.1

Source: Chen and Intal, 2017, p. 19

As ASEAN was formed to prevent regional conflicts, the Association generated the general awareness that peace was a necessary condition for regional progress. The atmosphere of peace was considered necessary to ensure state autonomy, which in turn was necessary to foster economic growth (Reed, 1997, p. 248). Regional stability offers a great incentive to investment. While in 1960s-1970s the four largest ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand) had pursued import substitution policies, the world economic slowdown followed with the high protectionism in the United States forced the policy makers in ASEAN to think about ASEAN Free Trade Area. Although, the proposal of reduction in intra-regional trade and an external common tariff had been introduced in the meeting in Manila in 1986, Indonesia and Singapore rejected it because they did not agree with the deadlines and did not want to raise the external tariffs. However, ASEAN countries got the suggestion from the international financial institutions to engage in trade liberalization in the early 1980s. They individually adopted policies more favorable to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with the purpose of attracting the foreign capital needed to spur continued industrialization (Bowles, 1997, p. 223). The Plaza Accord in 1985 brought Japanese firms expanding oversea and this phenomenon had major impact for the economic growth in the region. The East Asian Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) were also investing heavily oversea. That is why the gross domestic capital was increased to 7.1 per cent. Although both Japan and the NICs caused the fall of infra-regional trade, the activities of multinational corporations had gradually transferred new technology to the host. There was an increase in manufactured goods. Since ASEAN faced more competition in scarce global capital, it revived the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) in 1993. The aim of AFTA is to strengthen ASEAN's participation in global capital. It would be a great opportunity for the developing countries to seek partnerships with the developed nations. In addition, since one of the new characteristics of regionalism sheds light on multiple regionalisms, which meant that one country can belong to different regional groups, ASEAN succeeds in strengthening and acting as

a group by joining the APEC, ARF, and making agreement with other countries such as ASEAN-China FTA. Many extra-regional countries need economic cooperation with ASEAN. Due to the fact that India has become a strategic partnership with ASEAN for more than 30 years (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022), this implies that ASEAN offers more opportunities for cooperation than SAARC.

The economic development in the South Asia countries is far behind ASEAN. The important reason is that most of them are the least developing nations and are facing acute domestic poverty. As the primary products in SAARC members are similar, it causes the share of intra-regional trade among the members to be very small. Although India has the biggest economy in the regions, it does not act as an inner-core to playing a role of natural leadership in term of industrial growth, consumer demand and access to capital market in the region. The primary reason behind this scene is that the other states in the region have not accepted India's supremacy. India has never been able to act as a leader in offering capital or technology or developing aids to their neighbors. Moreover, the Indian market has been historically highly protected and characterized by high barriers to imports (Reed, 1997, pp. 240-241). Considering the economic abilities between India and its neighbors, most of them realize that India will completely dominate the economic relations. Pakistan would believe that the greater economic cooperation in the region could result in unequal gain and would eventually tend to favor India more than any of the other members. As it can be seen in the bilateral trade relation in the beginning of the 1990s, India's bilateral trade with its neighbors – Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – has registered sharp increase in trade, in some case even three-fold. Unfortunately, it was India who exported to these countries and then resulted in a huge adverse trade balance (Muni, 2000, p. 125).

The continuing conflicts between India and its neighbors end up jeopardizing the creation and effectiveness of regional trade agreement. So, it leads the members to advance their economy through bilateral agreement. Unless these conflicts are resolved to the point where South Asian states are willing to reduce barriers to trade, it seems as if the vision of an economic interdependent South Asia is more of a dream than reality (Thapar, 2006). As the pessimistic view from India's neighbors is one of the obstacles for Indian economic growth, together with the imperatives of liberalization and globalization, India initiated a look-east policy in 1991.

The recent progress of SAARC on the economic area is the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) which came into effect on 1 January 2006. The aim of SAFTA is to reduce tariffs for intra-regional trade among the seven SAARC members. Pakistan and India are to complete implementation by 2012, Sri Lanka by 2013 and Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal by 2015. It replaces the earlier South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and may eventually lead to a full-fledged South Asia Economic Union (South Asia Free Trade Agreement, 2004).

Despite these agreements, trade between SAARC member countries has remained considerably less than its potential. In India, the presence of tariff and non-tariff barriers such as a lack of infrastructure and comparative advantage namely textile and apparel exports, high transportation costs (Sinha and Sareen, 2020, p. 6), and the instability of political-security factors. The India–Pakistan border skirmishes in the disputed area of Kashmir during 2016–2018 obviously shows a greater effect on economic cooperation of this region since the Prime Minister of India decided to boycott the 19th SAARC summit after the diplomatic tensions in the situation of 2016 Uri attack. Later some member states, e.g., Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka, also stopped being involved in this meeting and SAARC summit was pending since then. This might not be too early to predict the effectiveness of SAFTA although we can find a movement in health cooperation among these countries during COVID-19 pandemic since its collaboration still appeared in a short term.

