

OPENING CEREMONY
(0900–1100 HRS; FRIDAY; 02 AUGUST 2024;
PARK PREMIER HALL, EXCEL COLOMBO CONVENTION CENTRE)

SOUTH ASIA TRADE FAIR & BUSINESS FORUM
COLOMBO, 02-04 AUGUST 2024

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. MD. GOLAM SARWAR,
SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

His Excellency Mr. Dinesh Gunawardena, Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka;
Hon'ble Minister of Industries of the Government of Sri Lanka,
Mr. Keerthi Gunawardane, President of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka;
Excellencies the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of SAARC Countries in Sri Lanka,
Trade and Investment Delegation from the SAARC Countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka
Excellencies;
Distinguished Invitees, Delegates, Exhibitors;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Morning!

It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Opening Ceremony of the South Asia Trade Fair and Business Forum being organized by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) in this beautiful city of Colombo.

Colombo – the capital city of Sri Lanka – assumes historical significance for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Colombo was the very first city, which hosted the first-ever Meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of the Member States of SAARC in April 1981, paving the way for the establishment of the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) in August 1983, and subsequently, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in December 1985, of which the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is a vital founding member.

Notably, the three historic SAARC Summits hosted by Sri Lanka in 1991, 1998 and 2008, and other numerous important initiatives spearheaded by Sri Lanka continue to guide the process of regional cooperation under SAARC, even today. Sri Lanka has evinced unflinching commitment to promote regional cooperation in South Asia under the auspices of SAARC. We are confident of continued support of the Government of Sri Lanka to the SAARC process in speedily realizing its Charter objectives.

On this note, I humbly acknowledge the distinguished presence of His Excellency Mr. Dinesh Gunawardena, Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, in our midst this morning. His presence not only signifies the importance of this event, but also demonstrates the steadfast commitment of the esteemed Government of Sri Lanka to promote intra-regional trade through interactions among the business leaders, exhibitions and fairs of this kind, to which all of us are witnesses today.

We look forward to benefiting from his Inaugural Address this morning.

I also extend heartiest felicitations to FCCISL for their whole-hearted efforts in bringing this grand event to a reality.

I thank and congratulate all exhibitors and participants of this South Asia Trade Fair and Business Forum. Your presence in this event underscores the dynamism and resilience of our business community, which is widely perceived as the “engine of growth” in the SAARC region.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Flourished trade in South Asia, backed up by a vibrant business ecosystem, is crucial for a multitude of reasons that contribute to holistic development of the SAARC region. Trade and business activities stimulate economic growth, leading to creation of employment opportunities, generation of income for individual citizens and revenue for the nation and fostering innovation for the world. A robust business ecosystem encourages investments, both domestic and foreign, which in turn boost productivity and economic output. In addition, a thriving business environment can lift people out of poverty by providing job opportunities and income sources. This is particularly important in South Asia, where poverty rates are still very high.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Asia is an important region with almost one quarter of the global population. A flourishing trade ecosystem encourages cooperation and integration among the nations of the region, leading to greater economic prosperity through intense collaboration. Increased trade and commerce also lead to improvements in education, healthcare, housing etc. and quality of life as a whole. Moreover, the business houses also contribute to community development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and by providing resources for social welfare programmes.

Trade fairs and business forums are crucial platforms for fostering sustainable economic growth, innovation, and collaboration. They provide a unique opportunity to entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services, forge new partnerships, and explore new markets. By bringing together industry leaders, entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers, they serve as a catalyst for economic development and prosperity.

The ensuing South Asia Trade Fair and Business Forum, which brings together a diverse range of exhibitors and participants from all over South Asia, offer invaluable opportunities for learning, networking and growth for the business leaders as well as aspiring entrepreneurs of the SAARC region.

On this note, I once again congratulate FCCISL for hosting this very important and productive event in this historic city of Colombo.

I wish the business leaders, exhibitors and all participants a successful and enriching experience at the South Asia Trade Fair and a memorable stay in this picturesque country of Sri Lanka.

Thank you.

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