



Reframing South Asian Regional Cooperation in the New Context

National and Global Dimensions

4-5 November 2023, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Summary of the Proceedings and Recommendations

Organised by



Co-organisers



RIS
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**Reframing South Asian
Regional Cooperation
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Organiser

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Co-organisers

Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka
Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India
South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal
Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan

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Fourteenth
South Asia
Economic Summit

**Background of
SAES Initiative**

1. Background of SAES Initiative

The South Asia Economic Summit (SAES) is the pre-eminent track 1.5 initiative in South Asia which aspires to identify modalities of deepening cooperation among the South Asian countries. It is a unique policy forum that brings together academics and policy activists, policymakers and diplomats, business and civil society leaders, international development partners and other personalities from the region who are keen to advance this cause.

Five leading think tanks in South Asia came together in 2008 to establish the SAES in the image of Davos, to create a South Asian Davos. These were: Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh; Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS); Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India; Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan; and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal. The founding members were entrusted with the responsibility of convening annual Summit on a rotating basis. SAES, convened as an annual event, is hosted by the five core partners in their respective countries sequentially (i.e., Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). This annual event is also attended by representatives of other countries in the region, including Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Maldives. The annual Summits are organised to bring together key stakeholders of South Asia's integration and also experts and scholars from beyond the region who worked on the issues of interest and concern to South Asia.

SAES was initiated as a platform to discuss and debate the issues perceived as critical to advancing the causes of deepening regional cooperation and integration in South Asia. It was initiated by realising that there was a need for a deeper understanding of the challenges confronting South Asia at a time of rapid changes within the region and in view of a fast-evolving global scenario. SAES was conceived as a two-track learning opportunity: (i) for knowledge actors to share results of evidence-based research and what these could mean in terms of policymaking in various critical areas of development and regional cooperation in South Asia; and (ii) for policymakers and non-state actors to exchange views as regards major challenges in implementing the various policies and initiatives to deepen South Asian integration. By leveraging contributions from across a diverse range of disciplines and by drawing contributions from research and policymaking communities, SAES was envisaged to emerge as an intellectual enterprise important in South Asia from which policymakers, researchers and non-state sectors would stand to gain.

In the process, a new generation of intellectuals and actors was motivated to commit themselves to advance the cause of South Asian cooperation. This regionally motivated network of stakeholders has kept the South Asia vision alive at a time when divisive politics has kept South Asian countries apart, and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) remains comatose and dysfunctional. These non-state actors are willing and able to shine a light on the possibilities and potentials of South Asian cooperation in view of the new global emerging contexts. SAES XIV is geared to leverage this intellectual capacity to reignite the political inertia and stimulate interest and action to take the agenda of South Asian cooperation forward in the years ahead. The following table shows that various themes of past SAES conclaves have covered a broad spectrum of issues reflecting both emergent and emerging challenges facing South Asia at that time.

Each of the SAES meets has come up with a concrete set of recommendations based on the discussions at various dedicated sessions, which saw evidence-based presentations and lively exchange of opinions among leading scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and representatives

Table 1: A Brief Summary of Previous SAES Events

Summit	Host, Place and Dates	Themes
First South Asia Economic Summit	IPS-Colombo: 28 July-3 August 2008	Economic Integration in South Asia: SAFTA and Beyond
Second South Asia Economic Summit	RIS-New Delhi: 10-12 December 2009	South Asia in the context of Global Financial Meltdown
Third South Asia Economic Summit	SAWTEE and SACEPS-Kathmandu: 17-19 December 2010	Regional Economic Integration, Climate Change and Food Security: Agenda for the Decade 2011-2020
Fourth South Asia Economic Summit	CPD-Dhaka: 22-23 October 2011	Global Recovery, New Risks and Sustainable Growth: Repositioning South Asia
Fifth South Asia Economic Summit	SDPI-Islamabad: 11-13 September 2012	Making Growth Inclusive and Sustainable in South Asia
Sixth South Asia Economic Summit	IPS-Colombo: 2-4 September 2013	Towards a Stronger, Dynamic & Inclusive South Asia
Seventh South Asia Economic Summit	RIS-New Delhi: 5-7 November 2014	Towards South Asia Economic Union
Eighth South Asia Economic Summit	SDPI-Islamabad: 7-8 December 2015	Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Development in South Asia
Ninth South Asia Economic Summit	CPD-Dhaka: 15-16 October 2016	Reimagining South Asia in 2030
Tenth South Asia Economic Summit	SAWTEE-Kathmandu: 14-16 November 2017	Deepening Economic Integration for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in South Asia
Eleventh South Asia Economic Summit	SDPI-Islamabad: 4-7 December 2018	Corridors of Knowledge for Peace and Development
Twelfth South Asia Economic Summit	IPS-Colombo: 26-27 September 2019	Shaping South Asia's Future in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)
Thirteenth South Asia Economic Summit	RIS-Delhi: 19-20 April 2022	Prospects of greater Economic Cooperation in South Asia

Source: Authors' compilation.

from civil society organisations (CSOs). Recommendations originating from SAES events were shared with policymakers in SAARC countries and were also fed into the SAARC Summit process. Papers presented at SAES events, proceedings and outputs of successive SAES meets have come out as dedicated volumes and were posted on the websites of participating institutions. These constitute a rich repository of knowledge, policy options and policy recommendations concerning regional integration in South Asia.

2. The Fourteenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES XIV)

The fourteenth SAES (SAES XIV) was organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), in Dhaka on 4-5 November 2023. In the past, CPD had hosted the SAES twice, in 2011 and 2016.

The theme of SAES XIV was ‘Reframing South Asian Regional Cooperation in the New Context: National and Global Dimensions’.

2.1 Need for fresh thinking on South Asian co-operation

Pan-South Asia regional cooperation remains paralysed by the burden of history, the legacy of bilateral tensions and the lack of initiatives to break the status quo. There is an urgent need for rethinking as regards the modalities to take the discourse on South Asian cooperation forward, taking into cognisance the new developments—both within and outside the region—which have implications for intra-regional cooperation in South Asia.

Four factors should inform the discourse on the emergent new context.

- First, the political and economic situation in individual member states of South Asia;
- Second, the variable geometry of cooperation involving various countries of the region;
- Third, the nature of the emerging interface of South Asian countries with countries of the neighbouring regions and beyond; and
- Fourth, how this new geo-economic, geo-political and geo-strategic scenario was likely to influence and inform South Asian cooperation over the foreseeable future.

The task before today’s thinkers interested in South Asian issues is to factor in these dynamics in crafting a new strategy to broaden and deepen cooperation among the countries of the region at various levels—multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral. This may entail taking a fresh look at the definition of South Asia, the pull and push factors of regional cooperation, centrifugal and centripetal forces influencing cooperation in the region and tools of cooperation in view of the current realities and new demands. SAES should be seen as a unique opportunity to take on this challenging task and come up with a set of concrete recommendations to reignite attention and trigger actions in this backdrop.

2.2 The traditional impediments

As a geographical entity, the SAARC region has enormous potential and possibilities which may be harnessed through regional cooperation and deepened through economic integration. However, over the years, regional cooperation in South Asia has been characterised by acute political tensions, historical animosity between countries, and ongoing political and territorial disputes, resulting in a high level of trust deficit. SAARC, launched almost four decades back, has been criticised for not delivering on agreed upon programmes and for lack of initiative to follow-up on the agreed decisions. Many of the initiatives taken under the rubric of SAARC, such as the creation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and South Asia Food Bank, have not been implemented and/or made effective as envisioned. To be true, some initiatives at bilateral and sub-regional levels, 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 following some initial progress. The question that arises is whether South Asian cooperation is failing us or whether we are failing in our responsibility as think tanks to re-envision and reimagine the future of South Asian cooperation.

The SAARC process currently remains in a state of atrophy. It is almost a decade since the last (eighteenth) SAARC Summit took place in Nepal in 2014.

2.3 New drivers, new considerations, new modalities

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. Further, 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. Currently, like the rest of the world, the South Asian economies are also battling to recover from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The war in Ukraine and subsequent global economic challenges are also having multi-dimensional impacts on South Asian economies. Countries such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan are facing unprecedented economic challenges. The other economies in the region are also 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 many countries in South Asia. A number of these countries have gone under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme and resorted to high level budgetary support from external sources. The prospect of smooth graduation of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the region (i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal) has become more challenging.

However, it needs to be also recognised that during the COVID-19 pandemic, South Asian countries did come together and cooperate among themselves, most commonly on a bilateral basis, in the areas of access to vaccines, financial support and food supply.

New geo-political developments—the growing interest of China in South Asia, on the one hand, and the Quad partnership involving India, Australia, Japan, and the United States (US), on the other, have also infused new dimensions and tensions in the regional cooperation framework in South Asia. Indo-Pacific Strategy, as a key plank of the geo-strategic outlook of the US, has fuelled these tensions. Indeed, over the years, the roles of larger economies are becoming increasingly visible and dominant in influencing the advancement of South Asian cooperation. Against the backdrop of the weakening of existing institutions and instruments, new modalities have emerged in the region. These include bilateral, plurilateral (sub-regional) and mega-regional initiatives of varying configurations ranging from bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and sub-regional initiatives (e.g., BBIN motor vehicle agreement) to Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) and mega-regional trade agreements (e.g., Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership – RCEP). All these initiatives have economic and strategic impacts on South Asian countries—individually and collectively.

Concurrently, while the traditional regional cooperation issues—i.e., trade, connectivity, water, and energy—remain on the table, a number of novel areas of engagement are coming up in a forceful way, e.g., cooperation in the areas of the public health system, structured labour market policies, expansion and deepening of supply chains, and the quest for efficiency-seeking Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for cross border markets. Issues such as collective bargaining in global climate negotiation and tactical alliances in view of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), which have long-term implications for South Asian countries, are also becoming important. The importance of cultural and intellectual exchanges in catalysing a regional political settlement is becoming increasingly visible. Challenges of strategic positioning of smaller South Asian economies, in view of the variable economic and strategic alliances, are also demanding urgent attention.

In sum, the discourse on cooperation in South Asia can no longer remain hostage to business as usual and pathways dictated by past trends. Crafting new pathways and charting new trajectories for cooperation among countries of South Asia demand innovative approaches, the novelty of

conceptualisation and a reframed empirical analysis. The knowledge actors in South Asia, along with other stakeholders, must play a creative out-of-the-box role to capitalise on the emerging opportunities as well as to manage the attendant risks. Thus, the fourteenth SAES needs to step up to seek practicable and pragmatic policy solutions in view of the emergent economic and political scenarios, global circumstances, and the often-uncertain domestic political settlements.

2.4 Objectives of SAES XIV

The overarching objective of the SAES XIV was to search for a new South Asian Deal (Compact) in view of the emergent national, regional, and global developments. The specific objectives of SAES XIV were the followings:

- i. To generate a shared understanding of the changed landscape by exploring new elements that inform national, regional, mega-regional and global contexts in which cooperation will need to take place among the countries of South Asia.
- ii. To identify and promote modalities and potential opportunities to advance the cause of regional cooperation in South Asia; and,
- iii. To explore the roles of the knowledge actors and political leadership envisioning the journey of South Asia in the next decade.

2.5 The Sessions of SAES XIV

SAES XIV included high-profile inaugural and closing sessions, interactive plenary sessions, and parallel thematic sessions. There was also a display of publications as well as book launching, networking opportunities and cultural activities.

Different sessions of SAES XIV were designed to attain the overarching and specific objectives of the Dhaka Summit. Thus, the sessions included a high-level curtain-raising inaugural session focusing on emergent elements at various levels that could inform and influence cooperation among countries in South Asia.

