



Panel Discussion  
On  
**The 16th SAARC Summit**

07 April 2010

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**SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

**1. Introduction**

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a **Panel Discussion** on ‘**The 16th SAARC Summit**’ at the BIISS Auditorium on 07 April 2010. Through the Welcome Address of **Major-General Golam Mohammad, nwc, psc, Director-General of BIISS**, the Panel Discussion was inaugurated. In the Panel Discussion, **Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP, Honourable State Minister for Environment and Forest, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh** was Chief Guest. **Major General Muhammed Firdaus Mian, psc, Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS**, chaired the Panel Discussion.

In the Panel Discussion, six presentations were delivered. The first presentation was on ‘**Institutional and Pragmatic Dimensions of SAARC: An Overview of 25 Years of SAARC**’. **Ambassador (Retd) Q A M A Rahim, Former SAARC Secretary-General** delivered this paper. **Ambassador (Retd) C M Shafi Sami, Former Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS**, delivered the second presentation on ‘**The Role of Non-Governmental Agents/Actors and Interfacing Track-I, Track-II and Track-III Dialogues to Strengthen the Regional Integration Process**’. **Ambassador (Retd) Farooq Sobhan, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Dhaka**, made the third presentation on ‘**SAARC Counter-Strategy to Combat Transnational Cross-Border Issues: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects**’. **Ambassador (Retd) Muhammad Zamir, Former Secretary of the Bangladesh Government**, delivered the fourth presentation on ‘**Issues of Energy, Food Security and MDGs: Challenges and Prospects for SAARC States**’. The fifth presentation on ‘**Climate Change in SAARC Context: What Should Be the SAARC Strategies and Action Plans to Address Effects of Climate Change**’ was delivered by **Dr Ainun Nishat, Senior Adviser, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Asia Region, Dhaka**. And the final presentation was on ‘**Deepening and Operationalising SAFTA in Expanded SAARC: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Future Outlook**’. **Professor M Ali Taslim, Chief**

**Executive Officer, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), Dhaka,** delivered this presentation.

Following the Panellists' presentations, **Open Discussion** was convened by the Session's Chair in which a host of distinguished scholars, members of the academia, SAARC member states' Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Deputy High Commissioners, representatives of multi-disciplinary professional bodies and government agencies and policy makers as well actively participated, raising a set of questions and queries, and giving their valued comments and recommendations.

## **2. Address of Welcome**

In his Welcome Address, **Major General Golam Mohammad, nwc, psc, Director-General of BISS**, asserted that South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been working forward and progressing steadily from a structure of antagonism that existed in the region. But its machinations and dimensions lack an adequate monitoring system, supervision and implementation or enforcement mechanism. Yet, during the last 25 years, the SAARC forum has made progress, accomplishing tangible results on many important issues. One of the SAARC's biggest achievements was the signing and ratification of South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by all members. He stated that deepening and operationalising SAFTA might open up a new window of opportunity for meaningful regional economic cooperation.

He informed the august gathering that climate change would be the key agenda of the 16th SAARC Summit. He then added that the other issues that would figure out prominently would be terrorism, trafficking of human beings, and other international organised crimes, drug peddling, small arms, etc. He reminded the audience that all these have negatively impacted upon the region's security and people's wellbeing. He also stated that SAARC needs adopting a regional approach and formulating a strategy to combat terrorism and to face the transnational and trans-boundary issues. Finally, he mentioned the Panel Discussion's key objectives were:

- To examine and assess the institutional and programmatic dimensions of SAARC, focusing the daunting challenges it faces locally, regionally and internationally and forecasting as to what future direction SAARC will go and what shape SAARC will assume in the coming years of a globalised world;
- To assess the role of non-governmental agents/actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs), business community, media, academics, and religious leaders 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-a-vis Bangladesh's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from the SAARC perspectives, 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 operationalising SAFTA among SAARC nations so as to deepen regional economic cooperation via SAARC connectivity.

