

***Statement by heads of state/government at the inaugural
of the 18th SAARC summit held in Kathmandu on 26-27
November 2014.***

Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Nepal Sushil Koirala

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies the Heads of State and Government of the SAARC Member States,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for Nepal to host the Eighteenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). On behalf of the people and Government of Nepal and on my own, I would like to extend you all very warm welcome to Kathmandu and wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Nepal.

Let me express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Yameen, the President of the Republic of Maldives, for his outstanding leadership of the SAARC process during the last three years.

I also thank SAARC Secretary General and the SAARC Secretariat for their efforts put in preparatory process for this summit.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As we begin our Summit meeting, the whole world is watching South Asia. We meet here at a time when the international environment is rapidly changing, and our societies and economies are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. South Asia has strategic geography, rich demographic profile with growing middle class, young, dynamic and hardworking population, increasing democratization process, abundance of natural resources, rich biodiversity and economic dynamism with a boundless market. The region has transformative potentials to gain global pre-eminence.

We meet here in a new spirit with new hopes and expectations of our people. We can take pride in the steady progress towards democratization in the region since the formation of SAARC. The evolution of Indian democracy as the largest and a strong civilizational force is inspiring. There have been a series of elections in the region since the last summit and legitimate, peaceful transfers of power. I would like to congratulate the distinguished and respected leaders on their successes.

While unique unity in vast diversity is the region's resilience, some stubborn challenges, ranging from endemic poverty to international terrorism, transnational crimes, and trafficking of persons, drugs and arms and climate change are constantly staring at us. They have undermined social cohesion,

peace, political stability, democratization process, and development. It is high time that we work honestly to confront these challenges, make proper use of resources, prove our worth by our collective commitment, and deliver the promise made to the people in the region.

Distinguished Delegates,

Poverty remains an affront to our collective conscience. It has been a primary source of several evils, much friction, and tension that afflict our societies. Our collective efforts in liberating our peoples from dehumanizing conditions of poverty and hunger will become one of the success stories of the 21st century. Poverty has multidimensional facets. We, therefore, need to push our collective efforts in critical areas as agriculture, health, sanitation, education and women empowerment.

South Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions due to natural disasters emanating from climate change and erratic weather patterns. Whether it is the melting of Himalayan glaciers or the rise of sea level with devastating floods in the hills and plains in between, our people continue to suffer from compounding threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation. We call for a climate justice mechanism guided by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and to activate funding mechanisms for adaptation and mitigation measures. No one has the privilege to pollute the planet without accountability.

Despite geographical proximity, our region is one of the least integrated. Lack of connectivity has kept us far apart. The volume of intra-regional trade and investment is distressingly low. It requires a quantum jump and deepening of economic linkages, through the full implementation of SAFTA and further liberalization of trade, including trade in services to move towards the goal of achieving South Asian Economic Union. We need to build roads, railways, airways, pipelines, ports and waterways to facilitate greater movement of goods, services, capital and people.

The region is a home to great civilizations and holds spectacular heritage sites humanity has ever created. Nature has blessed us with stunning Himalayas, including the world's tallest peak- Mount Everest, to the deep blue ocean. To reap the geographic dividend and to promote the seamless movement of our people, we require the effective implementation of SAARC process through the synergetic partnership among civic institutions, private sectors, and civil societies. By such measures, I am confident that we would be able to realize the theme of the Kathmandu summit "Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity" in real sense.

Excellencies, Distinguished participants,

In our region, we have a vast pool of young and dynamic population while other parts of the world are facing shortage of the workforce. However, lack of sufficient employment opportunities at home has compelled a sizable number of youth force to migrate to other countries for work. While remittances of the migrant workers substantially contribute to national income, these have not

come without psychological, economic and social costs. This situation demands concrete regional programs for optimal utilization of human resources. We also need a mechanism to work on a common position in international forums on migrant workers for their safety, security and dignity.

Excellencies,

Terrorism is our common enemy and a growing threat to civilized way of life. South Asia has been the worst victim of terrorism and transnational crimes of various kinds. Terrorism, in all from and manifestations including militant extremism and religious fundamentalism, must therefore be combated collectively and unequivocally. Any compromise on terrorism undermines the culture of peace. We have built some institutional frameworks under the SAARC, but we need their honest and effective implementation, active cooperation among our institutions and law enforcement agencies and timely sharing of critical information.

None of the challenges is more pressing in governance than the fight against endemic corruption. It is a growing threat to peace, stability, democracy and development. Our people after their decades of arduous struggles and disproportionate sufferings for a democratic system of governance deserve accountable, responsible, transparent, and corruption-free governance. We need to ensure that gaps in the governance need to be bridged and these values are not bypassed and undermined under any circumstances.

We have created a number of mechanisms under SAARC. They need to be made efficient, effective, and result-oriented. We strongly believe that SAARC Secretariat's institutional capacity needs to be enhanced to enable it to realize its goals and discharge responsibilities in the changing context.

We thank observer states for their engagement in the SAARC process. We hope to fully benefit from their resources, experiences, and expertise in various sectors. We need to develop suitable modalities to engage them in a meaningful way.

Distinguished Friends,

Before I conclude, let me speak a few words on the latest political development in Nepal. The pressing priority before the nation is to conclude the peace process that began with the mainstreaming of armed rebels into constitutional democratic politics with the promulgation of a democratic constitution through the Constituent Assembly. All political parties remain engaged in the constitution making process. We have made significant strides on key constitutional issues towards institutionalizing peace and democracy in the country. The new constitution, with the spirit of constitutionalism, political pluralism, universal democratic values, and the rule of law firmly embedded in it, will institutionalize democratic gains and lay the foundation for an inclusive federal democratic republic Nepal.

We firmly believe that national reconciliation and national unity based on mutual trust and understanding as enunciated by B.P. Koirala, the first elected

Prime Minister of Nepal, is absolutely necessary to give stability to the nation. Leader of the 2006 People's Movement GP Koirala brought parties with different ideologies together in one platform for safeguarding national sovereignty, democracy, and human rights. This continues to be our approach to the constitution writing process.

With common commitments from political parties in the country and goodwill, and support, from our neighbours and friends in the international community, Nepal is set to embark on the path of peace, stability, and democratic system of governance. We believe that a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous Nepal is in the long term interests of our neighbours, and region and acts as stabilizing force at the global level.

