



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT YOUTH CONVENTION 2018**

# **SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)**

**// TOPIC GUIDE //**

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## ABOUT THE CHAIRS

Deepak Alagu is a 17 year old student with a keen interest in programming and geopolitics. He loves his Infocomm Club and is currently taking a Computing Studies major in school. At the same time, he is passionate about Model United Nations and finds these conferences a conducive platform for delegates from different backgrounds to discuss and debate pressing global issues. He is delighted to be given the opportunity to chair the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and hopes that all participants will have a fruitful and memorable three days at SDYC 2018.



**Deepak**  
*Head Chair*



**Michelle**  
*Co-Chair*

Fascinated when she stepped into the world of MUN last year, Michelle enjoys delving deep into the variety of real issues that truly matter in the world. She believes that international relations and human rights are such important subjects to be discussed, perhaps as important as her favourite subject Biology! When there is free time, Michelle can be found reading juicy celebrity news, or just scrolling through any HuffPost that catches her attention. She looks forward to chairing this council, and cannot wait to meet all the wonderful delegates and hear what they have to say!

A humanities enthusiast masquerading as a student of the sciences; this is a term Deepankur John Njondimackal is often labelled as, but vehemently denies. Deepankur's guiding philosophy to navigating life is variety, as evidenced by his music tastes (classical Indian and Russian hardbass), academic interests (language arts and computer science), as well as his personal relationships. A powerful orator, Deepankur is a committed proponent of the idea that discourse and dialogue is what fundamentally makes us human, whether its politics, philosophy or superlatives. He's excited to chair the little-known South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and hopes that delegates will come not just with attaining the BD (Best Delegate) in mind, but rather, to cherish the HMs (Happy Moments).



**Deepankur**  
*Co-Chair*



## COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

Established in 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising eight member states in South Asia (see Figure 1). It aims to advance economic growth and social development with greater cooperation in the areas of economics, culture, science and technology. In addition, the organisation works towards the deepening of understanding of one another's problems, as well as pushing for a united front in international forums on matters of shared interests. One of the landmark achievements of SAARC was the launch of the South Asian Free Trade Area in 2006. The free trade area covers 1.8 billion people in the SAARC nations and it removed trade barriers in order to increase the level of economic cooperation and integration in the region. A special feature of SAARC is that decisions at all levels are subjected to unanimous consent, and contentious bilateral issues are usually not brought up at its meetings.



Figure 1. Member States of SAARC

## SPECIAL RULES OF PROCEDURES

Due to the consensus-building nature of SAARC, resolutions need unanimous consent from member states to pass. As there is a significant proportion of observer states present, we shall adopt joint press briefs to better simulate the council dynamics.

Joint press briefs are intended to be an avenue for observer states to influence debate. Based on the debate that has occurred in Council, delegates of observer states may draft press briefs.



These press briefs may be statements from national representatives or a short article or opinion piece in response to the actions being debated in Council. A possible title for a press brief is “United States voice concerns over Bhutanese push to end child labour.”

Delegates who draft a press brief have to seek support from a majority of observer states before submitting their joint press brief to the chairs. Upon the chairs’ vetting and approval, the submitters of the joint press brief may indicate to the chairs, via notepaper, when they would like their joint press brief to be introduced in Council.

Please note that observer states may not sponsor resolutions or working papers. However, they may be signatories of resolutions and working papers. In addition, observer states shall indicate ‘Present’ during roll call, and may not vote in substantive votes.





# TOPIC A

## Improving Tourism in the Region



## KEY QUESTION

Can SAARC achieve consensus on the issue of tourism within the region and are there areas for regional cooperation?

## TOPIC A INTRODUCTION

### - IMPROVING TOURISM IN THE REGION -

As a social and economic phenomenon, tourism is a potential force for change in the global landscape. While the developed world utilises tourism primarily for sociocultural exchange and soft power projection, tourism is a lifeblood of economic activity in some countries in the developing world. In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly declared sustainable tourism as one of the contributing sectors to the Sustainable Development Goals. A bustling tourism scene has been shown to not only fuel service industries, local manufacturers, retailers and real estate within countries of interest, revitalizing entire societies and transforming the way residents earn a livelihood, but also promote an increased awareness of community concerns.

