

**Closing Ceremony of the SAARC Cultural Capital,
29 June 2019, Thimphu, Bhutan**

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

**Hon'ble Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs of the Royal
Government of Bhutan,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to
address the Closing Ceremony of the SAARC Cultural Capital
in this picturesque and serene city of Thimphu.**

**I wish to express profound gratitude to the Royal
Government of Bhutan for inviting me to this important
SAARC event. It has always been a great pleasure for me to visit
this beautiful country, bestowed with pristine beauty and very
friendly and hospitable people.**

**I also wish to thank the Royal Government for warm
welcome and generous hospitality extended to me and my
delegation since our arrival here. The arrangements made for
this function are excellent.**

**We are greatly honoured by the august presence of the
Hon'ble Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs of the Royal
Government of Bhutan. His distinguished presence amply
signifies the importance of this event.**

As a founding member of SAARC, the Kingdom of Bhutan has played a very constructive role in its evolution. The historic Sixteenth SAARC Summit hosted by the Kingdom in April 2010 is a testimony to its steadfast commitment to SAARC. As the gracious host of the SAARC Development Fund Secretariat, the Kingdom has facilitated institutionalized project-based collaboration in the region.

In addition, the Kingdom has hosted several important SAARC activities. Besides this spectacular Ceremony today, only the other day, Thimphu hosted the Fourth Meeting of the SAARC Agriculture Ministers. I am pleased to state that the Thimphu Statement on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted by our Ministers shows the way forward for promoting sustainable agriculture with a view to ensuring food security in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, South Asia, while reflecting a rich and plurality of cultural traditions, has shared civilization, constituting a historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the peoples of the region. The emergence of SAARC should, therefore, be seen as the *raison d'être* for further strengthening cordial ties among the Member States.

Moreover, in recognition of the fact that the SAARC process could draw more deeply from the vitality and strength

of South Asia's cultural heritage, our leaders identified the acceleration of cultural cooperation and development in the region as one of the Charter objectives of SAARC.

In pursuance of this objective, during their Fourteenth SAARC Summit in New Delhi in April 2007, our leaders adopted the SAARC Agenda for Culture, which identifies several facets for collaboration in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of our region. I wish to acknowledge active role being played by the SAARC Cultural Centre in successfully implementing the SAARC Agenda for Culture, and other cultural activities.

As you are aware, in keeping with the provisions of the SAARC Agenda for Culture, we declared Bamiyan, Province of Afghanistan, as the First SAARC Cultural Capital for the year 2015. Thimphu was declared the SAARC Cultural Capital for 2018-19.

The declaration of Thimphu as the SAARC Cultural Capital for 2018-19 is due recognition of its rich and diverse cultural heritage. I wish to felicitate the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan over this accomplishment. I also wish to commend the sustained efforts of the Royal Government and the people to preserve Bhutan's rich cultural heritage and environment.

I am glad to note that as the SAARC Cultural Capital, Thimphu has successfully hosted several programmes and activities to showcase Bhutan's unique cultural heritage. Among others, the SAARC Handicraft Exhibition and Workshop in May 2018, Food Festival in February 2019, and Film Festival in April 2019, deserve our commendation.

Availing myself of this grand opportunity, I am pleased to state that India will host the SAARC Cultural Capital for 2019-2020. I am confident that next SAARC Cultural Capital Programme in India will also be a grand success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Ceremony is also of particular significance to literary figures of our region. Today, we will be presenting the SAARC Literary Award-2019 to Dr. Anisuzzaman from Bangladesh for his praiseworthy contribution to promoting literature. I warmly congratulate Dr. Anisuzzaman on his achievement. The SAARC Literary Award helps in promoting literature in the region.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to once again congratulate the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan on recognition of Thimphu as the SAARC Cultural Capital, and express gratitude for warm welcome and generous hospitality.

I thank you.