I am confident that our complementarities can bind us in a framework of peaceful cooperation. However, if we look back and do self introspection, our achievements are short of expectations. The cost of non-cooperation in a region of vast complementarities and abundance of resources has been colossal. Three decades of experience tell us to change the gear and introduce massive economic and technological innovations. Time has come for us to decide what kind of SAARC we want to pass on to our posterity. People have patiently waited for long. They deserve to be delivered with development dividends from the benefits of enhanced regional cooperation.

Let us address the impediments and challenges; let us strengthen our unity; let us demonstrate solidarity, let us muster courage to come out of past mindsets and prejudices, let us make SAARC a strong, unified, and meaningful means for overall development of South Asia, The pioneer of peace and son of this region, Gautam Buddha taught us and I quote: "Be a lamp to yourself, Be your own confidence. Hold to the truth within yourself as the only truth."

Peace, stability and democracy are the only means to help us harness resources, meet the common set of challenges that stare at us and deliver our promises to the people. Nepal is always happy to join hands with all the fellow Member States in their common vision and dreams. I reiterate Nepal's profound commitment to the objectives of SAARC.

Thank you. Jai Nepal.

Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif

Your Excellency, Prime Minister of Nepal and Chairperson of SAARC, Excellencies, the Heads of States and Governments of SAARC Member States and Heads of the Observer delegations, Distinguished Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a matter of immense pleasure for me to be among my eminent colleagues from South Asia and other friendly states, at the 18th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, in this beautiful city of Kathmandu.

Nepal, needless to emphasize, is home to an old civilization, and has the world's highest mountain, the mighty Everest, which has held an abiding fascination for lovers of nature.

I congratulate the Government of Nepal for successfully holding the SAARC Summit. On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I wish to express our profound gratitude to His Excellency, the Right Honourable Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, his Government and the people of Nepal, for making excellent arrangements for the Summit and for their warm welcome and hospitality.

I congratulate you, Mr. Prime Minister, on the assumption of the Chair of the SAARC Summit. Pakistan stands with you in your endeavours to promote the cause of regional cooperation in South Asia.

May I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the President of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Yameen, for the outstanding leadership his country has provided to the SAARC process, since the last Summit held in Maldives in 2011. I also wish to thank the Secretary General, His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa and his team, for their efforts towards preparation of this Summit and in promoting the SAARC Agenda.

Excellencies, From the people of Pakistan to the people of the SAARC region, I bring warm greetings and sentiments of goodwill and friendship.

Excellencies, Pakistan attaches high importance to SAARC. The organization has come to epitomize the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of our region, for peace, progress and prosperity.

If we look at a region which is home to nearly one quarter of humanity on the planet, it is mired in poverty, disease and illiteracy, with lowest human and social indicators. More than one fifth of the population is between 15-24 years of age, which is the largest number of youth to ever make transition into adulthood. The region, however, accounts for only 6 percent of world GDP in purchasing power parity, and only percent share in world trade, while attracting only 3 percent of global FDI. We are one of the least integrated regions in the world.

The theme selected for the 18th SAARC Summit is important. The focus on 'Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity' is most appropriate and reflects our common desire for promoting mutual understanding and reaching out to each other, to create a win-win scenario.

The cultural affinity among our peoples is a huge asset. Shared geography and history have culminated in a unique synthesis of cultures and traditions. We must therefore, place our people at the centre of the SAARC processes. SAARC

must capture the imagination of our peoples and contribute to creating strong and mutually beneficial bonds.

SAARC can contribute immensely towards building a trust surplus among member states. Interfaith and inter-cultural harmony must find especial emphasis in its programmes. An interactive process in this domain will reveal the beauty and strength of a true South Asian identity.

We should build on our inherent strengths and effectively address common issues, such as socio-economic disparities, poverty alleviation, women empowerment, health, and education. This requires close coordination at national and regional levels.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to note that today's South Asia has undergone a democratic transformation. All South Asian states are vibrant democracies. We earnestly hope that old and new democracies in South Asia will join hands to make our region peaceful and prosperous. We must strengthen regional cooperation through sharing of experiences, best practices and establishing institutional linkages.

The recent monsoon floods in South Asian countries raised the importance of regional cooperation on cross-border information sharing, and early flood forecasting systems, as human induced and natural disasters affect everybody, irrespective of national boundaries and socio-economic status.

The Government of Pakistan has recently launched Pakistan Vision 2025, which puts people first in our development equation through prioritising human and social capital, promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, and balanced development.

In pursuing the SAARC socio-economic agenda, we must pay special attention to rural development, expansion of the agricultural resource base, development of action plans to combat communicable diseases, promotion of greater collaboration in the health sector, elimination of illiteracy, scientific and technological capacity-building and development of information and communication technologies.

Excellencies,

The economic development of South Asia is closely linked to the availability of energy at an affordable price. With abundant alternate energy resources available region-wide, we need to collectively focus on harnessing indigenous energy production potential. We should also consider arrangements for trans-regional oil and gas pipeline.

By virtue of its geographic location at the confluence of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia, Pakistan is a natural economic corridor for the region. Promoting regional connectivity is one of the seven pillars in our development strategy. My government is actively pursuing this initiative which has the potential to

integrate South Asia, China, and Central Asia, the three engines of growth in Asia. A soft visa regime would greatly facilitate the realisation of these objectives.

I also wish to emphasize the importance of the role of the SAARC Observers. SAARC can benefit from its interaction with them.

Excellencies,

The gap between the promise of SAARC and reality of its accomplishments needs to be bridged. We should build on convergences, minimize divergences and most of all, seek to augment complementarities for the greater good of the people of this region.

My vision for our region is a dispute free South Asia, where instead of fighting each other, we jointly fight poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnourishment, and unemployment. We invest in our youth to unleash their creativity, talent, and enterprise. We strengthen our bonds of trust so that we can solve our problems.

Having hosted the 4th and 12th SAARC Summits, Pakistan will be pleased to offer itself to host the 19th SAARC Summit in Islamabad.

I wish this Summit every success.

Thank you!

