



SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION
SECRETARIAT

MESSAGE
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE THIRTY-FIRST SAARC CHARTER DAY

8 December this year marks the Thirty-first Charter Day of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).


SAARC came into being at the first-ever SAARC Summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in December 1985, following a series of brainstorming sessions among the Senior Officials, Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Ministers of its Member States. As defined in its Charter, the principal objectives of the Association are to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic cooperation, social progress and cultural development in the region.

SAARC is a regional organization born out of the consciousness that in an increasingly interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity are best achieved in the South Asian region by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation among the Member States, which are bound by ties of history and culture. At the same time, our founding Leaders were aware of the common problems, interests and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia and the need for joint action and enhanced cooperation within their respective political and economic systems and cultural traditions. Moreover, they were convinced that regional cooperation among the countries of South Asia is mutually beneficial, desirable and necessary; and that economic, social and technical cooperation among the countries of South Asia would contribute significantly to national and collective self-reliance.

SAARC commenced mutual collaboration in non-controversial areas such as health, communication and postal services at its initial phase as a confidence-building measure among one another. The Association embraced the crucial area of regional economic cooperation in early 1990s, following the conclusion of the SAARC Regional Study on Trade and Manufactures. Areas of regional cooperation continued to grow over the years. SAARC today stands to cater to almost all the spheres of human activity, with the overarching goal of poverty alleviation.

The Association has witnessed eighteen Summit meetings of the Heads of State or Government, with the last one held in Kathmandu under the theme, *Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity*. The Eighteenth Summit Declaration laid emphasis on deepening regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation, *inter alia*, in trade, investment, finance, energy, security, infrastructure, connectivity and culture; and to implement projects, programmes and activities in a prioritized, result-oriented and time-bound manner.

As we commemorate the Thirty-first SAARC Charter Day, I would like to extend my warmest felicitations to the peoples and Governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.


(Arjun B. Thapa)
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