Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
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Panel Discussion
on
THE 16TH SAARC SUMMIT
Organized by BIISS, Dhaka, Wednesday, April 07, 2010

Welcome Address of
Major General Golam Mohammad, nwc, psc
Director-General, BIISS

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.

Mr Chairman;

Hon'ble Chief Guest, **Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP**, Hon'ble State Minister for Environment and Forest, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh;

Excellencies, Learned Panellists, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning.

It is, indeed, an immense pleasure and a great opportunity for me to welcome you all to the Panel Discussion on **"THE 16TH SAARC SUMMIT"** organized by BIISS. As you know the Summit will be held in Bhutan from 28 to 29 April this year. We are grateful to the Hon'ble Chief Guest, **Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP**, Hon'ble State Minister for Environment and Forest, for gracing the occasion despite his busy schedule.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the international system, all nation-states are interdependent. In this era of globalization, this interdependence has reached such a level that no nation-state can survive in isolation. Reality is that, as nation-states, we all need to grow together. With this in view, about a quarter century ago, Bangladesh conceived and mooted the idea of SAARC. It was founded on the visionary approach that the countries of this region together can greatly help promote the quality of life and wellbeing of the people of this region. From a structure of antagonism that existed in the region, SAARC has been working forward and progressing steadily.

Today, SAARC is a viable forum. It has taken an institutional shape. It has a workable framework. But its machinations and dimensions do not yet have adequate monitoring, supervision and some level of implementation or enforcement mechanism. It is an area which is often identified as one of the core problems. Yet, during the last 25 years, the SAARC forum has made commendable progress, accomplishing tangible results on many important issues. Many conventions, agreements, protocols, MOUs, etc have been signed and ratified. One of the SAARC's biggest achievements is the signing and ratification of SAFTA by all members. Expansion of SAARC in terms of new member state (eg Afghanistan), and giving Observer Status to Australia, China, Japan, Mauritius, Korea, the European Union and the USA, are new positive dimensions.

Distinguished Participants,

Climate change will be the key agenda of the 16th SAARC Summit. Deepening and operationalizing SAFTA may open up a window of opportunity for meaningful regional economic cooperation — the primary goal of SAARC. SAARC has continued to face a series of transnational cross-border issues such as terrorism, organized crimes, trafficking of human beings, drugs and small arms, etc. All these have negatively impacted upon the region's security and people's wellbeing. To face these transnational issues squarely, SAARC needs to formulate a counter-strategy for terrorism. Additional counter-strategies are also necessary to combat other transnational and trans-boundary issues.

Against these settings, BIISS has organized today's Panel Discussion on **The 16th SAARC Summit**.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The main objectives of today's Panel Discussion are:

- To examine and assess the institutional and programmatic dimensions of SAARC, focusing the daunting challenges it faces locally, regionally and internationally and forecasting its likely direction and shape in the coming years;
- To assess the role of non-governmental actors such as civil society organizations (CSOs), business communities, media, academics, etc in the SAARC process, offering suggested measures to strengthen their role as watch-dogs and whistle-blowers;

- To look at energy and food security issues vis-à-vis Bangladesh's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from the SAARC perspective, examining challenges and opportunities;
- To give a brief overview of climate change taking into cognizance the SAARC context and focusing on SAARC's strategies and action plans to address the consequences of climate change in the region;
- To explore the opportunities for deepening and operationlizing SAFTA among SAARC nations so as to develop regional economic cooperation via SAARC connectivity.

Before concluding, let me express my deep sense of gratitude to the Hon'ble State Minister for kindly being with us, the learned Panellists for the presentations that they would be making shortly, and distinguished participants who would be participating in open discussion to enliven the discussion through their valued comments, observations and penetrating questions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I warmly welcome you all once again.

May I now request the Session's Chair to kindly commence the proceedings please.

Thank you.