### 3. Paper Presentations

**Ambassador (Retd) Q A M A Rahim**, former SAARC Secretary-General, in his presentation on 'Institutional and Pragmatic Dimensions of SAARC: An Overview of 25 Years of SAARC', asserted that following SAARCs' establishment its achievements have been very little. The yardstick to measure SAARC's achievements has also been inappropriate. It has neither been to a large extent successful to accelerate economic growth, social development and cultural progress in the South Asian region, nor has been much effective to promote welfare of the region's common people. For him, regional organisations such as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the European Union (EU) develop with their legal personality, ability to do things and implement things. They make decision to cooperate the member countries of the organisations to the extent that their sovereignty is transformed from national government to the regional organisation. Therefore, decision of the organisations overshadows the decision of their national governments. He opined that SAARC does not have that kind of mechanism. Rather every member country of the organisation guards its sovereignty from individual interest. If common interest cannot be implemented, then nobody takes any accountability. Also, none can challenge any national government.

In this regard, he cited the example of the SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism. Although all member countries have already signed and ratified the Convention, it has not yet been operationalised. The other example, which he cited, was related to the issue of positive and negative lists of tradable and non-tradable goods, respectively. While SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement) deals with the positive lists, SAFTA looks at the negative lists. Since SAFTA's inception, every member country decided to increase volume of trade in the South Asian region on the basis of negative lists (where all items would be traded except the items included in the negative lists). However, there was one certain a country which still trades on the basis of positive lists. In fact, there is no mechanism or authority to question the decision of the country. The country still considers it as its sovereign right. He dubbed SAARC as an eight-wheeled vessel; consequently if one disagrees, others can do nothing for the implementation of a common decision.

He claimed that certain shortcomings within the SAARC Charter were responsible for such anomaly. The Charter did not take into account the existing environment and it was not too pragmatic to address certain restrictions. In

addition, SAARC-Secretariat is not like the Secretariat of ASEAN or the EU-Secretariat. The SAARC Secretariat does not follow the evolutionary process of the ASEAN or the EU-Secretariat and their mode of function. In fact, in the pre-ception of SAARC, the biggest member of the organisation agreed to join the association based on three conditions. These were: i). no contentious bilateral issue would be discussed; ii) all decisions must be unanimous, and iii) there will be no SAARC-Secretariat. But when the SAARC Charter was finalised and it was about to be signed, the issue of SAARC- Secretariat again came into the forefront, and the biggest member put much emphasis on establishing a SAARC-Secretariat. However, during the beginning of SAARC- Secretariat, nothing was mentioned regarding what should the functions of SAARC-Secretariat: whether or not there will be any Secretary-General in the SAARC-Secretariat, what would be the structure of the SAARC- Secretariat, etc. But later on the issues were settled. More important, the functions of SAARC-Secretariat became operative through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the existing SAARC-Secretariat.

The functions of SAARC-Secretariat are to monitor and coordinate the activities of SAARC, and service the SAARC meetings. Coordinating and monitoring—these two functions have been the prime task of the existing two standing committee by the SAARC Charter. For Ambassador (Retd) Rahim, the MOU, related to the functions of SAARC-Secretariat has been violating the SAARC Charter, and, therefore, it is a challenge because some member countries have challenged this. In addition, nothing, related to the servicing of the SAARC meetings, is mentioned. For example, what the Secretary can do and how it will be done, etc. However, certain things have been developed by the SAARC Convention on the basis of decision and institutional memory. The SAARC-Secretariat has prepared some agenda through which SAARC can be advanced. But the Secretariat has not yet prepared any specific agenda that can serve effectively the functions and objectives of the organisation.

Therefore, he stated that functioning of SAARC Secretariat is in a way a function of the persuasive capacity of the Secretary-General. In fact, the MOU and the SAARC Charter do not support the Secretary-General of SAARC Secretary. These problems had to do with the absence of implementing mechanism and mechanism for asking accountability. In this respect, he suggested implementing a few recommendations outlined in the 10<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit. As a first step, GEP (Group of Eminent Persons) recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible. If it is thought that the recommendations, undertaken in the late 1990s, would not be more realistic, a new GEP should be appointed so that they can review the things and recommend additional new things.

**Ambassador (Retd) C M Shafi Sami**, former Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, in his presentation on ‘The Role of Non-Governmental Agents/Actors and Inter-facing Track-I, Track-II and Track-III Dialogues to Strengthen the Regional Integration Process’, argued that the parameters for SAARC set out in the Charter speak of promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia, improving their

quality of lives, accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development. He opined that South Asia has been slow in moving forward the forum of regional cooperation because this is a region of paradoxes. On the one hand, this is a region of enormous distrust and conflicts; on the other, this is a region of immense harmony and amity.

