



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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President of Sri Lanka visits SAARC Headquarters

H. E. Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, visited the SAARC Headquarters in Kathmandu on 02 September 2018.

To commemorate his visit to the Secretariat, H. E. the President planted a tree in its premises and signed the Visitors' Book.

In his remarks on the Visitors' Book, H. E. the President stated, “Sri Lanka strongly supports regional cooperation and integration in order to promote the well-being of the peoples of South Asia; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural interaction in the region; and for promoting and strengthening collective voice of the countries of South Asia.”

After taking a tour of the Secretariat premises, H. E. the President, in his address, stated that as a founding member of SAARC, Sri Lanka remains committed to the SAARC process. He stated that the Member States should work in the spirit of brotherhood to achieve the objectives of SAARC.

H. E. the President thanked the Secretary General for his diligence and dedication for sustaining the momentum of the SAARC process. He appreciated the Secretary General for creating a conducive working environment in the Secretariat to enable the officials to work effectively. He also appreciated the good work and commitment of the Secretariat's officials.

Earlier, delivering his welcome remarks, the Secretary General of SAARC said, “Your Excellency's momentous visit is a testimony to the importance that you personally and the esteemed Government of Sri Lanka attach to the SAARC process.” He further stated, “As a founding member of SAARC, Sri Lanka has been playing a very constructive role in its evolution since its inception in December 1985. As the host of three SAARC Summits and the three-time Chair of SAARC, Sri

Lanka has contributed enormously in enriching the SAARC process.”

Since its establishment in Kathmandu on 16 January 1987, several SAARC Heads of State or Government have visited the Secretariat.

H. E. the President's visit is the second one of a Head of State or Government to the SAARC Headquarters this year. In March, during his bilateral visit to Nepal, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan visited the SAARC Secretariat.



Informal Meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers

SAARC Council of Ministers met in an informal session in New York on 27 September 2018 on the sidelines of the Seventy-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

H. E. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Foreign Minister of Nepal, presided over the deliberations of the meeting, attended by the Hon. Foreign Ministers of the SAARC Member States. In his opening remarks, he thanked the Hon'ble Foreign Ministers for attending the meeting. The Hon'ble Minister stated that SAARC should be effective and result-oriented for the benefit of the people of the region.

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, in his brief remarks, updated the Hon. Foreign Ministers of the progress achieved in the implementation of the decisions of the Eighteenth SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, November 2014) and the Thirty-seventh Session of the Council of Ministers (Pokhara, March 2016).

During the meeting, the Hon. Ministers thanked the Secretary General for apprising the Council on the progress on regional cooperation since its Informal Meeting in New York in September 2017. The Hon. Ministers reiterated their full commitment to the SAARC process and stressed the need to promote progress and prosperity of the peoples of the region through the platform of SAARC. In order to enhance economic relations, the Hon. Ministers emphasized the need to improve connectivity by finalizing SAARC Motor Vehicles, SAARC Railways and Air Services Agreements.

Regional Conference on Scaling-up the Nutritional Care of Women

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, addressed the Inaugural Session of the Regional Conference on Scaling-up the Nutritional Care of Women in South Asia in Kathmandu on 07 May 2018. Devoted to the theme, "Stop Stunting – Power of Maternal Nutrition", the Regional Conference was co-hosted by SAARC and UNICEF.

In his address at the Inaugural Session, the Secretary General welcomed the participation of over 120 delegates from the region and other parts of the world. Touching upon the theme of the Conference, he stated, "Good nutrition and a healthy diet is important in every phase of life. It is even more crucial, during pregnancy, both for the health of the mother and the baby during the first years of the babies' life."

The Secretary General further stated, "One third of world's women with anaemia live in South Asia. Improving nutritional situation of women and children in South Asia requires reaching out to women during adolescence, pre-conception and pregnancy stage. In the meanwhile, combining nutrition-specific interventions with measures aimed at empowering women is essential."



Workshop on Strengthening Regional Infrastructure and Cooperation in the field of Quality Infrastructure

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, addressed the Inaugural Session of the Regional Kick-off Workshop of the Project, *Strengthening Regional Infrastructure and Cooperation in the field of Quality Infrastructure* in Kathmandu on 08 May 2018.

The two-day start-up Workshop was organized by Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB) (National Metrology Institute) of the Federal Republic of Germany in collaboration with Nepal Bureau of Standards and Metrology.