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksha

Right Honourable Sushil Koirala, Prime Minister of Nepal, the Chairman of the 18th SAARC Summit, Heads of State and Government, Excellencies, Representatives of SAARC Observer States, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure, to be here in this historic city of Kathmandu, for the Eighteenth SAARC Summit.

Please permit me at the outset, to convey to you Mr Chairman and the Government of Nepal, my deep appreciation, for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended. Mr Chairman, warmest felicitations to you on your assumption of the Chairmanship of SAARC and please be assured of Sri Lanka's support in achieving SAARC co-operation to the fullest.

I am confident that under your leadership SAARC will make remarkable progress on its exciting journey to make it more relevant, meaningful and beneficial, to the peoples of South Asia.

Sri Lanka warmly acknowledges the outstanding stewardship of SAARC by Maldives, as its outgoing Chair. I wish to also record out appreciation to the former Secretary-General and the incumbent, for their contributions. It is indeed an honour to be associated with my new colleagues who are attending a Summit of our Grouping for the first time. I look forward to our continued engagement.

Mr Chairman,

We gather here with renewed focus desiring "Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity" – the theme of the Eighteenth Summit. SAARC, having evolved in structure, form and content, through almost three decades, is at a crucial juncture. Now there is a need to shift from the present traditional approach and move towards implementing result-oriented, actionable plans, which impact directly on the lives of our peoples.

South Asia is characterized by diverse cultures, ethnic groups, religions and languages, but we are bound by values of unity and tolerance. SAARC's strength is in our diversity and harmonious coexistence. The region has plenty of valuable land and ocean-based natural resources and young, resourceful human capital – whose skills we must together promote, more vigorously.

The region's robust 6% average growth of the last 6 years translated into some impressive improvements in human development. The implementation in Sri Lanka of the national development strategy contained in the Mahinda Chintana – Vision for future, focused on inclusive, rural-centric development initiatives.

Sri Lanka's economy has recorded a stable growth of around 7.8% over the last few years, also achieving a low poverty level of 6.5%. South Asia, with a population of over 1.6 billion people, still has 24.5% of its population, living in poverty, and we cannot remain statisfied. SAARC needs to firmly address issues of poverty and exclusion, increasing disparities between the rich and poor, rural and urban communities.

Infusion of capital to infrastructure development, Mr Chairman, creates a vibrant economic environment, invigorating business, attracting investment, generating employment and sustaining livelihoods. This has been a policy of tenet of my Government in post-conflict development, which has resulted in an economic growth of 22% in the North, surpassing the national rate. This is a viable prescription for the Region.

Mr Chairman,

Economic cooperation within SAARC is one of the key engines driving the region, towards greater regional integration. Sri Lanka continues to support the full implementation of the SAFTA. However, trade and services need to be seen, not as an end in itself, but as part of the development process.

The SAFTA processes and our aspiration to establish a South Asia Economic Union (SAEU) by 2030 must take into account the asymmetries which exist within the region, as well as particular social and developmental contexts. No

country or section of South Asia's peoples should be left behind in such processes.

Addressing the challenges of lack of access to sanitation and clean water and emerging threats such as water quality management, health hazards including chronic kidney disease, is at the heart of human well-being. The failure to address these issues collectively would stunt human development achievements in the region.

Mr Chairman,

Shelter in our countries is a dire need, and have varying degrees of success in this area, which has to be addressed.

Mr Chairman,

Climate change, a defining challenge of our times, also demands a concerted regional and global response. Sri Lanka believes on the need to graduate SAARC member countries towards a climate change resilient future.

SAARC must forge a common position to the extent possible on the relevant issues, and become a significant voice on the global climate platform.

Mr Chairman,

Through some countries, our region has acquired excellence in the area of space technology. This advancement has captured the interests of our peoples. The initiative of Prime Minister Modi to develop and launch a Satellite dedicated to SAARC is a welcome initiative. Application of this technology to the areas including communication, distance education and disaster management, the socio economic development in the region would be greatly benefited.

Mr Chairman,

We must vigorously pursue alternative methods of energy production to establish energy security. This is a clear need to develop a balanced energy mix to mitigate over-dependency on fossil fuel.

The Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation will undoubtedly provide the platform to enhance regional engagement in the electricity sector.

Heritage and Culture are important facets of human development. I see culture as a facet which brings the region together, in a unique manner. Sri Lanka's commitment in this area will be further enhanced, with the completion of the state-of-the-art, SAARC Cultural Centre in Matara, in the Southern region of our country.

Buddhist civilisation heritage is seen across South Asia. As we meet here in Nepal – the hallowed birth place of the Gautama Buddha – I am inspired to come to this Summit, that we establish a cultural trail linking key Buddhist sites in the region, through which the people of South Asia, will find commonality in our shared civilisation wealth.

Mr Chairman,

We must recognize the need to empower youth, and foster their skills acquisition. Accordingly, I proposed to the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly to declare 15th July as the World Youth Skills Day.

With the support of all SAARC countries, a resolution has been adopted, by consensus, at the United Nations. I propose that SAARC too resolves to celebrate this event collectively.

The benefits of regional initiatives on infrastructure, communication, air, road and rail links, must reach those in the periphery. In this regard, it is important that the Regional Agreements on Railways and Motor Vehicles, be progressed. There is also a need, to broaden the scope of our aviation links by permitting freedom rights for airlines to reach not only the Capitals, but other SAARC cities as well. The ease of air link is imperative for the success of the Buddhist cultural trail.

Mr Chairman, with the neutralisation of the terrorist group in Sri Lanka, in May 2009, a vastly changed security environment has emerged in the region. Terrorism still remains a fundamental security challenge both regionally and internationally. Sri Lanka cannot remain complacent in maintaining safeguards against its possible resurgence.

We owe it to ourselves and out peoples to ensure that the radical views of a few and misplaced agendas of some others do not undermine the security and well-being of the large majority of peace loving people, firstly, in the member states and then, in the region as a whole.

South Asia's intellectual and spiritual heritage is unparalleled in many ways. The edicts of our forefathers established value systems, and principles of governance similar to contemporary human rights framework. Human Rights should be recognized by all as a moral and ethical concept rather than as a political tool.