The inaugural session was followed by three plenary sessions:

- State of Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Revisiting Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) Report, New Context, Challenges, and Opportunities
- Identifying New Opportunities and New Modalities for Fostering Regional Cooperation in South Asia
- Geo-strategic Factors Underpinning Contemporary Trends in South Asian Cooperation

Nine (9) parallel sessions were held covering specific issues of regional cooperation and development in South Asia.

1. Multi-modal Transport (cross-border logistics)
2. Macroeconomic Cooperation and the Possibility of a Common Currency
3. Towards an Integrated Energy Grid
4. Climate Change and Resilience
5. Cross-border Labour Market Management
6. Value Chains and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
7. Role of Knowledge Actors in Advancing a New Political Settlement in South Asia

8. Cooperation on Public Health
9. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

SAES XIV in Dhaka provided an excellent opportunity and a suitable platform to deliberate on the aforementioned issues to give shape to a new approach towards regional cooperation in the region in the backdrop of the emergent and emerging contexts. Recognised experts were invited to present keynote papers to kick off the discussion at various sessions. Each session posed a number of critical questions to guide the deliberations and keep the panellists focused on the issues at hand. There were adequate scopes for interactive discussions between the speakers and other participants. The moderator (chair) of the sessions summarised the the key takeaways.

2.6 Output

A conference volume, containing the presentations made at various sessions along with the summaries of the inaugural and closing sessions, and the plenary discussion, will be published duly.

2.7 Expected outcomes

- i. A better understanding of the trends, challenges, and opportunities of economic cooperation in South Asia in view of the new context, new developments, and new modalities
- ii. Enhanced knowledge as regards best practices and lessons learned from cross-regional experiences
- iii. A set of recommendations for policymakers and other relevant stakeholders as regards deepening economic cooperation in South Asia in the new context
- iv. Strengthened network of experts and stakeholders committed to promoting economic cooperation in the region in the days ahead.

Fourteenth
South Asia
Economic Summit

**Overview of the
Discussions and
Recommendations**

3. Overview of the Discussions and Recommendations

3.1 Inaugural Session

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) hosted the SAES XIV at Sheraton Dhaka in Bangladesh, and the inaugural session was held on 4 November 2023.

The speakers of the inaugural session presented a multitude of insightful suggestions. These encompassed promoting regional cooperation and partnership despite the changing national, regional, economic, and political contexts. Additionally, there were proposals for further assistance to graduating LDCs of South Asia, primarily in the form of continued trade preferences, particularly from India and other developing countries. The discussions also emphasised collective efforts on climate change, encompassing information sharing and cross-border disaster management. Ensuring the operationalisation of the SAARC institutions, such as SAARC Development Finance and Society for Advancement in Agriculture Rural Development (SAARD) Seed Bank, was underscored. The suggestion was made for the SAARC Food Bank to be activated, addressing seasonal food deficits in countries and avoiding restrictive trade practices, especially concerning essential food items and drugs.

Furthermore, the speakers highlighted the importance of leveraging global and regional value chains through promoting partnerships beyond the region. The call was made for both the public and private sectors to embrace green and sustainable finance in addressing climate change. Integrated basin management in South Asian River systems was advocated, along with increased investment in the development of human capital, including female empowerment. Lastly, recommendations were put forth to ease visa restrictions and reduce trade barriers to enhance regional trade.

In her welcome address during the inaugural session, *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, Executive Director, CPD, said, ‘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’.

‘We are striving to build a future where men and women can realise their full potential’, highlighted the Chief Guest, *Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury*, MP, Hon'ble Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament.

The Special Guest, *Mr M. A. Mannan*, MP, Hon'ble Minister Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh, said, ‘It is our duty to dismantle the culture of distrust and fear instilled by our colonial masters. We must work towards gradually easing these barriers to foster increased regional trade’.

‘What sets Bangladesh apart in South Asia is the active engagement of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in fostering human development, promoting female participation rates, and empowering women’, opined *Dr Ishrat Husain*, Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan and Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms & Austerity, Pakistan.

Dr P. Nandalal Weerasinghe, Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, said that trade within SAARC is limited due to various factors including political tensions, restrictive tariffs and duties, and excessive documentation.

Dr Yuba Raj Khatiwada, former Finance Minister and former Governor, Nepal Rastra Bank, said, ‘The region is grappling with severe food insecurity, despite certain countries having a surplus of food. Unfortunately, the cooperation mechanism has been hindered by a reverse order, with some nations imposing restrictions on food exports, even to their neighbouring countries. This trend extends to energy trade, which has also faced obstacles and lacks smooth coordination’.

Dr Dushni Weerakoon, Executive Director, IPS, Sri Lanka, stressed, ‘In the coming years, South Asian countries will need to confront challenges both individually and collectively, including issues related to import restrictions and export bans. Finding collaborative solutions will be crucial to navigating these challenges effectively’.

‘The robustness we see in the economic growth in South Asia should reinforce our potential for economic integration’, underscored *Professor Sachin Chaturvedi*, Director General, RIS, India.

While commenting on the progress made by SAES over the years, *Dr Paras Kharel*, Executive Director, SAWTEE, Nepal, said, ‘SAES has evolved over the years; the themes and issues covered, and the focus has kept pace with new developments, but importantly, without losing sight of the overriding goal of identifying constructive avenues of regional cooperation’.

Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, Pakistan, ‘The Russia-Ukraine conflict serves as a reminder that economic interdependence alone may not be sufficient to prevent conflicts. While European and Russian economies have been interconnected, the situation underscores that peace and stability depend on factors beyond economic ties. It prompts us to consider a broader perspective and recognise the multifaceted nature of geopolitical dynamics and potential sources of conflict’.

'As members of South Asian civil society, we have an added responsibility to maintain and advance the concept and evolving agendas for cooperation', emphasised *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Founding Chairman, CPD, Bangladesh, in his closing remarks.

Recommendations

- To enhance support for the graduating LDCs in South Asia, it is recommended to extend ongoing trade preferences, with a particular emphasis on sustained support from India and other developing nations;
- Collectively working on climate change including information sharing, cross-border disaster management;
- Ensuring operationalisation of SAARC institutions such as SAARC Development Finance, SAARD Seed Bank;
- SAARC Food Bank should come into force given the seasonal food deficit in countries;
- Avoid restrictive trade practices at least in case of essential food items and essential drugs.

3.2 Plenary Sessions

3.2.1 Plenary 1: State of Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Revisiting Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) Report, New Context, Challenges and Opportunities

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, world trade has struggled to regain momentum, and international investments have reached a plateau. The current phenomenon, often labeled as 'slowbalisation,' reflects a shift from the financial economy and hyper-globalisation to a renewed emphasis on the real economy. Observations highlight the dependence of the productivity paradigm on structural transformation, emphasising the crucial role of the manufacturing sector in generating quality employment opportunities. To drive this transformation, it is imperative to



harness the potential of regional value chains, necessitating a focus on reinforcing industrial policies in regional countries.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the first plenary session titled ‘State of regional cooperation in South Asia: Revisiting Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) Report, new context, challenges and opportunities’, held on 4 November 2023 at Sheraton Dhaka.

The Chair of the session, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, said, ‘The 1999 GEP Report aimed to make SAARC similar to the European Union in terms of trade and economic integration. However, these ambitions did not fully materialise’.

‘Connectivity, trade and transport facilitation are the primary obstacles hindering the realisation of South Asia’s full trade potential. Significant progress is needed in these areas to unlock the region’s trade capabilities’, emphasised *Dr Nagesh Kumar*, Director and Chief Executive, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), India.

While discussing the issues related to SAARC, *Ambassador Farooq Sobhan*, Distinguished Fellow & Board Member, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and Former Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh, highlighted, ‘The persistent challenge with SAARC over the years has been the issue of implementation. The organisation’s success often fluctuates based on the state of Indo-Pak relations and the personalities involved’.

Ms Mandakini Kaul, Regional Coordinator, South Asia Regional Integration and Engagement, The World Bank, underscored that the elevated trade and infrastructure expenses have created a situation where it is more costly for companies in Bangladesh to engage in trade with neighbouring countries than with countries such as Brazil or others located farther away.

‘We should not hold SAARC hostage to inter-governmental differences. It was the initiative of the people, not governments’, opined *Mr Abdul Ghufuran Memon*, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Government of Pakistan.

Ms Irosha Cooray, Director, Education Security & Culture, SAARC, said, ‘We are awaiting guidance from the member states, and we expect to hold the SAARC summit as soon as possible’.

‘The SAARC charter already includes provisions for sub-regional cooperation and acknowledges its importance’, said *Dr Posh Raj Pandey*, Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, Bangladesh, participated in the open floor discussion and recommended, ‘Whether a new GEP report is necessary to consolidate the lessons of the past—what has worked and what has not—requires an evidence-based approach’.

The speakers in session engaged in discussions surrounding the aspirations outlined in the GEP Report and deliberated on issues that have surfaced over the past 15 years. They expressed that SAARC should not be hindered by inter-governmental differences; drawing lessons from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where despite bilateral tensions among member states, collaboration persists towards shared goals.

Emphasising regional cooperation’s benefits, the suggestion is to initiate pilot projects that, when successful, can be scaled up. Collaboration with technical institutions to leverage their expertise

and resources was encouraged. Furthermore, sub-regional cooperation could concentrate on areas such as trade facilitation, connectivity, and disaster management.

Given the current context, the creation of a new GEP is deemed essential. The proposed GEP should take into account lessons from the past, conducting an evidence-based assessment to discern what has worked and what has not. This approach aims to inform and guide future initiatives for effective regional cooperation and development.

Recommendations

- A shift of focus from financial economy and hyper-globalisation to the real economy has been observed. The productivity paradigm depends on structural transformation. It is essential to harness the potential of the manufacturing sector to create quality employment opportunities. Transforming structural processes is essential, and regional value chains can play a crucial role in driving this transformation. Regional countries should put emphasis on further strengthening industrial policies.
- To demonstrate the benefits of regional cooperation, pilot projects could be started, and then successful ones can be scaled up. Opportunities to collaborate with technical institutions to leverage their expertise and resources can be explored.
- Sub-regional cooperation can also focus on areas such as trade facilitation, connectivity, and disaster management.

3.2.2 Plenary 2: Identifying New Opportunities and New Modalities for Fostering Regional Cooperation in South Asia

In the ever-changing landscape of South Asian regional dynamics, it is clear that the conventional strategies of regional cooperation are insufficient. Traditional approaches of



regional cooperation of South Asia are too top-down, government-led, and too focused on economic growth and development. A more people-centred approach involving non-state actors, such as civil society and the private sector, is needed in developing and implementing regional cooperation initiatives.

Regional cooperation currently centres around infrastructure and connectivity, but there is a need to broaden the focus to include higher education and public health. In terms of higher education, this means fostering cross-border collaboration for standardised certification, accreditation, and managing the growing demand for tertiary education. Additionally, it involves institutionalising lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to effectively address public health challenges.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the second plenary session titled 'Identifying new opportunities and new modalities for fostering regional cooperation in South Asia' held on 4 November 2023 at the Sheraton Dhaka.

The Chair of the session, *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, underscored, 'We can already recognise changes in terms of regional cooperation. For instance, we have moved from manufacturing to the service sector. Cooperation in the areas of health and education, multimodal and digital connectivity are becoming increasingly visible. We are talking about opportunities for financial cooperation as well'.

Dr P. Nandalal Weerasinghe, Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka, discussed about the economic situation of Sri Lanka and said, 'The new government in 2019 faced challenges with access to capital markets even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic'. He further discussed the economic measures taken by their government to address and solve these issues.

'We should promote student exchanges to advance cooperation and invite singers, artists, and media personalities from each other's countries to foster cultural harmony within South Asia', recommended *Dr Ishrat Husain*, Former Governor State Bank of Pakistan & Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms & Austerity, Pakistan.

