



SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

“SAARC is a people-centric organization. As enshrined in the SAARC Charter, our cardinal objective is to promote welfare of the peoples of our region.”



Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC

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Best Woman Entrepreneur Award-2018

“The role and status of women have been changing rapidly due to growing industrialization and globalization, supported by conducive social legislations and legal instruments. With the ever-changing socio-cultural values, and spread of education and awareness, women are increasingly engaging themselves in professional activities, including entrepreneurship,” H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), said.

The Secretary General made these remarks, while addressing the Best Woman Entrepreneur Award-2018 Function in Kathmandu on 11 January 2019. He was the Chief Guest at the function.

“More and more women are increasingly occupying higher positions in the Government, judiciary, parliament and political parties. We are proud that in South Asia, we currently have a lady Head of State in Nepal and a lady Head of Government in Bangladesh,” the Secretary General stated at the function.

He said that SAARC is a regional organization created primarily to promote the welfare of the peoples of this region.



Convinced that women, who constitute almost 50% of the population, are South Asia's strength, the SAARC Leaders have underscored the need for bringing them fully into the mainstream of socio-economic development, he added. “In essence, since its inception in December 1985, SAARC's focus has been on promoting women's education; protecting their rights; ensuring that they are free from all sorts of discrimination; and above all, empowering them economically,” he stated.

Established in 2001 in Colombo under the auspices of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an Apex Body of SAARC, the Women Entrepreneurs' Council has been working towards promoting women entrepreneurship across the region.

South Asian Regional Conference, “Weaving the Web”

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), addressed the Opening Session of the South Asian Regional Conference “Weaving the Web” in Kathmandu on 25 January 2019. He was Special Guest at the event.

In his address, the Secretary General introduced inter-governmental mechanisms and instruments aimed at promoting the welfare of women, including the SAARC Social Charter.

Highlighting the importance of education in empowering women, the Secretary General said, “The first and foremost pre-requisite is the education of our girls that will certainly be a catalyst for socio-economic development, improvement in the quality of life and reducing poverty.” He said that educated women will be able to play even greater role in all walks of life,

including at senior policy-making levels. “The powerful tool of education will help in mainstreaming of women and making them economically empowered and financially independent.”

The Conference, which was organized by Sankalpa – Women’s Alliance for Peace, Justice and Democracy, brought together eminent women representatives from the South Asian countries to discuss measures to promote the welfare of women in order to bring them into the mainstream of socio-economic development.



Round-Table on Asian Regional Cooperation Organizations

“Established in 1985, SAARC is a people-centric organization aimed at promoting welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life through accelerated economic growth and social progress,” H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), said.

The Secretary General made these remarks, while addressing the Round-Table on Asian Regional Cooperation Organizations in Boao, Hainan Province of China, on 28 March 2019.

“With nearly a quarter of the global population and abundant natural resources, South Asia has a vast potential for economic integration. Therefore, as envisioned by the SAARC leaders, our ultimate goal is to create South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased and planned manner through a Free Trade Area, a Customs Union, a Common Market, and a Common Economic and Monetary Union,” the Secretary General said.

“Improved intra-regional connectivity is the sine qua non for effective regional integration. SAARC’s quest for strengthening connectivity is manifest in the declaration of 2010-2020, as the ‘SAARC Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity’,” the Secretary General said. “Endowed with vast hydropower, natural gas, solar, wind and bio-fuel resources, South Asia offers tremendous potential for regional cooperation in energy generation, transmission and trade.”

In his address, the Secretary General touched upon the regional initiatives aimed at, among others, promoting people-to-people contacts; ensuring food and nutrition security; bringing women into the mainstream of development; and making South Asia an attractive common tourist destination. He also spoke about SAARC’s engagement with regional and international organizations, including its Observers.

Organized by China Institute of International Studies, a think tank of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, the Round-Table was devoted to the theme, *Opportunities and Challenges of Asian Regional*

Cooperation and was attended by Heads of Regional Organizations in Asia, including ASEAN-China Centre (ACC); Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD); Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS); and Asian Financial Cooperation Association (AFCA). Moderated by Ambassador Qi Zhenhong, President of China Institute of International Studies, the Round-Table was a component of Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2019 convened under the auspices of Boao Forum for Asia.



