

SIXTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT
28-29 April 2010
Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration
“Towards a Green and Happy South Asia”

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonchhen Jigmi Yoeser Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Nasheed; the Prime Minister of Nepal, His Excellency Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met in Thimphu, Bhutan, on 28-29 April 2010 for the Sixteenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

2. The Leaders expressed satisfaction that SAARC had achieved a number of important milestones with the completion of twenty five years of its establishment. The Leaders underscored the relevance and importance of the Association in providing a platform for regional cooperation to accomplish the Charter objectives.

3. In this Silver Jubilee Year of SAARC, the Leaders emphasized the need to develop a ‘Vision Statement’. They agreed to form a ‘South Asia Forum’ for the generation of debate, discussion and the exchange of ideas on South Asia and its future development. The Forum will consist of eminent personalities of diverse background including from all SAARC Member States. The Forum would provide inputs, based on a comprehensive understanding, for charting out the future course of SAARC in the medium and long run and recommend, if required, the necessary improvements required in the existing mechanisms. Such a forum could function on public-private partnership lines, and allow for multiple inputs beyond governments into the consideration of the future of SAARC.

4. In order to commemorate the 25th anniversary, the Leaders laid emphasis on effective communications and public diplomacy. They drew attention in this regard to the need to reach out to different sections of the South Asian community, particularly its students and youth, private media, private sector, think tanks, civil society, and institutions of economic development.

5. The Leaders agreed that the scope and substance of cooperation had expanded to diverse fields, providing a firm basis for genuine partnership. However, a number of these had not translated into meaningful and tangible benefits to the people. They, therefore, highlighted the need for more efficient, focused, time-bound and people-centric activities and called for appropriate reflection of all the SAARC decisions into the national policies and programmes of Member States. They resolved that the Silver Jubilee Year should be commemorated by making SAARC truly action oriented by fulfilling commitments, implementing declarations and decisions and operationalizing instruments and living up to the hopes and aspirations of one-fifth of humanity.

6. The Leaders, while appreciating that all the Member States had evolved into multi-party democracies, underlined the challenges faced by them in ensuring effective, efficient, transparent and accountable governments. In this regard, they emphasized the need for regional cooperation to strengthen good governance through sharing of experiences, best-practices and establishing institutional linkages. They noted the proposal by Bangladesh to convene an Inter-governmental Meeting in Dhaka on the idea of a SAARC Charter of Democracy on which Bangladesh offered to circulate a Concept Paper.

7. The Leaders recognised the need to draw on the democratic and participatory tradition collectively represented by the Parliamentarians of South Asia for the progress of SAARC. In this context, the Leaders recommended the convening of a “Conclave of SAARC Parliamentarians” in line with the SAARC Charter and directed the SAARC Secretariat to convene a Working Group, comprising nominees of the Member States, to workout the modalities for establishment of such a Conclave.

8. The Leaders emphasized on a greater focus to pursue people-centric development with due emphasis on socio-cultural progress and upholding traditions and values and in that regard, noted the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) pursued by Bhutan, inter alia, in ensuring people-centric development, culture, preservation of environment, better governance. They further noted that other Member States might consider Bhutan’s experience with the concept and welcomed Bhutan’s offer to host a SAARC Workshop on GNH in 2010.

9. The Leaders emphasized on deepening regional efforts on poverty alleviation, the overarching objective of SAARC. They called for the expeditious mainstreaming of the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) in the national processes and completion of the Mid-term Review of the SDGs as scheduled. They further noted the useful finding and recommendations made by successive regional studies through the Regional Poverty Profiles (RPPs) and directed the relevant SAARC mechanisms to act on them. In this regard, they welcomed the offer of the Government of Nepal to host the Third Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in 2011.

10. The Leaders welcomed Climate Change as the theme for the Summit and reaffirmed their commitment to address this challenge. In this context, they adopted the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change and directed that the recommendations contained therein be implemented in earnest.

11. The Leaders noted that while climate change impacted every country, the SAARC Member States as developing countries were shouldering a major burden, in spite of having contributed least to the problem. They emphasized that global negotiations on climate change should be guided by the principles of equity, and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities as enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and should be conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner.