Dr Shekhar Shah, Vice Chairman, Academic Advisory Council, Indian School of Public Policy (ISPP), India, proposed the idea of creating a forum similar to the Group of Twenty (G20) or Group of Eight (G8), but specifically for South Asian countries, where the leadership from these nations could meet periodically in a rotational manner. The goal would be to provide top-level guidance to their respective governments, facilitate problem-solving, and commit to maintaining unity among the countries involved.

While commenting on issues of SAARC, *Ambassador Durga Prasad Bhattarai*, Former Foreign Secretary, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, opined, 'Completely abandoning SAARC would be detrimental for South Asia. It is indeed possible to build pressure from within countries to encourage their governments to collaborate. This can be accomplished through the active engagement of CSOs, the private sector, and by organising professional events like SAES'.

Mr Md. Jashim Uddin, President, SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Bangladesh, emphasised the importance of private sector involvement in promoting regional products, noting the disparity between Bangladesh's exports to India and the potential for increased trade. He suggested private sector initiatives, beyond government efforts, are crucial for effective product promotion and trade expansion.

In the session, the speakers discussed the potential agreement between India and Pakistan to grant each other the most-favoured-nation status, which came to a halt in 2014 due to elections. This was a missed opportunity. The agreement needs to be revived as it would have been linked to SAFTA, decreasing the negative risks associated with exports from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

The question at hand is whether regional cooperation in South Asia has transitioned from an aspirational and ambitious approach to a more pragmatic and realistic model. In this scenario, adopting a variable geometry approach could be a viable path forward. Instead of trying to involve everyone, the focus would be on including whatever strategies and partnerships prove effective.

SAARC appears to be lacking in the learning department when compared to other regional groups like ASEAN, particularly in the realms of trust-building and having a clear sense of purpose. To address this, there was a suggestion for an extraordinary or emergency meeting of the Council of Ministers within SAARC. The aim would be to seek political guidance and consensus, given the current absence of agreement on regional issues.

Sri Lanka's journey can offer valuable lessons for its neighbouring countries. With a substantial portion of its debt in the commercial market, the shift from concessional to commercial debt sparked worries about debt sustainability. To tackle this, Sri Lanka's central bank had to take measures such as suspending foreign debt payments, raising interest rates significantly to manage inflation, floating the currency, and engaging in negotiations with the IMF to address the sustainability of its debt. This highlights the importance of implementing safeguards and measures to secure central bank independence and accountability.

Enhancing regional trade and fostering business growth hinges on addressing the pivotal issue of trade and travel logistics in the region. It is imperative to take additional measures to improve the current situation and facilitate smoother trade and travel operations.

Recommendations

- Traditional approaches of cooperation are too top-down, government-led, and too focused on economic growth and development. A more people-centred approach involving non-state actors, such as civil society and the private sector, is needed in developing and implementing regional cooperation initiatives.
- The issue is whether regional cooperation in South Asia has evolved from an aspirational, ambitious approach to a more realpolitik model. In this case, the implementation of variable geometry may be the way forward. Rather than including everyone, include whatever works for whatever alliances.
- There was a proposal to establish an SA8 (South Asian 8), with rotational leadership and joint commitment not to break apart. The SA8 would demand differentiation from SAARC-like processes, which would allow more flexibility and create political momentum for heads of state meetings.
- Regional cooperation already focuses on infrastructure and connectivity. Two other areas that should be focused on include higher education and public health. In terms of higher education, this entails cross-border cooperation for standardised certification, accreditation, and to handle excess demand for higher education. As well as for institutionalising the learnings from COVID-19 to address public health issues.
- SAARC is not learning from other regional groups like ASEAN, especially in areas of trust

building and clarity of purpose. There is a proposal for an extraordinary or emergency meeting of the Council of Ministers to seek political guidance and consensus within SAARC, as there is a lack of consensus on regional issues.

3.2.3 Plenary 3: Geo-strategic Factors Underpinning Contemporary Trends in South Asian Co-operation

The third plenary session titled ‘Geo-strategic factors underpinning contemporary trends in South Asian cooperation’ was held on 5 November 2023.

The Chair of the session *Professor Rounaq Jahan*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, remarked, ‘CSOs are more critical of the government's achievements in terms of cooperation. While some progress has been made, it has not met expectations’.

‘If there is a higher level of trust among neighbours, China's low borrowing rates may be beneficial for us’, said *Dr Swarnim Waglé*, Member, Federal Parliament of Nepal.

Brig. Gen. (Retd.) Dr Sakhawat Hussain, Former Election Commissioner, Bangladesh, said that the future of regional cooperation appears bleak unless we can overcome the weaponisation of economy, culture, business, and politics.

Professor Md Shahidul Haque, Professor, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University and Former Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh, said, ‘Bangladesh will need to play a significant role in addressing many of the issues in the South Asian region, primarily focusing on a political role rather than an economic one’.



'We have forgotten that some previous empires fell when they became superpowers. Now we must consider whether it's a matter of prosperity or a matter of existence', said *Dr Syed Kaleem Imam*, Former Federal Secretary, Government of Pakistan.

Dr Amena Mohsin, Professor, Department of International Relations University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, underscored, 'Within South Asia, there is another South, where the states are raising autonomous voices and seeking multiple alliances.'

'Inflation is surpassing workers' wages, leading to a situation where workers are experiencing a decline in their real income every day', highlighted *Dr Praveen Jha*, Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

The speakers at the session said that regionalism is a process deeply rooted in people's minds, yet South Asia faces a deficit in its establishment. The consideration of multipolarity alongside multilateralism is imperative, emphasising that the prosperity of the people should take precedence over aspirations of superpower status.

Collaboration, coexistence, and harmonious living among South Asian countries are vital. The intricacies of sub-regional politics within South Asia, where states are vocalising distinct perspectives and seeking diverse alliances, must be acknowledged. To ensure the survival of SAARC, a fundamental restructuring is necessary, incorporating a robust conflict resolution mechanism. Additionally, the facilitation of free movement is indispensable for fostering cooperation among member nations.

Recommendations

- The weaponisation of economy, culture, business, and politics suppresses cooperation. Unless this is overcome, it will be difficult to survive and play a major role in this region.
- Multipolarity must be considered side by side with multilateralism.
- The prosperity of people should come before the prospect of becoming a superpower. Therefore, the countries within South Asia need to cooperate, coexist, and live together.
- The politics behind sub-regional groups needs to be taken into cognisance. Within South Asia, there is another South, where the states are raising respective voices and seeking multiple alliances.
- For SAARC to survive, a reframing of the organisation is essential. It needs to have a conflict resolution mechanism. Cooperation cannot happen if people are not able to move freely.

3.3 Parallel Sessions

3.3.1 Parallel session A1: Multimodal Transport (cross-border logistics)

Geopolitical issues and numerous conflicts worldwide are impeding the progress of multi-modal transportation in South Asia. The region is facing challenges such as inadequate governance, subpar existing infrastructure, and bureaucratic hurdles. To prevent the initiation of impractical projects, it is crucial to tackle governance issues and ensure effective, transparent governance.

Failure to leverage existing infrastructure and opportunities represents a significant constraint. To address this challenge, South Asian countries can utilise common rivers to promote multi-modal connectivity through riverways.



These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session A1 titled ‘Multimodal Transport (cross-border logistics)’ held on 4 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Dr Dushni Weerakoon*, Executive Director, IPS, remarked, ‘An insightful takeaway from Sri Lanka’s experience underscores the need for a more cautious approach to infrastructure financing’.

‘The advancement of multi-modal transport necessitates addressing geopolitical challenges’, opined *Prof Dr Govind Raj Pokharel*, Former Vice-Chair, National Planning Commission, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

The Executive Director of South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), *Dr Selim Raihan*, recommended, ‘When it comes to multimodal connectivity, national efforts have to be aligned with regional plans. However, we do not have any regional plan’.

Mr Abdul Ghufuran Memon, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Government of Pakistan, urged, ‘Enhancing multimodal connectivity requires a shift from exclusive government control; empowering the private sector to manage it could lead to more efficient outcomes’.

‘Besides SAES, I do not see much interaction among think tanks, specifically in the area of multimodal connectivity’, said *Dr Prabir De*, Professor, RIS, India.

‘To facilitate coordination in multimodal connectivity, the presence of SAARC is essential’, stressed the Professor of Manipur University, India, *Dr Ch Priyoranjan Singh*.

Mr Chewang Rinzin, Director, Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies, Bhutan, said, ‘We can have grand infrastructure but if the people behind the infrastructure are inefficient, connectivity will slow down’.

The speakers of the session emphasised the geopolitical significance of multimodal transport connectivity and addressed challenges such as bilateral trust deficits and the progression of both bilateral and sub-regional connectivity.

One notable issue addressed was the lack of alignment between national and regional planning efforts, leading to inconsistencies in customs and logistical facilities on borders. Harmonisation among states and regions in terms of customs procedures is notably absent. The pervasive trust deficit emerges as a major obstacle hindering multi-modal connectivity.

Despite these challenges, some progress has been made in bilateral and sub-regional integration within South Asia. National projects present opportunities for exploring regional connectivity potentials. To enhance multi-modal transport, concerted efforts from the governments of the South Asian region are imperative. Collaboration is the key, and countries must work together to devise action plans that can improve multi-modal connectivity in the long run, with a significant role for SAARC.

Recognising that the responsibility for improving multi-modal connectivity extends beyond governments alone, private sector entities, such as airlines, can contribute by facilitating port sharing with others. Non-state actors also have a role to play in complementing the connectivity process. Capacity building of human resources is crucial to facilitate seamless connectivity.

Additionally, an agreement on the structure, framework, and modality to finance multi-modal connectivity is essential for sustained progress. Overall, a holistic and collaborative approach, involving both state and non-state actors, is crucial to overcome challenges and enhance multimodal transport connectivity in the South Asian region.

Recommendations

- Failure to leverage existing infrastructure and opportunities is a major constraint. South Asian countries need to utilise common rivers to promote multi-modal connectivity through riverways.
- There has been some progress made on bilateral and sub-regional integration in South Asia. Several national projects can be utilised to explore regional connectivity potentials. The improvement of multi-modal transport requires coordinated efforts from the governments of the South Asian region. Countries need to work together to provide action plans to improve multi-modal connectivity in the long run, where SAARC can play a major role.
- It is not solely up to the government to improve multi-modal connectivity. For example, private sector airlines can facilitate port sharing with other airlines to improve multi-modal connectivity. Non-state actors should also come forward to complement the process of connectivity.
- Capacity building of human resources should be promoted to facilitate connectivity.
- An agreement must be reached on the structure, framework and modality to finance multi-modal connectivity.

3.3.2 Parallel Session A2: Macroeconomic Cooperation and the Possibility of a Common Currency

Establishing a common currency in the South Asian region, similar to Europe, could potentially lead to greater economic integration, improved trade facilitation, and enhanced regional

cooperation. Currency cooperation is likely to happen if the benefits exceed costs for all parties involved. The possible benefits will be reduction in transaction costs and exchange rate risk. Conversely, the associated costs arise from constraints on the macroeconomic policy options available at the individual country level.

Several challenges hinder currency cooperation in South Asia. One significant obstacle is the low level of trade within the region, accounting for only 5 per cent compared to the 25 per cent seen in the ASEAN. Barriers to mobility are high, including non-tariff barriers and complex visa policies across all member countries. Bureaucracies in the region are notably inflexible, and concerns about national sovereignty further complicate matters, as national currencies evoke strong emotions and attachment.

To establish currency cooperation, concessions must be made; one cannot have both collaboration and maintain the status quo. Opting for a vehicle currency offers advantages by preserving more policy sovereignty compared to adopting a common currency. Moreover, the economic shocks experienced by these countries are diverse and not always similar, symmetric, or co-variant.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session A2 titled ‘Macroeconomic Cooperation and the Possibility of a Common Currency’ held on 4 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Professor Sachin Chaturvedi*, Director General, RIS, India, underscored, ‘With continuous adjustments to interest rates in the US, it is becoming much more challenging for the global south to maintain the necessary currency levels. However, this challenge is being addressed through open market operations’.