Within the context of South Asia, tourism is a major industry, led by India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The tourism sector generated 9.4% of India's GDP in 2017 and supported 41.6 million jobs, which constitutes nearly one-tenth of the country's total employment. Interestingly, the medical tourism sector in India is worth nearly \$3 billion and is projected to grow to \$8 billion by 2020. These trends have been enabled by the country's vast landscape dotted with picturesque scenery and cultural heritage. Sri Lanka, an island paradise brimming with amiable locals, ornate cave temples and unpolluted countryside has become a multi-magnet of sorts for tourism, with India being their largest consumer. Nepal has carved a niche of sorts in adventure tourism among SAARC nations, with foreigners flocking there for its mountains, Buddhist heritage and cool weather. Bangladesh and Bhutan are both emerging tourist destinations that are finding their place in the sun following the opening up and general liberalization of the '90s. Cognizant of the potential that socio-cultural exchange via people-to-people contact has in accomplishing economic interdependence for the integrated development of the region as a whole, the SAARC secretariat had seen fit to accord to tourism top priority in its developmental goals.

South Asia is endowed with an enormous potential for tourism due to its varied location-specific human and physical advantages, such as the unique and highly developed cultures found across



the region or the abundance of pristine natural beauty. Additionally, the valuable tourist resources and attractions present in the region, offer ample foundation for further growth. The geographical continuity of the subcontinent and its common cultural heritage are an excellent combination for the catalysis of regional integration and economic co-operation. Yet, numerous obstacles stand in the way of achieving the tourism superpower that South Asia could be. A primary cause for concern would be the state of infrastructure in most of the rising tourist hotspots in the region. Even in nations that have a significant tourism industry such as Nepal and India, nodes for tourist interest such as the Mt. Everest camps or Sabarimala often suffer from stuffy, dilapidated airports, dubious hotels and minimal Automated Teller Machine (ATM) penetration, just to name a few endemic issues. Another major stumbling block is a lack of public safety and security. Coupled with environmental and health concerns, a large sect of South Asia's potential tourist audience, particularly those hailing from a privileged, first-world background, would be discouraged from bringing their money to the region. As per the founding principles of SAARC, member nations should discuss possible common frameworks that can be put in place to transform the region into a bustling tourism scene.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Tourism

The UN World Tourism Organisation defines tourism as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. One of the intended outcomes of tourism is to transfer resources from the wealthier groups to allow the movement of resources in society and catalyse social mobility.

## KEY ISSUES

Developing regional tourism opens up a multitude of economic and partnership benefits for involved nations. In so far as the optimisation of regional tourism is to be achieved, it requires countries to come to a consensus on several key issues.

### Promoting Regional Tourism

Today, South Asia is bounded by a common identity, from its climatic conditions such as tropical weather and monsoons, ecological features including water and natural resources, to its cultural



convergences mainly in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. The common aspirations that tie these countries and their populations together can be utilised in the promotion of its region.

In contrast to international tourism, regional tourism here refers to an internal market within South Asia, where tourists and capital move across neighbouring states. While this has been present to some extent (see Topic Introduction), it is not a trend being clearly replicated throughout South Asia. There are many obstacles present to this day that the SAARC will have to overcome in order to promulgate and expand regional tourism.

One central hurdle of promoting regional tourism amongst developing nations is the lack of economic means. When even the basic requirements of everyday life are barely met, it is hard for people within such regions to fathom going abroad. A whopping 52.6% of the subcontinent's populations live below the Lower Middle Income Poverty Line, according to the Poverty & Equity Databank. Set at \$3.20 per day, or \$96 a month, this is barely enough to support even an occasional overseas trip. Facts like these are what makes it necessary to readily identify sources of financing to support the growth in various organizational levels that will further encourage tourism in the region. As a whole, promoting this industry in the South Asian region requires building up multiple aspects of the economy, as shall be more thoroughly discussed in later sections.

Private partnerships with state authorities can be effective in marketing and developing regional tourism projects. An example would be the development of the Cochin International Airport (CIAL) in South India, an unprecedented public-private partnership (PPP) with an airport that uses sustainable technology and exhibits stable growth. While a PPP is not the best tool for every scenario, the strategic use of these partnerships can contribute significantly to the development of a sustainable tourism program and can be a part of a broader strategy to facilitate tourist access, enhance quality and efficiency and improve the destination experience by tapping on to the creativity and resources of the private sector. Additionally, cooperative projects by a regional tourism organisation can render direct support to both tourists and regional service providers.