Sadly however, we are witnessing motivated political agendas being thrust by extra regional entities, on some countries in our region, in the guise of human rights. Intervention in such form is being attempted with scant regard to the structures, and cultural traditions of societies, and ground realities.

While SAARC practice has been to abstain from involvement in bilateral issues of a political nature, we must resist external manipulations. It would be morally in keeping with the SAARC spirit, to join forces against external threats on Member States.

SAARC has enjoyed useful engagement with several Observer States. Sri Lanka appreciates and values their partnership through the conduct of several capacity building initiatives.

It is imperative to seek ways and means in enhancing this engagement with the Observer States, and consider graduating their role to a more project based,

results-oriented partnerships. At the same time, SAARC's outreach to other regional groupings needs further consolidation.

Mr Chairman,

There is need to re-double efforts to forge common positions at international for a on issues of critical common importance, such as human rights, environment and climate change, labour migration, equitable financial and trading system, terrorism etc.

There is a reservoir of political will amongst us Member States, and I am confident that it would be harnessed towards this end. At this Summit, let us resolve to break through the shackles of bureaucracy and pursue a co-operative, action-oriented path.

This will pave the way to a wonderful opportunity to elevate this region to one of prosperity and peace, for all our peoples. Let us resolve to do so in earnest. This collective undertaking will make our commitment to the theme of this Summit and to SAARC, even deeper.

May the Triple Gem bless you all.

Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. Chairperson, Your Excellency Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, Hon'ble Presidents and Prime Ministers of SAARC Member States, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu alaikum and a very good morning to all.

I am delighted to be in this beautiful valley of Kathmandu for the 18th SAARC Summit. I would like to extend my warmest felicitations to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, on his election as the Chair of SAARC. I am confident that SAARC will attain greater heights under his wise stewardship.

I would also convey my deep appreciation to the Government and the people of Nepal for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Summit.

I would also like to commend the leadership of the Maldives, our outgoing Chair. Our Association was created three decades ago with the core objectives of building partnership for the welfare and prosperity of the people. Looking back, one would have the impression that its achievements have been rather modest compared to our expectations and potentials.

Yet, I remain optimistic of what SAARC can actually attain given our collective political will and ambitions. What is needed is to set aside our differences and work on collective strength for bringing real progress to the people in the region. A candid assessment and frank conversation among us is the need of the hour to bring dynamism to SAARC and its activities.

Mr. Chairman,

For long, we have been talking about “People’s SAARC”. The new Global Agenda also requires that we place people first. Let me, therefore, share some of my thoughts on some of the critical areas that need our urgent attention.

First, poverty as our common and key enemy hinders peace and development in the region. Ensuring food and nutritional security of our ever-increasing population poses a big challenge. However, over decades, much of South Asia has attained self sufficiency in production of key cereals. This has helped us reduce abject poverty and improved our MDGs profile.

In Bangladesh, with an average growth rate of 6.2% for the last five years, we have reduced poverty to 24.4% by now from 40% in 2005. We have attained targets of universal safe drinking water and sanitation for the people. We need to do more as we have targeted to turn Bangladesh into a Middle-Income Country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041.

Cooperation in increasing productivity of key cereals, inland fisheries and livestock, improving water efficiency in agriculture are crucial for attaining nutritional security of our people and eradicating poverty. In this context, effective operation of SAARC Food Bank and Seed Bank are important.

Second, each of our countries has a large youthful population. We now need to develop them as human resources - primarily by giving them quality education and effective training.

In Bangladesh, we have taken innovative steps to ensure education for all. Girls are getting free education up to graduation level. About 12.8 million students from poor families are getting monthly stipend. 75 percent of them are girls. Each year, we are distributing nearly 318 million textbooks free to all students up to the secondary level. It is increasing every year. Gender parity in primary and secondary schooling has been achieved. Now, we are focusing on ensuring “quality education” for our students.

We recognise that our education system should be need-based and innovative, with adequate exposure to scientific and technological advancement and comparable with the advanced countries.

Our women and men need easy access to affordable and quality technical and vocational education. Our education and skill development need to be linked to employment and entrepreneurship.

Sustainable development entails empowerment of women and their equal participation with men in all walks of life. In this context, Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in empowering women in social, economic and political arena. Pragmatic policies, resource allocation and strong commitment of our government are instrumental to this achievement.

Third, technology, especially ICT, determines our everyday life in so many ways. It is changing our lives and livelihoods bringing solutions that we could not even thought of a few years back.

To fulfil our vision to build “Digital Bangladesh” by 2021, we have established 5 thousand 275 Digital Centres across the country. Rural people have been receiving more than 200 ICT-related services from the Centres. They are also getting health care services from 13 thousand 500 IT-connected Community Health Clinics with free medicine. We have, so far, set up over 3 million solar home systems. We have increased tele-density to 77.3% from 31.3% in 2008 and internet density to 27% from 2.8% during the last five years.

For achieving development faster, we must deepen our collective efforts to develop, use and apply science-technology-innovation at all levels. We need support in health, agriculture, food and climate change technologies. Bangladesh would call for deeper cooperation in these areas.

Fourth, climate change poses serious challenge to much of our development enterprise. Intensity and frequency of disasters in our countries are rising. The risks are so grave that, for Bangladesh, climate change may wipe out 2 to 3% of our annual GDP, including displacement of more than 30 million people by 2050.

To address the challenges of climate change related risks effectively and comprehensively, we have adopted a National Climate Change Strategy and a National Plan of Action. We have, so far, allocated 385 million US dollars from our own resources for adaptation and mitigation.

At SAARC level, we need to secure result-oriented implementation of the regional Agreements and Plans through cross-border initiatives.

Fifth, optimum supply of energy remains fundamental to ensuring steady growth and sustainable development of our people. Progress on the SAARC Framework Agreement on Electricity Cooperation is laudable.

Energy is a sector where we have much to tap in terms of regional hydro-power. There are aspects, like energy regulation, efficiency and conservation, regional power grid – where we can work beneficially. It is, therefore, the time to commit ourselves on regional, sub-regional and bilateral initiatives for the development of energy sector in a comprehensive manner.

Sixth, the new Global Development Agenda requires us to focus on our fourth frontier - the Indian Ocean. There is so much to benefit through collaborative exploration of the living and non-living marine resources. The ocean resources-

based “Blue Economy” can play a critical role to sustainable development of the SAARC region.