In his presentation, *Dr Zahid Hussain*, Former Lead Economist, The World Bank, Bangladesh opined, ‘Currently, I do not think South Asia is suitable for a currency union. But going forward, greater economic integration will increase incentives for monetary cooperation’.



‘South Asian countries have the potential to decrease their reliance on the dollar and mutually support one another in their quest for economic development’, said the Executive Director of SDPI, Pakistan, *Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri*.

‘The ideal conditions for a common currency are far from what we are experiencing here’, opined *Dr Priyadarshi Dash*, Associate Professor, RIS, India.

The Executive Director of Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), *Dr Ahsan Habib Mansur*, underscored, ‘Trade facilitation, investment, people-to-people relations, and policy harmonisation are key factors in achieving regional economic cooperation’.

Dr Md. Habibur Rahman, Chief Economist, Bangladesh Bank, stated that the adoption of a common currency necessitates certain preconditions. These include achieving economic comparability, addressing disparities, and, currently, the South Asian region is not ready for such a move.

The speakers at the session also discussed that fostering cooperation in South Asia demands a comprehensive approach that extends beyond physical connectivity to include digital integration, especially in banking and finance. Clarity regarding the mechanics of cross-border transactions and the permissible types of current account and capital account transactions are essential. Trust, safety, liquidity, settlement facilities, and system integrity are critical components for sound cross-border transactions.

In addition to digital connectivity, harmonising tax policies is indispensable for promoting fairness and combating issues such as profit shifting. This includes measures like customs duty rationalisation and congruent income tax policies. Such harmonisation not only enhances economic collaboration but also ensures that collective efforts are directed towards maintaining fairness and equity in the region. By addressing these key aspects—digital connectivity in banking and finance, clarity in cross-border transactions, and harmonisation of tax policies—South Asian nations can pave the way for more effective regional cooperation and sustainable economic growth.

Recommendations

- Clarity regarding the mechanics of cross-border transactions and the permissible types of current account and capital account transactions are essential. Trust, safety, liquidity, settlement facilities, and system integrity are critical components for sound cross-border transactions.
- Harmonising tax policies, such as customs duty rationalisation and congruent income tax policies, is essential to combat profit shifting and ensure collective efforts for fairness.
- South Asian countries, including India, as part of the Group of 77 (G77) plus China, may consider setting up a virtual currency akin to Special Drawing Rights (SDR) to promote currency independence and macroeconomic stability.
- Establishing institutional learning sharing mechanisms, where institutions like Central Banks convene regularly, is critical. This ensures continuous discussion on inflation differentials, currency system adjustments, and interest rate fixes.

3.3.3 Parallel Session A3: Towards an Integrated Energy Grid

Regional integration can not only enhance energy security but also facilitate the transition towards clean energy through regional energy trade. Within South Asian countries, seasonal variations in energy demand and supply are evident. Countries like Nepal and Bhutan experience a surplus of hydropower during monsoons. Conversely, in Bangladesh, electricity demand is low during winter, leading to an excess supply of electricity. Therefore, fostering regional integration not only can strengthen energy security but could facilitate the transition to cleaner energy.

There are several bilateral energy trade models within the South Asian region, but there is a lack of regional institutional framework. The framework for regional energy cooperation and grid integration should be a bottom-up framework as we proceed from the micro- or sub-regional level towards a regional approach. The collaboration within the BBIN could be the starter pack and after that SAARC can step in for the regional cooperation.

Bilateral trade must be built to further enhance trilateral and regional trade relations. Recent cooperation among India, Bangladesh, and Nepal is a pioneering initiative. Upon being successful, such a cooperation framework can be replicated by other countries in the region.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session A3 titled 'Towards an Integrated Energy Grid' held on 4 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Dr M Tamim*, Professor, Dept of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), remarked, 'The attainment of Bangladesh's 40 per cent renewable energy goals by 2041 necessitates the inevitability of engaging in renewable energy trade with India and Nepal through regional cooperation. Given India's central position in South Asia, it is imperative for the country to assume a pivotal role in fostering this collaboration'.



'With regional cooperation, excess electricity produced from hydropower in one country can be exported to another within the region. The hydropower generated in Nepal and Bhutan can serve as a renewable energy storage system, forming a key modality for fostering cooperation in the region', suggested *Dr Shankar Shrestha*, Executive Director, Nepal Development Research Institute (NDRI).

Mr Richard Kaniewski, Deputy Country Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), India, remarked, 'In matters of mentality or people's sentiments, this region exhibits significant similarities and connections. However, concerning trade or political initiatives, regional connectivity lags behind'.

'The need of the hour is not the integration of the grid, but rather a seamless cooperation', said *Mr Alias Wardak*, Independent Regional Power Integration Expert, Afghanistan.

Mr Hartmut Behrend, Project Manager, Project for support of the Climate and Development Partnership, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Bangladesh, highlighted, 'The economic cost of climate change is already high and in the case of South Asia, it is much higher'.

Professor Badrul Imam, Honorary Professor, Department of Geology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, underscored that Bangladesh holds gas reserves in border areas shared with India and Myanmar. Collaborative exploration programmes among these governments are likely to be significantly more effective with regional cooperation.

'Without a political framework that facilitates infrastructural connectivity for energy trade, no techno-economic framework can help achieve regional grid integration', opined *Mr Mbuso Gwafila*, Senior Energy Specialist, The World Bank.

The speakers at the session also highlighted that the kick-start of regional cooperation for grid integration depends on two key factors. One is geopolitical will, and another is the technological transformation. India may take the lead, but excluding other countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan will not lead to regional development. In this sense, any meaningful cooperation in the South Asian region must include all the SAARC countries.

To attract the private sector to the discussion of regional cooperation, a proper business model is required. The government must design business-friendly policies and structures to incentivise the private sector to participate by investing in the establishment of regional grid transmission system.

The South Asian countries together need a common vision and narrative on ensuring energy security and transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy. The countries should mutually decide a renewable energy target and a plan to achieve the goal without threatening energy security.

The economic cost of climate change is much higher than anticipated. As part of mitigating measure, necessary investment is required for energy transition. Each country should first identify not only the required infrastructure and technology but also identify skilled workforce, knowledge, and soft skills to attract investment for smooth transition

Recommendations

- There are several bilateral energy trade models within the South Asian region, but there is a lack of regional institutional framework. The framework for regional energy cooperation and grid integration should be a bottom-up framework as we proceed from the micro- or sub-regional level towards a regional approach. The collaboration within the BBIN could be the starter pack and after that SAARC can step in for the regional cooperation.
- The kick-start of regional cooperation for grid integration depends on two key factors. One is geopolitical will, and another is technological transformation. India may take the lead, but excluding other countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan will not lead to regional development. In this sense, any meaningful cooperation in the South Asian regional must include all the SAARC countries.
- To attract the private sector to the discussion of regional cooperation, a proper business model is required. The government must design business-friendly policies and structures to incentivise the private sector to participate by investing in the establishment of regional grid transmission system.
- The South Asian countries together need a common vision and narrative on ensuring energy security and transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy. The countries should mutually decide a renewable energy target and a plan to achieve the goal without threatening energy security.
- The economic cost of climate change is much higher than anticipated. As part of mitigating measure, necessary investment is required for energy transition. Each country should first identify not only the required infrastructure and technology but also identify skilled workforce, knowledge, and soft skills to attract investment for smooth transition.

3.3.4 Parallel Session B1: Climate Change and Resilience

Climate change has far-reaching impacts on the physical, social, and economic aspects of our environment, affecting plants, animals, rivers, forests, and soil, among other elements. In the



South Asian region, it is crucial to reduce the cost of climate financing to make sustainable initiatives more accessible and feasible. The government should leverage its authority to efficiently implement policies aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change. A comprehensive approach involving the simultaneous implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies is necessary to effectively tackle the challenges posed by climate change. This holistic strategy will contribute to the region's resilience and sustainability in the face of climate-related issues.

Partnerships can be established between various vulnerable cities in South Asia that face similar challenges, facilitating regional learning and knowledge sharing. Cities that are situated in inappropriate locations or lack proper planning are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. The cities of Sirajganj and Satkhira are at a higher risk of experiencing severe damage and destruction because of floods, cyclones, and other natural calamities.

One of the important observations is that the actual impact of climate change in coastal areas and the actual cost of damage due to climate change are not well understood. This phenomenon hinders development in those areas. People in these climate-affected coastal areas need to be relocated where we can create employment opportunities for them, and policies should emphasise land use.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session B1 titled 'Climate Change and Resilience' held on 5 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Dr M Asaduzzaman*, Former Research Director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), highlighted that the pressing question before us is how to address the impact of climate change in South Asia.

Mr Md Anisur Rahman, Senior Urban Planner (Consultant), CRISC Project, GIZ Bangladesh, opined, 'Cities expanding in inappropriate or unplanned locations are disproportionately experiencing the devastating impact of climate change'.

'The rise in carbon emission inequality is likely to lead to a higher incidence of poverty resulting from the impact of natural disasters', underscored the Associate Professor of RIS, India, *Dr Sabyasachi Saha*.

Dr A Atiq Rahman, Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) said that the key to addressing climate change lies in efficient energy management.

'A key issue in the upcoming 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) is to address loss and damage', remarked *Professor Dr Babar Shahbaz*, Professor and Director, Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education and Rural Development University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Mr Florian Höllen, Head of Cooperation, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, recommended, 'We should join forces to implement environmental rules and regulation for pollution prevention'.

During the session, speakers emphasised that in the post-COVID-19 era, amid a backdrop of sluggish economic expansion, escalating emissions, and inadequate infrastructural frameworks,

the shift from a focus on quantity to one emphasising quality has proven elusive. The Global South faces challenges in finance, technology, and trade, with significant implications for climate change. South Asian countries specifically require the transfer of technology, green tech solutions, and sustainable agriculture technology to address these pressing issues.

One of the important themes in the upcoming COP28 should be water and coastal security in climate-vulnerable countries in South Asia. The region should join to raise the issues of climate change, loss, and damage in the upcoming COP28. Since people's lifestyles have an effect on the world, we should pay attention to how much water we use, how the land changes, and how we live.

To facilitate the adoption of eco-friendly behaviours among residents and mitigate the use of materials that contribute to carbon emissions, a range of resources and infrastructure are necessary. Additionally, consolidating means of implementation of low-cost finance is important for mitigating the impact of climate change.

Countries in the South Asian region have to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of their respective plans and strategies to determine their efficacy in effectively tackling the challenges posed by climate change. Despite Nepal's substantial commitments and efforts to enhance climate resilience, the nation is confronted with notable obstacles, including insufficient climate data, constraints in capacity, and a lack of social and financial institutional frameworks.

A clear action plan, outlining specific targets, a climate resilience framework, and a developing financial structure will help to solve the country's climate change issues. The action plan should be locally driven since every country has its own local solutions to problems.

The promotion of green energy is vital. In addition to the implementation of an enhanced early warning system, it is imperative to provide sufficient resources towards research and development efforts, as well as foster regionally coordinated investment. The sharing of resources across nations has the potential to address challenges associated with climate change, since countries with plentiful resources may provide support to more vulnerable nations.

Managing the energy system more effectively is of paramount importance in addressing the issue of climate change. The use of effective strategies may aid in the mitigation of the repercussions stemming from the accelerated process of urbanisation.

Moreover, South Asia should move from adaptation to resilience, and from a reactive to a proactive approach. A programme for developing urban resilience is also important since rapid urbanisation is posing a threat to climate change.