In short, ASEAN has economic cooperation more than SAARC in two ways. Firstly, it is obvious that political-security cooperation is a factor that affects the success of economic cooperation. By this point, the peace and stability in ASEAN makes ASEAN more attractive than SAARC. Foreign investments not only bring the capital into ASEAN, but they also transfer higher technology to the host countries. Secondly, if we accept that regional integration is going along with globalization, ASEAN succeeds in integrating itself into the globalization force. ASEAN leaders make the liberalization policy, emphasize global force, and give less focus on the intra-regional trade such as the protectionism policy. In this way, ASEAN can enjoy its profit from the world capitalism much more than SAARC. This can be seen in the emergence of AFTA that many countries and other regional organizations are willing to cooperate with ASEAN.

#### *Regional Identity and Social Cooperation*

In this section, this paper investigates the creation of regional identities and the effectiveness of social assistance among members. After ASEAN was formed, it gradually built its trust through its method called the 'ASEAN Way'. The 'ASEAN Way' avoids bureaucratic and supra-national arrangements and reaffirms the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs of other states. Hence, the Association is said to offer a unique model of cooperation based on specific cultural attributes (Emmers, 2003a, p. 3). While SAARC members felt doubtful about attitudes towards each other, a key political contribution of ASEAN lies in its value as a source of psychological comfort and support for the member states (Kurus, 1993, p. 824). The 'ASEAN Way' is considered as an approach to promote constructive regional understanding. In this way, ASEAN is very different from SAARC because ASEAN preserved the feeling of isolation among the states. The enlargement of its members to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma through 'ASEAN Way' and constructive engagement could be proved in the previous statement.

ASEAN also succeeds in assisting members affected from the natural disaster, e.g., Tsunami and the flooding in Cambodia. It is very different when we consider SAARC's role. For example, SAARCS Food Security Reserve could not be utilized to meet the need of Bangladesh during its worst natural disaster in 1991. The limited role of SAARC is because the Association is facing a serious resource crunch. Without funds from outside, most of the projects are found difficult in implementation. Moreover, the SAARC countries have shown little willingness to increase their contributions to the association (Thapar, 2006).

Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN based its cooperative mechanisms in the existing regional health cooperation, whereas SAARC has increased its cooperation that brought about tangible advantages. At least two teleconference meetings with member state leaders resulted in the establishment of an emergency fund in this region. It is interesting to note that not only China, but India also played a leading role in this mask diplomacy. The evidence shows that India played a leading role in this short-term collaboration by pledging \$10 million to the fund, offering a surveillance platform and sharing online training programs for emergency responders to assist neighboring countries in controlling the outbreak (Pattanaik, 2021).

To summarize, while SAARC interacts in the process of social cooperation during COVID-19, ASEAN enhances the 'ASEAN Way' as a tool in creating social interaction and building trust among member states. Consequently, the development of its identity is gradually increased.

It can be said that the 'ASEAN Way' helps ASEAN to sustain peace in the region. Not only does ASEAN achieve in constructing its identity, but also the success in its good neighbor tasks demonstrated to its members who suffer from dreadful disaster.

## Conclusion

ASEAN and SAARC are the third world regional integration that cooperates in security, economic and social aspects. This article reaffirms that the stability and trustworthiness in political-security cooperation between members states of a regional association leads to the achievement in economic cooperation in the community. ASEAN achieves in preserving peace and stability in the region. Considering its limited role in domestic affairs, ASEAN attempts to play its role by peaceful means at a diplomacy level – there is no confrontation among its members – which finally gains more acceptance from the international states. It can be said that ASEAN is influenced by globalization force which pushes the change from the 'Old Regionalism' to the 'New Regionalism'. Southeast Asia is attractive to foreign investors, and the political stability in the region creates economic growth in ASEAN. ASEAN grabs this opportunity and forms AFTA to attract investment. The interaction among ASEAN members and the social assistance among them results in creating trust and ASEAN's identity. The achievement of ASEAN is based on the three pillars which support each other; they are security pillar, economic pillar, and socio-cultural pillar. In the case of South Asia, although the leaders of the member states had increased their health cooperation during the spread of COVID-19, some of political conflicts in these countries have not stopped until now, and the member states seem to distrust each other. Consequently, it is difficult for SAARC to play a significant role in economic cooperation in this region more than the stage of informal bilateral talks in the formal SAARC meeting. SAARC is suspicious in the cooperate trade between each other, particularly in India.

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