We should collaborate on development of capacities, partnerships and research in utilizing our marine resources. Our common undertakings must secure protection, development and exploration of seas and oceans in a sustainable manner.

Seventh, physical connectivity is important in ensuring overall peace, progress and stability across South Asia. Multimodal physical connectivity links territories and communities of SAARC.

Bangladesh approaches connectivity in a wider context. We believe in connecting ideas, knowledge, technology, culture, people, road-rail-air, movement of goods, services and investment.

Bangladesh, will appreciate the early signing of the Regional Motor Vehicles Agreement and the Regional Railways Agreement. Beyond those, I would urge all SAARC leaders at the podium to lend their support to advance implementation of the agreed regional outcomes on connectivity.

At the same time, we need to focus on increasing intra-regional trade. Early and effective implementation of SAFTA remains important. We will particularly need to address the non-tariff and para-tariff barriers. Our people want to see robust actions, on-the-ground. They are more focused on “outcomes” than “process”.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the years, some of the SAARC Observers have brought in useful knowledge and support. Bangladesh value their contribution and engagement with SAARC.

In SAARC, a number of Regional Centres have generated important regional goods, knowledge and ideas. We must support them in all possible ways to develop them as centres of regional excellence.

Forty years ago, our Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his maiden speech at the UN General Assembly said, “The Bangalee nation is pledge-bound to establish a global order based on peaceful co-existence, social justice and freedom from poverty, hunger, exploitation and aggression.” That vision continues to guide Bangladesh’s national development pursuits and our engagement in regional and global affairs.

Let us focus on undertaking more realistic, result-oriented and mutually beneficial partnership for cooperation to prosper together.

Let that be our contribution to redeem our pledge to our people to leave a more peaceful, progressive, connected and knowledge-based South Asia.

I thank you.

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan Tshering Tobgay

Mr. Chairman , Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to convey the warm greetings and good wishes of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk, the government, and the people of Bhutan to this august gathering and to the friendly people of Nepal.

Nepal is a country of breathtaking beauty. As the birthplace of Lord Buddha, it is a country of spiritual affinity to all Bhutanese and millions of people all over the world. Nepal is also home to an institution of great diplomatic significance for all South Asians- the secretariat of our Association. We are indeed happy and privileged to be here in Kathmandu for the 18th SAARC Summit. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government and people of Nepal for the meticulous arrangements and the warm hospitality extended to us.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation expressed our warmest felicitation to you on your election as the Chair of SAARC. We have no doubt that SAARC will be greatly strengthened under your wise and able stewardship. I assure you of my Government's full support and cooperation.

I would also like to convey my deepest appreciation to H.E. President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom for the sterling manner in which he discharged his responsibilities during his tenure as our Chairman.

Let me also congratulate Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa on his assumption of the post of Secretary General of SAARC. I am confident that he will utilize his rich experience in international affairs and proven diplomatic skills for the benefit of SAARC. We also owe our gratitude to the former Secretary General, Mr. Ahmed Saleem, for his dedication and diligence in advancing the goals of SAARC.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation welcomes "Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity" as the theme of the Eighteenth SAARC Summit. We believe that whether we do so now, on our own terms, or later, under compulsion-forces are at play, which can only be adequately addressed through the collective endeavors of all nations. Such united, coordinated responses are imperative in order to tackle cross-border crimes like terrorism, trafficking in humans and drugs, as well as to address wider common challenges like climate change, poverty alleviation and indeed to realize our dreams of prospering together through increased intra-regional trade.

Mr. Chairman,

Protecting our environment even as we pursue economic growth is a decision which Bhutan made from the beginning of its development history around 50 year ago. We have consistently taken many initiatives to promote eco-friendly policies and have made a constitutional commitment to maintain at least 60% of our land area under forest cover. We have also pledged to remain carbon neutral for all time to come. And we have designated more than half of our country as protected areas. We know that as a tiny county, our actions may have minimal impact in the world. We also know that we are sacrificing growth while larger and more developed nations continue to do less. But we will continue to do the right thing.

Sadly, we are already living with the consequences of climate change. Snowfalls have become less frequent not just in the valleys but even on mountain peaks. Glaciers are retreating, crop yields are fluctuating, water levels in our rivers and streams have receded and we are experiencing more extreme weather. Flash floods and landslides have become recurring events, causing widespread damage and destruction in our countries.

The increasing frequency of devastating floods each season is an alarming trend that we can no longer afford to ignore. We must redouble our efforts in accelerating action to avert potential dangers from environmental degradation. Our region should exert itself to fulfill regional and international commitments to protect the environment and build resilience against climate change. National actions must spur even greater collective action the regional and international levels. In this regard, I would like to draw attention to the latest report of the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change which was summarized by the influential US magazine Mother Jones in three simple sentences earlier this month- "It's getting hotter. We are causing it, and we have to act now."

Mr. Chairman,

Bhutan welcomes the closing of three Regional Centers and merging of four related centers into one, as the "SAARC Environment and Disaster Management Center." The establishment of his new center will reduce costs, avoid overlapping of activities and contribute to making the programs more effective. Bhutan offers its support and cooperation to the Centre in fulfilling its mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

Poverty alleviation is our region's unfinished task. We cannot claim to be the custodians of the world's great civilizations and yet allow so many among us to go hungry and exist in dehumanizing level of want and deprivation.

Our region is blessed with abundant natural resources but we need to ensure that the bounty from these is used optimally and redistributed more equitably. But, it is our human resource that is our greatest and most precious asset. We have one fifth of the world's population. That population, with a young demographic dividend, can transform the socio-economic landscape of the region. But our young population needs to be provided not only with better

education and skills development but also with enabling policies to unlock their unlimited potential.

Our poverty alleviation strategy must, therefore, be aimed at making optimal use of both- the abundant natural resources and the rich human resources we have in our region.

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to report that in Bhutan, we have made good progress to improving the living conditions of our people. 94% of the population has access to safe drinking water, primary health coverage in 90%, and net primary school enrolment stands at 98%. However, poverty in the midst of growing prosperity remains a great challenge for us, as 12% of our population still lives below the poverty line. As a small and least developed country that promotes Gross National Happiness, my government is committed to reducing poverty and improving the socio economic wellbeing of all our people.