Recommendations

- Within the South Asian region, the cost of climate financing should be lowered.
- The government may use its powers to effectively implement policies. It is conceivable that the simultaneous implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies might be used in tandem to address climate change challenges.
- Partnerships between different vulnerable cities in South Asia (with similar challenges) can be formed for regional learning and knowledge sharing.

- People in the climate-affected coastal areas need to be relocated where we can create employment opportunities for them, and policies should emphasise land use.
- Countries in South Asia need the transfer of technology, green tech solutions, sustainable agriculture technology, etc.

3.3.5 Parallel Session B2: Cross-border Labour Market Management

South Asian countries are currently undergoing enhanced industrialisation, primarily driven by one or two major sectors. However, this growth is accompanied by challenges, notably national security concerns and conflicts between natives and non-natives, which impact cross-border labour migration.

Undocumented regional migration at a large scale is occurring, yet it is not accurately reflected in official numbers. Workers in the South Asian region often migrate to the informal sector with low wages, exposing them to a higher risk of discrimination. The significant migration indicates a demand for labour supply, yet policymakers tend to overlook the issue of labour market migration.

To address these issues, there is a need for a comprehensive study to examine the structure of the labour market in South Asia. This study should encompass a skill demand analysis and explore opportunities for cross-border migration. Learning from the experiences and models of ASEAN and other regional cooperations concerning labour migration is crucial in developing effective policies.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session B2 titled ‘Cross-border Labour Market Management’ held on 5 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Mr Madhu Raman Acharya*, Former Foreign Secretary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, emphasised the need to discuss complementarity in the South



Asian labour market. The crucial question posed was whether the South Asian countries are solely competitors or if there is any potential for mutual complementarity.

‘Though intra-regional migration in South Asia is quite substantial, it is barely reflected in South Asian policy discourse’, remarked *Ms Dikshya Singh*, Programme Coordinator, SAWTEE, Nepal.

Mr Kshitiz Dahal, Senior Research Officer, SAWTEE, said, ‘Today, not only is the science of climate change crystal clear, but its impact is being seen and heard all over the world’.

‘Understanding the economic and social contributions of cross-border migrants will be beneficial, as it allows for an assessment of the synergies and trade-offs involved’, emphasised *Mr Raghav Chakravarthy*, Senior Research Associate, JustJobs Network, India.

The Research Director of SANEM, *Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha*, raised a critical question, stating, ‘While we have achieved higher total factor productivity and overall growth, has this translated into proportionate industrialisation in all countries when considering the environmental impact?’

While commenting on the migrants' situation, *Dr Syed Kaleem Imam*, Former Federal Secretary, Government of Pakistan, highlighted that migrants seek a better life. However, he emphasised the importance of questioning whether there are adequate legal frameworks in place to protect their rights. He stressed that effective management and the reduction of economic disparities are essential to create suitable opportunities for migrants in their destination countries. He underlined the crucial need to implement regulations that govern the treatment and rights of migrants.

‘We must take action to address malpractices in migration policies. We need to establish a framework for setting minimum standards for working conditions and wages, among other factors,’ stated *Dr Praveen Jha*, Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

The speakers at the session emphasised that poverty is the primary cause of unsafe migration in the region, highlighting the urgent need to address human trafficking as a major concern.

Additionally, due to gender norms in South Asian countries, women encounter constraints when entering the job market and striving to reach the upper segments of the employment sector. Therefore, there should be a distinct focus on uplifting skills across these countries.

A well-harmonised accreditation of skills for workers in this region could enable them to access job opportunities in cross-border labour markets. Establishing a common agreement among South Asian countries on the minimum standards for worker benefits, such as wages and working conditions, is essential. Harmonised labour laws across South Asian countries can further ensure better protection for workers.

Recommendations

- Human trafficking is a major concern and needs to be addressed.
- A study should be conducted to examine the structure of the labour market in South Asia. This study should also include a skill demand analysis and explore the opportunities for cross-border migration. It is important to consider the experience and models of ASEAN and other regional cooperations regarding labour migration.

- Due to the gender norms in South Asian countries, women face constraints when entering the job market and reaching the upper segments of the employment sector. Therefore, uplifting skills should be given a distinct focus across these countries.
- A well-harmonised accreditation of skills of the workers in this region could allow them to find job opportunities in cross-border labour markets. There should be a common agreement between South Asian countries regarding what should be the minimum standard for worker benefits, such as wages and working conditions. Harmonised labour laws across South Asian countries can also ensure better protection for workers.

3.3.6 Parallel Session B3: Value Chains and Foreign Direct Investments

South Asia faces challenges in global value chain integration due to the high trading costs, hindering its competitiveness on the global stage. The region's historical advantage of offering affordable labour and resources is diminishing, necessitating a shift towards attracting more FDI.

Overreliance on FDI poses risks, and the need to foster the growth of local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Cross-Border SMEs (CSMEs) is crucial for sustainable development. The role of the SAARC Chambers of Commerce needs refinement to mediate effectively between the private sector, including both large industries and SMEs, and the government to enhance the regional value chain.

The industry-Academia linkage is currently insufficient, impacting knowledge generation, which could be addressed through improved regional integration. Exploring the revival of food corridors and assessing the feasibility of exchanging food for products between countries could open new avenues for economic cooperation.

To address the integration challenges, efforts should be directed at reducing the cost of trading in South Asia. FDI can play a role in providing necessary capital, but a balanced approach



involves supporting local SMEs and CSMEs, encouraging local investors, and fostering a conducive business environment.

The SAARC Chambers of Commerce should focus on mediating partnerships between the private sector and the government. Strengthening the linkages between Industry and Academia is essential for reducing knowledge generation costs through regional integration. Exploring the revival of food corridors and assessing the feasibility of exchanging food for products could stimulate economic cooperation.

Additionally, South Asian countries should collaborate on green initiatives, going beyond business considerations, and harmonise environmental standards for traded products. Ensuring political stability, a predictable taxation policy, and fostering friendly relations among South Asian countries are crucial for regional economic growth and cooperation.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session B3 titled 'Value Chains and FDI' held on 5 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Dr N R Bhanumurthy*, Vice-Chancellor, Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics (BASE) University, India, remarked that the South Asia has huge potential to capitalise on its digital infrastructure and leapfrog into the global value chain.

'The economic dynamics in South Asia has been shaped by CSMEs and people to people connectivity', underscored the Honorary Consul of Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Mr Shams Mahmud*.

Engr Abdul Jabbar Memon, Senior Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry, emphasised that South Asia's economic challenges can be addressed through the collective efforts of the private sector and civil society, rather than relying solely on the government.

'It is necessary for politics to gradually recede, enabling the emerging tech-driven world to introduce effective algorithms that can facilitate the global value chain', recommended the Founder and Chairperson of MAP Capital Holdings, Pakistan, *Ms Huma Fakhar*.

Mr Buwaneka Perera, CEO/Secretary General of The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka, proposed that the key role of the SAARC Chambers should be mediating between the private sector, encompassing both large industries and SMEs, and the government. This mediation aims to facilitate the development of the value chain in the South Asian region.

While commenting on the issues of imports, *Dr Biswash Gauchan*, Executive Director, Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal, said, 'Being a landlocked country, Nepal is heavily dependent upon India for imports and now agriculture is also becoming a liability as well and no one is talking about the farmers' rights'.

Dr Ch Priyoranjan Singh, Professor at Manipur University, India, highlighted the significance of India's substantial investments in transportation corridors. However, he emphasised that the establishment of an economic corridor in the region is even more crucial for fostering regional development.

Recommendations

- South Asia does not have adequate integration in the global value chain due to the high cost associated with trading. Therefore, it is important to reduce the cost of trading.
- The advantage that South Asia had of providing affordable labour and resources is slowly fading away as these are becoming expensive. Therefore, there is a need for more FDI. The idea is that FDI and global value chain can reinforce each other. This is because FDI can provide capital constrained countries with required funds, enabling them to be a part of the GVC.
- Instead of relying on FDI, it is rather important to facilitate the growth of local SMEs and CSMEs and rely on local investors.
- The prime role of the SAARC Chambers of Commerce should be to mediate between the private sector, comprising not just the large industries but also the SMEs, and the government to enhance the value chain in this region.
- The linkage between Industry and Academia needs to be enhanced. If SAARC becomes integrated, then cost of generating knowledge will decrease.

3.3.7 Parallel Session C1: Role of Knowledge Actors in Advancing a New Political Settlement in South Asia

There is a longstanding tradition of collaboration among think tanks in South Asia, with coalitions forming since the 1980s. These institutions play crucial roles in promoting evidence-based policies, facilitating open dialogues, and complementing official processes to monitor progress. Despite their valuable contributions, think tanks encounter challenges such as sustainability, funding shortages, and restricted civic space.

To safeguard their independence, it is imperative for think tanks to remain objective and neutral. Establishing connections among think tanks is vital for knowledge transfer in all directions, fostering regional cooperation. Joint research studies across borders are commendable for



leveraging the network of think tanks. The advancement of political settlements relies on various knowledge actors, including think tanks.

Researchers should engage in country visits to establish networks and friendships, laying a strong foundation for cooperation. Knowledge actors, including universities and think tanks, should collaborate on generating new ideas, fellowships, and knowledge transfer initiatives, including student exchanges, across countries in the region.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session C1 titled ‘Role of Knowledge Actors in Advancing a New Political Settlement in South Asia’ held on 5 November 2023.☒

The Chair of the session, *Dr Swarnim Wagle*, Member Federal Parliament of Nepal, highlighted, ‘The primary role of think tanks is to bridge the gap in knowledge generation between security providers, such as the government, and development organisations, like CSOs and think tanks’.

Professor Sanjib Baruah, Andy Matsui Distinguished Professor of the Humanities, Asian University for Women, cautioned against conflating heritage with history. He emphasised that heritage is shaped by people based on their history to evoke a positive sense of identity and well-being.

‘The government is overlooking a significant opportunity, as a group of intelligent individuals remains uninvolved in the public sector and is not contributing to policymaking’, cautioned the Vice Chancellor of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), *Professor Imran Rahman*.

Mr Rinzin Wangchuk, Member, Journalists Association of Bhutan, said that knowledge actors are the catalysts in shaping new political settlements in South-Asia.

‘Localising Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a novel approach, and it is essential to establish medium-term objectives. Evidence-based research is crucial for scaling up development efforts’, underscored the Associate Professor of RIS, India, *Dr Sabyasachi Saha*.

Mr Felix Kolbitz, Resident Representative, FES, Bangladesh, suggested, ‘To foster cooperation, we require exchanges. The interchange of researchers between different countries can cultivate friendships and expand networks’.

Recommendations

- Think tanks face several challenges such as sustainability, funding shortages, and reduced civic space. To maintain their independence, it is critical for think tanks to remain objective and neutral. It is also essential for all think tanks to connect and ensure knowledge transfer in all directions. The network of think tanks can be used to benefit regional cooperation, and joint research studies across borders are commendable.
- Advancing political settlement requires various knowledge actors such as think tanks. Researchers need to visit countries to establish networks and friendships, which can help build a strong foundation of cooperation to advance political settlements.
- Knowledge actors, universities, and think tanks should come up with new ideas, fellowships, or transfer knowledge by transferring students among the countries of this region.

3.3.8 Parallel Session C2: Cooperation in Public Health

South Asia has witnessed improvement in public health, but only in comparison to Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of life expectancy, maternal mortality, and mortality rates. Sri Lanka's comprehensive and high-quality healthcare system, offering free healthcare, stands out in the region. However, challenges persist, including a shortage of health professionals, limitations in infrastructure, and difficulties in enhancing public health quality.

To address these challenges, the implementation of a universal healthcare system at the country level is crucial, and regional cooperation becomes essential for meaningful integration. Collaborative initiatives, including telemedicine, joint research on infectious diseases, and regional pharmaceutical production, are identified as potential solutions. Pooling resources for research and development in medicine and vaccine development, as well as addressing financing issues and developing an emergency support system, are key considerations.

