



PRESS RELEASE

Making SAARC Work: A South Asian Imperative

New Delhi, November 18, 2014: The absence of an effective multilateral mechanism in South Asia has withheld any purposeful convergence in the region. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), continues to be plagued by regional rivalries and trust deficit, and is yet to attain the vibrancy demonstrated by several regional arrangements in other parts of the world. This is despite the enormous potential for cooperation in cross-cutting sectors that the forum possesses.

Reflecting on these issues, **Dr Gowher Rizvi**, *International Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh*; **Amb. Shyam Saran**, *Chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board* and **Amb. Sheel Kant Sharma**, *Former Secretary General of SAARC*, deliberated on finding new ways to enhance regional connectivity and promote trade at an Ananta Aspen Centre program in the capital today.

Addressing the gathering, **Dr. Rizvi** lauded the work undertaken by the SAARC secretariat but stressed there was still immense scope for improvement. *"The SAARC Secretariat has been doing a remarkable job in compelling governments to work on the most significant regional problems--environment, money laundering, extremism and security—which are essentially transnational issues. However, implementation of resolutions is holding SAARC back. The mechanism needs greater resources and focus to succeed,"* he said. **Dr. Rizvi** also highlighted the potential for regional cooperation in the power sector. *"Last year, Bangladesh linked its grid to India. There is scope for expansion in the power market in South Asia. By creating a pan-South Asia grid, we stand to free the region from one of the key impediments to growth: power crisis."*

Identifying climate change cooperation, counter-terrorism and trade as key focus areas for the region, **Amb. Saran** urged New Delhi to spearhead the strengthening of the SAARC process. *"The upcoming Summit can be highly meaningful due to the change of government in India. The new government, in intent at least, has put the neighbourhood at the centre of its foreign policy. To make the SAARC work, India has to take the lead, because it shares its borders with most member countries. And the logic of greater SAARC cooperation is compulsive,"* said **Amb. Saran**.

The 18th SAARC summit will be held in the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu, on 26-27 November. The last meeting was held in Maldives in 2011 three years ago. The meeting will be attended by Heads of States of Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The key issues of discussion at the Summit would focus on strengthening economic cooperation to harness the historical and geographical synergies between member states; finding ways to meet emerging challenges of climate change, power crisis, pandemics, natural disasters and regional security; and capitalising on the expanding demographics of South Asia. According to a recent SAARC newsletter, member states are expected to play a role in shaping South Asian multilateral security and development policies, including placing concrete proposals for Afghanistan.

About Ananta Aspen Centre

Ananta Aspen Centre is an independent and not-for-profit organisation that focuses on leadership development and open dialogue on important issues facing Indian society, to help foster its transformation. The Centre engages civil society, business, Governments and other stakeholders on issues of importance to India's development and national security.

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