In his address, the Secretary General thanked PTB for launching the project in 2010, which is now in its third and final phase for the period 2018-2021.

Underscoring the importance of SAARC's collaboration with its partners, including PTB, he said, "This Workshop is a testimony to SAARC's increasing engagement and collaboration with regional and international organizations, as well as with its observers. It is also a good example of SAARC's interest in project-based collaboration."



Delegation of Bhutan Broadcasting Service visits SAARC Headquarters

A 14-member delegation from Bhutan Broadcasting Service paid a visit to the SAARC Headquarters in Kathmandu on 17 May 2018. The delegation was led by Mr. Jigme, Executive Producer.

The Secretary General received the delegation and briefed them about the SAARC process. He also elucidated the current status of cooperation in priority areas. He underscored that the cardinal objective of SAARC, as enshrined in its Charter, is to promote the welfare of the peoples and improve their quality of life.

In his briefing, the Secretary General referred to the ongoing project-based collaboration under the auspices of the SAARC Development Fund, the umbrella funding mechanism of SAARC. He also highlighted SAARC's current engagement with its Observers to promote project-based collaboration in the seven priority areas identified by the Eighteenth SAARC

Summit, namely, communication; connectivity; agriculture; public health; energy; environment; and economic cooperation. He underscored that improved intra-regional connectivity and enhanced people-to-people contacts were key to the realization of the goal of effective regional economic integration.

The presentation of the Secretary General was followed by an interactive session in which the visiting members of the delegation raised several pertinent questions.

The Secretary General hosted a working luncheon in honour of the delegation, which was visiting Nepal on a study tour.



Secretary General calls on Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussian B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, paid a courtesy call on Hon. Mr. Gokul Baskota, Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology of Nepal, on 23 May 2018. He felicitated the Hon. Minister on his assumption of the Office. He also expressed good wishes for success in the important assignment.

While reiterating Nepal's commitment to the SAARC process, the Hon. Minister highlighted the role of communication and information technology in today's interconnected and interdependent world for advancement and prosperity of the common people. He underscored the need for strengthened collaboration among the Member States of SAARC in the areas of information and communication technology, media, knowledge-based industry, culture, trade, connectivity, tourism, and people-to-people contacts for socio-economic



development in South Asia. The Hon. Minister expressed the hope that the Nineteenth SAARC Summit would be convened at the earliest for which, he added, Nepal, as the current Chair of SAARC, will play its due role.

The Secretary General expressed appreciation for Nepal's commitment to the SAARC process and endeavours being made by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal for early convening of the Nineteenth SAARC Summit. He briefed the Hon. Minister on the progress being made under the SAARC process, with particular reference to regional cooperation in the fields of information and media, telecommunication and ICT, and connectivity.

Secretary General calls on the Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussian B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, called on Hon. Mr. Raghbir Mahaseth, Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport of Nepal, on 24 May 2018. He felicitated the Hon. Minister on his assumption of the Office. He also expressed good wishes for success in his important assignment.

While reiterating Nepal's commitment to the SAARC process, the Hon. Minister underlined the need for regular convening of the SAARC Summits. He expressed the hope that the Nineteenth SAARC Summit would be convened at the earliest, for which, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal, as the current Chair, has been in consultation with the SAARC Heads of State or Government. The Hon. Minister underlined the importance of road, rail and air connectivity for meaningful regional integration.

The Secretary General expressed appreciation for Nepal's commitment to the SAARC process and endeavours being made by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal for early convening of the Nineteenth SAARC Summit. He informed the Hon. Minister about the progress being made to enhance physical connectivity across the region and efforts underway to conclude the SAARC Motor Vehicles and SAARC Railways Agreements. He also emphasized the need for early finalization of the SAARC Air Services Agreement. He underscored that improved connectivity is essential to promote meaningful regional integration, economic relations, people-to-people contacts and tourism.



Third Convocation of the South Asian University

At the invitation of the South Asian University, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, attended its Third Convocation in New Delhi on 07 June 2018.

Addressing the Convocation, the Secretary General stated, “The establishment of the South Asian University is the manifestation of the determination of the Member States to promote regional engagement in education. As a Centre of Excellence, the University is a beacon of hope for our youth who are our future.”