The lack of a dedicated healthcare vehicle system and the absence of a structured regional integration framework contribute to the difficulties faced in cross-border healthcare issues. The experience of COVID-19 revealed the need for enhanced regional collaboration, as demonstrated by the ASEAN model. Integration efforts should extend to administrative processes, diplomatic facilitation, and official payment systems to ensure comprehensive regional integration in public health.

These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session C2 titled 'Cooperation in Public Health' held on 5 November 2023.

The Chair of the session, *Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman*, Chairperson, BRAC, Executive Chairman, Power and Participation Research Centre – PPRC, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government, Bangladesh, said that the discussion of the platform, needed for regional health system



integration, should not be tied to the political dimension of SAARC office. There are more avenues of discussion for regional collaboration on other platforms such as education, private sector involvement, instruments of incentives and so on.

‘Telemedicine plays a crucial role in establishing an inclusive healthcare system, particularly because rural areas often lack access to quality healthcare services’, highlighted *Dr Ganga Tilakaratna*, Research Fellow and Head of Poverty and Social Welfare, IPS.

Dr Syed Abdul Hamid, Professor, Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, urged, ‘We require a dedicated cross-country healthcare vehicle system integrated into the regional transportation network’.

‘Diseases know no borders, and this phenomenon has been occurring for years, with the COVID-19 outbreak serving as a recent example’, cautioned *Dr Prabir De*, Professor, RIS, India.

Dr Rudra Suwal, Lead/Coordinator, Economic Development Programme, NDRI, Nepal, suggested, ‘Political commitment should play a pivotal role in facilitating regional integration in public health, as shortages of funding and human resources pose significant obstacles’.

‘Health education is a collaborative learning process that should not merely flow in one direction from the educator to the recipients. Instead, it should be intertwined with the community’, proposed *Ms Sabina F Rashid*, PhD, Professor, Mushtaque Chowdhury Chair in Health and Poverty BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, Bangladesh.

The speakers at the session also said that education and knowledge-sharing are vital components of public health integration. There is a call for collaboration in research, universities, and education curricula within South Asian countries. Acknowledging the disparities among the SAARC countries in child mortality rates, the importance of institutional capacity and the role of global organisations in addressing health challenges were emphasised.

The discussion underscored the need for political commitment, learning from successful national health insurance schemes, and developing a regional cooperation framework with horizontal and vertical integration. Overcoming funding and human resource shortages, sharing technology, and fostering political commitment are essential for achieving regional collaboration and ensuring quality healthcare in South Asia.

Recommendations

- The universal healthcare system should start at the country level, and regional cooperation is crucial in terms of achieving meaningful regional integration in the healthcare system.
- South Asia can pull resources for research and development in terms of medicine, vaccine development, and the procurement process.
- Detecting common areas shared by all South Asian countries is the first step in regional collaboration.
- An emergency support system should be developed across the region to build capacity.
- Coordinating healthcare policy while considering other countries’ challenges in order to effectively fight against cross-border healthcare problems.

3.3.9 Parallel Session C3: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Balancing work and personal life pose a significant challenge for women, especially who often bear an unfair share of family responsibilities as sole caregivers. This imbalance underscores the need for a shift in societal mindsets to achieve gender equality. Identifying and revising discriminatory laws is also crucial for ensuring gender parity.

Women entrepreneurs in South Asia face major hurdles related to access to information and finance. The need for substantial support in terms of training and financing is evident, with a crucial role for the private sector in addressing these challenges.

The high incidence of female student dropouts in tertiary education across South Asia is primarily attributed to the lack of a safe environment. Ensuring safety in public places is essential to encourage higher female participation in education and the workforce.

To address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, there is a need for comprehensive support systems, including training and financial assistance. The private sector can play a pivotal role in providing the necessary resources and mentorship to empower women in business.

Ensuring the safety of women in public places is paramount for reducing female student dropouts. Implementing measures to create safe educational environments will contribute to higher retention rates and increased female participation in tertiary education.

Addressing the challenge of balancing work and personal life requires a societal shift in mindset. Encouraging equal sharing of family responsibilities and promoting policies that support work-life balance are essential. Additionally, revising discriminatory laws is crucial to creating an environment that fosters gender equality and supports women in their dual roles as caregivers and professionals.



These are some of the insights that emerged at the parallel session C3 titled ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’ held on 5 November 2023.☒

The Chair of the session, *Dr Beena Pandey*, Assistant Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India, suggested, ‘Providing education to children in local languages may help to increase female enrollment in schools’.

‘Businesses can come forward to fill the gap in government and civil society initiatives to address gender inequality’, recommended *Ms Huma Fakhar*, Founder and Chairperson, MAP Capital Holdings, Pakistan.

Barrister Rashna Imam, Managing Partner, Akhtar Imam & Associates, cautioned, ‘If we cannot ensure safety for women in public spaces, we will fail to increase female participation in education and the labour force’.

‘Women entrepreneurs require capacity building through training, skill development programmes, and participation in networking and outreach activities’, highlighted *Ms Neeru Rayamajhi*, Immediate Past President, Federation of Women Entrepreneurs’ Associations, Nepal.

Dr Faria Sultana, Head of the Department, Department of Economics, American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB), emphasised, ‘Changing mindsets is crucial for achieving gender equality in society. We need to raise girls in a way that empowers them to believe in themselves’.

The Programme Coordinator of SAWTEE, *Ms Dikshya Singh*, highlighted, ‘Balancing work and personal life is a major challenge for women, especially as they are viewed as the sole caregivers in society’.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, also attended the session and underscored, ‘Household allocative behaviour is very gender discriminative in nature. Parents in poverty choose not to spend on the girl child if there is shortage of finances’.

Recommendations

- Access to information and access to finance are the major challenges for women entrepreneurs. They need a lot of support in terms of training and financing, where the private sector can play a great role.
- There is a high incidence of dropouts of female students in tertiary education across South Asia due to lack of safe environment. Thus, it is essential to ensure safety for women in public place. Without this, we will fail to ensure higher female participation in education and workplace.
- Balancing work and personal life are a major challenge for women. As they are the sole caregivers, they have an unfair share of family responsibility. Changing mindsets is crucial in terms of ensuring gender equality in society. Need to raise the girls in a way that they believe in themselves. It is high time the discriminatory laws are identified and revised to ensure gender parity.

3.3.10 Closing Session

SAES XIV concluded underscoring the significance of regional integration to foster the development of bilateral trade and tap into an extensive market potential. The discussions of the conference revolved around advancing South Asian Regional Partnership and Cooperation amidst the evolving dynamics and challenges in both national and international spheres. The closing session was held on 5 November 2023, at Sheraton Dhaka.

During the concluding session of the two-day summit, speakers reiterated the importance of integrating socio-economic advancements, tax and customs policies, cultural exchanges, and fostering trade opportunities through cooperation rather than competition in cross-border trade for the progress of South Asian nations.

‘The central problem is that our focus remains primarily on the future, while what we truly need to comprehend is why progress in the realm of South Asian cooperation remains limited’, remarked *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Founding Chairman, CPD.

Dr Fahmida Khatun, Executive Director, CPD, moderated the session and thanked the co-organisers and the speakers at the conference.

‘It is important to revisit and assess the GEP report in view of the changed global context’, recommended *Dr Paras Kharel*, Executive Director, SAWTEE, Nepal.

Mr Florian Höllen, Head of Cooperation, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, opined, ‘One essential step to ensure the functionality of regional institutions is to establish a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, clarifying who is responsible for what’.



‘One of the priority areas in which SAARC has not yet ventured, but has the potential for collaborative efforts, is the banking sector across these member countries’, highlighted *Professor Sachin Chaturvedi*, Director General, RIS, India.

‘The fact that 40 per cent of the population, especially women and those in rural areas, are digitally excluded presents a significant opportunity for a technological revolution that could be ignited through regional or cross-border collaboration’, proposed *Mr Stefan Liller*, Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladesh.

Ms Irosha Cooray, Director, Education Security & Culture, SAARC, remarked, ‘Establishment of SAARC signifies the clear vision and wisdom of leaders of South Asia region even decades back’.

Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Research Director, CPD, presented a summary of the conference and said, ‘The countries in the South Asian Region need to move forward with regional partnership and cooperation despite having challenges in the national and international arena’.

The conference was attended by high level policymakers, academics, experts, business leaders, development practitioners, development partners and media personalities of SAARC countries and beyond. SAES XIV saw an overwhelming number of attendees, with 597 participants from both Bangladesh and countries across the South Asian region.

Fourteenth
South Asia
Economic Summit

Annexure 1

**Resource
Person List**

Bangladesh

Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP

Hon'ble Speaker
Bangladesh Parliament

Mr M. A. Mannan, MP

Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Planning
Government of Bangladesh

Dr M Asaduzzaman

Former Research Director
Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
(BIDS), Bangladesh

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya

Distinguished Fellow
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha

Professor, Department of Economics, University
of Dhaka and
Research Director, South Asian Network on
Economic Modeling (SANEM), Bangladesh

Dr Syed Abdul Hamid

Professor, Institute of Health Economics
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Professor Md Shahidul Haque

Professor, South Asian Institute of Policy and
Governance (SIPG), Bangladesh and
Former Foreign Secretary

Brig. Gen. (Retd.) Dr Sakhawat Hussain

Former Election Commissioner, Bangladesh

Dr Zahid Hussain

Former Lead Economist
The World Bank, Bangladesh

Professor Badrul Imam

Former Chairman, Petrobangla and
Honorary Professor, Department of Geology
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Barrister Rashna Imam

Managing Partner
Akhtar Imam & Associates, Bangladesh

Professor Rounaq Jahan

Distinguished Fellow
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Dr Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Mr Shams Mahmud

Former President, Dhaka Chamber of
Commerce & Industry (DCCI) and
Honorary Consul, Federal Democratic Republic
of Ethiopia

Dr Ahsan Habib Mansur

Executive Director
Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI),
Bangladesh

Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem

Research Director
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Dr Amena Mohsin

Professor, Department of International
Relations
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr A Atiq Rahman

Executive Director
Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies
(BCAS), Bangladesh

Professor Mustafizur Rahman

Distinguished Fellow
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman

Chairperson, BRAC
Executive Chairman, Power and Participation
Research Centre (PPRC), Bangladesh and
Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government

Dr Md. Habibur Rahman

Chief Economist
Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh

Dr Selim Raihan

Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka
and Executive Director, South Asian Network
on Economic Modeling (SANEM), Bangladesh

Professor Imran Rahman

Vice Chancellor
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB),
Bangladesh

Ms Sabina F Rashid, PhD

Professor, Mushtaque Chowdhury Chair in
Health and Poverty
BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health
BRAC University, Bangladesh

Ambassador Farooq Sobhan

Distinguished Fellow and Board Member
Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and
Former Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh

Professor Rehman Sobhan

Founding Chair
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh

Dr M Tamim

Professor, Department of Petroleum and
Mineral Resources Engineering
Bangladesh University of Engineering and
Technology (BUET), Bangladesh

Dr Faria Sultana

Head of the Department, Department of
Economics
American International University-Bangladesh
(AIUB), Bangladesh

Mr Md. Jashim Uddin

President, SAARC Chamber of Commerce &
Industry and
Former President, Federation of Bangladesh
Chambers of Commerce & Industries (FBCCI),
Bangladesh

India**Dr N. R. Bhanumurthy**

Vice-Chancellor
Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics (BASE)
University, India

Mr Raghav Chakravarthy

Senior Research Associate
JustJobs Network, India

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi

Director General
Research and Information System for
Developing Countries (RIS), India

Dr Priyadarshi Dash

Associate Professor
Research and Information Centre for
Developing Countries (RIS), India