In his presentation, he discussed changing perceptions of security. To him, the concept of security has shifted from a focus on State towards individual, broadening the analysis beyond military dimension in order to reach non-military threats that are being posed to the individual. Even after that, governmental preoccupations or concerns or emphasis is on the contentious issues of inter-state relations or on national boundary-oriented traditional security concept, while non-governmental attitude emphasises on positive aspects of people-to-people relations, or human security transcending boundaries of nation states. In this respect, the paper presenter reminded the initiatives approved in the second SAARC Summit, and other initiatives undertaken in various SAARC Summits to promote people-to-people contact in the region.

While discussing on the ‘importance of non-governmental interactions’, he stated that SAARC member states at government level have always promoted non-governmental interactions as they rightly visualised these to stimulate and provide vital supplement to governmental efforts. Non-governmental civil society initiatives, Track II and Track III diplomacy and international conferences organised in various South Asian countries have sensitised public opinion and have paved the way for the member states to arrive at momentous decisions that governmental machinery in one or other member state was wary of endorsing. From SAPTA to SAFTA, the non-government agents helped the government machinery in some member states to move out of their inhibitions. The non-government agents, and the peoples level seminars and conferences were uniquely responsible to highlight the enormous cost of non-cooperation in South Asia. In addition, people-based movement like INSA—Imagine A New South Asia also played a significant role in promoting concepts of cooperation at grass roots level, highlighting its benefits. In many ways, the GEP exercise was also a product of non-government agents.

The task of outlining a vision of SAARC has, in some form, already been addressed by the group of eminent persons (GEP), which was set up by the 9th Summit at Male in 1997. The GEP exercise was quite incisive, but because of the time-bound mandate, the GEP Report records only when the members could reach an agreement within the one year mandate period, understandably on the economic rather than any other aspect of regional cooperation. The exercise was successful in identifying core achievements as well as shortfalls. The GEP envisioned down the line a graduation to a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) through a progression by stages from a preferential trading arrangement (SAPTA) to a free trade area (SAFTA), to a customs union (SACU), and finally the economic union. In spelling out this goal, the GEP has also set out a time line

coupled with a set of enabling measures required for graduating to the successive stages.

He opined that there is however a strong feeling among the peoples of the region that the governmental approaches have failed to demonstrate the required vision, insight and courage to rise above the stereotyped perceptions of inter-state relations emphasising more on their negative aspects. Additionally, the governmental initiatives have lagged to generate the required speed and were much behind those taken by the peoples of the region as manifested by the sustained efforts in Track II diplomacy by the civil societies to promote understanding and friendship and those by the chambers of commerce to enhance international trade, encouraging intra-regional investment. There have also been commendable initiatives by professional communities such as lawyers and media people to develop friendly professional ties in addition to the efforts made by common citizens to re-establish trans-border personal and familial linkages. As against these initiatives we have not seen matching ventures at the government level.

For an arrangement that aims at promoting the welfare of the peoples of the region, there cannot but be an effective window for integrating people-to-people contact and participation. There cannot be a vision of SAARC thriving alone in the corridors of the foreign officers or the SAARC Secretariat. According of recognised body status to NGO's and civil society and professional organisations with a regional outreach is a useful tool that can promote positive synergies in the region. The civil society and professional expertise that we have throughout the region can be a tremendous resource in promoting regional cooperation. The challenge, therefore, is how regional synergies both governmental and non-governmental can be devised to for all entire South Asia. Ambassador (Retd Shafi Sami opined that SAARC will deliver only to the extent that we are collectively ready to deliver under its folds.

**Ambassador (Retd) Farooq Sobhan**, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Dhaka, delivered a presentation on 'SAARC Counter-Strategy to Combat Transnational Cross-border Issues: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects'. In the presentation, he contented that although SAARC has a Convention to combat transnational cross-border issues, the achievements in this regard have been very little. Therefore, he suggested certain steps that should be taken into consideration.

First, devise a strategy as to how to combat terrorism and trans-border issues. To develop such a strategy, Track-II level is important. Once the strategy is developed, it should be discussed in the Track-I level i.e. at the level of Foreign Ministers and the Heads/Governments of States. Second, looking at the issue of countering terrorism, four subjects are important in terms of common challenges and threats: (a) finding out the ways in tackling the sources of financing terrorism (b) arranging training of senior police officials, security guards and prosecutors

from all SAARC countries to interact and share their knowledge and views (c) building capacity and continuing research work, and (d) moving all wheels of SAARC together to strengthening regional cooperation. Third, increasing interaction between governments and civil societies in addressing the challenges posed by terrorism. He said that government alone would not be able to tackle the issue of terrorism. Therefore, all stakeholders should be involved in the issue.