A key shortcoming is that there are no regular official cultural exchanges in the bilateral relationships between SAARC nations. In contrast, at the peak of the Indo-Soviet relationship, there was an annual cultural exchange in each country's capital. No such official exchanges exist between any of these countries. Strategic development methods can take inspiration from other robust tourism industries around the globe, for instance, within the European Union (EU). Some



of which include their myriad of aviation routes, tourism packages, and destination marketing strategies. At present, it is also crucial to look at the dynamic areas for publicity and promotion of tourism. Regional connectivity would strengthen digital and partnership marketing in order to increase demand for regional travel.

Finally, mobility between the SAARC nations, or rather the lack of it, is one of the more subtle yet present obstacles that regional tourism faces. For example, India borders all of the SAARC members except for the Maldives, yet only has railway connections to three: Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, of which the first one is plagued by lengthy border regulations and instability, while the second is heavily unreliable and the third is underused and isolated. Such issues are further elaborated in the Infrastructure section later. As a whole, this paints a grim picture for the average South Asian attempting to see the sights in his own backyard.

## **Environment**

South Asian countries boast rich cultural and natural heritages, which is a boon to the tourism industry. The diversity of ethnicities, in addition to conservation of traditional practices and places of interests, attracts a substantial number of tourists each year. However, as paradoxical as it is, South Asia is also infamous for resource depletion, ecological degradation, agricultural waste generation, urban air and noise pollution as well as lack of proper sanitation. Several of the South Asia countries have adopted Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) to assess negative environmental effects from various projects. While it is a commendable system that has the ability to effectuate change in order to reduce negative biophysical consequences, the lack of implementation would render the system ineffective nonetheless. While some countries such as Maldives and Bhutan already have a vibrant tourism industry, others resort to building more coal fired power plants, diesel fuelled transports and burning yards of crop remnants in an effort to yield faster growing crops as solutions to boost their economy. As such, in regions like Dhaka, Bangladesh, air pollution was in the “extremely unhealthy” range (301-500) for many months in 2017, spiking at an Air Quality Index (AQI) reading of 374 in November. Labelled as the “most polluted” city in the world would certainly dash the dreams of any rapidly developing city to draw in more regional tourists. It is imperative that countries consider and manage the environmental factors as they discuss the issue of tourism.



## Infrastructure

While the countries of South Asia may possess strong pull factors in their natural beauty and extensive heritage, tourism will rarely pervade potential sites with little traffic if there is nothing to facilitate it. Across South Asia, a lack of basic amenities or support systems often disincentivises foreigners to visit more remote areas. The problem is primarily that of transport, with a lack of good roads and poor connectivity. This is especially problematic in emerging nations like Bhutan or even Bangladesh and Nepal which according to the 2017 World Economic Forum, were ranked 80th, 113th and 118th respectively in road quality in Asia. No matter how exciting a remote temple or a waterfall may be, most tourists may simply prefer to travel to locations that require less effort to do so.

South Asian tourism also suffers from an excess of points of differentiation that are not being cashed upon adequately. Tourists have a plethora of options, from rappelling down the Himalayas to trekking through the remains of Mohenjo Daro in Pakistan, yet very few of the income flows from these activities are being gainfully tapped, either by governments or a corporation operating across the region. Native populations often receive insufficient protection and returns on tourism, which throttles the ability of tourism to become authentic, communities-oriented experiences.

South Asian bureaucracy frustrates tourists and tour operators alike, with ever-shifting visa rules that can leave visitors in the lurch and propagate inconsistent enforcement. For example, rather than e-visas or visas on arrival, Bangladeshis are required to appear in person at the Indian consulate to secure a visa while Indians need to provide original passports and proof of employment. Thus, cooperation on transit could also be further strengthened. Additionally, service, luxury and transportation taxes are high and contribute significantly to the costs incurred by visitors planning a trip to these countries.

