



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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Thirty-fourth SAARC Charter Day

The Thirty-fourth Charter Day of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was commemorated on 08 December 2018 in all Member States of SAARC.

The Heads of State or Government or the Ministers for Foreign/External Affairs issued messages to observe the Charter Day. In addition, the Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs of the Member States organized special events to celebrate the Charter Day. SAARC's Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres also commemorated the Charter Day.

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, hosted a Reception in Kathmandu on 07 December 2018 to commemorate the Charter Day. Rt. Hon. Mr. Nanda Bahadur Pun, Vice President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, was the Chief Guest of the occasion.

In his address at the function, the Secretary General said, “Over the last thirty-three years, SAARC has made steady progress toward socio-economic development in the region, which is fundamental to the promotion of the welfare of the peoples and improving their quality of life.” He stated, “Endowed with vast human and natural resources, South Asia has immense potential. With sustained endeavours, we will surely be able to realize the region's fullest potential. Essentially, therefore, SAARC is the beacon of hope and aspiration, and a matter of pride for all South Asians. SAARC is our common identity, our inspiration and our future.”

During the First Summit in Dhaka, the Heads of State or Government adopted the Charter of SAARC on 08 December 1985, marking the beginning of a new era of regional cooperation in the history of South Asia. Established with the primary objective of promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life, SAARC promotes regional collaboration in almost every aspect of

development activity having a bearing on the life and livelihood of the peoples of the region.



Fifty-sixth Session of the Programming Committee

The Programming Committee met in Kathmandu on 11-12 December 2018. The Programming Committee is a Charter Body of SAARC.

Mr. Krishna Prasad Dhakal, Joint Secretary (SAARC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, chaired the Fifty-sixth Session of the Programming Committee attended by the Heads of SAARC Divisions at the Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs and the Heads of Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Krishna Prasad Dhakal, Chairperson of the Programming Committee, reiterated unflinching commitment of Nepal to the SAARC process. He also appreciated the role of the SAARC Secretariat and excellent arrangements made for the meeting.

Addressing the delegates attending the Fifty-sixth Session of the Programming Committee, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, underscored the need to ensure implementation of the activities once agreed to by the Member States, including those at the Ministerial level. Stating that improved intra-regional connectivity is essential to promote economic relations, tourism and people-to-people contacts, he expressed the hope that the three regional Agreements on Motor Vehicles, Railways and Air Services would be concluded soon. He also highlighted the importance of project-based collaboration to reap tangible benefits for the peoples of the region.

The two-day Session of the Programming Committee reviewed the progress of work in several areas since its last Session in July 2018. The Committee also finalized the budgets and Calendars of Activities of the SAARC Secretariat, Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres.



Secretary General convenes Coordination Meeting

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, convened a Coordination Meeting at the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu on 10 December 2018, preceding the Fifty-sixth Session of the Programming Committee.

Heads of Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres attended the Coordination Meeting chaired by the Secretary General. Directors at the Secretariat were also present.

During the Meeting, Heads of Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres presented to the Secretary General several administrative and financial matters, including issues pertaining to their budget and annual calendar of activities.

The outcome of the Coordination Meeting was fed to the Programming Committee that took place in Kathmandu on 11-12 December 2018.

The Harmonized Rules for Administrative and Financial Matters of the Regional Centres provide for Coordination Meetings among them to be convened by the Secretary General annually. Heads of Specialized Bodies were also invited to the Meeting.

SAARC Cultural Festival held

“The South Asian countries are heirs to a rich tradition of dance and music from the ancient times. The dance traditions of our countries have evolved drawing inspiration from each other,” said H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC. He made these remarks addressing the Closing Ceremony of the SAARC Cultural Festival on Traditional Dance in Kathmandu on 14 December 2018.

Organized by the SAARC Cultural Centre in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation of Nepal, the four-day Festival brought together artists from the Member States to showcase their talents as well as some of the best classical dances of the region.

“In today’s world where many elements of culture and traditions are being overshadowed due to the impact of globalization, our artists have largely managed to keep alive South Asia’s dance traditions,” the Secretary General said. “Events such as this Festival play an important role in preserving and promoting the traditional dances of the SAARC region.”

The Secretary General thanked the SAARC Cultural Centre for making sustained efforts in preserving the region’s cultural and traditional heritage through such events.

He also thanked the Government of Nepal, particularly the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, in facilitating the organization of the Festival in Kathmandu.

SABAH holds Tenth Annual General Meeting

“Economic empowerment of women falling below the poverty line has to be our primary objective, if we were to achieve gender equality and accelerated economic growth in South Asia,” said H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC. The Secretary General made these comments speaking at the Inaugural Session of the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the SAARC Business Association of Home-based Workers (SABAH) in Kathmandu on 31 October 2018.