Mr. Chairman,

The most obvious path to a more prosperous South Asia is through increased intra-regional trade. At present this is dismally low due to the many barriers that have been holding back meaningful economic cooperation in our region. In this context, we welcome the progress towards finalization of the SAARC agreements on motor vehicles, regional railways and intergovernmental framework for energy cooperation. Once these agreements are signed, their implementation will contribute to removing barriers and deepening economic integration of our region.

Mr. Chairman,

Terrorism has spread across all borders, to all regions of the world, including our own. The adoption of the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its additional protocols and other SAARC anti terrorism initiatives bear testimony to the commitment of SAARC to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in all its manifestations. We are pleased to know that the SAARC Home Ministers have been meeting annually. Such important forums provide an opportunity to further strengthen the existing regional mechanisms to collectively address the menace of terrorism that increasingly threatens the peace and security of our peoples.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Asia is a region with vast potential. But our concerted effort is needed to tap this potential for the benefit of our peoples. Let us give substance to the theme of our Summit, "Deeper integration for peace and prosperity" by giving a strong commitment to remove the barriers that have held back meaningful economic cooperation in our region. Other regional groupings have done it and their peoples have been enjoying the benefits. Let us exercise our political will and take the necessary steps to make it possible for the people of South Asia to also reap the full benefits of close regional cooperation.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Tashi Delek!

Prime Minister of the Republic of India Narendra Modi

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala ji, my colleagues from South Asia

I am delighted to return to Kathmandu.

Koiralaji, congratulations on organising an excellent Summit. Thank you, Nepal, for your warm hospitality once again.

Greetings to the Observer countries present here.

This is my first SAARC. But, this is the second time I meeting most of you together. I stepped into the office with the greetings of the entire world. But, what moved me, dear colleagues, was your personal presence, with the good wishes of one-fourth of humanity. Because the future I dream for India is the future I wish for our entire region.

The last Summit was three years ago. Only two of us here were present in Addu. Even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has come here after her re-election. President Rajapaksa will soon go into one and I wish him good luck. I especially welcome our newest colleague, President Ghani.

Ours is a region of thriving democracy; of rich inheritance; the unmatched strength of youth; and, a strong thirst for change and progress. In the last few months, I have travelled around the world. From the middle of the Pacific, to the southern coast of Atlantic Ocean, I see a rising tide of integration.

And, negotiations on major trade agreements such as Regional comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Because the barriers of boundaries inhibit progress; international partnerships add speed to it. Because, in the life of an individual or a nation, a good neighbourhood is a universal aspiration. Where does South Asia wish to stand in this world? Nowhere in the world are collective efforts more urgent than in South Asia; and, nowhere else is it so modest. Big and small, we face the same challenges- a long climb to the summit of development. But, I have great belief in our boundless potential; and, confidence-that comes from the many inspiring stories of innovation and initiative in each of our countries.

There is much to learn from each other; even more - to do together. That was the vision and aspiration that brought us together as SAARC 30 years ago. We have travelled a long distance together since then. We have an agreement, an institution or a framework of cooperation in every field. We also have many

successes. Just think of what we are doing to our consumers - and to our environment!

We must shrink the distance between our producers and consumers and use the most direct routes of trade. I know India has to lead, and we will do our part. I hope, each of you will, too. Infrastructure is our region's greatest weakness and it's most pressing need. When I thought of coming to Kathmandu by road, it made many officials in India nervous. Because of the condition of roads at the border!

Infrastructure is my greatest priority in India. And, I also want to set up a Special Purpose Facility in India to finance infrastructure projects in our region that enhances our connectivity and trade. We speak of ease of doing business in India. Let's extend this to our region. I promise to ensure that our facilities at the border will speed up, not slow down, trade.

Let's all make our procedures simple, our facilities better, our standards common and our paper workless burdensome. India will now give business visa for 3-5 years for SAARC. Let's make it even easier for our businesses through a SAARC Business Traveller Card.

Excellencies,

India has a huge trade surplus with SAARC countries. I believe that this neither right nor sustainable. We will address your concerns and give you a level playing field in India. But, I encourage you to attract Indian investments to produce for the Indian market and create jobs for your youth. I also look to a future when your companies can easily raise funds in India for investments at home; and, when we have cross-border industrial corridors, so that we can take advantage of the natural synergies and connected lives in our Border States.

I also believe that if we can light up each other's towns and villages, we can build a brighter tomorrow for our region. Or, face a future when someone looks down at us from Space, and says that this is world's darkest corner. Let us treat electricity as a commodity like any other that we invest and trade in. India will fully support these initiatives in the region. We should also think with ambition to use solar energy and micro grids to quickly provide clean power to villages across the region.

Our relations become stronger when we connect the lives of the ordinary citizens of our countries. That is why connectivity and services by rail and road are so important. We should also connect ourselves more by air. We will not only make a difference to the lives of our people, but also promote tourism in the region. We should use the strength of shared heritage and our diversity to encourage tourism within our region, and present South Asia to the world. We could begin with the Buddhist circuit, but we don't have to stop there.

As we seek to build bridges to prosperity, we must not lose sight of our responsibility to the millions living through SAARC or outside it. Among us or some of us. We can all choose our paths to our destinations. But when we join

our hands and walk in step, the path becomes easier, the journey quicker and the destination closer. I say this as much to my government and people, I say to you.

We are meeting in the lap of himalaya, which has nurtured us ages. Today, it is calling us to act. Let us work to change cynicism into optimism.

Let us turn South Asia of flowering hope into a rich field of peace and prosperity.

President of the Republic of Maldives Abdulla Yameen

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Prime Minister of Nepal, Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, the Secretary General, Distinguished Observers, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Assalamu-Alaikum-Wa-Rahmathullahi-Wa-Barakaathuhu;

We have come from the shores of the lowest lying country in the region, to the highest peaks and the most beautiful valleys. I must commend Your Excellency Mr Sushil Koirala, Prime Minister of Nepal, SAARC's new Chairman, for the excellent arrangements made for us.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, on his assumption of office as the Secretary General of our Association.

