

Challenges of SAARC in Its Third Decade

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The twice deferred Thirteenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is being held at last on 12-13 November 2005 at Dhaka, the birth place of this regional organisation. Bangladesh will be elected Chairperson of this regional forum for the third term.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Morshed Khan recently said two new agenda have been added for the summit -- disaster management preparedness and fighting the menace of terrorism -- while four agreements on customs, taxation, investment and arbitration are expected to be signed during the summit. The Foreign Minister also said, "India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all want a SAARC arbitration centre to be set up in their respected countries. The summit will decide on it while the other issues are more or less decided.

With a view to facilitating the economic integration under the South Asian Free Trade Arrangement (SAFTA), Khan said supplementary memoranda of understanding (MoUs) would be signed while Bangladesh will propose 2006-2015 SAARC decade of poverty reduction. Khan said political will is a "mental block" and nothing could be achieved without mutual understanding of the member countries.

"We will have to share resources for a win-win situation for all. This time we are looking forward to see what the common people of this region have got, what Bangladesh's common people in the rural areas have gained from the SAARC and what the SAARC means to them," Khan added.

"We did not exclude anything from the programme... this summit will not be a summit of declaration, it would be a summit of implementation." In reply to a question regarding the early warning centre for disaster management, Khan said Bangladesh wants a coordinated effort within the SAARC family that will be a prior preparedness to tackle disaster situation before any disaster takes place.

Regarding poverty alleviation, a major agenda before the summit, the Foreign Minister said the forthcoming Dhaka meet should evolve a mechanism to spend money of the South Asian Development Fund which has \$5.0 million left unutilised. The SAARC finance ministers will meet within three months after each summit to collate money from different funds for implementing poverty-reduction projects.

The SAARC will complete 20 years in age on 8 December, 2005. During this period people of this region witnessed the regional organisation come of age. The Association, which was born in Dhaka with the signing of its Charter two decades ago by the founding fathers of the seven South Asian Countries, has come a long way since then. Member countries have been able to lay down a firm foundation to strengthen cooperation within the region for the betterment of their peoples. SAARC as a regional organisation has provided the much needed institutional framework for cooperation in a region which on the one hand is bound by a common cultural heritage and on the other marked by diverse socio-economic features.

Introduction: The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprising the seven countries of South Asia i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka is manifestation of the determination of the peoples of South Asia to work together towards finding solutions to their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding and to create an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits. The primary objective of the Association is to accelerate the process of economic and social development in member states, through joint action in agreed areas of cooperation.

Evolution: The concept of regional cooperation in South Asia was first mooted in November 1980. After consultations, the Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met for the first time in Colombo in April 1981. This was followed, a few months later, by the meeting of the Committee of the Whole, which identified five broad areas for regional cooperation under an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA). The Foreign Ministers, at their first meeting in New Delhi in August 1983, adopted the Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC), and formally launched the IPA. At the First Summit held in Dhaka on 7-8 December 1985, the Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was signed by the Heads of the State or Government.

Institutional structure: The highest authority of the Association rests with the Heads of State or Government. During the period 1985-2004, twelve meetings of the Heads of State or Government had been held in Dhaka (1985), Bangalore (1986), Kathmandu (1987), Islamabad (1988), Male (1990), Colombo (1991), Dhaka (1993), New Delhi (1995), Male (1997), Colombo (1998), Kathmandu (2001), and Islamabad (2004). The Thirteenth SAARC Summit is being held in Dhaka on 12-13 November, 2005.

Council of ministers: Comprising of the Foreign Ministers of member states, the Council is responsible for formulating policies; reviewing progress; deciding on new areas of cooperation; establishing additional mechanisms as deemed necessary; and deciding on other matters of general interest of the Association. The Council meets twice a year and may also meet in extraordinary session by agreement of Member States. It has been held twenty five sessions. The twenty sixth session of the Council will be held in Dhaka prior to the Thirteenth Summit.

