

FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE,
KATHMANDU, 11-12 DECEMBER 2018

REMARKS BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Distinguished Chairman,
Esteemed Delegates,
Heads of Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to Kathmandu and to the Fifty-sixth Session of the Programming Committee.

We are happy that the Programming Committee, which is an important Charter Body, is meeting regularly.

This Session of the Programming Committee is taking place soon after commemoration of the Thirty-fourth SAARC Charter Day. I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude Charter Day messages from the leadership of SAARC. I wish to thank you all, especially the Heads of SAARC Division, for organizing or facilitating celebratory events to mark the Charter Day in SAARC capitals. I also wish to thank the Heads of Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies for observing the Charter Day in a befitting manner.

Distinguished Delegates,

This Committee has important agenda items before it. We look forward to the Committee's useful recommendations on them.

One of the important items on the agenda of this Committee is consideration of the document, *SAARC Vision-2030*, the draft of which was circulated among the Member States in February this year.

Since the last Session of the Programming Committee, a number of activities have been held. However, several activities were postponed due to lack of confirmation for participation. We may, therefore, critically review our Calendar of Activities. Once we agree to the Calendar of Activities, every endeavour should be made to implement them.

The Ministerial Meetings provide policy directives in steering regional cooperation in the identified areas. In spite of offers made by the Member States, several Ministerial Meetings could not be held. It is highly desirable to regularly convene Ministerial Meetings on SAFTA, Transport, Education, Energy, Science & Technology, Poverty Alleviation, Tourism and Agriculture, among others. We count on your support in organizing the Ministerial Meetings.

As you are aware, improved intra-regional connectivity is crucially important to bolster the process of regional integration. It will also promote economic relations, tourism and people-to-people contacts. It is, therefore, necessary for us to finalize early the three Agreements on Motor Vehicles, Railways and Air Services.

Distinguished Delegates,

As provided for in the Harmonized Provisions relating to Financial and Administrative Matters of the SAARC Regional Centres, I have had the privilege to convene yesterday a Coordination Meeting among the Heads of Regional Centres, which was also attended by the Heads of Specialized Bodies. The Secretariat will brief the Committee about the outcome of this meeting under relevant agenda items.

Project-based collaboration among the Member States recently initiated by our Centres of Excellence, including those with the support of our partners, is a welcome development. The Committee may wish to provide guidance to the Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres to pay greater attention to project-based collaboration in the region.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that the retrofitting work of the Annex Block of the Secretariat, which was damaged during the 2015 earthquake, is likely to complete by the end of this month. Availing myself of this opportunity, I wish to thank the host of the Secretariat, the esteemed Government of Nepal, for its technical and financial support for the retrofitting work as well as for its continued support to the Secretariat.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Secretariat is at the disposal of the Committee to make this Session a great success. I am personally available for any consultation the distinguished delegates may wish to have.

I look forward to welcoming you all to a dinner tonight at Hotel Radisson that I am hosting in honour of the participants of this meeting.

I wish the Committee a fruitful outcome and the delegates a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

I thank you.
