



Know thy neighbour-It is time for India and Pakistan to have a liberal visa regime

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Highlights

- The idea of a free and vibrant media is not a utopian concept. It is an essential requirement not only for the people but also for the state to make informed choices and policies that reflect reality, and to calibrate various decision-making processes.
- The critical distance maintained by journalism from various entrenched interests gives it the ability to document changes and record people's aspirations.
- It is in this context that the inability of Indian journalists to cover the biggest news story of last week, the general election in Pakistan, shows the insular attitude of South Asian leadership.

Poor intra-regional cooperation:

- Among the various regional groupings, intra-regional reporting within South Asia has been one of the weakest. The illiberal visa regime is the main reason for this avoidable lacuna.
- In 1985, when SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) was formed, its charter laid out some lofty objectives such as to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia
- SAARC proclaimed to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems. However, in reality, intra-regional cooperation and travel has been minimal, and we have ended up with more mistrust than trust.
- While it is true that securing a journalist visa for South Asian countries remains a major hurdle, it has become nearly impossible for Indian journalists to travel to Pakistan and for Pakistani journalists to travel to India.
- One of the cornerstones of the Composite Dialogue is an increase in people-to-people interaction. The visa restriction makes a mockery of this aim.

There is a need for more liberal visa regime across SAARC countries for greater regional integration and enhanced cooperation across the borders for regional peace and prosperity

Source: [The Hindu](#)