In fact, there should be an interaction between Track-I and Track-II level to move SAARC ahead. For this to happen, he emphasised on joint research, joint interaction, and involvement of think tanks. He also pointed out that exchange of information, intelligence and mechanisms are important as we are integral part of the international system and we cannot isolate ourselves from international framework. He furthermore advocated that there should be more and more monitoring and evaluating as the issues already discussed in the SAARC platform are not yet materialised effectively.

He personally believes that annual Summit of SAARC should be lesser ceremonial, less speech making and more and more based on monitoring and evaluating SAARC's burning issues. He also mentioned following the procedures of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), how the EU and other regional blocs met several times in a year on a specific issue, how they make decisions, and how they operationalise their decisions.

**Ambassador (Retd) Muhammad Zamir**, Chief Information Commissioner and Former Secretary of the Bangladesh Government, delivered a presentation on 'Issues of Energy, Food Security and MDGs: Challenges and Prospects for SAARC States.' His argument was that through inclusion of Afghanistan, SAARC is now no longer just a South Asian arrangement, rather the border between West Asia and South Asia has disappeared. On the other hand, SAARC, with its institutional framework, has involved some countries and organisation as observers such as the USA, Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Myanmar, and the EU. Therefore, SAARC has recently observed a paradigm shift. Such an expansion of SAARC, according to him, might facilitate development needs and strengthen the capacity of South Asian region in the areas of renewable energy, bio-fuel and hydropower. In fact, with the help of observers, fulfilling the requirements related to the four areas of climate change such as mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, and financial investment can be accomplished.

Within the periphery of SAARC, regional approach and also cooperation are important in case hydropower generation and management. In this context, he highlighted the possibility of setting up of the Saptakoshi dam project in Nepal to create 54 thousand mega watt electricity and water generation for passing on to the lower lying States. He informed that Nepal is very keen in this regard but Indian drive is yet to be taken. On the issue of importing energy, he emphasised on increasing partnership between India and Bangladesh.

He then focused on accessing relatively secure and clean energy. To ensure energy security he stressed on improving infrastructure, distribution system, micro and macro grid process, stable and effective regulatory framework, diversification of energy supply and energy sources, promotion of energy efficiency and savings, promotion of transparency and good governance, and reduction of corruption. Additionally, he emphasised on private sector involvement to further the energy development programme.

On food security, he stated that ensuring food security has been a major challenge in different regions due to increase of bio fuels and natural disasters which are also affecting climate variability. Within South Asia it is noticed that, because of the volatile situation of food and energy security, calorie intake of vast areas of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh goes down from 2200 to something around 2040. Therefore, he suggested that South Asian countries should meet the food security problem by enhancing capacity building, creating food bank and sharing of information on new crops, and diversifying the genetically modified crops. He also informed that Track-II level has already done something in these respects but the 'something' has not been fare enough to ensure food security.

Finally, he spoke on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During his discussion on the issue, he raised two questions: whether MDGs are working in South Asia, and how the goals are affected. Within the eight core goals of MDGs, he gave more emphasis on food and health security. In the area of food security, he mentioned that a lot of land has already been lost due to the sea level rise in the coastal areas and lack of disaster management initiatives in South Asia. Therefore, he suggested SAARC countries recognising the two climate-oriented issues seriously, and undertaking immediate steps within the framework of SAARC so that they can have lesser impact on food security.

On health security, he informed that at present the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) in some countries such as Bangladesh has gone up due to successful family planning programme, whereas in some other countries the use of contraceptive has not yet been satisfactory. On the other hand, gender disparity in primary and secondary education has not yet been to a large extent eliminated. Bangladesh has done well followed by India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in this respect. But others are still far behind the expected outcome. Therefore, he recommended two points to be implemented without delay. One is increasing the use of contraceptive, and the other is eliminating gender disparity. Therefore, SAARC countries should jointly undertake some initiatives:

- (a) Strengthening awareness building measures to increase the use of contraceptives;
- (b) Increasing opportunities of education and employment for girls and female youth respectively;
- (c) Involving more women in productive income generating activities and proving women with child care facilities.