Since its establishment in August 2010 in New Delhi, the University has been providing quality education to South Asian students at affordable cost. Until last year, 837 students have got Master’s Degree, while seven have secured M.Phil. Degree from the University. At the Third Convocation this year, the University awarded 161 students with Master’s Degree, 10 with M.Phil. and 06 with PhD.

The Government of India has allocated 100 acres of land in



Maidan Garhi, South Delhi, and funds required for constructing a permanent complex of the University.

Role of Arbitrators in Fostering Efficient Resolution of Disputes

The SAARC Arbitration Council, a Specialized Body of SAARC, and Nepal Council of Arbitration co-organized the Workshop on the theme, *the Role of Arbitrators in Fostering Efficient Resolution of Disputes* in Kathmandu on 26 June 2018.

Addressing the Inaugural Session of the Workshop, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, said, “In view of fast growing economies of the countries in the region, it



is crucially important to put in place an efficient mechanism for resolution of trade disputes. As we all know, efficient legal services for trade arbitration espouse greater trade and investment, both intra-regionally and globally.”

The Secretary General further said, “Our region has a vast pool of arbitrators and young budding professionals working towards creating a modern and sustainable trading environment, including a system to efficiently resolve regional and international commercial disputes within the SAARC region. This Workshop provides a welcome opportunity to discuss measures to harness the region’s potential in arbitration and Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR).”

Fourteenth SAARCFINANCE Governors’ Symposium

Addressing the Inaugural Session of the Symposium in Kathmandu on 27 June 2018, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, said, “With a view to achieving the objectives of SAARC, our leaders have expressed their resolve to promote trade, economic and financial relations among the Member States. More recently, during the Eighteenth SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014, our leaders expressed their strong determination to deepen regional integration by intensifying cooperation, *inter alia*, in trade, investment and finance. More importantly, our leaders renewed their commitment to achieve 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.”

Devoted to the theme, “*Developing a Common Platform for Strengthening Digital Payment System in the SAARC Region*”, the two-day Symposium was organized by Nepal Rastra Bank under the auspices of SAARCFINANCE. It was attended by the Governors and Deputy Governors of the Central Banks of the Member States of SAARC.

SAARCFINANCE is a network of Governors of the Central Banks of the Member States of SAARC. Its primary objective is to share knowledge and experiences on macroeconomic policy issues and promote collaboration among the monetary authorities in the region.



Second Meeting of Core Group of SAARC Immigration Authorities and Visa Experts

The Second Meeting of the Core Group of SAARC Immigration Authorities and Visa Experts was held at the SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, on 28 June 2018.

Comprising representatives from the Immigration Authorities of the Member States of SAARC, the Core Group discussed measures to streamline the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme, including development of its security software for implementation across the region.

Addressing the meeting of the Core Group, H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, defined the launch of the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme as a milestone step towards enhancing people-to-people contacts in the region. He said, “It is essential for promoting regional integration, economic relations and tourism. The ultimate goal is to have a visa free regime in the SAARC region.”

The Fifth SAARC Summit held in the Maldives in 1990 had decided to launch the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme. The Scheme became operational in 1992. It allows entitled categories of people visa-free travel across the region.



Fifty-fifth Session of the Programming Committee

The Fifty-fifth Session of the Programming Committee of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was held in Kathmandu on 06 July 2018 under the Chairpersonship of Nepal.

The one-day Session of the Programming Committee was attended by representatives from all Member States of SAARC.

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, addressed the Fifty-fifth Session of the Programming Committee. He congratulated Mr. Krishna Prasad Dhakal, Joint Secretary (SAARC) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal on assuming the Chairmanship of the Programming Committee. He also welcomed the delegates to the meeting and wished them successful deliberations.



In his opening remarks, Mr. Dhakal reiterated the commitment of Nepal to the SAARC process and commended constructive contribution of the Member States in the attainment of the objectives of SAARC. He also appreciated the role of the SAARC Secretariat and excellent arrangements made for the meeting.

The Programming Committee performs functions of selection

of regional projects and their location, formulation of cost-sharing modalities and mobilization of external resources. The Committee is also mandated to scrutinize budgets of the SAARC Secretariat, SAARC Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies of SAARC, besides determining inter-sectoral priority and finalizing annual Calendar of Activities. It makes its recommendations to the Standing Committee of SAARC comprising Foreign Secretaries.