Standing committee: The Committee, comprising of the Foreign Secretaries of Member

States is entrusted with the overall monitoring and coordination of programmes and the modalities of financing; determining inter-sectoral priorities; mobilising regional and external resources; and identifying new areas of cooperation based on appropriate studies. It may meet as often as deemed necessary but normally holds its sessions twice a year and submits its reports to the Council of Ministers. It has held thirty regular sessions and four special sessions. The Thirty-first session of the Standing Committee will take place before the Thirteenth Summit in Dhaka.

Programming committee: Comprising of senior officials, the Committee meets prior to the Standing Committee sessions to scrutinise Secretariat Budget, finalise the Calendar of Activities and take up any other matter assigned to it by the Standing Committee. The Programming Committee has now been assigned to consider the Reports of the SAARC Regional Centres and submit its comments to the Standing Committee. This Committee has held twenty five sessions. The twenty sixth session of the Programming Committee will be held in Dhaka prior to the Thirteenth Summit.

Technical committee: Comprising of representatives of Member States, the Technical Committees formulate programmes and prepare projects in their respective fields. They are responsible for monitoring the implementation of such activities and report to the Standing Committee. Chairpersons of Technical Committees have met twice so far (Male' -1990) and (Kathmandu-1996) to review implementation of SIPA activities and inter-sectoral coordination.

Other meetings: Since the establishment of the Association, several other important meetings have taken place in specific contexts. A number of SAARC Ministerial Meetings have been held, to focus attention on specific areas of common concern and have become an integral part of the consultative structure.

A number of meetings of Planners have been held so far. These meetings initiated cooperation in important areas such as Trade, Manufactures and Services; Basic Needs; Human Resources Development; Data base on socio-economic indicators; Energy Modelling Techniques; Plan Modelling and Poverty Alleviation Strategies.

SAARC secretariat: Established in Kathmandu on 16 January 1987, the SAARC Secretariat is responsible to coordinate and monitor the implementation of SAARC activities, service the meetings of the Association and serve as the channel of communication between SAARC and other international organisations. The Secretariat being the headquarters of the organisation has been increasingly utilised as the venue for various SAARC meetings. The Secretariat comprises of the Secretary-General, a Director from each Member State and the General Services Staff. The Secretary General is appointed by the Council of Ministers upon nomination by a member state, on the principle of rotation in alphabetical order, for a period of three years.

Mr. Abdul Ahsan from Bangladesh was the first Secretary General (16 January 1987-15 October 1989) followed by Mr. Kant Kishore Bhargave from India (17 October 1989-31 December 1991), Mr. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki from the Maldives (1 January 1992 - 31

December 1993), and Mr. Yadab Kant Silwal from Nepal (1 January 1994 - 31 December 1995), Mr. Naeem Ul Hasan from Pakistan (1996-1998), Mr. Nihal Rodrigo from Sri Lanka (1999-2001). Mr. Q. A. M. A. Rahim from Bangladesh (January 2002 - February 2005). Mr. Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji of Bhutan has assumed the office of the next Secretary General of SAARC from March 2005.

Directors are appointed by the Secretary General, upon nomination by member states for a period of three years which in special circumstances, may be extended by the Secretary General for a period not extending another full-term in consultation with the member state concerned.

Financial arrangements in SAARC: Member States make provision in their respective national budgets, for financing activities and programmes under the SAARC framework including contribution to the Secretariat budget and that of the regional institutions. The financial provision thus made is announced annually, at the meeting of the Standing Committee. The annual budget of the Secretariat, both for capital as well as recurrent expenditure, is shared by member states on the basis of an agreed formula.

A minimum of forty percent of the institutional cost of regional institutions is borne by the respective host government and the balance is shared by all member states, according to an agreed formula. Capital expenditure of regional institutions which includes physical infrastructure, furnishing, machines, equipment etc. are normally borne by the host government. Programme expenditure of regional institutions is also shared by member states, according to the agreed formula.

In the case of activities under the approved Calendar, local expenses including hospitality are borne by the host Government, while the cost of air travel is met by the sending Government.

