



**Reframing South Asian
Regional Cooperation
in the New Context**
National and Global Dimensions

4-5 November 2023, Dhaka, Bangladesh



Welcome Remarks by
Dr Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
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Good morning.

Chief Guest of the Fourteenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES-14),

Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Hon'ble Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament,

Special Guest, **Mr M. A. Mannan, MP**, Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh,

Distinguished Speakers on the stage -

- **Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe**, Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka,
- **Dr Yuba Raj Khatiwada**, Former Finance Minister of Nepal, and Former Governor, Nepal Rashtra Bank,
- **Dr Ishrat Husain**, Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan, Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity,

Our fellow colleagues from the co-organisers of the 14th SAES -

- **Dr Dushni Weerakoon**, Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Colombo,
- **Dr Paras Kharel**, Executive Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Kathmandu,
- **Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri**, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad,
- **Professor Sachin Chaturvedi**, Director General, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.

Over 40 distinguished participants from South Asia,

Distinguished Guests, Excellencies, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen -

On behalf of the Founding Chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, Professor **Rehman Sobhan**, Members of Board of Trustees of CPD, and all colleagues of CPD,

I extend a warm welcome to all participants – from home and abroad – to the Fourteenth South Asian Economic Summit.

We are indeed honoured to have the gracious presence of the Hon'ble Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament.

Indeed, Hon'ble Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament also joined as the Chief Guest at the closing session of the 9th South Asia Economic Summit in 2016.

Hon'ble Minister for Planning also joined a Plenary Session of the 9th SAES in 2016 as the Guest of Honour.

Their participation both at the 9th and 14th SAES is a sign of commitment of the Government of Bangladesh for closer cooperation among South Asian countries.

My special thanks to our **foreign guests who have travelled to Bangladesh** to attend the 14th SAES. *I wish you a pleasant stay in Dhaka.*

Dear Guests,

The overarching theme of the 14th South Asia Economic Summit is:
**Reframing South Asian Regional Cooperation in the New Context:
National and Global Dimensions**

The reasons for choosing this theme are manifold. Let me very briefly mention some of those to give a context to the 14th SAES.

In recent times, factors relating to internal political, economic, and institutional dynamics as well as extra-regional, geo-political and geo-economic configurations, have become more pronounced.

Moreover, the global economic and political order and alliances in which cooperation in the South Asian region is to take place, have been undergoing significant changes.

South Asia as a region has enormous potentials and possibilities which may be harnessed through regional cooperation and deepened through economic integration.

However, currently, like the rest of the world, the South Asian economies are also battling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ukraine war and subsequent global economic challenges are also having multi-dimensional impacts on South Asian economies.

Some economies in the region are finding it difficult to maintain macroeconomic stability and sustain the economic growth momentum experienced in the recent past.

Political polarisation and revealed vulnerabilities have emerged as significant issues in some countries in South Asia. A few countries have gone under IMF programme and resorted to high level budgetary support from external sources.

Three South Asian countries – Bhutan will graduate on 13 December 2023; Bangladesh and Nepal will graduate in 2026 from the Least Developed Country to Developing Country Status. The prospect of smooth graduation of the South Asian LDCs has become more challenging in the new economic reality.

In this context, cooperation among the countries in the South Asian region is crucial.

Indeed, we have observed that during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, South Asian countries had come together and cooperated among themselves, most commonly on a bilateral basis, in the areas of access to vaccines, financial support and food supply.

However, we also observe that regional cooperation in South Asia has stumbled over the years due to political tensions, historical animosity between countries, and ongoing political and territorial disputes. There prevails a trust deficit among countries in the region.

Distinguished guests,

Of course, there have been some initiatives at bilateral and sub-regional levels. For example, cooperation in energy, trade, and multi-modal transport connectivity, produced some results. At the same time, a number of other initiatives, such as the Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN), have stalled after some initial progress.

Moreover, when we talk about cooperation, we have to now expand the horizon beyond traditional regional cooperation issues – such as trade, connectivity, water, and energy – and bring in a number of new areas on the table.

New areas of cooperation may include the **public health system, structured labour market policies, expansion and deepening of supply chains, and foreign direct investment (FDI)**.

Issues such as collective bargaining in **global climate negotiation** and alliances for **technology transfer in view of the fourth industrial revolution**, which have long-term implications for South Asian countries, have become important. Challenges of strategic positioning of smaller South Asian economies, in view of the **changing economic and strategic alliances**, also demand urgent attention.

In view of the emergent economic and political scenarios, global circumstances, and the often-uncertain domestic political settlements, the 14th SAES will discuss the abovementioned issues in detail.

During the three (3) Plenary Sessions and nine (9) Parallel Sessions of SAES, policymakers, scholars, representatives of the private sector, media, civil society organisations, and development partners will deliberate on these critical issues and offer practical and pragmatic policy solutions.

We feel, discussions during the 14th SAES will help us in charting a path forward, with a focus on harnessing the region's potential, addressing challenges, and envisioning a more prosperous and integrated South Asia.

I once again thank our **Hon'ble Chief Guest, Special Guest**, CPD's Chairman, my CPD colleagues, distinguished speakers, all panellists, participants, our co-organisers and partners for extending their support to CPD in making the 14th SAES a success.

I look forward to your active participation at various sessions of the 14th SAES during these two days.