International Relations · GS - II

“Increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in India and growing interference in the internal affairs of member-states by Pakistan are not conducive for the future of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).” Explain with suitable examples.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2016	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
12.5	~200 words

Answer Hint

SAARC; cross-border terrorism; India-Pakistan tensions; regional cooperation; trade barriers; security concerns; bilateral disputes; alternative regional forums

Model Answer

Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, aims to promote regional cooperation in economic, social and cultural development. Persistent India-Pakistan tensions have repeatedly obstructed its progress.

Impact of Terrorism and Political Interference

1. Erosion of Trust

Cross-border attacks, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2016 Uri attack, intensified tensions between India and Pakistan. Such incidents make sustained regional dialogue politically difficult.

2. Disruption of Summits

The proposed 2016 SAARC Summit in Pakistan was postponed after several member countries withdrew amid heightened tensions following the Uri attack. This demonstrated how bilateral disputes can paralyse regional institutions.

3. Weak Economic Integration

Intra-regional trade remains below its potential because of political mistrust, trade barriers, poor connectivity and limited economic integration. The stalled implementation of the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement and the SAARC Railways Agreement has further constrained regional connectivity.

4. Reduced Cooperation on Shared Challenges

Political divisions limit collective responses to climate change, public health threats, disaster management, poverty and energy insecurity.

5. Loss of Institutional Relevance

Slow progress has encouraged greater reliance on alternative frameworks, including BIMSTEC, for some regional initiatives. However, these forums do not entirely replace SAARC's wider South Asian membership.

Way Forward

- Rebuild trust through sustained diplomatic engagement.
- Address terrorism through credible cooperation and intelligence-sharing.
- Strengthen trade, transport, energy and public-health cooperation.
- Protect technical and humanitarian initiatives from political disruption.
- Respect sovereignty and resolve disputes through peaceful dialogue.

Conclusion

Cross-border terrorism and political mistrust have seriously weakened SAARC, but the region's shared developmental challenges make cooperation essential. Separating practical regional collaboration from political confrontation could help revive its relevance.