Dr Prabir De

Professor
Research and Information System for
Developing Countries (RIS), India

Dr Praveen Jha

Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and
Planning, School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), India

Dr Nagesh Kumar

Director and Chief Executive
Institute for Studies in Industrial Development
(ISID), India

Dr Beena Pandey

Assistant Professor
Research and Information System for
Developing Countries (RIS), India

Dr Sabyasachi Saha

Associate Professor
Research and Information System for
Developing Countries (RIS), India

Dr Shekhar Shah

Vice Chairman
Academic Advisory Council, Indian School of
Public Policy (ISPP), India

Dr Ch Priyoranjan Singh

Professor
Manipur University, Imphal, India

Nepal**Mr Madhu Raman Acharya**

Former Foreign Secretary
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Ambassador Durga Bhattarai
Former Foreign Secretary
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Mr Kshitiz Dahal
Senior Research Officer
South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and
Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal

Dr Biswash Gauchan
Executive Director
Institute for Integrated Development Studies
(IIDS), Nepal

Dr Paras Kharel
Executive Director
South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and
Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal

Dr Yuba Raj Khatiwada
Former Finance Minister and
Former Governor, Nepal Rastra Bank, Nepal

Dr Posh Raj Pandey
Senior Economic Advisor
Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal,
Nepal

Professor Dr Govind Raj Pokharel
Former Vice-Chair, National Planning
Commission
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Ms Neeru Rayamajhi
Immediate Past President
Federation of Women Entrepreneurs'
Associations, Nepal

Dr Shankar Shrestha
Executive Director
Nepal Development Research Institute (NDRI),
Nepal

Ms Dikshya Singh
Programme Coordinator
South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and
Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal

Dr Rudra Suwal
Lead/Coordinator, Economic,
Development Programme
Nepal Development Research Institute,
(NDRI), Nepal

Dr Swarnim Wagle
Member
Federal Parliament of Nepal

Pakistan

Ms Huma Fakhar
Founder and Chairperson
MAP Capital Holdings, Pakistan

Dr Ishrat Husain
Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan
Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on
Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Pakistan

Dr Syed Kaleem Imam
Former Federal Secretary
Government of Pakistan

Mr Abdul Ghufuran Memon
Federal Secretary, Ministry of Maritime Affairs
Government of Pakistan

Engineer Abdul Jabbar Memon
Senior Vice President
Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce
& Industry, Pakistan

Professor Dr Babar Shahbaz
Professor and Director, Institute of Agricultural
Extension, Education and Rural Development
University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan

Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri
Executive Director
Sustainable Development Policy Institute
(SDPI), Pakistan

Sri Lanka

Mr Buwaneka Perera
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/
Secretary General,
The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, Sri
Lanka

Dr Ganga Tilakaratna

Research Fellow and Head of Poverty and Social Welfare
Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka

Dr Dushni Weerakoon

Executive Director
Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka

Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe

Governor
Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Afghanistan**Mr Alias Wardak**

Independent Regional Power
Integration Expert, Afghanistan

Bhutan**Mr Chewang Rinzin**

Director, (Dy. Chamberlain to His Majesty The King)
Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies, Bhutan

Mr Rinzin Wangchuk

JAB Member
Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB), Bhutan

Others**Professor Sanjib Baruah**

Andy Matsui Distinguished Professor of the Humanities
Asian University for Women, Bangladesh

Mr Hartmut Behrend

Project Manager
Project for support of the Climate and Development Partnership
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Bangladesh

Ms Irosha Cooray

Director, Education Security and Culture
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Mr Mbuso Gwafila

Senior Energy Specialist
The World Bank

Mr Florian Höllen

Head of Cooperation
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
Bangladesh

Mr Richard Kaniewski

Deputy Country Director
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung India Office, India

Ms Mandakini Kaul

Regional Coordinator
South Asia Regional Integration and Engagement
The World Bank

Mr Felix Kolbitz

Resident Representative
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Bangladesh

Mr Stefan Liller

Resident Representative
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladesh

Mr Md. Anisur Rahman

Senior Urban Planner (Consultant)
CRISC Project, GIZ Bangladesh

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Annexure 2

**Programme
Schedules**

DAY 1: SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2023

INAUGURAL

9:30 am – 11:30 am

Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka

9:00 am – 9:30 am	Registration and Reception
9:30 am – 9:35 am	National Anthem
9:35 am – 9:45 am	<i>Welcome Address</i>
	Dr Fahmida Khatun Executive Director Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh
9:45 am – 10:05 am	<i>Brief Remarks by Co-organisers</i>
	Dr Dushni Weerakoon Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka Dr Paras Kharel Executive Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan Professor Sachin Chaturvedi Director General, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India
10:05 am – 10:35 am	<i>Remarks by Distinguished Speakers</i>
	Dr Yuba Raj Khatiwada Former Finance Minister and Former Governor Nepal Rastra Bank, Nepal Dr Ishrat Husain Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Pakistan Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe Governor Central Bank of Sri Lanka

10:35 am – 10:50 am	<i>Address by the Special Guest</i>
	Mr M. A. Mannan, MP Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Planning Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh
10:50 am – 11:10 am	<i>Address by the Chief Guest</i>
	Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP Hon'ble Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament, Bangladesh
11:10 am – 11:30 am	<i>Closing Remarks by the Chair</i>
	Professor Rehman Sobhan Founding Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh
11:30 am – 12:00 pm	Refreshments

DAY 1: SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2023

PLENARY SESSION: 1

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

Plenary 1 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka	State of Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Revisiting Group of Eminent Persons' (GEP) Report, New Context, Challenges, and Opportunities
	<i>Chair</i> Professor Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh <i>Panellists</i> Ms Mandakini Kaul (Online) Regional Coordinator South Asia Regional Integration and Engagement The World Bank Ambassador Farooq Sobhan Distinguished Fellow and Board Member Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and Former Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh Dr Nagesh Kumar Director and Chief Executive Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), India Ms Irosha Cooray Director, Education Security and Culture South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

	<p>Mr Abdul Ghufuran Memon Federal Secretary, Ministry of Maritime Affairs Government of Pakistan, Pakistan</p> <p>Dr Posh Raj Pandey Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal, Nepal</p>
1:30 pm – 2:30 pm	Lunch

DAY 1: SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2023

PARALLEL SESSIONS: GROUP A

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Parallel Session A1	Parallel Session A2	Parallel Session A3
Venue: Annex 1, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Annex 2, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Nawab, Sheraton Dhaka
Multi-modal Transport (Cross-border Logistics)	Macroeconomic Cooperation and the Possibility of a Common Currency	Towards an Integrated Energy Grid
<i>Chair</i>	<i>Chair</i>	<i>Chair</i>
<p>Dr Dushni Weerakoon Executive Director Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka</p>	<p>Professor Sachin Chaturvedi Director General Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India</p>	<p>Dr M Tamim Professor, Department of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh</p>
<i>Panellists</i>	<i>Panellists</i>	<i>Panellists</i>
<p>Professor Dr Govind Raj Pokharel Former Vice-Chair National Planning Commission, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Nepal</p> <p>Dr Selim Raihan Professor of Economics University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM, Bangladesh</p> <p>Mr Abdul Ghufuran Memon Federal Secretary Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Government of Pakistan Pakistan</p>	<p>Dr Zahid Hussain Former Lead Economist The World Bank, Bangladesh</p> <p>Dr Posh Raj Pandey Senior Economic Advisor Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal, Nepal</p> <p>Dr Md. Habibur Rahman Chief Economist Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh</p> <p>Dr Priyadarshi Dash Associate Professor Research and Information Centre for Developing Countries (RIS), India</p>	<p>Dr Shankar Shrestha Executive Director Nepal Development Research Institute (NDRI), Nepal</p> <p>Mr Richard Kaniewski Deputy Country Director Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) India Office, India</p> <p>Mr Alias Wardak Independent Regional Power Integration Expert, Afghanistan</p> <p>Mr Hartmut Behrend Project Manager Project for support of the Climate and Development Partnership Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Bangladesh</p>

Parallel Session A1	Parallel Session A1	Parallel Session A1
<p>Mr Chewang Rinzin Director (Dy. Chamberlain to His Majesty The King), Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies, Bhutan</p> <p>Dr Prabir De Professor Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India</p>	<p>Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri Executive Director Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan</p> <p>Dr Ahsan Habib Mansur Executive Director Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), Bangladesh</p>	<p>Professor Badrul Imam Honorary Professor Department of Geology, University of Dhaka Bangladesh</p> <p>Mr Mbuso Gwafila Senior Energy Specialist The World Bank</p>
Open Discussion	Open Discussion	Open Discussion
Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair
4:00 pm – 4:30 pm	Refreshments	

DAY 1: SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2023

PLENARY SESSION: 2

4:30 pm - 6:00 pm

<p>Plenary 2 4:30 pm – 6:00 pm Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka</p>	<p>Identifying New Opportunities and New Modalities for Fostering Regional Cooperation in South Asia</p>
	<p><i>Chair</i></p> <p>Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya Distinguished Fellow Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Guest of Honour</i></p> <p>Mr Md. Jashim Uddin President SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Panellists</i></p> <p>Dr P. Nandalal Weerasinghe Governor Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka</p> <p>Dr Shekhar Shah Vice Chairman Academic Advisory Council, Indian School of Public Policy (ISPP), India</p> <p>Dr Ishrat Husain Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan Former Advisor to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Pakistan</p>

	<p>Ambassador Durga Bhattarai Former Foreign Secretary Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal</p>
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DAY 2: SUNDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2023

9:00 am - 9:30 am	Registration and Reception
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PLENARY SESSION: 3

9:30 am - 11:00 am

<p>Plenary 3 9:30 am – 11:00 am Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton</p>	<p>Geo-strategic Factors Underpinning Contemporary Trends in South Asian Cooperation</p>
	<p><i>Chair</i></p> <p>Professor Rounaq Jahan Distinguished Fellow Centre for Policy Dialouge (CPD), Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Panellists</i></p> <p>Dr Swarnim Wagle Member Federal Parliament of Nepal, Nepal</p> <p>Professor Md Shahidul Haque Professor, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) and Former Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh</p> <p>Dr Syed Kaleem Imam Former Federal Secretary Government of Pakistan, Pakistan</p> <p>Dr Amena Mohsin Professor, Department of International Relations University of Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Dr Praveen Jha Professor Centre for Economic Studies and Planning School of Social Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), India</p> <p>Brig. Gen. (Retd.) Dr Sakhawat Hussain Former Election Commissioner Bangladesh</p>
11:00 am – 11:30 am	Refreshments

DAY 2: SUNDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2023

PARALLEL SESSIONS: GROUP B

11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Parallel Session B1	Parallel Session B2	Parallel Session B3
Venue: Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Annex 1, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Nawab, Sheraton Dhaka
Climate Change and Resilience	Cross-border Labour Market Management	Value chains and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
<i>Chair</i>	<i>Chair</i>	<i>Chair</i>
<p>Dr M Asaduzzaman Former Research Director Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Bangladesh</p>	<p>Mr Madhu Raman Acharya Former Foreign Secretary Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal</p>	<p>Dr N. R. Bhanumurthy Vice-Chancellor Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics (BASE) University, India</p>
<i>Special Guest</i>	<i>Panellists</i>	<i>Panellists</i>
<p>Mr Florian Höllen Head of Cooperation Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany</p>	<p>Ms Dikshya Singh Programme Coordinator South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal</p>	<p>Dr Priyadarshi Dash Associate Professor Research and Information Centre for Developing Countries (RIS), India</p>
<i>Panellists</i>		
<p>Mr Md. Anisur Rahman Senior Urban Planner (Consultant) CRISC Project, GIZ Bangladesh</p>	<p>Mr Raghav Chakravarthy Senior Research Associate JustJobs Network, India</p>	<p>Mr Shams Mahmud Former President Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) Honorary Consul, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia</p>
<p>Dr Sabyasachi Saha Associate Professor Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India</p>	<p>Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Director, SANEM, Bangladesh</p>	<p>Engineer Abdul Jabbar Memon Vice President, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry, Pakistan</p>
<p>Mr Kshitiz Dahal Senior Research Officer South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal</p>	<p>Dr Syed Kaleem Imam Former Federal Secretary Government of Pakistan, Pakistan</p>	<p>Dr Biswash Gauchan Executive Director Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal</p>
<p>Dr A Atiq Rahman Executive Director Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), Bangladesh</p>	<p>Dr Praveen Jha Professor Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), India</p>	<p>Ms Huma Fakhar Founder and Chairperson MAP Capital Holdings, Pakistan</p>
<p>Professor Dr Babar Shahbaz Professor and Director Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education and Rural Development University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan</p>		<p>Dr Ch Priyoranjan Singh Professor Manipur University, Imphal, India</p>
<p>Mr Buwaneka Perera Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/ Secretary General, The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, Sri Lanka</p>		
Open Discussion	Open Discussion	Open Discussion
Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Lunch	