SAARC as of today: In its two decades of establishment today the SAARC stands to cater to almost all the spheres of human activity impacting upon the lives of the peoples of the region. These include Integrated Programme of Action, Regional Centres, Economic and Social Agenda, Poverty Alleviation, Environment, Communications Information and Media, People to People Contacts, Human Resource Development, Agreements Conventions and Legal Issues, SAARC Funds, and Cooperation with Regional and International Organisations.

SAARC regional institutions: The Heads of State or Government of SAARC member countries emphasised the need to progressively carry out the SAARC activities with a broad framework, of a long term perspective and to harmonise their efforts to ensure tangible benefits to the people of the SAARC region. Towards this end, they recognised the necessity of mutual cooperation in several areas as means of realising the SAARC objectives. Besides a number of SAARC Integrated Programme of Activities (SIPA) under several Technical Committees, they agreed to establish several SAARC Regional Centres on different disciplines in the Member States. These are SAARC Agriculture Information Centre (SAIC) and SAARC Metrological Research Centre (SMRC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh;

SAARC Tuberculosis Centre (STC) in Kathmandu, Nepal; SAARC Documentation Centre (SDC) in New Delhi, India; SAARC Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC) in Islamabad, Pakistan; SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC) in Male'. Four more such SAARC Regional Centres are also coming up in other member countries of SAARC. These include SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC) in Colombo, Sri Lanka; SAARC Information Centre (SIC) in Kathmandu, Nepal; SAARC Forestry Centre (SFC) in Thimphu, Bhutan; and SAARC Energy Centre (SEC) in Pakistan.

Economic agenda: Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC): The acceleration of economic growth is a charter objective of SAARC. The Council of Ministers at its Ninth Session in Male in July 1991 established the CEC comprising Commerce/Trade Secretaries of Member States. The CEC is mandated to formulate and oversee implementation of specific measures, policies and programmes to strengthen and enhance intra-regional cooperation in the fields. With the creation of CEC, regional economic cooperation was formally institutionalised as an integral component of the SAARC process. Twelve Meetings of the CEC have been held so far, the last one being in Islamabad in November 2004.

Meeting of Commerce Ministers: Recognising the important role economic cooperation plays in South Asia and the need to give policy directives the Meetings of the SAARC Commerce Ministers focused on enlarging the scope and coverage of regional economic cooperation. Meetings of Commerce Ministers also evolve common positions on issues before WTO Ministerial Meetings.

SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA): The agreement on SAPTA was signed on 11th April 1993. It entered into force on 7th December 1995 and it was recommended that till such time as the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) is given effect to, the process of trade negotiations under SAPTA may be continued for further trade liberalisation in the region.

South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA): The Tenth SAARC Summit in Colombo decided to set up a Committee of Experts to draft a comprehensive treaty framework for creating a free trade area within the region, taking into consideration the asymmetries in development within the region and bearing in mind the need to fix realistic and achievable targets. An agreement on SAFTA was signed in the Twelfth Summit in January 2004 in Islamabad. The agreement shall enter into force on 1st January 2006 upon completion of formalities, including ratification by all contracting states and issuance of a notification thereof by the SAARC Secretariat.

Trade Facilitation Measures: Action is underway on a series of practical measures aimed at trade facilitation such as a Regional Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Investment in the SAARC Region, a SAARC Arbitration Council, and a Regional Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs. Four accords are expected to be signed during the Thirteenth Summit on these issues.

Social agenda: The SAARC Charter envisages the acceleration of social progress through active collaboration and mutual assistance among Member States in the social sector.

Women: SAARC recognises that issues related to gender and empowerment of women need to be addressed to promote social development. In this regard, it has a MoU with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) signed in December 2001 for cooperation in the promotion of gender issues. Other activities included pursuing a Regional Plan of Action for Women; publishing the SAARC Solidarity Journals on specific themes on women's highlighting the plight of the Girl Child in South Asia; and holding gender related workshops, seminars, and training programmes.

