



INDIA
भारत

74th Session of the UNGA

**The Informal Meeting of SAARC Council of Ministers (CoM)
on the sidelines of UNGA, New York**

STATEMENT BY

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26 September 2019

**Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Nepal,
Excellencies,
Secretary General of SAARC,**

It has been customary for SAARC Foreign Ministers to meet informally on UNGA sidelines and it gives me immense pleasure to meet esteemed colleagues on this occasion.

One of the significances of this meeting is the opportunity it presents in terms of reviewing the status of our cooperation and how much we have progressed since the last time we met at the same time.

I am thankful to the Secretary General for his detailed report in this regard. India attaches great value to the prosperity of the neighborhood under its 'Neighborhood First' policy. And appreciate of his services and contribution as he prepares to hand over.

India has been more than willing to share the fruits of its economic, scientific and technological progress with the South Asian community and this is evidenced by the serious efforts undertaken towards implementation of the announcements made by our Prime Minister at the 18th SAARC Summit.

Excellencies,

The example of South Asian Satellite is instructive about how India has been taking up the initiatives that bear prosperity to the neighborhood. South Asia Satellite, launched in 2017 with an intention to arrive at scientific solutions to address poverty in the SAARC region has impacts in sectors as varied as health, education, disaster response, weather forecasting and communications. As committed in last meeting, with the view to enable Member-states to firm up specific requirements and utilization plans for establishing ground networks, an Utilization Workshop was held (by ISRO) on 11 December 2018 in New Delhi with participation of technical experts from all participating SAARC Countries.

South Asian University (SAU) is another instance where India has been proactive in building academic excellence that will have generational impact. SAU has 580 students and 58 faculty members at present. Till date, SAU had three convocation ceremonies along with one award ceremony to honour 1174 students, who have graduated from the University and contributing immensely in the development of respective member states in the region. India is committed for giving 100% capital cost towards construction of SAU and the construction is going on. India is also the major contributor of operational costs of SAU.

I am also glad to note that SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC-Interim Unit), established in Gujarat has trained more than 350 candidates in the last two years.

India also hosted 11 Training programmes and workshops in Agriculture and Disaster Management since last September.

Excellencies,

Regionalism has taken root in every corner of the world. If we have lagged behind, it is because South Asia does not have the normal trade and connectivity that other regions do.

It is unfortunate that we have not made any headway with reference to some of the connectivity initiatives such as the Motor Vehicles and Railways Agreements. Similarly, there has been no progress in the SAARC Regional Air Services Agreement, initiated by India.

That there are other success stories of last year speaks volumes. This includes the extension of National Knowledge Network (NKN) to our SAARC Partner countries. NKN extension has been completely implemented in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, NKN extension to Bhutan was inaugurated by our Prime Minister on 17 August 2019.

Excellencies,

India has also been pursuing the announcements made by our Prime Minister in the 18th Summit. For instance, we are following up on the

solar electrification of one village per each SAARC Country and we are awaiting positive response from our member states.

Excellencies

Ours is really not just a story of missed opportunities but also of deliberate obstacles. Terrorism is one among them. In our view, elimination of terrorism in all its forms is a precondition not only for fruitful cooperation, but also for the very survival of our region itself.

I reiterate our leaders' statement in Kathmandu in 2014, where they called for full and effective implementation of SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, including through enacting necessary legislation at the national level to root out terrorism. The relevance of SAARC would be determined by these actions against terrorism and this will decide our collective journey of the future become more productive.

Excellencies,

We have already conveyed our concurrence for appointment of H.E Mr. Esala Weerakoon as a next Secretary General of SAARC. I hope today we all will also consider and approve his appointment. I would like to convey India's best wishes to H.E Mr. Esala Weerakoon and hope that his valuable experience will guide the SAARC towards stronger cooperation after he takes over in March 2020.

As a founder member of SAARC India is committed for development in the SAARC region and aspire for great future for the SAARC.