Regional Cooperation under SAARC: Way Forward

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, delivered a talk on *Regional Cooperation under SAARC: Way Forward* at the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu on 18 July 2018. The Rector of the University, faculty members and students of International Relations and Diplomacy Programme, were present.

The Secretary General briefed the participants about the SAARC process, and SAARC’s collaboration with Observers, regional and international organizations.

Touching upon the core subject of his talk, the Secretary General emphasized the need to promote project-based collaboration through the SAARC Development Fund, an umbrella funding mechanism created in 2010. Underscoring that improved connectivity is the key to effective regional integration, and promotion of economic relations, people-to-people contacts and tourism, he highlighted the need to effectively implement the Agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and actively pursue the decisions of the Eighteenth Summit regarding establishment of the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased and planned manner through creation of Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market and Common Economic and Monetary Union.

First SAARC Agri Cooperative Business Forum

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, addressed the Inaugural Session of the First SAARC Agri Cooperative Business Forum in Kathmandu on 28 August 2018. Devoted to the theme, *Organizing and Strengthening Family Farmers’ Cooperatives to attain SDG-1 and SDG-2 in South Asia*, the Forum was co-organized by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Asian Farmers’ Association (AFA) with the support from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Addressing the Inaugural Session of the Forum, the Secretary General said, “South Asia is home to around a quarter of the global population, majority of whom live in the rural areas and depend on natural resources like land, freshwater, coastal fisheries, and forests. Much of the agricultural production in the region is undertaken by smallholders with very small landholdings, while women play a significant role in agriculture.” He added, “In the context of diminishing farm sizes, sustainable Family Farmers’ Cooperatives can play an instrumental role in achieving food security, improving nutrition and developing value chain, eventually contributing to poverty alleviation and ending hunger.”

Referring to the SAARC Agriculture Vision 2020 adopted by the SAARC Agriculture Ministers in 2008, the Secretary General said, “Small-sized farms in South Asia face serious constraints in adopting modern technology and in marketing

their produce. To some extent, the size disadvantage can be obviated through contract and cooperative farming.”

International Women Entrepreneurs’ Summit-2018

“By economically empowering women, not only we promote gender equality but also socio-economic development. Once women are empowered, both the society and economy will transform,” said H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC.

He made these remarks while addressing the Valedictory Session of the International Women Entrepreneurs’ Summit-2018 in Kathmandu on 05 September 2018, organized by South Asia Women Development Forum, a Recognized Body of SAARC. He was the Chief Guest of the Valedictory Session, in



which women entrepreneurs from 27 countries participated.

The Secretary General further said, “Our focus has been on promoting women’s education; protecting their rights; ensuring that they are free from all sorts of discrimination, both at home and in society; promoting their active participation in socio-economic development; and above all, empowering them economically.”

The three-day Summit, which commenced on 03 September 2018, carried the theme, *Equality Begins with Economic Empowerment*.

International Conference on Doubling the Income of Farmers

Nepal Agricultural Extension Association, Nepal Agriculture Information and Training Centre and International Society of Extension Education co-organized the International Conference on Doubling the Income of Farmers in Kathmandu from 20 to 23 September 2018.

H. E. Mr. Amjad Hussain B. Sial, Secretary General of SAARC, in his inaugural address, said, “Although our region is endowed with abundant human and natural resources and agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the South Asian economies, the agricultural sector encounters massive challenges, which include increasing population, shrinking arable lands and farm sizes, rapid urbanization, impact of climate change, natural disasters, post-harvest losses, animal diseases, etc.” He said that the leaders of SAARC have underscored the importance of agriculture in the context of

overall developmental goals of the region. He further stated “Food and nutrition security and agriculture constitute a key component of cooperation under the framework of SAARC. The “SAARC Agriculture Vision 2020” shows the way forward for enhanced regional engagement in the field of agriculture and related sectors.”

The Secretary General informed the assembly that regional projects on “Consortium for Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia” and on “Livelihood enhancement of small farmers in SAARC region through small agro-business focusing on value chain development” have been recently developed, while projects on Zero Energy Cold Storage, Post-Harvest Management and Value Addition of Fruits are being implemented.

New Directors at the Secretariat

Ms. Varuni Muthukumarana assumes charge as Director, SAARC Secretariat

Ms. Muthukumarana joined the SAARC Secretariat on 17 August 2018, succeeding Mr. M H M N Bandara. Ms. Muthukumarana joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka in 2000 and has served in several Divisions in the Ministry. Prior to her current appointment at the SAARC Secretariat, Ms. Muthukumarana served as the Director, State Minister’s Bureau of the Foreign Ministry. She has also completed two postings at the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to UN in New York.