Finally, while the Indian subcontinent is host to a deluge of temples, mosques, palaces and even the occasional church, the South Asian governments, from India to Afghanistan to the Maldives, all face the common struggle of not possessing sufficient funds to properly maintain their cultural gems. The battle against the sinking and deterioration of the Taj Mahal is a rare example of a concerted, successful attempt at preservation. On a general scale, historical sites in South Asia are often squalid affairs, with barely a signpost or government official. Replication of efforts such as the Archaeological Survey of India are not to be found in the rest of the region, and this could be due to a lack of desire to coordinate such efforts across borders.



## Security

The creation of SAARC has unfortunately failed to ensure enduring peace on the subcontinent. India is in a constant state of tension with its fellow nuclear neighbour Pakistan, and the U.S. government has long warned travellers to avoid the restive border and disputed Kashmir. The fact that the U.S. is the second largest source of tourists or that Kashmir is objectively one of the most attractive regions in South Asia, with lush valleys and wide rivers should hardly be ignored in light of this fact. The threat of terrorism to tourists is also a cause for concern. An example would be the 2008 Mumbai attacks where gunmen fired on a train station platform, cafes and luxury hotels; the victims included 28 foreigners from 10 countries. Since then, smaller-scale bombings conducted by Islamic extremist and Maoist insurgent groups have continued in public places frequented by Westerners. Tourists have to wade through a continually shifting slate of warnings, and the spectre of terrorism is even more entrenched elsewhere. Afghanistan severely underperforms in the area of tourism because of the lack of true government control beyond Kabul, which is of itself the most dangerous city in the world. Elsewhere, it is an oxymoron, with the province of Balkh undergoing unprecedented development and growth while neighbouring Kunduz sees insurgent occupation and constant conflict between the remnants of the Taliban and the government. This is a juxtaposition played out verbatim across the nation, making any form of tourist-oriented infrastructure non-existent. In addition, in the last five years, Islamic State terror cells have taken advantage of increasing unemployment and social insecurity in Bangladesh to make inroads into the nation's youth, with an unprecedented rise in radicalisation as well as domestic terror attacks.

We then shift our lens from national security to the often overlooked consideration of civil security. In the Maldives, a steadily worsening stand-off between the government and the judiciary regarding political prisoners has led to civil confrontation as well as the imposition of a state of emergency in February in this year. Such developments, as well as speculation of an escalation to violence have been broadly covered by Western media, jeopardising the islands' marketability to tourists and prompting hasty reassurances from Mr Ahmed Shiaan, Ambassador of the Maldives to the UK regarding its safety as a tourism hub. India's tour operators reported a 25% drop in business over the first quarter of 2013 after the high-profile gang rape of a 23-year-old woman who was riding a bus in Delhi the previous December. With the case inspiring other victims of sex crimes to bring their stories into the light, the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India said female tourism dropped by 35% that same quarter. The U.S. State Department reports a "modest increase" in violent crime against foreigners and cautions women against travelling alone in India, using public transportation after sunset and visiting isolated



areas. These problems are only worse in India's neighbours (barring serene Bhutan), with a woman being raped every two hours in Pakistan and political turmoil in the Maldives shaking up protests even in the country's most popular tourist spots. Security concerns also include the pettier yet equally persistent problem of rampant crime. A lack of a common quality standard among law enforcement (compare the police of metropolitan Mumbai to that of rural Afghanistan) is a key reason for tourists' unwillingness to risk their necks in exploring lesser known parts of the subcontinent.

## PAST INITIATIVES

Despite the strong emphasis on tourism as a development priority in South Asia, there has been a noticeable dearth of actual policy in promoting it. It took six years since SAARC's founding to create a Technical Committee on Tourism and a decade to hold the first meeting of the tourism ministers. During the First Meeting of the Technical Committee on Tourism held in Colombo in October 1991, an Action Plan on Tourism was formulated. The first Meeting of the SAARC Tourism Ministers was held, once again, 6 years later in Colombo in September 1997. The Colombo Resolution was adopted and during the 15th Summit, the vital contribution that tourism could afford to the economic development of the SAARC region was emphasised. Agreements were made to implement a comprehensive action plan with efforts such as facilitating the movement of people through improved travel infrastructure and air, sea and land connectivity among the SAARC countries, collaboration in human resource development and the promotion of SAARC as a common destination using public-private partnerships and joint campaigns. In 2012, the SAARC promoted the region as a common tourist destination by enhancing the role of the private sector and through human resource development. Several novel possibilities such as joint marketing, relaxing the visa regime, granting cross-border driving licences, creating a single currency for SAARC similar to the Euro and increasing intra-SAARC movement by air by national flag carriers were brought up.

