

NINETEENTH ASIA COOPERATION DIALOGUE MINISTERIAL MEETING
TEHRAN, 24 JUNE 2024

REMARKS
BY
H. E. MR. MD. GOLAM SARWAR,
SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Afternoon!

On behalf of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it is a great honour and a privilege for me to address the First Session of the Nineteenth ACD Ministerial Meeting in this beautiful city of Tehran. It is more so for me, as most of the members of SAARC are also the members of ACD.

I avail myself of this opportunity to convey warm greetings to the Honourable Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegation, attending this important Ministerial Meeting.

Echoing with other distinguished delegates, with deep sorrow, we express heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran over the untimely demise of former President Dr Ebrahim Raisi; former Foreign Minister Dr. Hossein Amir Abdollahian; and other eminent leaders and top officials in a helicopter accident on 19 May 2024. May Almighty Allah grant all of them Jannatul Ferdous.

With the compassion, courage and determination of the people of Iran, we are confident that the country will soon overcome the challenges triggered by the untimely death of the visionary leaders.

Excellencies,

I congratulate His Excellency Dr. Ali Bagheri for presiding over this important Ministerial Meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and for his insightful opening remarks. We are confident of a successful outcome of this Meeting under his able chairmanship.

I also thank His Excellency Dr. Bagheri for inviting me to this Meeting and the esteemed Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation since our arrival in this thriving city of Tehran.

Excellencies,

The largest and the most populated continent of the Earth, Asia has always enjoyed a rich history and cultural diversity. Asia prides itself as the birthplace of early civilizations and the origin of early science, technology, medicines, liberal arts and many other manifestations of human ingenuity. Abound with a third of the Earth's landmass and almost two thirds of the world

population, mostly young and energetic, Asia today is a promising combination of economic strength, demography and unique value system that accords primacy to social well-being over individual, self-centered pursuits.

Endowed with immense human and natural resources, this is the era for the countries in Asia to come closer to pursue a path of 'collective development'. Seen from this perspective, the establishment of ACD in 2002 marks a historic development, providing a common forum for dialogue for the countries in Asia in forming a prosperous Asian Community through active collaboration in different areas. We are confident that this Ministerial Meeting will add further momentum to the ongoing cooperation among the Asian countries under the framework of the "ACD Blueprint-2030".

Excellencies,

Launched in December 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has eight member states now, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We are happy that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an important observer state of SAARC and we are looking forward to continued meaningful cooperation with all the Observer States, including Iran.

Excellencies,

SAARC manifests the determination of its Member States to promote peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through joint initiatives, while adhering to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and peaceful settlement of disputes. SAARC is based on the premise that in an increasingly interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity are best achieved in the South Asia region by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation among the Member States, which are bound by ties of history, culture and geographic contiguity.

SAARC is essentially a people-centric organization, created to promote the welfare of its peoples and to improve their quality of life through regional cooperation. Though SAARC concentrated on a few areas for regional collaboration at its initial stage, its ambit continued to grow over the years, and now includes Trade, Commerce, Connectivity, Food Security, Energy, Environment, Science and Technology, Social Affairs and so on, encompassing almost every sphere of activity, having a bearing on the life and livelihood of its peoples.

SAARC have ambitious goals too. It currently pursues the visionary goal of the South Asian Leaders to achieve a South Asian Economic Union in a phased and planned manner through creation of a Free Trade Area, a Customs Union, a Common Market, and a Common Economic and Monetary Union.

In the quest of a fruitful journey towards effective regional integration, SAARC is always eager to learn from other regional and international organizations with similar aims and purposes. SAARC

and ACD have common objectives and their initiatives complement each other. This spurs the possibility of active engagement between SAARC and ACD and we look forward to it.

Excellencies,

We believe that regional cooperation such as ACD and SAARC are more of a necessity than a choice for greater prosperity in Asia. The cost of lack of cooperation or less cooperation will be much higher than what we can imagine. This has become more true today, especially because we have more challenges today, than ever before.

Nevertheless, with the concerted efforts and a shared vision for a more integrated and prosperous Asia, I am confident that SAARC will play a fundamental role in shaping the future of South Asia, thereby significantly contributing to the ACD's vision of consolidating the Asian strength.

I wish the Nineteenth ACD Ministerial Meeting every success.

I thank you.