Excellencies;

During our recent Chairmanship, the Maldives took a keen interest in institutional reform of the organisation. We sought to make SAARC more relevant, goal-oriented, and results-based. We listened to the often heard saying that SAARC was very efficient in having meetings regarding every aspect of South Asia, but less effective in delivery than perhaps we had hoped to be. We wanted SAARC to move towards regional resilience; to make SAARC an organisation that gives the people of this region a collective and common identity; one that made South Asians proud.

I congratulate you, the Member States, and the ever-so diligent Secretariat, on delivering reforms that are necessary and essential.

Excellencies;

Our engagement with other regions and countries has been revitalised. I have no doubt that there is, indeed, much scope for further strengthening such ties. We live in a globalised world where inter-regional relations matter: we need to focus on internal regionalisation, but we also need to focus on building our relationship with other countries that are keen to work with us. Dialogue partners are interested in the advantages that our innovative, creative and

youthful populations can offer. And it would only be to our benefit to engage with partners as a group, rather than individually.

Excellencies;

The chosen theme for this Summit “Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity” encapsulates some of the core values and stated objectives of our Organisation.

This region accounts for one-quarter of the world’s population, yet as a region we hold limited sway, have limited say and we have not been heard enough, in the power rooms of the world.

The vision of our founders was clear. It was grounded on the cherished bonds of the shared civilisation, common history and culture; on the genuine desire to build relations between us; on the sacred premise that regional cooperation is mutually beneficial, desirable; and indeed necessary.

There is no doubt that the Twenty First Century is indeed the Century of Asia. Ours is the region within Asia that holds the most advantages in both human and natural resources, to benefit from global undercurrents.

I firmly believe that trade and commerce hold the key to the future prosperity of our peoples and for peace within our region. SAARC must attune itself to the realities of the day and seize the opportunities that are presented to us. We must not be left behind.

Excellencies;

Thirty years after the inception of SAARC, how far have we managed to come towards realising the dream of our Founding Fathers? SAARC has managed to hold countless meetings. It has expanded into many fields, many services and many issues. It has contributed to building confidence and trust among the top leaders of our nations.

But, let’s take a step back. Let’s review our progress and the way ahead. Let’s rethink our priorities, our goals: the ultimate vision of what we want SAARC to be.

The last time we were here, in Nepal was at the dawn of the new millennium. At that meeting, we concentrated in a big way, on the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, in the hope of realising poverty eradication around the region. Twelve years later, we are here again, at the cusp of the post-2015 development agenda. And yet again, we shall renew our commitment to end poverty across this region.

One such avenue to deepen our integration, to realise poverty alleviation, is trade. Commerce underscores good neighbourly relations, unlocks the doors to each other’s communities. Trade fosters mutual understanding and benefits, moving entire communities from poverty to prosperity.

If trade holds the answer to tackling poverty, eliminating barriers to trade is its linchpin. Without mutual trust, trade can never foster. And without trade, without commerce, we cannot improve the lives of our peoples.

Excellencies;

The true potential of this region may be unlocked, and the relations between us deepened, through innovation, drive, and most importantly leadership. Regional growth and prosperity most certainly requires the contribution, cooperation and commitment of all States within the region. Yet, given the geographical, economic, and political complexities, it is natural that some States will take the lead role, and steer the region on an upward developmental trajectory.

We are particularly encouraged by the example set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We are inspired, Excellency, by your various initiatives, in this short period of time, towards strengthening regional relationships including the “neighbourhood first” policy. These are steps in the right direction, a signal of the renewed activism with which India is facing SAARC. As Prime Minister Modi noted in his inaugural address, the one occasion where all SAARC Leaders met outside of a SAARC Summit, South Asia has overcome enormous challenges, passed huge obstacles to get to where we are, to secure our independence, so there is no question about our potential to secure a prosperous future for our peoples.

Excellencies;

As a region, SAARC has the right, and surely has the might, to make it one of the most powerful regions in the world. Yet we continue to be led, rather than lead. Even when we continue to progress and bring development to our countries, poverty and destitution remain rampant. Despite our share of the global population, we have no collective voice.

Our region will be one of the most affected by climate change. Yet we continue to be complacent in taking action as a group. We continue to leave climate change on the back burner. The Maldives, as the next Chair of AOSIS, will be looking to our friends for support during the crucial years ahead.

I ask you, should we not demand for what we want? Should we not stand up for what we believe? Dare we not speak up for what is right for our people? Is it not time, Excellencies, that we stand up to receive our share, raise our voice, in the international arena?

Is it not time that we forge common positions on critical issues of importance, and defend them ardently? Individually, most of the countries in this region, are too small to hold a loud voice, yet collectively, we can cross oceans and scale mountains. It is time that we start putting “South Asia first”.

Excellencies;

Our challenge today is to work towards peace, security and economic sustainability in the SAARC region; to harness the full potential of every corner of this region; to deliver prosperity that is felt by every individual, seen in every

community, realised in every country, and appreciated by the rest of the world; to transform SAARC from a group of aspirations to an Association of actions and results.

Next year SAARC celebrates its thirtieth anniversary. It is also a time of celebration and joy in the Maldives, as we celebrate our Golden Jubilee of Independence. Such milestones not only offer us an opportunity to look back on what has been achieved. It is, more importantly, an opportunity to chart the course for the future, reaffirm resolve and reassess priorities. I firmly believe that, at this important juncture, our priorities for future collaboration and cooperation should be the 4 “P”s – peace, prosperity, progress, partnership.

The objectives of SAARC were not in doubt. The potential of South Asia is not in doubt. The resolve of its leaders and expectation of its peoples must not be in doubt. And, hence, the success of the Organisation will surely not be in doubt.

As the last speaker of this distinguished gathering, I’m particularly happy and duty bound to acknowledge the contributions of my predecessor speakers, and I’m particularly encouraged by the parting words Prime Minister Modi has expressed towards making SAARC a real success. I congratulate Mr. Prime Minister.

The success of this organisation should not be held in doubt. Big or small, in the south or in the north, we are bound by common identities; we are bound by a common culture. Each one of us has a contribution to make this region a success.

The lives and livelihoods of a billion people are in our hands. It is time, my distinguished colleagues, we show leadership, and we walk the talk.

Thank you.