If drastic measures are not taken to both enhance the capacity of the Secretariat to operationalize the announced projects and to implement strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to verify the implementation of the decisions taken at various SAARC meetings, there will be no effective improvement to the situation.



## LINKS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Three years ago, the United Nations established a set of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that countries meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Of these goals, “Decent Work and Economic Growth” and “Partnership for the Goals” are the most applicable to the issue at hand.

Tourism can be a juggernaut for social change and a harbinger of prosperity in the region. In the end however, if the tourists do not come to South Asia, South Asia must come to the tourists. It is crucial for SAARC to identify key areas requiring change and reform in order to effectively harness one of its most potent economic sectors to make a higher standard of living possible for its people.

## STAKEHOLDERS

Members	Observers
Afghanistan	Australia
Bangladesh	China
Bhutan	European Union
India	Iran
Maldives	Japan
Nepal	Mauritius
Pakistan	Myanmar
Sri Lanka	South Korea
	United States

### Afghanistan

In the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan has been under international scrutiny on the safety of tourists. The range of landscapes and massive Buddhist statues the country holds still attracts a number of tourists each year, but the number has been steadily declining decreasing, especially after the 2012 incident where Canadian Joshua Boyle and his family were taken hostage.



## **Bhutan**

Bhutan has adopted a model of tourism development where its operations are based on a kinked demand curve of creating premium value -- limiting regional tourists to just over 50 000, a premium charge is made for the visit and thus obtaining a higher per capita yield from tourists.

## **India**

A major influence and economic power in the region, India is both a key source of regional tourists as well as an in-demand destination for international tourism. Major policy decisions under the Modi regime include digitalisation of the visa application process, business transactions and tourist services.

## **Maldives**

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, 78.1% of Maldives' 2014 GDP stems either directly or indirectly from the tourism industry. Known today as one of the most successful island destinations in the world, Maldives works on a business model of establishing strong partnerships with foreign investors and tour operators; it all started with an investment from Sri Lankan conglomerates in the early 1980s who still account for about 20% of all hotel rooms.

## **Japan**

A highly developed country, Japan implements a variety of support systems for SAARC Member States such as the Hatoyama Initiative for climate change. Due to the region's pivotal nature in the world, Japan attaches great importance to the role of SAARC and actively supports it through promoting regional connectivity and enhancing the SAARC-Japan relationship. Japan also has a history of involvement in domestic projects such as India's first high speed railway. Japan currently invests in the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youth (JENESYS) which has allowed for people-to-people exchange on a large and structured scale throughout all of the SAARC countries. With additional involvement in sustainable growth, disaster prevention and peace building -- all of which are important to maintaining and growing the tourism sector -- Japan is poised to take SAARC to greater heights with the many proficiencies it brings to the table.



## European Union

More than just an economic community of neighbours, EU is in many ways what SAARC could have been like but never became. Historically, most of the collaboration between these two bodies have been limited to periodic memorandums in the fields of trade and market access. With a high affluence that boosts the propensity for tourism, the EU could consider if and how it should use its resources to invest in and improve the the situation in South Asian.

## QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. How can the SAARC Technical Committee on Tourism be better able to strengthen its role and fulfil its stated goals after more than a decade of ineffective operations?
2. Will it be possible for SAARC to improve connectivity between nations and facilitate the intra-regional movement of international and regional tourists?
3. Should regulations be geared towards promoting unification and increasing coordination between the various institutions of member nations or towards building up the capabilities of individual member nations?
4. How feasible is it for SAARC to promote safety for tourists in the region and increase confidence in South Asia as a whole?
5. What can SAARC do to improve the quality and standards of services and infrastructures available to foreign tourists?



# TOPIC B

## The Bay of Bengal



## KEY QUESTION

How can member states of the SAARC work together to improve security by reducing piracy in the Bay of Bengal?

## TOPIC B INTRODUCTION

### - THE BAY OF BENGAL -

The Bay of Bengal, located in the north-eastern corner of the Indian Ocean, has historically been a major trade and transportation route between South Asia and Southeast Asia. The largest bay in the world at over 800,000 square miles, it is bookended by India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. Both littoral and landlocked nations in the region rely on the bay for various maritime activities such as fishing and shipping.

