

INAUGURAL SESSION
(27 JUNE 2019)

FOURTH MEETING OF THE SAARC AGRICULTURE MINISTERS, THIMPHU, 27 JUNE 2019

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

**Chief Guest, Hon. Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan,
Hon. Minister for Agriculture and Forests of the Royal Government of Bhutan,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a great honour for me to address the Inaugural Session of the Fourth Meeting of the SAARC Agriculture Ministers in this beautiful city of Thimphu.

We are greatly honoured by the august presence of the Honourable Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan as the Chief Guest of this Inaugural Ceremony. His gracious presence in our midst today is a singular testimony to the importance that he personally and the Royal Government of Bhutan attach to this prominent Ministerial forum as well as to the SAARC process. We look forward to benefitting from the Honourable Prime Minister's Inaugural Address.

I wish to express profound gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting this Ministerial Meeting and its preceding meetings. I also wish to convey sincere appreciation to the Royal Government for

warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us and for the excellent arrangements made for the meetings.

**Honourable Chief Guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

South Asia is home to around a quarter of the global population, majority of whom live in rural areas and depend on agricultural and livestock resources. Recognizing both the inherent challenges and opportunities in agriculture, our leaders have time and again underscored the importance of regional cooperation in agriculture, which is crucial to alleviating poverty, livelihood security, food and nutritional security and promoting sustainable and inclusive growth of our economies. The directives of our leaders culminated in the adoption of the “SAARC Agriculture Vision-2020”, which shows the way forward for enhancing regional engagement in the field of agriculture for maximizing benefits from available options, enhancing ability to face new challenges and harnessing opportunities.

In pursuance of the vision set forth by our leaders, we have been able to establish the SAARC Food Bank and the SAARC Seed Bank. These are significant accomplishments of SAARC.

The mechanism of SAARC Chief Veterinary Officers’ Forum deserves our appreciation for its very useful work in promoting regional collaboration. The two important documents prepared by the Forum, namely, Statement on SAARC’s Cooperation on Antimicrobial

Resistance (AMR) and Regional Action Plan to Curb Antimicrobial Use (AMU) or Antimicrobial Resistance in the SAARC Region are before this Ministerial Meeting for consideration. Moreover, the Forum has set 2028 as the SAARC Year to Declare the Region Free from *Peste des Petits Ruminants* (PPR).

The SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC), which is the Centre of Excellence, has been playing an important role in implementing the SAARC Agriculture Vision adopted by our leaders.

Our collaboration with regional and international organizations is progressing well. With the successful completion of several projects with their collaboration, we have now developed a regional Project on “*Consortium for Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia*” with the help of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). With the financial assistance of IFAD for an amount of US \$ 1.5 million for three years, we hope to implement this project soon.

The SAARC Development Fund, hosted by the Kingdom of Bhutan, has also been actively facilitating project-based collaboration in agriculture and rural development.

**Honourable Chief Guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Though commendable achievements have been made, there is yet more to be done to fully realize the vision of our leaders. Among other

things, we need to facilitate agricultural diversification and sharing of climate resilient agricultural strategies, technologies and crop varieties. We also need to invest more to improve nutritional security and food safety. We should strengthen cooperation to expand agro-processing and building competitive value chains from producers to local, regional and global markets. More gender sensitive approaches may be adopted in agriculture. Greater private sector investments are required in developing markets and marketing, value chains and agro-processing. Barriers in intra-regional trade in agriculture should be addressed and agricultural trade liberalized.

I am confident that the Thimphu Statement on Agriculture and Rural Development to be adopted by this Ministerial Meeting will reinvigorate regional collaboration.

I wish to thank the Senior Officials' Meeting and the Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development for their diligent preparatory work for this Ministerial Meeting. The Multi-stakeholders' Dialogue was a great success with its useful recommendations.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to once again thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting this Ministerial Meeting and its preparatory meetings.

**I wish the distinguished Heads of Delegation fruitful deliberations
and a pleasant stay in Thimphu.**

I thank you.