The Secretary General stated, “During SAARC Summits, our leaders have underscored the need to improve the social and economic status of women. The resolve of our leaders to empower women is manifest in SAARC’s Social and Economic Agenda aimed at promoting their economic and financial emancipation.”

“As we are aware, women who are working in the informal sector are the ones who are facing hardships and challenges, while their contribution is not recognized formally. Against this backdrop, the establishment of SABAH is a positive step in creating opportunities for home-based women workers in the region,” the Secretary General said. “It is very heartening to note that SABAH today has been able to establish itself as an important entity in South Asia. In essence, SABAH is contributing to the promotion of the spirit of SAARC at the grassroots level in South Asia.”

Chief Patron of SABAH, Ms. Chandni Joshi; Chairperson of SABAH; UN Resident Coordinator; and Head of UNWomen in Kathmandu also addressed the Tenth Annual General Meeting.



SABAH is the first pilot project funded by the SAARC Development Fund under its Social Window. The project that lasted for six years from 2009 to 2015 was intended to empower home-based workers through economic self-sufficiency by harnessing their indigenous skills for producing market-oriented products.

A self-sustaining entity since 2016, SABAH continues to thrive across the region, bringing ample opportunities to the home-based workers. On the whole, SABAH endeavours to empower the women of South Asia, particularly those in the informal sector.

Secretary General of SAARC calls on the Vice President of Nepal

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, called on Rt. Hon'ble Mr. Nanda Bahadur Pun, Vice President of Nepal, on 22 November 2018.

During the meeting, the Rt. Hon. Vice President underscored the need for early convening of the Nineteenth SAARC Summit. He stated that as the current Chair of SAARC, Nepal has been in active consultation with the Member States for evolving a consensus on a new set of dates for the Summit. He also appreciated the role played by the Secretary General for taking forward the SAARC process.

The Secretary General expressed appreciation to the Government of Nepal for its unflinching commitment to the SAARC process and sustained efforts being made by the leadership for early convening of the Nineteenth SAARC Summit. He also thanked the Government of Nepal for its continued support to the SAARC process as well as to the SAARC Secretariat.

HOMENET Delegation visits SAARC Headquarters

A 15-member delegation from the Network of Homebased Workers in South Asia (Homenet South Asia) visited the SAARC Headquarters in Kathmandu on 02 November 2018. The delegation was led by Ms. Chandni Joshi, Enforcer, Homenet South Asia Trust.

In addition to office bearers and members of Homenet South Asia, the delegation comprised office bearers of SABAH in Bhutan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who assembled in Kathmandu for the Tenth Annual General Meeting of SABAH Nepal.

In his briefing to the visiting delegation, the Secretary General elucidated the genesis, objectives and principles of SAARC, including its institutional set-up, Secretariat, Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies. He introduced the areas of regional cooperation being pursued under the aegis of SAARC, which, *inter alia*, include communication; connectivity; agriculture; public health; energy; environment; and economic cooperation. He also spoke about the agreements and conventions adopted by SAARC to facilitate regional cooperation in several areas.

In his presentation, the Secretary General referred to the ongoing project-based collaboration under the auspices of the SAARC Development Fund, which was established in 2010 as the umbrella funding mechanism. He also

highlighted SAARC's ongoing collaboration with its Observers, and regional and international organizations, several of which are the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations.

Speaking about the way forward, the Secretary General underscored the importance of regular convening of the



meetings of the Charter Bodies of SAARC, including the Summit, to provide renewed impetus to the SAARC process. Improved intra-SAARC connectivity, economic relations and tourism facilitate SAARC's speedy progression towards the goal of the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU), he affirmed.

The presentation was followed by an interactive session during which members of the delegation raised several pertinent questions.

Secretary General attends the Swearing-in Ceremony of the Maldivian President

At the invitation of H. E. Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, President of the Republic of Maldives, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, attended his Swearing-in Ceremony in Malé on 17 November 2018, as special guest.

H. E. the President granted an audience to the Secretary General on 18 November 2018. In the meeting, the Secretary General congratulated H. E. the President on his momentous election. He also wished H. E. the President tremendous success during his tenure of office.

H. E. the President thanked the Secretary General for accepting the invitation to his Swearing-in Ceremony. He appreciated the important role played by the Secretary General and his team at the Secretariat in carrying forward the SAARC process. He expressed the Maldivian Government's unwavering support and commitment to the SAARC process. He also emphasized the need for early convening of the Nineteenth SAARC Summit.



The Secretary General briefed H. E. the President about the ongoing activities of SAARC, with particular reference to regional economic integration, intra-regional connectivity, people-to-people contacts and tourism. He also underscored the importance of regular convening of Ministerial Meetings, , on SAFTA, Transport, Agriculture, Tourism, Poverty Alleviation, and Education, among others.