Concerned over the trafficking of women and children within and between countries, Member Countries signed a Regional Convention on Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution on 5 January 2002 during the Eleventh Summit held in Kathmandu. The Convention calls for cooperation amongst Member States to effectively deal with the various aspects of prevention, interdiction and suppression of trafficking in women and children for prostitution and for the repatriation and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. It also calls for the prevention of use of women and children in international prostitution networks, particularly where the countries of SAARC region are the countries of origin, transit and destination.

Children: The development and well-being of children is a principal area of cooperation identified by SAARC from its very inception. The Ninth Summit (Male 1997) gave impetus to tackling the important issues relating to women and children.

Pursuant to the decision of the Ninth Summit, the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements on the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia was signed on 5 January 2002 during the Eleventh Summit in Kathmandu. The objectives of the Convention include facilitating the development and protection of full potential of the South Asian child, with the understanding of their rights, duties and responsibilities as well as those of others.

The social charter: The Tenth Summit (Colombo, 1998) while reviewing the progress made in the social sector by Member Countries determined that, in order to enhance social development, it would be necessary to develop, beyond national plans of action, a regional dimension of action including a specific role for SAARC. In this context, it directed that a Social Charter be developed for SAARC to focus on drawing up a broad range of targets to be achieved across the region in the areas of poverty eradication, population stabilisation, empowerment of women, youth mobilisation, human resources development, promotion of health and nutrition, and protection of children.

The SAARC Leaders at the Twelfth Summit held in Islamabad in January 2004 hailed the signing of SAARC Social Charter as a historic development, which would have a far-reaching impact on the lives of millions of South Asians.

Poverty alleviation: Poverty Alleviation has been placed high on the social Agenda of SAARC by the Leaders of the Sixth Summit (Colombo, 1991). The Summit established an

Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) consisting of eminent persons from member states which conducted an in-depth study of the diverse experiences of member states and reported their recommendations on the alleviation of poverty to the Seventh Summit (Dhaka, 1993). The Summit expressed its commitment to alleviate poverty from South Asia through an agenda of action which, inter-alia, included a strategy of social mobilisation, policy of decentralised agricultural development and small-scale labour-intensive industrialisation and human development.

The Eleventh Summit decided to reconstitute the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) to review the progress made in cooperation on poverty alleviation and to suggest appropriate and effective measures mandated to review the report of the erstwhile Commission and suggest measures and strategies for downscaling the incidence of poverty in the region.

Regional poverty profile: The Eleventh Summit acknowledged that investment in poverty alleviation programmes contributed to social stability, economic progress and overall prosperity. It emphasised the need to promote sharing of the best practices and experiences among the Member States and to this end, instructed the Secretary- General to prepare the Regional Poverty Profile (RPP) with the assistance of the relevant UN agencies, nodal agencies and independent research institutions specialised in the field. The RPP will serve as a policy tool for promoting regional cooperation on poverty alleviation and will also act as an advocacy tool. The Secretariat in collaboration with UNDP/UNOPS prepared the final version of the profile bringing out the regional dimension based on the country level profiles. The Twelfth Summit (Islamabad 2004) declared that the SAARC Secretariat should periodically update and submit the RPP.

Regional poverty alleviation priority projects: The Eleventh Summit underlined the urgent need to make the South Asian Development Fund (SADF) operational by making utilisation of the existing funds for regional poverty alleviation projects. It also instructed the Secretary-General to submit a proposal for seeking possible assistance from regional and international sources for the implementation of specific regional poverty alleviation priority projects. The social mobilisation strategy as envisaged by the first ISACPA has been put into practice across South Asia (except Bhutan) through UNDP sponsored South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP), which was launched in early 1996 and completed in March 2003.

The Twenty Fourth Session of Council of Ministers held in Islamabad in January 2004 directed the SADF Governing Board to expedite the completion of feasibility study in identifying the regional poverty alleviation projects.

Regional conventions/agreements: Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve (SFSR): During the Third SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 1987), an Agreement on establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve was signed. The Agreement, which came into force on 12 August 1988, provides for a reserve of food grains for meeting emergencies in member countries.

