

AB93

The Growing Need for a SAARC-ASEAN Platform: South Asian Perspective

Hashan Wijesinghe¹

Despite the fact that, today we are living in the Asian century, and the center of global economic gravity is shifting towards the Asia, not adequate effort has been made at all levels in understanding and discovering the possibilities and prospects of constructing a common platform on which SAARC and ASEAN as two regional setups can work collectively for realizing common objectives. As both the regions are on the track for attaining greater political stability and economic success, efficient and effective SAARC-ASEAN cooperation would provide an ideal multilateral mechanism for member states of both ASEAN and SAARC to pursue their political, economic and social gains and to attain a powerful position in the international arena. From a South Asian perspective, increasing ties with the ASEAN member states would be a golden opportunity for the South Asian countries to expand its regional scope and yield better results. Can these two regional setups, which are at different levels of regional integration join hands and be on a common platform? What are the main challenges to be overcome if such platform is to be created? And how South Asia would be benefitted through such a platform? These are the main questions which would be attempted to answer through the study. The study consists of two main objectives. First, the study attempts to analyze the prospects and challenges to be overcome in the context of creating a SAARC-ASEAN platform for greater political, economic, social and cultural cohesion. Secondly, the study shall look into how such a platform affects South Asia as a region. In order to gain the in depth knowledge required for the study, a comparative study of SAARC and ASEAN is done with interviews with individuals having a greater bearing on the foretold objectives. In order to attain the first of the foretold objectives, the study has made a SWOT analysis where it looks into strengths which could be strengthened further, weaknesses to be rectified, opportunities to be grabbed and work on and threats to be deterred in the context of strengthening SAARC-ASEAN relations. Basically, the study results reflect the fact, despite the inadequate enthusiasm shown and efforts made, there is a wealth of opportunities and space for creating a common platform what would mutually benefit both the groups and especially for SAARC it would also be a learning curve for strengthening relations among its member states.

Key words: SAARC, ASEAN, Regionalism, multilateralism

¹ Political and Economic Affairs, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Colombo- Sri Lanka, Sri

Lanka, hashanviraj@gmail.com