Secretary General addresses International Conference of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, addressed the Opening Session of the Seventh International Conference of the International Society of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons in Kathmandu on 05 December 2018. He was the Special Chief Guest at the occasion.

In his address, the Secretary General appreciated the initiative taken by the Society in organizing the Conference. “This is an important endeavour to improve the health of women, especially those who battle the challenges of obstetric fistula,” he said.

“This Conference is of enormous significance to SAARC as a regional organization, which accords high priority to the well-being of women in South Asia, including their health, the Secretary General stated. “We believe that the empowerment of women socially, economically and politically is crucially important to achieve greater progress and prosperity in our societies.”

“Our ultimate objective is to prevent and cure fistula. We should also make sustained endeavours to rehabilitate and reintegrate all those women who are already suffering from it. They should be enabled to live a healthy, comfortable and dignified life. Let us work together to achieve this humane objective,” the Secretary General said.

Secretary General attends Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan

At the invitation of the Hon. Foreign and Finance Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, attended the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan on 28 November 2018. The Conference was preceded by several other important side events on 27 November 2018.

In his address at the Ministerial Conference, the Secretary General introduced SAARC to the audience. He added, “SAARC has made steady progress toward the attainment of its objectives, while sustained efforts are being made to achieve effective regional integration.”

“The scourge of terrorism has to be eliminated for continued progress toward the attainment of SAARC’s objectives. During the SAARC Summits, our leaders have stressed the need to root out terrorism and violent extremism, in all their forms and manifestations, through effective cooperation among the Member States,” the Secretary General said. “Our leaders have also underscored the need to take effective measures to combat illicit trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances, arms smuggling, money laundering, counterfeit currency and other transnational crimes.”

The Secretary General stated, “Afghanistan’s entry into SAARC has extended the geographical outreach of South Asia, linking it with Central Asia. The leaders of SAARC have emphasized the need for linking South Asia with contiguous regions, including Central Asia, and beyond, by all modes of connectivity for the promotion of economic relations, people-to-people contacts and tourism.”

In concluding his remarks, the Secretary General expressed the confidence that the Ministerial Conference will result in renewed commitments for peace, self-reliance and socio-economic development of Afghanistan and the South Asian region.



Third Meeting of SAARC Council of Experts of Energy Regulators (Electricity)

The Third Meeting of the SAARC Council of Experts of Energy Regulators (Electricity) was held on 13-14 November 2018 in Colombo. The Meeting was organized with the technical and financial support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The Meeting was attended by the representatives of the Member States of SAARC and its international partners (ADB and SARI/EI). The Meeting considered the draft roadmap, prepared by the SAARC Secretariat, for the implementation of the SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation (Electricity).



Educational Tour to Secretariat by Students of various schools in Kathmandu

120 students from Triyogi High School and 59 students from Miniland High School, accompanied by their teachers, visited the SAARC Secretariat on 25 November 2018 and on 21 December 2018, respectively on an educational tour to learn about SAARC and the functioning of the SAARC Secretariat. A chapter on SAARC is a part of the Social Studies curriculum in Nepali schools.

The Secretary General of SAARC met and interacted with the students. The students were also briefed about the activities and functioning of the Secretariat. The students were very curious and excited to get the knowledge about the SAARC process and the functioning of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat welcomes educational trips from educational institutions of the Member States and provides visiting students with an opportunity to observe, interact and learn about SAARC.



List of Activities conducted by SAARC Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres

SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC)

1. Twenty-eighth Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre, 4-5 December 2018, Kathmandu.

SAARC Arbitration Council (SARCO)

1. Ninth Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Arbitration Council (SARCO), 30-31 October 2018, Maldives.

South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO)

1. Seventh Meeting of the Governing Board of the South Asian Regional Standards Organization, 21-23 November 2018, Kathmandu.

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

1. Twelfth Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Agriculture Centre, 24-25 October 2018, Dhaka.

SAARC Energy Centre (SEC)

1. Thirteenth Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Energy Centre, 19-20 November 2018, Islamabad.

SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC)

1. SAARC Non-Violence Day- Art Competition, 2 October 2018, Sri Lanka.
2. SAARC Seminar, Research Grant and Publications on Hindu Cultural Trails, 8-10 October 2018, India.
3. Tenth Governing Board Meeting of the SAARC Cultural Centre, 30-31 October 2018, Sri Lanka.
4. SAARC Artist Camp & Exhibition of Paintings, 4-6 December 2018, Sri Lanka.
5. SAARC Cultural Festival on Traditional Dance, 11-14 December 2018, Nepal.
6. SAARC Non-violence Day Art Competition Award Ceremony, 8 December 2018, Sri Lanka.