The SAARC Food Security Reserve Board comprises representatives from each member country and meets once a year. The main functions of the Board are to undertake a periodic review and assessment of the food situation and prospects in the region including factors such as production, consumption, trade, prices, quality and stocks of food grains. Member countries are now actively considering the possibility to further improve the functioning of the Reserve. To that end, the Council of Ministers has requested the Secretary-General to examine various options in this regard and make concrete proposals for improvement.

SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism: The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed in Kathmandu in November 1987 during the Third SAARC Summit and came into force on 22 August 1988 following ratification by all member states.

The Convention provides a regional focus to many of the well-established principles of international law in this respect. Under its provisions, member states are committed to extradite or prosecute alleged terrorists thus preventing them from enjoying safe heavens. Regional Cooperation is also envisaged in preventive action to combat terrorism. Exchange of information, intelligence and expertise are among the areas identified for mutual cooperation under the Convention. Cooperation among Liaison Officers (Anti Terrorist Law Enforcement Officers) is being developed through holding international meetings continually at regular intervals to monitor, update, evaluate and improve counter-terrorism strategies.

The SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) has been established in Colombo to collate, analyse and disseminate information about the terrorist incidence, tactics, strategies and methods. Efforts are being undertaken for further strengthening STOMD.

Challenge in its third decade: No doubt, during the last two decades, SAARC has made substantial progress in providing at least the road maps in the areas of economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific development of the region. But more aggressive steps are needed in the coming years at the implementation level for all the SAARC Action Plans. Strengthening of SAARC Secretariat, SAARC Bodies, SAARC Regional Centres and expediting their operations, increase in the SAARC budgets by each of the Member States are the most crucial and important steps required to make the SAARC result oriented for the benefit of the teeming millions of the region.

The two big member states of SAARC, India and Pakistan agreed that the SAARC has not lived up to expectation and discussed a slew of proposals to boost the regional economic grouping at its next summit in Dhaka in 2005. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz held a meeting in late 2004 at New Delhi and shared the assessment that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not come up to the desired level to be an effective engine for development. Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran also remarked that: "there was general agreement that the SAARC has really not fulfilled general expectations, and noted that it's time to energise it."

Singh reiterated India's various proposals for SAARC, which include founding of a regional fund for poverty alleviation, launching a high economic council comprising finance or commerce ministers to lead to a 'South Asian Economic Union', Aids eradication and creation of a regional energy grid. He said India has offered to contribute \$ 100 million for poverty alleviation that could be used in collaborative projects and another \$ 10 million for infrastructure fund for collaborative ventures to strengthen communication, energy and road networks.

On the other hand while meeting the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mr. Morshed Khan at the same time in late 2004 in Islamabad President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf said that Pakistan would continue to step up endeavours to make the SAARC grouping an active, efficient and effective forum. Reiterating his country's role in strengthening the SAARC activities the Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Shaukat Aziz said that SAARC had a great future as a regional organisation. He said in the third decade of its existence, member states of SAARC should make a transition from standard setting to concrete measures and their practical implementation. Pakistan Prime Minister also said that the SAARC Secretariat should also have professional experts advising on areas of cooperation and monitoring of their implementation. He also suggested restructuring of SAARC Secretariat, saying that it should have its permanent staff and the Secretary General should be of minister's level.

13th summit agenda for next decade: Most of the declarations made by SAARC leaders during earlier summit meetings have not been implemented in the absence of effective mechanism. As follow-up measures, Bangladesh's foreign minister M. Morshed Khan said that the seven-nation forum needs institutional reforms to ensure implementation of the decisions. "The 13th summit would be a summit of working out ways for implementations of the SAARC decisions, instead of making mere declarations. It would really be a businesslike summit," Khan told a press conference at the foreign office of Bangladesh recently. The Thirteenth SAARC Summit is being held in Dhaka on November 12-13, 2005 and is expected to give an agenda for the organisation for next 10 years. Referring to seven agreements and four action plans adopted over the last 20 years of SAARC, Khan said, no effective mechanism is there to follow-up and/or implement the decisions."

