



**Ninth
South Asia
Economic Summit**
15-16 October 2016
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Reimagining South Asia in 2030

Speech

Inaugural session

Mr Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan

Co-organisers



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Statement by

Mr. Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan

Member, National Assembly of Pakistan and

Parliamentary Secretary of Finance,

Government of Pakistan

Excellency Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid, President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ

and Good Morning.....

I would like to express our profound gratitude to the Centre for Policy Dialogue for hosting the 9th South Asia Economic Summit in Dhaka. We wish to convey our deep appreciation for the excellent arrangements that have been made for our comfortable stay in this beautiful city of Dhaka.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The countries of South Asian region, having more than 1.7 billion inhabitants and with a cumulative GDP of US \$ 2,600 trillion, are bound by cultural linkages and shared history. On the one hand the region has rich natural resources and large youth population, and on the other it is home to nearly 40 percent of the world's poor. It is one of the least integrated regions in the world. Thus, the cooperation among the nations of South Asia in economic, social and political fields is highly desirable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The political history of the region has traversed an uneven ride. The long standing-unresolved issues among the South Asian countries, lack of trust and baggage of history, are some of the impediments to region's economic growth. The intra-regional trade, economic integration and physical connectivity have been severely hampered in the region, due to unconducive political environment. The goal of maintaining peace and security within the region has also been largely missed out due to lack of coordinated efforts among the South Asian countries.

The absence of cooperation in social, economic and political fields at regional level has left far-reaching impact on the peoples of this region. This has weakened the collective endeavors against poverty, hunger, illiteracy and other social evils. The over-arching agenda of the national governments of this region of taking their peoples out of the shackles of poverty has not materialized due to weak regional response to such issues.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being a founding member of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), we remain committed to achieve the objectives of SAARC as enumerated in its Charter. SAARC can be a forum to implement the agenda of tackling social issues of this region. It is a platform to attain the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity for the peoples of South Asia, through collective efforts. Sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States are the guiding principles of the SAARC Charter. The Article-X (2) of SAARC Charter stipulates that "bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded" from the deliberations in the SAARC forum. In our view, SAARC can attain its objectives of amelioration of our peoples if we scrupulously abide by the principles of SAARC.

Excellencies,

Of course there are issues that need to be resolved through dialogue in the spirit of good neighborly relations and in conformities with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The issues should not cast a shadow on regional cooperation. We should focus on the economic development and human resource development in the region.

Our collective efforts for the attainment of the objectives of SAARC can be achieved by enhanced cooperation with Observers and other international and regional organizations. To this end:

- The Observer status of those countries which are actively engaged in SAARC process should be given an enhanced role in SAARC process.
- More countries and organizations should be invited to join SAARC as Observers.
- The scope of areas of cooperation between SAARC and its Observers should be broadened.
- SAARC Observers should be invited to engage in the efforts for economic development in South Asia.

Similarly, there should be a reality check within SAARC itself. Following should be considered:

- Bilateral contentious issues should not impede the process of SAARC in conformities with its Charter.
- Unnecessary proliferation of areas of cooperation should be done away with.
- SAARC Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies should be strengthened to make them centers of excellence.
- The result-oriented, time-bound and technology driven policies and mechanism should be incorporated.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

SAARC needs urgent action with courage and commitment of the Member countries. We have to overcome the dormancy in SAARC. The national governments in South Asia will have to make sincere efforts to make the region vibrant and proactive and to resolve the issues of the peoples of the region. Let us work together for the social and economic uplift of our masses.

In the end, once again, I would like to thank the Centre of Policy Dialogue for the excellent arrangements for this meeting and the Bangladesh Government, for making it possible for the Pakistan Delegates.

I thank you.