The Bay of Bengal is a region of enormous economic significance. It boasts rich reserves of tuna, skipjack and various other fish, which give rise to an annual catch of more than six million tonnes. Discoveries of petroleum, natural gas and rare minerals have also been made in the bay, and countries have actively engaged in the development of these resources for commercial use. In addition, the region functions as a key transit zone for trade between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as the main route for trade in energy to East Asia. Several ports of importance such as the Port of Chittagong (Bangladesh), Chennai Port (India) and the Port of Kolkata (India) line the coast of the bay.

Furthermore, the Bay of Bengal is of strategic importance, primarily due to its central location between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and SAARC. The United States has held several joint military exercises in the area, most recently holding the Tri-nation Malabar Naval Exercise with India and Japan in July 2017. China has also steadily increased its political, military and economic influence in the region by building up strong maritime relationships, investing heavily in the infrastructure of nations such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Today, the Bay of Bengal faces several issues with security, as the ever-persistent piracy threat has taken the lives of numerous fishermen and ruined the livelihoods of their families. SAARC has to come together as a council, and find solutions to these pressing problems.



## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Piracy

According to Article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, piracy consists of any of the following acts:

- (a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:
  - (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;
  - (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State;
- (b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft;
- (c) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b).

Therefore, piracy is simply any act of unlawful force directed against a vessel or its passengers, carried out for private gain on the high seas or outside the jurisdiction of any country. Piracy can also refer to any act of instigating, aiding or abetting the aforementioned action.

## KEY ISSUES

Piracy has been a pervasive issue in the Bay of Bengal for a long time. In 1498CE, for over a century, Portuguese marauders wreaked havoc in the Bengal area by raiding vast territories and obstructing the flow of commerce. In the modern day, pirates have successfully created a reign of terror in the bay by regularly robbing fishermen, kidnapping them and even at times murdering them. According to Yar Ali, a fishermen union executive from Banskhal, at least 2,000 such incidents were reported in Bangladeshi waters from 2011 to 2012. In a particularly devastating attack in March 2013, pirates shot at a returning deep-sea fishing expedition, capturing 32 Bangladeshi fishermen, their catch and their boats. A week later, 23 of their bodies were recovered with their hands and legs bound.

Piracy threatens the livelihoods of the families of fishermen by forcing them to fork up large sums of money as ransom, as a result saddling them with enormous debt that they struggle to



pay back. In 2016, pirates in the Sundarbans region kidnapped more than 20 fishermen and extracted about Rs 3 million (S\$61,000) from them. A villager from the coastal village of Gosaba, West Bengal describes the plight of one of his neighbours this way: "She had to sell everything - her house, cattle, the little jewellery she had - to buy (her husband's) release."

Being kidnapped for ransom is not the worst fate that could befall fishermen. In the unfortunate scenario where the fishermen lose their lives in captivity, their families lose a precious source of income, usually the sole breadwinner of the family, and thereafter struggle to make ends meet. At times, the widespread piracy has even halted fishing in certain areas, disrupting fishermen's revenue stream. A prime example is the deep sea off the Anwara and Banshkhali coast in Bangladesh, which has faced a growing threat of pirates from the Kutubdia-Maheshkhali channel. With fishing not generating many earnings in the first place, piracy simply adds another layer of worry and uncertainty for these typically impoverished households.

Three major causes have been identified for the rampant piracy in the Bay of Bengal. First and foremost, the inefficiency and lack of capacity of law enforcement agencies has prevented effective policing of the area. A case in point is the Bangladesh Coast Guard. According to its founding Director General Shafiq-ur-Rahman, the Coast Guard is stretched thin with a lack of manpower and resources. He cited the small force of 2,000 officers who require better equipment and a larger number of modern vessels that can operate during the monsoon season in order to carry out their duties well.

Secondly, the authorities in the region are highly corrupt and often receive bribes from pirates. In the words of the Bangladeshi fishermen's union leader: "When we urge the police to act against the pirates, we have to bribe them. But, from the pirates, they take double that amount in bribes to refrain from taking any action against them. The police and other security agencies definitely take cuts from the pirates. Otherwise, they could never attack so frequently."

