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Reimagining South Asia in 2030

Speech

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Mr Romi Gauchan Thakali

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**Statement by the Honourable Minister for Commerce of Nepal, Mr. Romi Gauchan Thakali at the 9th South Asia Economic Summit (SAES-IX)
Dhaka, 15-16 October 2016**

His Excellency the President of Bangladesh,
Hon'ble Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I begin by thanking the Centre for Policy Dialogue for the kind invitation to participate in this august summit. The conversations we will have today and tomorrow on the shared promise and perils that our region faces are necessary and timely. I commend CPD for hosting this latest edition of a unique series of regional discourse.

This year's theme looks forward to 2030 and asks what kind of a place we wish South Asia to become. The challenges of the 21st century require us to utilize all platforms of cooperation at our disposal. From eradicating poverty and creating lasting prosperity to mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing vulnerabilities, we need to fire all engines of bilateral, regional and global partnerships.

The noble goals of SAARC enshrined in the charter have been much relevant in present context. Indeed, the stake is much bigger for the least developed countries who have limited means and fewer options. I would like to take this opportunity to urge all the member states of SAARC to come forward and transform the agreed agenda in a result-oriented manner. I am confident that the success of regional cooperation and understanding among the member states will contribute to achieve the set up goals of 2030s.

The latest global project in development solidarity is the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is a collective plan of action for people, planet and prosperity put forth by all members of the United Nations. SDGs require big investments, but equally crucial is the urgency of collective effort. We must now internalize, regionalise and localize, and then prioritize the common aspirations that the SDGs embody.

Important regional issues must adopt a regional approach. Allow me to highlight three.

First, to reduce poverty to the low single digits within a generation, we need to pursue high quality growth that is inclusive, fast, and stable. This demands that we reorient and adapt our model of production and commerce to the realities of the new century.

Our borders should be more open not just to the flow of goods and people, but also to new methods and techniques of shared production that gives opportunities to young people. For this, we must invest massively in building new networks of skills and connecting our most vibrant urban centres.

Second, the tearing of social fabric through widening inequality and vulnerabilities requires us to help each other prop up policies and institutions that share the gains of development. This involves social enablement through decent education, healthcare and jobs -- as well as social protection through insurance and universal allowances.

Third, climate change poses an existential threat because it affects the flow of water, the land we till, and the air we breathe. While we in South Asia may not be decisive when it comes to global greenhouse gas emissions, we can actually take on the threat posed by black carbon which is a regional menace and has a regional solution. We must take the Paris Climate Accord seriously and help limit global temperature rise to well within 2-degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

These challenges need to be undergirded by better governance at home, a secure and peaceful regional neighbourhood, and a global search for financial resources.

Let me end with a note of optimism from my own country Nepal. The pace of our economic achievements has been sluggish, but on the socio-political front, we are proud of our march towards a more just and inclusive society. Last year, we issued a progressive constitution, which we will continue to improve through democratic dialogue. We also hope that our post-conflict contract can be a basis for better economic future.

It is in this context that we look to our friends in South Asia for new ways of cooperation in production and trade; investments in shared infrastructure; protection of our regional commons; and for best practices in social innovation.

If we learn from our mistakes and amend our ways, I am optimistic that the best days of the citizens of South Asia still lie ahead.

Thank you and Namaste.