FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE,

KATHMANDU, 12-13 DECEMBER 2017

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

Distinguished Chairman,

Esteemed Delegates,

Heads of Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres,

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to the SAARC Secretariat and to this Fifty-fourth Session of the Programming Committee.

I wish you a pleasant and memorable stay in this beautiful city of Kathmandu. You are welcome to contact us for any service during your stay here.

I am grateful to the Member States for their cooperation in the discharge of my responsibilities since I assumed office in March this year. During my introductory visits, I was particularly encouraged by the assurances of support to me by the leadership and their unequivocal expression of commitment to the SAARC process.

I also wish to thank the host Government, Nepal, for its continued support to me personally and to the Secretariat for its smooth functioning.

Mr. Chairman,

We have made sustained endeavours to reinvigorate the SAARC process. As you are aware, the Eighth Meeting of Interior or Home Ministers and the Sixth Meeting of Health Ministers were held in Colombo in July 2017. The informal meetings of the Council of Ministers and the Finance Ministers were also held respectively in May and September this year. Several other meetings of SAARC bodies have been held in this year.

However, a number of SAARC activities had to be postponed due to lack of adequate confirmations for participation. In our view, we should rationalize the work of SAARC mechanisms, as directed by our Leaders. But once we agree to the calendar of activities, these should be held as planned for smooth, efficient and effective progress in the SAARC process.

One of the factors that impedes holding of the activities, particularly those of the Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres, is the payment of per diem and airfare of participants by the sending Member States. The Committee may wish to make a recommendation if these expenses may be included in the programme cost. I believe this will certainly facilitate holding of the planned activities.

Mr. Chairman,

The Eighteenth Summit in November 2014 had declared this Committee a Charter Body and directed that it should meet twice a year. It is important to comply with this decision of the Summit.

We are fully cognizant of the fact that we are all developing countries and our resources are meagre. Therefore, there is a need to have maximum possible economy and to make frugal use of resources. This is our common objective.

Accordingly, we have prepared the budget for 2018 keeping this objective in mind. This in fact should have been a negative growth budget but for the expenditure on mandatory revision of salaries, as approved by the Council of Ministers, and transfers of five Directors and four GSS-I in 2018. Nevertheless, after the adjustments, a nominal increase of 0.32 per cent is proposed in the budget for 2018.

Mr. Chairman,

To enhance efficiency, efficacy and visibility of SAARC and the Secretariat, several measures have been taken recently. A new website was launched in June 2017. In addition to frequent interactions with media personnel, media in the region is informed about all important SAARC activities through press releases, which are also uploaded on our website. A quarterly e-newsletter has been initiated by the Secretariat and is widely disseminated across the region. A SAARC Twitter account has been activated. A new Computer Server Room has been set up with solar power back-up for uninterrupted access. A state-of-the-art video-conference facility has been recently established in the Secretariat.

We have paid a lot of attention to make the Secretariat modern premises. This room and a few other rooms on the ground floor had been damaged by 2015 earthquake. Now you have seen that all the rooms have been renovated with modern furniture and equipment to meet functional requirements. The backyard has also been renovated.

With these upgraded facilities, the holding of meetings at the Secretariat will result in considerable savings to the Member States. We hope that the Government of Nepal will soon carry out retrofitting of the annex building of the Secretariat, which was also badly damaged during the earthquake.

The Secretariat is at the disposal of the Committee to make this Session a great success. I am personally available for any consultation the distinguished delegates may wish to have.

I wish the Committee a very fruitful outcome.

I look forward to welcoming you at a dinner that I am hosting tonight at Annapurna Hotel.

I thank you.

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