The third main factor is poverty and the shortage of job opportunities, which fuels illegal activities like maritime piracy in the area. A 2015 international survey of convicted pirates, jointly conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as well as Oceans Beyond Piracy, found that poor economic conditions constitute a major reason for engaging in piracy. Honing in on the Bay of Bengal region, academic Carlos Ortiz asserts in his book, *Private Armed Forces and Global Security: A Guide to the Issues* (2010), that the "deprived communities living there (which) have extracted rewards from the practice over generations" are a root cause of the current piracy



situation. The lack of economic opportunities in coastal rural villages has prompted large-scale urban migration, and some of those that stay behind in the villages turn to illicit activities as an alternative source of income. In fact, many maritime pirates live in these villages under the guise of fishermen, and launch from staging areas supported by their local communities.

## PAST AND PRESENT INITIATIVES

The United States Navy has conducted the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training exercise, abbreviated as CARAT, annually with countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This exercise, which was first established in 1995, places an emphasis on the non-traditional threats like piracy that these littoral nations face. The United States has also forged a close maritime partnership with Bangladesh, helping it set up a naval commando base that can react quickly to any maritime situation, as well as supplying it with 16 high-speed boats and two former U.S. Coast Guard cutters. At a ceremony in 2014, the then-United States ambassador to Bangladesh, Dan Mozena, heralded the 70% reduction in piracy in the Bay of Bengal as an achievement of the support from the United States.

The Indian military has also increased its maritime presence in recent decades, establishing the country's first tri-service command in 2001, the Andaman and Nicobar Command, as well as increasing the number of military personnel and equipment in the Eastern Naval Command. This capability is largely devoted to protecting India's exclusive economic zone by combating illegal activities like piracy.

## LINKS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 2015, the United Nations established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that countries do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs by continuing the current unsustainable practices. Of these goals, "No Poverty" and "Decent Work and Economic Growth" are the most applicable to the issue at hand.

As discussed above, poverty is a major cause of piracy in the region, with the scarce economic opportunities in rural coastal areas enticing people to seek an alternative income in illegal activities. As such, any solution that aims to combat piracy in the long term has to take into account the root cause of poverty.



# STAKEHOLDERS

## Bangladesh

Bangladeshi fishermen, especially those that live in the Sundarbans region, are greatly affected by piracy. Kidnapping, extortion and looting are common activities that the pirates undertake, devastating the livelihoods of fishermen and their families. In recent years, the Bangladesh Coast Guard, the Bangladesh Navy and the Water Transport Monitoring Cell have intensified raids on coastal areas and stepped up patrols in piracy hot-spots. To increase its surveillance capabilities, the Navy ordered two maritime patrol aircraft from Germany in October 2017. In battles with notorious gangs like the Kalam Bahini, the authorities routinely recover large stashes of lethal, modern weapons.

## India

Indian fishermen from West Bengal face a similar predicament as their Bangladeshi counterparts. They are regularly subjected to attacks by pirates who are mostly of Bangladesh origin but are believed to have a support base in Indian soil. Pradip Chatterjee, the secretary of the National Fishermen Forum, alleges that the pirates are able to intrude up to 20 kilometres into Indian territories due to complicity of the Border Security Force and Indian Coast Guard. Strategically, India uses the combat of maritime threats like piracy as a means to strengthen relations and enhance cooperation with its neighbours. For example, India has delivered two large patrol vessels to Sri Lanka under a major contract in the past year, and has been hosting the biennial MILAN series of multilateral naval engagements in the Bay of Bengal since 1995.

## China

As a global superpower whose competition with India has been widely documented, China sees the issue from a geopolitical viewpoint as well. Countering piracy, along with other security threats, gives China the opportunity to boost its ties with littoral countries in SAARC. It is notable that China is the principal supplier of equipment and training to the Bangladesh armed forces. In addition, the Chinese government has a strong incentive to eradicate piracy in the area, since gaining access to the bay grants economic benefits to its impoverished Yunnan province.



## QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. How can SAARC address the root causes behind rampant piracy in the Bay of Bengal?
2. How can SAARC better cooperate in order to reduce the incidence of piracy in the region?
3. How can governments effectively reach out to and provide aid to the victims of pirate attacks?
4. How can each member state and observer state contribute in combating piracy?





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