

Islamabad Declaration

Adopted at the 12th SAARC Summit
Islamabad on January 6, 2004

Following is the text of Islamabad Declaration adopted at the 12th Saarc Summit, which concluded on January 6, 2004.

We, the prime minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia; the prime minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigmi Yoezer Thinley; the prime minister of the Republic of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee; the president of the Republic of the Maldives, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the prime minister of the Kingdom of Nepal, Surya Bahadur Thapa; the prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali; and the president of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga:

Having met at the 12th summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in Islamabad, Pakistan, on Jan 4-6, 2004;

Guided by the vision of a peaceful and prosperous South Asia and proud of its rich culture and traditions; Deeply conscious of the growing interdependence within and amongst nations and regions in an increasingly globalizing world;

Desirous of promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and non-alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of the states and peaceful settlement of all disputes;

Reaffirming the centrality of Saarc for promoting regional cooperation and emphasizing the need to enhance its efficacy; Strongly reaffirming our commitment to the objectives, principles and provisions of the charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation;

Declare that:

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Economic

1. We renew our commitment to the objectives and principles of Saarc and pledge to reinvigorate cooperation to realize peace, amity, progress and prosperity of all peoples of South Asia.
2. We affirm our determination to create an inclusive, just and equitable partnership for peace, development and prosperity. Satisfactory progress has been made in Sapta (South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement). The signing of the Framework Agreement on Safta (South

Asian Free Trade Area) is a major milestone. It is important to maintain this momentum and move towards further broadening of economic cooperation and to ensure equitable distribution of benefits of trade and cater to the special needs of the small and LDC member states by providing them special and differential treatment.

3. We reiterate our commitment made at the 11th Saarc Summit at Kathmandu in January 2002 for the creation of a South Asian Economic Union. In this context, we underline that creation of a suitable political and economic environment would be conducive to the realization of this objective.

4. A study on creating a South Asian Energy Cooperation, including the concept of an Energy Ring, should be undertaken by the Working Group on Energy.

5. For accelerated and balanced economic growth it is essential to strengthen transportation, transit and communications links across the region.

6. Public and private sector cooperation, particularly joint ventures holds great promise. It is important to move towards project cooperation under Saarc.

Prospects for setting up of a South Asian Development Bank should be examined by the Saarcfinance through the council of ministers.

7. Priority attention should also be given to the need for harmonization of standards, simplification of customs procedures, as well as cooperation among the central banks.

8. Development of tourism within South Asia could bring economic, social and cultural dividends. There is a need for increasing cooperation to jointly promote tourism within South Asia as well as to promote South Asia as a tourism destination inter alia by improved air links. To achieve this and to commemorate the 20th year of the establishment of Saarc, the year 2005 is designated as "South Asia Tourism Year", for the success of which, each member would individually and jointly organize special events.

9. Saarc members should continue to safeguard their collective interests in multilateral forums by discussing, coordinating and exchanging information with a view to adopting common positions, where appropriate, on various issues.

Poverty alleviation

10. We recognize poverty alleviation as the greatest challenge facing the peoples of South Asia and declare poverty alleviation as the overarching goal of all Saarc activities. It is imperative to relate regional cooperation to the actual needs of the people.

11. Provision of basic needs, promotion of literacy, and better health care are a regional priority. It is important to undertake effective and sustained poverty reduction programmes through pro-poor growth strategies and other policy interventions with specific sectoral targets.

12. The Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation, prepared by the meeting of finance and planning ministers in Islamabad in 2002, is hereby approved.

13. The reconstituted Independent South Asian Commission for Poverty Alleviation (Isacpa) has done commendable work. An effective strategy should be devised to implement suggestions made in its report "Our future our responsibility". In this context, Isacpa should continue its advocacy role. It should prepare and submit to the next Saarc summit a comprehensive and realistic blueprint setting out Saarc development goals for the next five years in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, health and environment, giving due regard, among others, to the suggestions made in the Isacpa report.

14. The Saarc secretariat should periodically update and submit regional poverty profiles.

15. Saarc should continue to collaborate with international organizations and UN agencies in the field of poverty alleviation. Arrangements for Saarc food security reserves should be made more effective. We also recommend the establishment of a regional food bank for which a concept paper should be prepared.

16. Investment in human resources is critical for future development of South Asia. It is, therefore, essential to establish a network of centres of higher learning, training and skill development institutes (SDIs) across South Asia. In this context, the role of the Saarc Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC) is important.

Science and Technology

17. Strengthening of scientific and technological cooperation across the region is fundamental to accelerating the pace of economic and social development. Sharing of scientific and technological expertise, joint research and development and industrial application of higher technology should be encouraged and facilitated.

Social

18. We hail the signing of the Saarc Social Charter as a historic development, which would have a far-reaching impact on the lives of millions of South Asians. Issues covered under the charter, such as poverty alleviation, population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilization, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition and protection of children are key to the welfare and well-being of all South Asians.

19. Progress has been made in the constitution of Saarc Autonomous Advocacy Group of Prominent Women Personalities (Sawag). To enable women to contribute to the socioeconomic development, there is a need for Saarc to encourage women entrepreneurs in the region.

