



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

Reimagining South Asia in 2030

Speech

Inaugural session

Professor Mustafizur Rahman

Co-organisers



15 October 2016

Organised by



CENTRE FOR POLICY DIALOGUE (CPD)
B A N G L A D E S H
a civil society think tank

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Statement by

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Good Afternoon:

Chief Guest of the Inaugural Session of the Ninth South Asia Economic Summit – SAES IX – His Excellency Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid, Hon'ble President, People's Republic of Bangladesh; Special Guest Dr. Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of Bangladesh; Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Hon'ble Minister for Special Assignments, Sri Lanka; Mr Romi Gauchan Thakali, Hon'ble Minister for Commerce, Nepal; Mr Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan; Emeritus Professor Deepak Nayyar, Chair, South Asia Centre for Policy Studies-SACEPS.

Dear Guests of SAES-IX, Excellencies, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of Professor Rehman Sobhan, Founding Chairman of the CPD, the Board of Trustees of the CPD, CPD Research Director and Convenor of SAES-IX Preparatory Committee Dr. Fahmida Khatun and all my colleagues at CPD, let me extend a very warm welcome to all of you for your presence at this Inaugural Programme of SAES-IX.

Dear Guests:

We are immensely encouraged and inspired by the gracious presence of His Excellency the President of the Republic who has so kindly agreed to be with us this afternoon as the Chief Guest of the Inaugural event. I would like to take this opportunity to gratefully recognise the contribution of His Excellency in promoting deeper understanding and cooperation among the member countries of the SAARC and the people of our region, as a member of parliament for over three decades, as Speaker of the Parliament and in his current high capacity. We take the presence of His Excellency, and of our Special Guest,

as a sign of the commitment of the Government of Bangladesh to pursue closer cooperation among all countries of the SAARC region.

Dear Audience:

In registering our deep appreciation, I am joined by our four co-organising think tanks of SAES-IX: Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka – IPS – Colombo; Research and Information System for Developing Countries – RIS – New Delhi; South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment – SAWTEE – Kathmandu; and Sustainable Development Policy Institute – SDPI – Islamabad. I am happy to recognise the presence of our friends representing the co-organising think tanks, our twelve partner organisations of SAES-IX and the more than sixty overseas participants from South Asia and beyond who have assembled here this afternoon. In this connection, I am particularly happy to recognise in the audience the presence of Members of Parliament from the region: Ms Romina Khurshid Alam from Pakistan, Dr Najma Afzal Khan from Pakistan and Mr Choida Jamtsho from Bhutan.

Esteemed Guests:

What inspired us in 2008 to take the initiative of organising SAES, on an annual basis, was the aspiration of creating a broad-based platform for debate and discussion, with participation of key actors from South Asia and from other regions who worked on south Asian Issues. The preceding eight SAES events have made important contributions in support of the work of the SAARC and in creating a wealth of knowledge in a diverse range of areas that are pertinent and important for promoting regional cooperation and economic integration in South Asia. We earnestly hope that SAES-IX will be able to build on this tradition of intellectual exercise – by identifying newly emerging challenges, proposing innovative solutions and by coming up with actionable agendas.

Dear Guests:

All of us are aware of the challenging times that we are passing through when we are hosting SAES-IX in Dhaka. Fluctuating fortunes of political developments have put under stress and strain the future of the SAARC. To compound the situation, the global recovery has been more subdued than we had anticipated, many countries are pursuing protectionist policies that have adverse implications for our market access; security

issues are becoming an increasing concern in global relationships. But we strongly believe that it is in times like this, that it becomes even more urgent and imperative to talk about the South Asian enterprise, about strengthened global integration of South Asia, about the benefits that could emerge from closer interactions among people and countries of our region; to talk on what unites us and what we could do collectively and cooperatively. Our conviction is that, Track-2 endeavours such as the SAES-IX could make important contribution to reinforce the ideas and ideals of SAARC, help sustain its mission and vision and help regain its momentum.

Dear Guests:

Realising the demographic dividends, addressing climate change impacts, identifying appropriate modalities for sharing and managing our common resources, building inclusive and just societies – these aspirations challenge all countries of our region. We need to identify all routes in the evolving variable geometry of cooperation to attain these aspirations – through cooperation at regional, sub-regional and cross-regional levels. And we remind ourselves that, we can best address these challenges only when we have closer interactions and exchanges between those who produce evidence-based research, those who are involved in development praxis and those whose responsibility it is to formulate policies and define political strategies. This triangulation of involved actors, with contributions coming from a wide-range of stakeholders, expertise and experience, is what SAES is all about.

Dear Guests:

The overarching theme of SAES-IX is *Reimagining South Asia in 2030*. As we may recall, in September, 2015, at the UN, our countries, represented at the highest political levels, have made a solemn pledge to attain the 17 Goals and 169 Targets of the SDGs, by the year 2030. There is a general consensus in South Asia that the SDGs do reflect the aspirations of the people of our region. But then we ask ourselves – what will South Asia actually look like in 2030? Will it be possible to have a poverty-free, zero-hunger South Asia by this target year? Can we build a South Asia where no one is left behind? Can we imagine a South Asian future of shared hope, shared prosperity and shared destiny, by 2030. A South Asia – integrated because goods and capital, and transport and people can move without hindrance across borders thanks to seamless connectivity; a South Asia,

harmonious because common resources are collectively managed; a South Asia of strong institutions and good governance; a South Asia committed to the principles of equity, justice and fairness; a South Asia of friendly neighbours. With these aspirations informing our deliberations in the course of SAES-IX, in the four Plenaries we ask: Is the political leadership in South Asia willing and ready to implement the 2030 Agenda? What are the possible pathways to sustainable transformation of the South Asian Economy by 2030? How could global partnerships be harnessed to support implementation of the SDGs in South Asia? Who could be the change agents and champions of the aspired transformative journey towards an inclusive and peaceful South Asia?

In the different issues-specific sessions of SAES-IX we ask: what measures are needed to provide sustainable energy to all in South Asia, at affordable prices? How can we enhance inclusivity and reduce inequality? What are the trade-offs that we face in promoting climate-compatible development? How can industrialisation be sustainable, and how can trade policies be gender-sensitive? We ask, how best to mobilise the significant resources that we will need to implement the envisaged initiatives? And how, through the active role of a free media, can we give voice to our people and promote and project a South Asian Identity. We like to believe that the agenda of SAES-IX and our quest to lay an intellectual foundation in this regard, embody the true spirit of SAARC.

Dear Guests:

Before I conclude, let me recognise my debt of gratitude to my colleagues who have done all the hard work in organising SAES IX in a befitting manner: I would like to mention Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD for his wise guidance and intellectual inputs; Ms. Anisatul Fatema Yousuf and her colleagues at the CPD Dialogue and Communication Division for their excellent organisational work, and Dr. Fahmida Khatun, for giving the leadership in organising SAES-IX as the Convenor of the Preparatory Committee, with excellent support from members of her Committee.

As always, all of us at CPD continue to draw inspiration from the members of the CPD Board of Trustees, and from Professor Rehman Sobhan who has taught us that the future of a strong Bangladesh is, of necessity, linked to a peacefully rising South Asia.

Dear Guests: Thank you once again for your support towards SAES IX. And I would like to end by once again registering our most sincere gratitude to His Excellency the President for his kind presence this afternoon.

Thank you for your patient hearing.