President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani

Excellency Prime Minister Sushil Koirala,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

I am delighted to be here in Nepal, where peace through democratic consensus is being established and where regional cooperation is being practiced. I express our deep appreciation to the Government and people of Nepal for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality. I wish to join my other distinguished colleagues, Prime Minister Koirala, on your election as the Chairperson of SAARC. We look forward to your energetic leadership of our organization. I assure you of Afghanistan’s full support and cooperation.

I wish to thank His Excellency the President of Maldives for his excellent leadership of SAARC as the outgoing Chairman. I also commend our Secretary-General and his team for their commitment and tireless efforts.

Deeper integration for peace and prosperity, our theme, is an imperative. Threats to our daily routines and national security come from networks of violence without passports. And constraints and opportunities conditioning the life chances of our citizens are defined by the ability of leaders in government, business and civil society to shape the regional and global environment for collaboration and cooperation. The test of leadership is, therefore, to change the rules of the game and the playing field among the nations from confrontation to cooperation.

I lead a country marked by recurrent acts of terror against the innocent. The tragedy of Yahya Khel on Sunday, where 57 of our citizens were murdered in cold blood during a game of volleyball is a reminders, as is the earlier tragedy of Wagah in Pakistan. To hold wounded children in one's arms in a hospital, as I was late Sunday evening, is to feel the depth of our fall from our sense of shared humanity and the values of our great religions.

Firms, networks, and states provide the connecting tissues of our interconnected world. While functioning states enable legitimate firms and virtuous networks to thrive, collapse or failure of states results in emergence of ungoverned spaces that provide the breeding ground for criminal enterprises and networks of violence to form symbiotic relations. The relation becomes lethal when state actors embrace and sponsor these non-state actors, providing them with resources and sanctuaries, and use them as proxies in their competition against other states.

Regardless of the rationale for the genesis of the symbiotic relations that produced reliance on non-state actors by states as lethal instruments of competition, it should be clear that such measures have blow back effects, destabilizing the state system as such. Deeper integration within SAARC, therefore, requires honesty in facing the various degrees of hostility, now covert and now overt, between and among our countries and making genuine commitment to address the root causes of violence within and across our countries and forging instruments of cooperation to bring lasting peace to our people and societies. The humane and tolerant values of our civilizations and religions should enable us to articulate visions of inclusion and participation to the poor and the excluded from within our cultural discourses to heal the wounds of conflict.

Deeper integration for peace also requires acknowledgment of failures of governance, such as corruption, exclusion, and injustice on the part of the rich and powerful. Legitimate use of force and the quest for claiming legitimate monopoly of force by the states requires that political disagreements must be dealt with politically. Every problem must not be viewed as a nail to be hit with the hammer of force. Pursuit of peace through political means is, therefore, the other side of our determination to confront terrorism.

Deeper integration for prosperity is an even more of an imperative for our countries. India's steady growth, followed by others, has shown that we have the capability not to be home to the largest number of the poor and the least economically integrated region on earth. Yet we have been unable to muster the sense of urgency to translate the discourse of cooperation into reality. The constraint is in political will and in perceived interests of certain segments of our economic and political elites, requiring different ways of seeing to move to walking the talk.

An Asian continental economy is in the process of emerging. But whether the energy resources of the Caspian basin and Central Asia – estimated at 600 trillion cubic meters of gas tens of thousands of megawatts of electricity, will power SAARC's transformation from factor driven growth to efficiency and innovation driven growth depends on our collective will. As we speak, Europe is planning and investing in the smart grids to connect to the Caspian and Central Asia. As time does not stand still, each country is forced to make decisions on regional and global outreach that will create path dependencies. It will not be geography or history but economic ties that will determine the orientation, life chances and, therefore, the sense of identification of our young people with Southeast or West Asia.

Located as we are in the heart of Asia, we, in Afghanistan, register and are affected by the movements and tremors of all parts of Asia. Driven by the vision of it becoming the Asian Roundabout, where goods, ideas and people will flow in all directions -- as was the case for two millennia -- we are determined to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the region and ourselves. We offer platforms of cooperation for the five intersecting sectors of our foreign relations: our neighbors; the Islamic world; North America, Australia, Europe, and Japan; Asia; and development organizations, regional and global firms, and regional and global civil society networks.

Having completed the first democratic transfer of authority from one elected president to another, we eschewed the prevalent practice of winner take all and formed a Government of National Unity, from all of whose members and President Karzai I bring greetings to all of you distinguished leaders and colleagues. As bringing peace to our country is our top priority, we are steadily creating the national, regional and global enabling environment for it.

We have moved CASA 1000 – the first, we hope, of many projects to bring energy from Central Asia to SAARC – by breaking the deadlock over the tariff. We are determined to make TAPI a reality. To translate our latent assets – location, water and land, mineral and hydrocarbon, money and entrepreneurial energies of our people—into wellbeing for our people, we are determined to create systems of accountabilities that will result into a compact between citizens and the state and the state and our international partners.

Looking at Afghanistan as a fulcrum point within a regional network rather than as a national economy in isolation, we can see the prospects of a new kind of

regional economy. To the north there are pipelines that extend deep into Central Asia. To the west is access to oil and employment. To the south we can extend transport and improve transit. Seeing Asia as a single region opens up entire horizons for re-thinking our strategies for growth and development.

Looking south, we see areas where focus on early wins could open up the prospects for deepening and broadening regional cooperation. Generation, transmission and trading in power --- building on CASA- are an obvious first. Gas and oil pipelines, telecom and fiber optics networks, and railways and highways will follow. The breakthrough, however, will not be in ensuring connectivity but in innovations in designing, financing, building and using, and operating and maintaining the infrastructure that will be the precondition and result of our cooperation. The construction industry – a significant driver of growth in efficiency and innovation driven economies – has been having erratic growth in our region.

Were SAARC to form a Commission on Infrastructure and Connectivity to explore and demonstrate the advantages of regional cooperation to key groups of stakeholders and the public at large, we might be able to align vision and delivery. Embarking on Afghanistan's National Infrastructure Plan, we invite innovators from the region to join us in creating world-class facilities.

Having been plunged into conflict in 1978, we are determined to create a virtuous circle of peace, stability and prosperity. As the President of Afghanistan, I am committing our country to deeper integration for peace and prosperity.

Thank you