Second Meeting of the SAARC Seed Bank

The Second Meeting of the SAARC Seed Bank Board was held in New Delhi on 17 January 2019. The Meeting was attended by the Seed Bank Board Members or their Representatives. The Meeting was inaugurated by Mr. Sanjay Agarwal, Secretary (DAC & FW), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of the Government of India.

During the Meeting, the Board reviewed the status of implementation of the decisions of its First Meeting. The Board recommended to shortlist potential common varieties of the crops of the Member States for adaptive



trials in order to fix the assessed share of the Member States for the Seed Bank Reserve. The Board decided to develop common minimum Seed Quality Standard, Seed Testing Procedures and a draft Protocol for the SAARC Seed Bank Agreement.

The SAARC Seed Bank was established by the Member States recognizing its importance in attaining Seed Security as a means of ensuring Food Security.

Tenth Meeting of the SAARC Food Bank Board

The Tenth Meeting of the SAARC Food Bank Board was held in Islamabad on 21-22 January 2019. The Meeting was attended by the Food Bank Board Members or their representatives. The Meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Muhammad Hashim Popalzai, Secretary, Ministry of National Food Security and Research of the Government of

Pakistan. The closing ceremony was graced by H.E. Mr. Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Hon'ble Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

During the Meeting, the Board reviewed the status of implementation of the decisions of its Ninth Meeting and provided further guidance for early operationalization of the Food Bank. The Board reviewed Schedule-II of the Agreement and decided to formulate the Regional Guidelines on Storage Method, practices and Quality Control Measures.

Representatives of International Organizations also participated in a particular session of the Meeting to discuss possibilities of mutual collaboration and cooperation to enhance regional food and nutrition security.

The SAARC Food Bank was established to act as a regional food security reserve during normal time food shortages and emergencies for the Member States of SAARC and to provide regional support to national food security efforts.



Uni-Global Model United Nations Conference

Mr. Dadhi Ram Bhandari, Director, SAARC Secretariat, represented the Secretary General at the inauguration ceremony of the Uni-Global Model United Nations (UGCI MUN) Conference on “SAARC process and activities of the Secretariat”. The Conference was organized by the Global College International, Kathmandu on 22 February 2019. The conference was attended by more than hundred schools from various countries and its opening session was addressed by the Ambassador of Finland to Nepal, Representative of the UN Country Office to Nepal and other prominent personalities on multilateral diplomacy.

6th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

Ms. L.V. Muthukumarana, Director, SAARC Secretariat, represented the Secretary General at the 6th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) held in Bangkok from 27 to 29 March 2019 which was organized by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). APFSD serves as the regional platform on sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region, and also as a preparatory event for the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF 2019).

Ms. Muthukumarana apprised the meeting about the follow-up in the SAARC Region with respect to SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), with a particular

emphasis on the SAARC Framework for Action (SAFFA) on Education 2030.

Familiarization Tour to Secretariat by students of various schools/colleges

The Secretariat welcomed students from educational institutions of the Member States and provided them with an opportunity to learn, observe and interact about SAARC. During the period, the following visits took place:

i) **Visit by students of the House Academy, Shenzhen, China:** A group of eleven high school students of the House Academy, Shenzhen, China, visited the Secretariat on an educational tour, accompanied by their teachers. The students were addressed by the Secretary General, followed by a power point presentation on “SAARC Process and its Activities” and interaction session.

ii) **Visit by Pathshala Nepal Foundation School, Kathmandu:** Sixty-two students from Pathshala Nepal Foundation School situated in New Baneshwor, Kathmandu, accompanied by their teachers, visited the SAARC Secretariat on 6th February 2019 on an educational tour to learn about SAARC and its activities, as a part of their school curriculum.

The Secretary General met and interacted with the students. The students were also briefed about the functions and activities of SAARC and its Secretariat.



iii) **Visit of National Cadet Corps (NCC):** On 25 February 2019, a 150-member delegation comprising NCC cadets from SAARC Member States and Singapore, accompanied by their staff and escort officers, visited the Secretariat under Youth Exchange Programme conducted by National Cadet Corps Nepal. The educational visit of NCC cadets was coordinated by NCC-Nepal.