**Dr Ainun Nishat**, Senior Adviser, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Asia Region, Dhaka, made a presentation on ‘Climate Change in SAARC Context: What Should Be the SAARC Strategies and Action Plans to Address Effects of Climate Change’. In the presentation, he first spoke on climate change, climate variability and some impacts of climate change on Bangladesh and also other SAARC countries. He then focused on adaptation, mitigation, and reducing the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). He opined that SAARC countries should pay more attention to mitigation and less to adaptation. He argued that adaptation should be country-driven.

He also spoke on the national action plan undertaken by each SAARC country to tackle the issue of climate change. He opined that national progress in dealing with climate change has not been evenly developed in the SAARC countries. Therefore, he emphasised on integrating national developmental activities for adapting to climate change. He also stressed on increasing regional cooperation in some specific areas such as river basin management, water resource management, etc. He furthermore put emphasis on mutual cooperation in using renewable energies among SAARC countries. In SAARC, five are LDCs and three are non-LDCs. The non-LDCs should undertake some mitigation measures voluntarily which would be subjected to MRV i.e. measurable, reportable and verifiable.

As for global measures, he mentioned that the Western countries are trying to kill the Kyoto Protocol but China and all the LDCs of the G-77 are trying to save the Protocol. There is also debate on UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change) based on five building blocks of Bali Action Plan (BAP). He contended that if the BAP’s Article 1-B (1) and (2) are made legally binding documents under the Ad-hoc Working Group Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA), the Kyoto Protocol might not be necessary. He argued that until then the Kyoto protocol must continue. In these respects, SAARC countries should make their respective positions clear, develop their mutual respects and support each other.

He informed that the Annex-1 countries under the Kyoto Protocol within the first commitment period (which would end in 2012) pledged to cut GHGs emission by 5 per cent. In this respect, SAARC countries together should put continuous pressure on the Annex-1 countries (USA, China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia) so that they are bound to go for the mitigation commitments. He also recommended SAARC countries putting persistent stress on controlling the rise in global temperature, and if possible, to keep it within 1.5 degrees. Then again, in case of international negotiations relating to climate change he informed that the African groups are the most vocal whereas the SAARC group is the weakest one. He opined that SAARC countries must understand their mutual stances, and should collectively attend the international negotiations and make their cases strong. He also opined that negotiations should be held at political level, not at technical level.

In his presentation, Dr Ainun Nishat also spoke on the huge funds promised from the Copenhagen Summit to be disbursed after 2012 not only for mitigation but adaptation purpose also. Therefore, he suggested SAARC countries developing common programmes to handle the funds. They should also demand adequate funds and assure easy access to the funds. Actions of SAARC countries in these respects should be MRV. On technology transfer, he said that Bangladesh and some other countries are pushing for relaxation of laws on intellectual property rights (IPRs), whereas India is against the relaxation of IPRs. SAARC countries should develop a mutual interest and cooperation in this regard. Finally, he concluded by saying that not only the SAARC countries but the whole world also should pay adequate attention to the refugees or displaced persons resulting from climate change.

**Professor M Ali Taslim**, Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), Dhaka, made a presentation on ‘Deepening and Operationalising SAFTA in Expanded SAARC: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Future Outlook’. In his presentation, he asserted that India, to a certain extent, has granted duty-free access of goods for all the least developed countries (LDCs). Therefore, the LDCs like Bangladesh have been enjoying this privilege. Additionally, Bangladesh is a signatory to SAFTA. Therefore, he stated that signing of SAFTA as well as Indian concessions have increased Bangladesh-India trade relations, in particular Bangladesh’s exports to India and in turn employment opportunity for the people associated with export oriented tasks.

He held signing of SAFTA in 2006 has not only increased bilateral trade but also intra-SAARC trade although trade imbalance between and among SAARC countries is still huge. This has been due to lack of effective and prompt implementation of the initiatives already undertaken to increase trade relations within SAARC countries. Therefore, he emphasised on increasing realisation among the countries about opening up of mutual trade, lifting the restrictions on business people that would help to promote greater communication among the SAARC countries, and eliminating the visa restrictions on the movement of people to increase intra-SAARC trade.

He said that SAFTA is gradually moving ahead and there are also proposals for bilateral trade expansion within the framework of free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries of SAARC such as India-Pakistan or India-Sri Lanka. He emphasised on identifying major challenges that can impede bilateral trade relations, and increasing economic negotiations to secure a FTA.