Mr. Chanchal Chand Sarkar assumes charge as Director, SAARC Secretariat

Mr. Chanchal Chand Sarkar joined the SAARC Secretariat on 09 August 2018. Mr. Sarkar joined Indian Civil Service in the year 1999. He served in several Divisions of the Ministry of Finance. Prior to his current appointment at the SAARC Secretariat, he served as Director in the International Investment Treaties and Framework (IITF) Division of the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance.



Prior to joining Civil Service, Mr. Sarkar had worked as a Consultant at the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), New Delhi, dealing with multilateral and regional issues, including WTO and EU.

Details of the activities of SAARC Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres

SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC)

1. SAARC Film Festival, National Film Corporation Cinema Hall in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 22nd to 27th May 2018.
2. Inauguration of the SAARC Culture Capital 2018, Thimphu, Bhutan, 31st May 2018.

3. SAARC Handicraft Exhibition and Workshop, Thimphu, Bhutan, 31st May 2018 to 1st June 2018.
4. SAARC Exhibition of Paintings, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka, 10th to 13th July 2018.
5. SAARC Research Seminar on Hindu Cultural Trails – Preliminary Meeting, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 12th to 15th September 2018.

SAARC Energy Centre (SEC)

1. Dissemination Webinar on the Study “Review of Existing Feasibility Study of Karnali Chissapani Hydro Power Project (10,800 MW) for Defining the Way Forward to Materialize its Development as a Regional Hydro Power Project”, Pakistan, 08 May 2018.
2. Knowledge Sharing Workshop on “Modern Techniques Including Renewable Energy Auctions for Economizing Renewable Energy Tariff”, Sri Lanka, 9-10 May 2018.
3. Celebration of World Environment Day, Pakistan, 05 June 2018.
4. Training on Energy Statistics and Publishing of National Energy Data, Bhutan, 4-5 July 2018.
5. Training on Energy Statistics and Publishing of National Energy Data, Nepal, 8-9 July 2018.
6. SAARC Workshop "Training on Load/Power Flow Studies using PSS/E for Efficient National & Cross Border Interconnected Power Systems in South Asia" Bhutan, 18-20 July 2018.
7. Training on Energy Statistics and Publishing of National Energy Data, Maldives, 6-7 August 2018.

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

1. SAARC Regional Training on “Animal Feed and Nutrient Analysis”, ICAR-National Institute of Animal Nutrition and Physiology (NIANP), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, 9-14 May 2018.
2. SAARC Regional Training on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in SAARC Member States, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Joydebpur, Gazipur, Bangladesh, 28-31 May 2018.
3. SAARC Regional Training on Animal Disease Informatics and Biostatistics, ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (NIVEDI), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, 3 May 2018.
4. Learning Exchange on Community Engagement on Seed Sovereignty for Resilient Agriculture in South Asia, RDA, Bogura, Bangladesh, 19-21 May 2018.
5. SAARC Regional Training Programme on Mass breeding and culture techniques of catfishes, ICAR-CIFA, Bhubaneswar, India, 16-21 July 2018.

1. Expert consultation meeting on sustainable rural poultry value chain model for poverty reduction in South Asia through video conferencing, 17 July 2018.
2. Regional Consultative Meeting for Exchange of Rice Based Production and Value Chain Development Technologies in SAARC Member States, IRRI, India, 13-19 August.
3. Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on “Women’s Empowerment for Agriculture Development in South Asia: enabling policies”, ICAR-Central Institute of Women in Agriculture, Bhubaneswar, India, 5-7 September 2018.
4. Regional Training on Integrated Nutrient Management for improving soil health and crop productivity, ICAR-Indian Institute of Soil Science, Bhopal, India, 5-10 September 2018.
5. Regional Training Programme on Proven Production Technology, Value Chain Development and Nutrition Security through Pulses in South Asia, ICRISAT, Hyderabad, India, 12-15 September 2018.

SAARC Development Fund (SDF)

1. SAARC Development Fund (SDF) Partnership Conclave, 2-3 July 2018, New Delhi, India.
2. Meeting of SDF Counterpart Agencies of SAARC Member States, New Delhi, 4 July 2018.