20. Member states should move towards an early ratification of the two Conventions on Child Welfare and Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

21. Easy and affordable health care, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other serious communicable diseases are priorities. The year 2004 is declared as the "Saarc Awareness Year". The Saarc secretariat should effectively implement the proposed programmes

on the observation of the Saarc Awareness Year and develop a regional strategy through a consultative process and collaborate closely with the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and other international organizations and civil society.

22. The important initiative taken by the Maldives in hosting the emergency meeting of the Saarc health ministers on the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in Male on April 29, 2003, was a welcome development.

23. As agreed by the Saarc health ministers' conference held recently in New Delhi, a Saarc Health Surveillance Centre and a Rapid Deployment Health Response System should be set up to deal with the emerging and re-emerging diseases as well as to establish a network between various institutions dealing with malaria and other vector borne diseases in the member states. Also, documentation of traditional knowledge to safeguard intellectual property rights (IPRs) in medicine needs attention.

24. The importance of cooperation in medical expertise and pharmaceutical as well as in the field of traditional medicine requires elaboration of a Saarc plan of action that should be developed in the shortest possible time.

Cultural

25. We take pride in the rich cultural mosaic of the peoples of South Asia and underline the need for preservation of traditional skills and crafts and promotion of cultural exchanges between nations.

26. We welcome the establishment of a Saarc Cultural Centre in Kandy, which will serve as a symbol of South Asian shared cultural heritage.

Environment

27. It is important to undertake and reinforce regional cooperation in the conservation of our water resources, environment, pollution prevention and control as well as our preparedness to deal with natural calamities. We welcome the early establishment of the Coastal Zone Management Centre in the Maldives.

28. The early and effective implementation of the Saarc Environment Plan of Action is important. We further stressed the early submission of the state of the environment reports to expedite the preparation of Saarc state of environment report and the commissioning of the work on drafting a regional environment treaty.

Combating terrorism

29. We condemn terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations and note that people of South Asia continue to face a serious threat from terrorism.

30. We are convinced that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is a challenge to all states and to all of humanity, and cannot be justified on any ground, whatsoever. Terrorism violates the fundamental values of the United Nations and the Saarc Charter and constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. We agree to fully implement the relevant international conventions to which we are parties.

31. We reaffirm our commitment to Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which, among others, recognizes the seriousness of the problem of terrorism as it affects the security, stability, and development of the region.

32. The signing of the Additional Protocol to the Saarc Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism to deal effectively with financing of terrorism is a further manifestation of our determination to eliminate all forms and manifestations of terrorism from South Asia.

Saarc Award

33. We welcome the institution of the Saarc Award on the basis of a concept paper drawn up by His Majesty's Government of Nepal and decide to present the award during the summits in future. The award will honour and encourage outstanding individuals and organizations within the region in the fields of peace, development, poverty alleviation, and in other areas of regional cooperation.

Information and communication

34. We recognize the vital role that information and media can play in the promotion of peace, progress and harmony in South Asia. In this context, the initiatives for introducing regular 'Saarc roundup' and 'Saarc news' programmes for telecast and broadcast on national TV and radio channels, respectively, in member countries is a welcome development. We agree to the establishment of a Saarc Information Centre in Kathmandu.

35. Saarc should endeavour to bring the benefits of information and communications technology to all peoples of the region, bridging the digital divide and assist in the development of knowledge based societies.

Saarc Integrated Programme of Action (Sipa)

36. We note with satisfaction the progress achieved in regional cooperation through Sipa. The commitment to Sipa must be matched by a corresponding allocation of resources for it.

SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION

37. We encourage the development of specific projects relevant to the individual needs of three or more member states under the provisions of articles VII and X of the Saarc Charter.

INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION

38. We express our determination to develop mutually beneficial links between Saarc and other regional and international organizations, bodies and entities and agree to establish dialogue partnership with other regional bodies and with states outside the region, interested in Saarc activities.

Enhancing political cooperation

39. We envision South Asia to be a peaceful and stable region where each nation is at peace with itself and its neighbours and where conflicts, differences and disputes are addressed through peaceful means and dialogue.

40. Reaffirm our pledge to promote good neighbourly relations on the basis of the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and national independence, non-use of force, non-intervention and non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes and recognize the importance of informal political consultations in promoting mutual understanding and reinforcing confidence building process among member states.

Security of small states

41. We are particularly mindful of the security concerns of small states that arise, inter alia, from their particular vulnerabilities, which should be firmly addressed by scrupulous adherence to the UN Charter, rules of international law and strict adherence to the universally accepted principles and norms related to sovereign rights and territorial integrity of all states. This should be ensured by all, both severally and collectively, through appropriate actions.

42. We endorse the recommendations made by the council of ministers at its 23rd and 24th sessions.

13th Saarc Summit

43. We appreciate the offer of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to host the 13th Saarc Summit in January 2005. Islamabad, Jan 6, 2004.

Courtesy: *Dawn*, January 7, 2004