

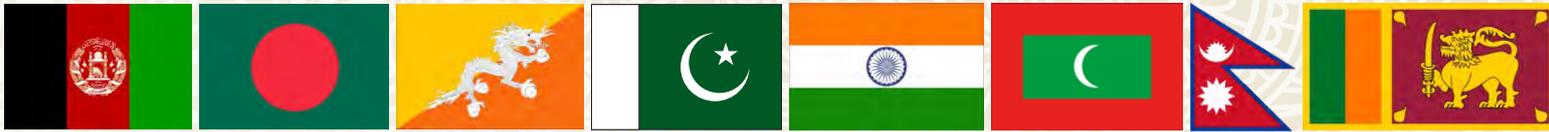


# 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers & Parliamentarians 2012

4-6 November, Islamabad, Pakistan



6th NOVEMBER, 2012



## Hon'able Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza Addresses the CASSP General Assembly



Hon'able Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan Dr. Fehmida Mirza in her formal opening Speech to the General Assembly of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians said "it is indeed an honour for me to assume the Chair of the President of the 6th Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians. The Parliament of Pakistan is privileged to hold this important regional parliamentary event and on its behalf, I once again warmly welcome the worthy Presiding Officers and their delegations to our beautiful Capital, Islamabad.

In its over two decades of existence, SAARC has been instrumental in promoting regional integration through sustained dialogue and cooperation in diverse fields of economic and human development, environment and climate concerns, science, technology, culture and tourism. The principles of SAARC Charter have been guiding our governments to seek for a peaceful, progressive and democratic South Asia by "promoting the welfare of the peoples in mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems". However, the gap between the promise of SAARC and the reality of its accomplishment still remains large.

This can be filled through accelerated people-to-people contacts. As the representatives of the people, parliamentarians are the ideal agents of change. Our Association, therefore, can become the needed catalyst to imbue new life in SAARC body. Through our regular and more frequent meetings, our forum can bring the focus on issues of urgent importance, which affect the daily lives of our people. I am pleased to note that since our last meeting in New Delhi in 2011, all our member Parliaments have shown determination to benefit from the Association.

I am also delighted to share with you the decisions of yesterday's Meeting of the Speaker's Council. The Council received a message from the first-ever meeting of Women Parliamentarians, whereby it was informed that women legislators have agreed on setting up a permanent "Women's Committee of SAARC Association of Speakers and Parliamentarians."

The Council has agreed to the suggestion. It will now be formalised through an amendment in the Charter and Rules of Association. I request the Secretary General of our Association to take up the matter at the earliest. The Council also discussed ways and means to encourage young parliamentarians from its platform. It was decided that the Committee of Secretaries General and Secretaries would present a detailed plan of action in this regard in our next Conference in 2013 in Male, the Maldives.

These are indeed positive developments and reflect our common desire to promote and strengthen our mutual parliamentary contact. I hope that Islamabad Conference provides the worthy delegates a perfect setting to discuss matters placed before this Conference in friendship and candour. In my capacity as the President of this august Assembly, I look forward to a meaningful outcome of the 6th Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians and wish this Conference the very best".

## Proceedings of General Assembly of CASSP



### Hon'able Deputy Speaker Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi Speaks on "Meaningful Participatory Democracy in South Asia"

Deputy Speaker, National Assembly of Pakistan Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi said under the leadership of Dr Fehmida Mirza the association of speakers and parliamentarians would help peaceful and progressive region.

Speaking on topic titled "Meaningful Participatory Democracy in South Asia," he said the SAARC parliamentarians have the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people through law making and oversight and advocacy functions therefore they can contribute effectively to guaranteeing the people's rights and liberties, securing civil peace and ensuring harmonious development.

The relationships between the parliament and democracy can only be cemented with the active participation of the people.

South Asia face common challenges of terrorism, extremism, mass poverty, unemployment, lack of adequate health care, literacy, governance and environmental degradation. All the problems could be overcome by adopting a strengthened and collective democratic approach.

The deputy speaker said unity is the key for meeting all challenges. The modern technology has enabled the people of remote areas to contribute their views in strengthening democratic culture.