He informed that in the Doha Round, African countries jointly raised their demands to the bigger players of the international trade negotiations, and received sufficient attention from them. Therefore, he emphasised on forming alliance among the SAARC countries with similar interests and impetus to face the challenges stemming from the bigger players, to raise their demands strongly, to

receive more attention, and thus to secure some concessions from the bigger players.

Professor Taslim concluded by saying that during the forthcoming 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit, Bangladesh government must attempt to implement the Article 8 of SAFTA that would facilitate to expand trade relations which included harmonisation of standards, customs cooperation, simplification of bank procedures, transit facility for intra-SAARC trade, removal of barriers in intra-SAARC investments, connectivity etc. These would be needed to properly implement SAFTA and to ensure better trade relations among the SAARC countries.

#### 4. **Open Discussion Session:**

**His Excellency Dasho Bap Kesang**, the Bhutanese High Commissioner, said that Bhutan feels honoured to undertake the responsibility of holding 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit. According to his view, climate change issue, trade and commerce would be the key agenda for discussion in the forthcoming SAARC Summit. He then opined that stakeholders should play a significant role to facilitate the functions of SAARC.

**Ambassador (Retd) Ashfaqur Rahman**, Chairman, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies, Bangladesh, asserted that SAARC is tied to a big country. Therefore, inequalities among the SAARC countries have been continuing in various respects. It is true that asymmetric relations are persistent among the SAARC countries but immediate need is to take a different a look at SAARC, to rethink about the SAARC Charter, and initiation by leaders of the SAARC countries to move things forward.

**Ambassador (Retd) Humayun Kamal**, Former Secretary, claimed that Article 7 of the SAARC Charter had never been implemented in reality. In 1997, an attempt was made in this regard, but no progress was made. Therefore, he suggested undertaking necessary infrastructures for implementing Article 7. He then emphasised on increasing cooperation on water and energy. He also held that the regional centres established under the auspices of SAARC are not performing their duties well and they are less effective as well. They should be more pro-people.

**Dr Mustafizur Rahman**, Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy (IDS), Bangladesh, opined that conflicts of interests have made the SAARC countries inept and disintegrated. To him, without peaceful approaches and honest intentions, we would never be able to resolve the problems existed in our bilateral relations. Consequently, bilateral issues must not be prohibited to be raised at the SAARC Summit level discussions. Regarding SAFTA, he advised to reduce dependency on one specific sector or industry, suggesting diversification of industries. He also suggested focusing on service sector, technological

development and population control. He was in favour of increased use of contraceptive to controlling population boom.

One of the distinguished participants wanted to know why there is no banking arrangement between Bangladesh and North-East region of India even after 25 years of SAARC formation. He also wanted to know from Professor M Ali Taslim about the growth of trade of Bangladesh under SAFTA. If SAFTA came into force in 2006, how did Bangladesh export more before SAFTA? He opined that it was basically under the bilateral trade arrangement, not much resulted from the benefit of SAFTA.

**Monaem Sharker**, Director-General, Bangladesh Foundation for Development Research, advocated that SAARC should have an effective politician as the Secretary-General of SAARC Secretariat.

## 5. Panellists' Response

Responding to the queries of the distinguished participants, **Ambassador (Retd) Shafi Sami** opined that bilateral and multilateral issues might be discussed in the setting of informal arrangements, and the outcomes and suggestions came out from the setting could be sent to the formal setting. He believes that informal consultations may help to resolve many unsettled issues such as Bangladesh-India border issue, India-Pakistan bilateral trade issue, Bangladesh-India-Nepal water issue, etc.

**Ambassador (Retd) Q A M A Rahim** mainly made his comments on two points: SAARC Centres and trade under SAFTA. He pointed out that there are nine SAARC Centres. He endorsed the criticism that those centres are almost unknown, they are not performing well, and they are just confined to some research activities. He doubted whether intra-SAARC trade is increasing following SAFTA or bilateral arrangement. He argued that SAFTA cannot achieve anything. Even if the trade barrier is reduced it would not achieve much as the trade basket is very small.

**Ambassador (Retd) Farooq Sobhan** in his response described eight points for the functioning of SAARC.

- Heads of SAARC countries should play a suitable role in case of monitoring and evaluating. He also suggested establishing three task forces: 1. task force of new group of eminent persons for focusing on implementation; 2. task force for focusing on projects or SDF (SAARC Development Fund) including sub-regional cooperation; and task force for focusing on SAARC's nine regional centres.
- Heads of SAARC countries should meet more frequently. For example, they could hold short functional one day meeting for reviewing progress.