DAY 2: SUNDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2023

PARALLEL SESSIONS: GROUP C

2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Parallel Session C1	Parallel Session C2	Parallel Session C3
Venue: Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Annex 1, Sheraton Dhaka	Venue: Nawab, Sheraton Dhaka
Role of Knowledge Actors in Advancing a New Political Settlement in South Asia	Cooperation in Public Health	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
<i>Chair</i> Dr Swarnim Wagle Member Federal Parliament, Nepal <i>Panellists</i> Professor Sanjib Baruah Andy Matsui Distinguished Professor of the Humanities, Asian University for Women, Bangladesh Professor Imran Rahman Vice Chancellor University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), Bangladesh Mr Felix Kolbitz Resident Representative Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Bangladesh Mr Rinzin Wangchuk JAB Member Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB), Bhutan Professor Dr Babar Shahbaz Professor and Director Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education and Rural Development, University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan Dr Sabyasachi Saha Associate Professor Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India	<i>Chair</i> Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman Chairperson, BRAC Executive Chairman, Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government, Bangladesh <i>Panellists</i> Dr Ganga Tilakaratna Research Fellow and Head of Poverty and Social Welfare Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka Dr Syed Abdul Hamid Professor Institute of Health Economics University of Dhaka, Bangladesh Dr Prabir De Professor Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India Ms Sabina F Rashid, PhD Professor Mushtaque Chowdhury Chair in Health and Poverty, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, Bangladesh Dr Rudra Suwal Lead/Coordinator, Economic Development Programme Nepal Development Research Institute (NDRI), Nepal	<i>Chair</i> Dr Beena Pandey Assistant Professor Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India <i>Panellists</i> Ms Dikshya Singh Programme Coordinator South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal Dr Faria Sultana Head of the Department Department of Economics. American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB), Bangladesh Ms Neeru Rayamajhi Immediate Past President Federation of Women Entrepreneurs' Associations, Nepal Barrister Rashna Imam Managing Partner Akhtar Imam & Associates, Bangladesh Ms Huma Fakhar Founder and Chairperson MAP Capital Holdings, Pakistan
Open Discussion	Open Discussion	Open Discussion
Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair	Summing up by the Chair

DAY 2: SUNDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2023

CLOSING SESSION

4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka

4:00 pm – 4:10 pm	<i>Remarks by the Moderator</i>
	Dr Fahmida Khatun Executive Director Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh
4:10 pm – 4:25 pm	<i>Presentation of the Conference Summary</i>
	Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem Research Director Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Bangladesh
4:25 pm – 4:40 pm	<i>Remarks by Distinguished Speakers</i>
	Professor Sachin Chaturvedi Director General Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) India
	Dr Paras Kharel Executive Director South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) Nepal
4:40 pm – 5:05 pm	<i>Guest of Honour</i>
	Ms Irosha Cooray Director, Education Security and Culture South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
	Mr Florian Höllen Head of Cooperation Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
	Mr Stefan Liller Resident Representative United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladesh
5:05 pm – 5:20 pm	<i>Closing Remarks by the Chair</i>
	Professor Rehman Sobhan Founding Chairman Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh
5:20 pm – 5:30 pm	<i>Vote of Thanks by the Moderator</i>
5:30 pm	Refreshments

Fourteenth
South Asia
Economic Summit

Annexure 3

**Media
Coverage**

For the media coverage, please follow the links below:

Day 1 (4 November, 2023)

English

1. The Daily Star 1- <https://tinyurl.com/22rdupcz>
2. The Daily Star 2- <https://tinyurl.com/58fy9eed>
3. The Daily Star 3- <https://tinyurl.com/p868tfrac>
4. The Daily Star 4- <https://tinyurl.com/4xpcazmx>
5. The Business Standard 1- <https://tinyurl.com/y6pz3pvr>
6. The Business Standard 2- <https://tinyurl.com/2e4pv452>
7. The Business Standard 3- <https://tinyurl.com/39hzw9mk>
8. The Business Standard 4- <https://tinyurl.com/brp5yxf3>
9. The Business Standard 5- <https://tinyurl.com/wtzc2j9a>
10. The Financial Express 1- <https://tinyurl.com/4b5ns56f>
11. The Financial Express 2- <https://tinyurl.com/3fsf524m>
12. The Financial Express 3- <https://tinyurl.com/ypxf7dsm>
13. The Financial Express 4- <https://tinyurl.com/489sa24e>
14. Dhaka Tribune- <https://tinyurl.com/2s53afn>
15. Daily Sun 1- <https://tinyurl.com/2dy76ytj>
16. Daily Sun 2- <https://tinyurl.com/yc2bbnve>
17. UNB 1- <https://tinyurl.com/m2sfkzj>
18. UNB 2- <https://tinyurl.com/5fyejt2d>
19. Business Post- <https://tinyurl.com/2aedy274>
20. New Age- <https://tinyurl.com/34kat3xw>
21. Bangladesh Post 1- <https://tinyurl.com/52t65prv>
22. Bangladesh Post 2- <https://tinyurl.com/ykkuvrrt>
23. Bangladesh Post 3- <https://tinyurl.com/5y79ewpt>
24. Asian Age- <https://tinyurl.com/3ur87p26>
25. BSS News- <https://tinyurl.com/nhk6xmbr>

Bangla

1. Prothom Alo 1- <https://tinyurl.com/5yenkavn>
2. Prothom Alo 2- <https://tinyurl.com/y5yua7ej>
3. Prothom Alo 3- <https://tinyurl.com/377a3376>
4. Bonik Barta 1- <https://tinyurl.com/59rwm6h>
5. Bonik Barta 2- <https://tinyurl.com/3cn6xse2>
6. Ajker Patrika- <https://tinyurl.com/4dknktm>
7. Amader Orthoneeti 2- <https://tinyurl.com/2hjr5pi>
8. Jugantor- <https://tinyurl.com/37bd3fhn>
9. Bangladesh Protidin- <https://tinyurl.com/yrmzwd9y>
10. Kaler Kantho- <https://tinyurl.com/3enbpcjr>
11. Bhorer Kagoj- <https://tinyurl.com/yc5ttzay>

12. Protidiner Sangbad- <https://tinyurl.com/38pzvbw2>
13. Sangbad- <https://tinyurl.com/3sf8kesc>
14. Sharebiz- <https://tinyurl.com/4hpk6tp>
15. Sangram- <https://tinyurl.com/33wetdxk>
16. Alokito Bangladesh 1- <https://tinyurl.com/3crbsthn>
17. Alokito Bangladesh 2- <https://tinyurl.com/36jbuuff>
18. Sara Bangla- <https://tinyurl.com/mrywfy8>
19. Orthosongbad- <https://tinyurl.com/y8ktx5j>
20. Protidiner Bangladesh 2- <https://tinyurl.com/3y3j6jn5>

Online

1. The Daily Star (Bangla)- <https://tinyurl.com/2s38zwn3>
2. Gramer Kagoj 1- <https://tinyurl.com/2h6zux9r>
3. Gramer Kagoj 2- <https://tinyurl.com/5n6hnd39>
4. Bangi News 1- <https://tinyurl.com/4m3rksnf>
5. Bangi News 2- <https://tinyurl.com/dyefsmu7>
6. Bangi News 3- <https://tinyurl.com/2c44dukC>
7. Bangla Insider- <https://tinyurl.com/4z2wchj9>
8. Dhaka Post- <https://tinyurl.com/2dssrf3b>
9. Bd News 24 1- <https://tinyurl.com/yckspn3p>
10. Bd News 24 2- <https://tinyurl.com/y76z2ct8>
11. Prothom News- <https://tinyurl.com/mt48fnjn>
12. Kaler Alo- <https://tinyurl.com/8268jxfe>
13. News 2 Narayanganj- <https://tinyurl.com/ez2fvzu6>
14. Mymensingher Alo- <https://tinyurl.com/58uwbapd>
15. Vat Bondhu- <https://tinyurl.com/444b8zk6>

Day 2 (5 November, 2023)

English

1. The Daily Star 1- <https://tinyurl.com/yc29uxxx>
2. The Daily Star 2- <https://tinyurl.com/mr4cn4bz>
3. The Daily Star 3- <https://tinyurl.com/3jb6xt3e>
4. The Financial Express- <https://tinyurl.com/2xbu5msu>
5. The Business Standard- <https://tinyurl.com/2pac8mrz>
6. The Business Post- <https://tinyurl.com/ef8epj3t>
7. Bangladesh Post- <https://tinyurl.com/2mutvnyj>
8. Observer BD- <https://tinyurl.com/24fcnsd6>
9. Dhaka Tribune- <https://tinyurl.com/7w2hynvp>
10. UNB- <https://tinyurl.com/mv8p2snh>
11. Daily Sun- <https://tinyurl.com/mvaubaux>

Bangla

1. Kaler Kantho- <https://tinyurl.com/5n6kkbrz>
2. Jugantor- <https://tinyurl.com/yc7c4f4v>
3. Bonik Barta - <https://tinyurl.com/2s3vt28u>
4. Kaler Kantho 1- <https://tinyurl.com/3vprkt9b>
5. Kalbela- <https://tinyurl.com/schehrak>
6. Samakal 1- <https://tinyurl.com/288kjrr5>
7. Ajker Patrika- <https://tinyurl.com/5akrjm32>
8. Bangladesh Pratidin- <https://tinyurl.com/y6b8z4kz>

Online

1. Bonik Barta (English)- <https://tinyurl.com/26htx8ak>
2. Share Business 24- <https://tinyurl.com/4kj92sx9>
3. Donet BD- <https://tinyurl.com/5n8vmae4>
4. US Bangla 24- <https://tinyurl.com/35793v9n>
5. Barta 24 1 - <https://tinyurl.com/3p5u9e8b>
6. Barta 24 2 - <https://tinyurl.com/3snkvncz>

For more media coverage, visit the following link: <https://saes14.cpd.org.bd/>

Fourteenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES XIV)

The Fourteenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES XIV) was organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 4-5 November 2023, in continuation of the preceding thirteen SAES events hosted by rotation of the co-organisers. The overarching theme of the SAES XIV was 'Reframing South Asian Regional Cooperation in the New Context: National and Global Dimensions'. Within this broad theme, the Summit focused on specific issues of regional cooperation and development in South Asia.

Objective of SAES is to advance the cause of regional integration in South Asia through discussions and deliberations by stakeholders on key issues of interest and concern to countries and people of the region. The vision is a gradual evolution of SAES into a South Asian Davos. SAES events are conceived as opportunities to bring together key stakeholders to contribute to South Asian cooperation through exchange of evidence-based knowledge and innovative ideas.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) hosted the SAES XIV jointly with 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.

The SAES XIV in Dhaka was participated by more than sixty participants including ministers, high-level policymakers, leading experts and academics, trade and industry leaders, representatives of civil society and grassroots groups, and development partners from the region and beyond.

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