12. The Leaders, underscored the need to initiate the process to formulate a common SAARC position for COP16 and thereafter, including on issues such as separate financing for adaptation

and mitigation as well as technology transfer. In this regard, they welcomed the offer of Bhutan to host an Inter-governmental Expert Group meeting.

13. The Leaders welcomed the Government of Nepal's initiative to organize a Ministerial Meeting of Mountainous Countries in Kathmandu later this year.

14. In pursuance of the recommendation contained in the SAARC Ministerial Statement on Environment on conservation of aquatic ecosystem, trans-boundary bio-diversity zones, automated network of weather stations and regular and systematic sharing of scientific data, the Leaders called for focus on water management and conservation and development of cooperative projects at regional level in terms of exchange of best practices and knowledge, capacity building and transfer of eco-friendly technology.

15. The Leaders, deeply concerned by the extent of environmental degradation in the region, reiterated the importance of sustainably managing environment and development through adoption of eco-friendly approaches and technologies and that South Asia should become a world leader in low-carbon technology and renewable energies. They welcomed the signing of the SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment and called for its early ratification and implementation.

16. The Leaders, concerned by the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, called for effective regional programmes in early warning, preparedness and management including response and rehabilitation while remaining within their respective national laws and procedures. They called for further negotiations and early finalization of the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters.

17. The Leaders noted with satisfaction the ongoing initiatives in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through regional cooperation. In this regard, the Leaders welcomed the announcement by the Government of Maldives to nominate a Woman Secretary General as the Tenth Secretary General of SAARC.

18. The Leaders appreciated the comprehensive directives of the Colombo Statement on Children of South Asia, specially highlighting the importance of the in-depth assessment of the SAARC Decade of the Rights of the Child (2001-2010) and its follow up. Recognizing the important role young people play in the region, the Leaders directed the development of a SAARC Youth Action Plan, in line with the SAARC Youth Charter, to guide regional cooperation in this area. To achieve this end, the Leaders directed to organize SAARC Youth Summit, involving policy makers and youth leaders from all Member States.

19. The Leaders underlined the important role of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) for financing regional and sub-regional programmes and projects. They welcomed the ratification of the SDF Charter. The Leaders also welcomed the inauguration and operationalization of the Permanent Secretariat of the SDF including the appointment of its first Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Leaders also urged the importance of projects being funded through SDF are demand-driven, time-bound and aligned with the developmental priorities of the region. The Leaders also emphasized the need for the Member States to take full advantage of the

mechanism of the SDF through expeditious clearance and implementation of the projects and programmes to promote the welfare of the people of the SAARC region, to improve their quality of life and to accelerate economic growth, social progress and poverty alleviation in the region.

20. The Leaders reiterated their commitment to implement SAFTA in letter and spirit. They emphasized the need to realize the full potential, through reduction of the size of the sensitive lists, acceleration of trade facilitation measures, and removal of non-tariff, para-tariff and other barriers. They directed the SAFTA Ministerial Council to work in earnest in these areas in a time-bound manner.

21. The Leaders welcomed the signing of the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services and expressed that this will open up new vistas of trade cooperation and further deepen the integration of the regional economies. They called for the early ratification of the Agreement. The Leaders also called for the early conclusion of negotiations on the specific schedule of commitments under the Agreement.

22. The Leaders emphasized the need to strengthen the role of private sector in regional initiatives through appropriate mechanisms including through Public-Private Partnership as well as the need for greater intra-SAARC investment promotion efforts.

23. The Leaders underlined the need for taking concrete measures to improve trade facilitation. They directed the relevant SAARC bodies to expedite their work in these areas. They also recognized the importance of development of communication system and transport infrastructure and transit facilities specially for the landlocked countries to promote intra-SAARC trade.

24. The Leaders noted with appreciation that SAARC Commerce Ministers had coordinated SAARC position on WTO Issues and Doha Development Agenda during the Seventh WTO Ministerial Conference and agreed on the SAARC Ministerial Communiqué. They directed the Commerce Ministers to continue the process.

25. The Leaders emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in education and directed greater interaction among the universities in the region towards undertaking of joint programmes on collaborative research and exchange programmes. They underscored the imperative of recognition of degrees, and where possible facilitation of credit transfers for open and distance education etc. They directed the expeditious finalization of mutual recognition of academic and professional degrees as also harmonization of educational curriculum in South Asia.