The delegates were addressed by the Secretary General and a power point presentation on “SAARC Process and its Activities” was given, which was followed by a question/answer session.

The NCC cadets and their supervising officers thanked the Secretariat for an informative briefing about SAARC and its activities, particularly the programmes aimed at benefiting the youth.



SAARC Internship Programme

The SAARC Secretariat offers internship to under-graduate, graduate and post-graduate students from South Asia and researchers of any nationality working in South Asian research institutes based within the region. The overall objective of the SAARC Internship Programme is to promote awareness about the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in and beyond South Asia. Under this programme, interested students or researchers are placed at the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu for a period of two weeks to six months, depending on the need and nature of the projected research work. During the period, January to March 2019, six students successfully completed their internship at the Secretariat.

Activities carried out by SAARC Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres

South Asian University (SAU)

1. Lecture on “Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Young Generation of the SAARC Region”, 19 February 2019, New Delhi.
2. Visit to SAU by the students of University of Dhaka, 17 January 2019, New Delhi.
3. 4th International Conference on Recent Developments in Theory, Computation & Application of Differential Equations (ICRD-TCA-DE 2019), 21-23 January 2019, New Delhi.
4. Panel Discussion under the theme, ‘Gender Concerns in the Contemporary Times: Old Perceptions, New Challenges’, 31 January 2019, New Delhi.
5. Interdisciplinary Panel Discussion on the theme, “Debating ‘Quotas’: The Law, Politics and Economics of the 10 Percent Reservation”, 14 February 2019, New Delhi.
6. Discussion on the book titled, Living and Dying: Meanings in Maithili Folklore, 20 February 2019, New Delhi.
7. Fourth Alumni Meet 2019, Faculty of Economics, 23 February 2019, New Delhi.
8. Fifth International Conference on South Asian Economic Development, 21-22 February 2019, New Delhi.
9. International Mother Language Day Observation, 21 February 2019, New Delhi.
10. SAU Sports Fest 2018-19, 18-27 February 2019, New Delhi.
11. Second South Asian Border Studies Conference with the theme - “Beyond Boundaries and Borders: South Asian Quest for Peace, Development and Regional Connectivity”, 01-02 March 2019, New Delhi.
12. Meet the Press by President SAU, under the title “A Vision for South Asian University”, 05 March 2019, New Delhi.

SAARC Development Fund (SDF)

1. Training on Bamboo based products for Dumka and Ri-Bhoi cluster, 10 December-22 January 2019, India.

2. Promoting Integrated Bamboo Based Enterprise Development among SAARC Region project, which introduced thirty-five new prototypes of handicrafts and lifestyle items, 20 December-28 February 2019, India.
3. International Trade Fair organized by the Implementing Agency for Bamboo Project in Guwahati, 28 December-13 January 2019, Bhutan.
4. Exposure visits to Bamboo Technology Park, Guwahati Bamboo and Cane Development Institute Tripura, Tirpura Bamboo Mission, Agri-Business Incubation Centre and other bamboo related places in India, 16-24 January 2019, India, arranged by the Implementing Agency from Bhutan.
5. Seminar on Moodle software for faculty and students, 05 February 2019 and 30 March 2019, Bangladesh.

SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC)

1. SAARC Exhibition of Paintings, 22-24 January 2019, Sri Lanka.
2. SAARC International Women’s Day, 08 March 2019, Sri Lanka.

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

1. Participation in the 21st Book Fair 2019, 1-28 February 2018, Bangladesh.
2. SAARC Regional Consultation on Development of Aquaculture for Commercially Important Finfishes in South Asia, 26-28 March, Sri Lanka.

SAARC Energy Centre (SEC)

1. Webinar on “Sharing Australian Experiences in Solar PV Technology”, 26 February 2019, Pakistan.
2. Webinar on “Promotion of Energy Conservation in Municipalities of SAARC”, 12 March 2019.