- Heads should attempt to strengthen SAARC Secretariat. Here, he suggested that the Secretary-General of SAARC should be nominated and appointed from the former Prime Ministers or Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the SAARC countries. And also, the SAARC Secretary-General should have the status equivalent to that of Minister for Foreign Affairs of any SAARC country.
- Heads should agree to initiate interactions with SAARC Chambers, SAFMA (South Asian Free Media Association) and the GEP.
- Heads should provide a clear directive on the role of multilaterals in support of regional and sub-regional projects.
- Issues of coordination should be addressed. Here, he spoke about coordination on SAARC Centre for Energy in Islamabad, BIMSTEC Centre on Energy in Colombo, and establishing a counter-terrorism task force. He opined that Heads should also establish a South Asian Regional Forum.
- Heads of SAARC countries should commission a Track-II process on security. The outcomes came out from the process should be sent to the Heads of States.
- Role of the observers in SAARC should have to be determined. He also opined that we need to examine whether SAARC should follow the example of ASEAN.

## 6. Address by the Chief Guest

**Dr Hasan Mahmud**, MP, Honourable State Minister for Environment and Forest, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, in his speech as the Chief Guest of the Seminar stated that today the globe has become a global village and the communities around the globe are becoming closer and closer. Therefore, countries are becoming more dependent than anytime in the past. He opined that unfortunately SAARC has been a least integrated region. In the wake of celebrating SAARC's Silver Jubilee in December 2010, he suggested the leaders of this organisation re-emphasising on their avowed commitments to address some basic socio-economic needs that would impact upon the quality of the region's commoners' lives. He also suggested establishing a special SAARC Committee to develop actions and strategic plans to alleviate poverty. He furthermore suggested learning from other regional organisations such as the EU or ASEAN.

Dr Hasan Mahmud stated that the share of intra-SAARC trade is now only 5 per cent. High non-tariff and para-tariff barriers along with large negative lists unofficially numbering about 300 have become matters of mutual concern and debate among SAARC countries. Therefore, SAARC nations need working together in order to bring about a win-win solution regarding all these issues. He also suggested developing an institutional infrastructure and increasing regional cooperation on poverty alleviation, food security, women and children's welfare, crime, drugs and narcotics control, health care, agriculture and energy, etc. These would create adequate scope for working jointly.

He stated that the issue of climate change would be one of the top agendas in the 16th SAARC Summit. He also stated that today flood has become more devastating in the region than anytime of the past due to deforestation and decreasing carrying capacity of rivers. Highlighting the extent of air pollution, he gave an example that air pollution might take place in Calcutta but acid rain might happen in Dhaka. Thus, the place of origin and impact become completely different. Therefore, he stressed on the issues which could be discussed in the forthcoming SAARC Summit and also other forums. On the other hand, he informed that the share of greenhouse gas (GHG) emission by the developed countries is now about 60 per cent and 40 per cent by the developing countries. He commented that even tomorrow if all the developed countries stop their emission, 50 per cent emission will remain in the planet. After 10 years, the share of greenhouse gases by the developing countries would be more than 60 per cent. Unless this issue is addressed well, it is not possible to reduce greenhouse gas and halt climate change properly. Therefore, the issue of GHG emission should be discussed in SAARC forum.

He mentioned that economic growth is not possible without meeting the demand of energy. South Asian countries have potentialities to produce energy. Nepal has the potentiality to produce one lac forty thousand mega watt (MW) electricity and also Bhutan is potential to produce 20 thousand MW electricity from the hydropower. But the countries are not producing this energy due to inadequate integration and coordination in the region. Therefore, the issue of energy should be dealt with regionally in SAARC forum. Another point he highlighted was the population control. Without controlling population, it will never be possible to achieve sustainable economic benefits to improve the standard of living of the people in South Asian region. Therefore, he opined that population control should be discussed at national and also regional level.

For him, SAARC has still potentials, and if the eight wheels of SAARC work together, this regional organisation will become very much operative.

## **7. Summing Up by the Chair**

**Major General Muhammed Firdaus Mian, psc, Chair of the Panel Discussion**, thanked all Panellists and distinguished participants for their presentations.