26. The Leaders took note of the Reports of the Steering Committee of the South Asian University, and appreciated the progress being made towards establishing the University. They also underscored the importance of establishing regional campuses of the South Asian University. They appreciated the announcement of the CEO of the SAU project office to initialize the first academic session of the University with effect from August 2010. Further they asked the Steering Committee to work towards finalizing the modalities of the University.

27. The Leaders called for collaborative efforts to achieve greater intra-regional connectivity and endorsed the recommendation to declare 2010-2020 as the “Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity in SAARC”. They agreed on the need to expedite negotiations with a view to finalizing the two agreements on Motor Vehicles and Railways.

28. The Leaders, reiterating the centrality of connectivity to further deepen and consolidate regional integration, mandated the Chair to convene an Inter-Governmental Meeting to recommend specific measures to enhance multi-modal connectivity including air, sea and surface transport.

29. Acknowledging the enormity of the challenges related to food insecurity and poverty, the Leaders directed the SAARC Agriculture Ministers to vigorously pursue regional cooperation in agriculture covering all sub-sectors to enhance overall agricultural productivity. They called for regional efforts on increased sharing of best practices, technologies, techniques, and materials. Given the importance of quality seeds in enhancing productivity, they further directed early consideration of the concept of a regional seed bank, regional testing and certification of seeds, and a framework for transfer of plant genetic material and seeds. They agreed that South Asian agriculture must benefit from collaborative efforts from within and among SAARC countries by undertaking specific initiatives and projects.

30. The Leaders underscored the need for promotion of tourism to enhance greater people-to-people contacts in the region and called for the creation of tourism-friendly environment. They welcomed the offer of the Government of Nepal to host the Third SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Kathmandu in 2011 which coincides with the Nepal Tourism Year 2011.

31. The Leaders recognized the need to enhance cooperation in the energy sector to facilitate energy trade, development of efficient conventional and renewable energy sources including hydropower. They emphasized the need to undertake studies to develop regional energy projects, promote regional power trade, efficiency, conservation and development of labeling and standardization of appliances, and sharing of knowledge and technologies.

32. The Leaders agreed that an Action Plan on Energy conservation would be prepared by the SAARC Energy Centre (SEC), Islamabad with inputs from the Member States and submit to the inter-governmental mechanism for consideration. They called for the creation of a web portal on Energy Conservation for exchange of information and sharing of best practices among SAARC Member States.

33. The Leaders noted the proposal from India for preparing a Roadmap for developing a SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME) on a regional basis, as SAARC is considering electricity trading, supported by enabling markets in the Member States.

34. The Leaders strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and expressed deep concern over the threat which terrorism continues to pose to peace, security and economic stability of the South Asian region. They reiterated their firm resolve to root out terrorism and recalled the Ministerial Declaration on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism adopted by the Thirty-first Session of the Council of Ministers in Colombo. They emphasized

that the linkages between the terrorism, illegal trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substance, illegal trafficking of persons and firearms all continue to remain a matter of serious concern and reiterated their commitment to address these problems in a comprehensive manner. The Leaders emphasized the need to strengthen regional cooperation to fight terrorism and transnational organized crimes. They reaffirmed their commitment to implement the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol and SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. They re-emphasized the importance of coordinated and concerted response to combat terrorism. The Leaders also recognized in this regard the value of the proposed UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and noted the progress made during the recent rounds of negotiations and called for an early conclusion of the Convention.

35. The Leaders welcomed the hosting of the Third Meeting of SAARC Home/Interior Ministers and related Meetings in Islamabad to review the implementation of relevant SAARC Conventions. They underscored the importance of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and called for its ratification.

36. The Leaders welcomed the Observers from Australia, the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius, the Union of Myanmar, the United States of America and the European Union and appreciated their participation in the Summit. They acknowledged that Australia and Myanmar were attending the Summit for the first time. They appreciated the interest shown by the Observers to work with SAARC.

37. The Leaders welcomed the offer of the Government of Maldives to host the Seventeenth Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 2011.

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