Dwelling on South Asian Development Fund (SADF), foreign minister informed newsmen that \$6 million is lying unutilised for lack of policy and mechanism of its utilisation. Regarding the SAARC poverty alleviation fund, he said, "India has made a commitment of \$100 million for poverty alleviation projects in all SAARC countries except India. But member states want to have an inclusive fund with voluntary contribution from all according to capacity and with projects in all countries having the incidence of poverty."

SAARC economic union: Dhaka plans to push for an action plan to lay the groundwork for a SAARC Economic Union at the Council of Ministers' Meeting prior to the Thirteenth Summit, against the backdrop of little progress in a planned feasibility study on the union. The Council of Ministers Meeting would also set the agenda for discussion by SAARC leaders at the 13th summit. Leaders at the Twelfth SAARC Summit in Islamabad had directed SAARC Finance to submit the study report to the Council of Ministers Meeting.

SAARC Finance comprising the finance secretaries and central bank governors of the member states, has missed the July deadline and is unlikely to submit the study report at the upcoming council of ministers (foreign minister-level) meeting as well, sources say. SAARC leaders are expected to discuss the SAARC economic union during their talks on the day of retreat on January 10. It, however, depends on how the other members entertain the Dhaka proposal. At the Islamabad summit last January India proposed a target of setting up the economic union by 2015 while on a different note, Pakistan suggested incorporation of political agendas in the union's agenda.

Despite the conflicting proposals from India and Pakistan, SAARC leaders unanimously endorsed the idea of a possible SAARC economic union. They said they would support any steps to that end.

Bangladesh's proposal for strengthening SAARC: Dhaka is likely to propose that poorer SAARC nations contribute more to the \$1.5 million budget of the SAARC Secretariat to allay the major powers' fear of shouldering the increased financial responsibility for expanding its secretariat. An expert meeting on expansion of the SAARC Secretariat scheduled to be held did not take place. Now the expansion proposal and the member states' concerns about it would be thrashed out at the Standing Committee (foreign secretary-level) Meeting stated to be held prior to the Thirteenth Summit.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan has already laid out Dhaka's position in accordance with a detailed working paper by the Secretariat. It proposes elevation of status of the SAARC Secretary-General to a cabinet minister, creation of posts for a Deputy Secretary-General and more positions for advisers, technocrats, professional and administrative staff.

Of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member states, India contributes 33 percent, Pakistan 22 percent while Bangladesh 11 percent to the budget for the Kathmandu-based Secretariat, sources say. Dhaka at the standing committee meetings would propose an increase in their contribution of 15 to 18 percent with a view to take some load off Pakistan and India. Since the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad, India and Pakistan have been complaining that they would have to bear the bulk of the costs of increasing human and material resources to the SAARC Secretariat given the current structure of contributions, sources say.

SAARC Secretariat's expansion has been widely endorsed by SAARC leaders, academics and policy-makers in several SAARC -related seminars over the past few years. According to the proposal being discussed, the expansion of the SAARC Secretariat would be modelled on organisations like European Union. If implemented, such expansion would provide greater autonomy to the Kathmandu office, sources say. With greater autonomy the Secretariat would be better positioned to oversee progress in numerous SAARC mechanisms that have been on the back burner since the Secretariat's inception in 1987.

The increase in permanent staff at the Secretariat is also being seen as a step to ensure

continuity of SAARC mechanisms. The staff members will not have to rotate too frequently as they do now, sources say. At present, the Secretariat's working divisions include agriculture and rural development division, environment and science and technology division, trade, economic and transport division, social affairs division, information and publications division, human resources and tourism division, legal, administration and finance division.

In its Third Decade, SAARC should substantially be brought out of Five Star Hotels and be placed to the closer of the teeming millions of the region for their welfare. The Association must get rid of the accusation that the organisation has become for 'talk shops' and only organising the numerous meetings without generating any meaningful result. The people of the Region will be expecting from the 13th SAARC Summit a clear vision as well as concrete and result oriented practical programmes of SAARC in its Third Decade.

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