In the theme for discussion "Meaningful Participatory Democracy in South Asia-Parliaments' Affirmative Action", Hon'able Speaker Lok Sabha Smt. Meira Kumar said "As a policy affirmative action is intended to provide increased opportunities for under represented and disadvantaged groups that have been traditionally left out of the loop of development. In India, our constitution guarantees formal equality which means equal protection of law against discrimination. The constitution of India contains provisions for the special representation rights of the Scheduled casts and the Scheduled tribes by way of reserved seats in legislatures and quotas in the government jobs and education institutions. We are also striving towards creating an atmosphere where trade and industry come forward to provide training for jobs for the socially backward groups, as is being done in the public sector. Preferences are also given to these groups as also to women with regard to provision of certain expenditure, services and ameliorative schemes such as scholarships, grants, loans, land allotments, etc. We also have in place commissions like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and other Commissions like the National Commission on Women, National Commission of Minorities to monitor the safeguards provided for these groups and to give recommendations for new schemes and for improving the delivery systems".



In the theme for discussion "Meaningful Participatory Democracy in South Asia-Parliaments' Affirmative Action", Hon'able Abdulla Shahid Speaker of the People's Majlis, Republic of Maldives said "Participatory democracy is, I believe, first and foremost about people - inclusion of our citizens in decision making, which helps to empower them. We should not be so complacent as to believe that the mere act of holding elections at regular intervals to determine who amongst us should hold the reins of power constitute democratic governance or people power.

If indeed, democracy is said to be about governing through the consent of the people by forming a Government that is freely chosen by the people to govern over them in their interests, then it is only right that every citizen has an equal opportunity to be part of that system; be able to contribute, in a meaningful way, to the upholding of a democratic system that both protects and promotes their interests".



In the theme for discussion “Targeting Food Security in the Region: ensuring parliaments role in accomplishing MDGs”, Hon’able A.H.M Azwer Alhaj MP, Sri Lanka said “When it comes to the situation in Sri Lanka, our accomplishments in achieving the MDGs are quite remarkable. Sri Lanka has achieved many of the MDGs and is on track to realize all of them by 2015. Sri Lanka’s overall development strategy spelt out in ‘mahinda chintana - vision for the future’ has set specific targets to combat poverty within the MDG framework. A range of programmes and projects have been designed for the eradication of poverty by 2016. This vision has specifically targeted achieving the MDGs ahead of time. The ‘divi Neguma’, the sustainable livelihood programme seeks to empower households through the establishment of one million domestic economic units. The ‘Gama Neguma’, the empowered villages programme targets on improving or provision of access to electricity, water, sanitation and other essential services including health and education. Eradicating poverty and ensuring food security are the main focus of the above programmes. These programmes promote the concept of self-employment with the infusion of financial and technical assistance to youth and women in rural areas. The poverty level in Sri Lanka has declined to 7.6% in 2011 from 15.2% in 2005. The per capita income on the other hand, increased from US \$ 1062 in 2004 to US \$ 2836 in 2011”.

In the theme for discussion “Targeting Food Security in the Region: ensuring parliaments role in accomplishing MDGs”, Hon’able Member of National Council of Bhutan, Tashi Wangmo said “I would like to highlight a few important parliamentary actions taken with the intention of addressing issues of food security in Bhutan. Nearly 70% of Bhutanese people are subsistent farmers. One of the farming community’s biggest challenges against producing adequate food for subsistence needs is wildlife depredation of crops and livestock. The Parliament has not only passed resolutions asking the government to deal with the issue. Almost on a yearly



basis, the Parliament has been publicly checking on the government actions. The government has also adopted some of the Parliament’s recommendations, initiated some on its own, pilot tested the strategies and began implementing them in rural communities. Although this challenge will not be overcome overnight, there are already success stories being reported from communities victimized by wildlife depredations.

The Bhutanese Parliament has also ratified the SAARC Food Bank agreement. We understand that SAARC member countries have difficulty meeting food securities on our own and therefore, such an initiative from our leaders to make food available on the basis of regional co-operation to our peoples in order to tackle food shortages during times of natural disasters and to stabilize volatility of food prices convinced our parliament to support this agreement.



In the theme for discussion “Targeting Food Security in the Region: ensuring parliaments role in accomplishing MDGs”, Hon’able Abdul Hamid Advocate, Speaker Parliament of Bangladesh said “Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in domestic production of food by adoption of High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) in agriculture sector. Since Independence in 1971, Bangladesh has tripled food production. The country now produces over 34 million tons of food grain each year and in most years it is near self-sufficient in rice. Expect for pulses and wheat, production of fruits, vegetables, fish and meat has also been increased. However, except rice, other crop production is less than required for a nutritionally balanced diet for the population.

Bangladesh’s advancement towards MDGs is evident in human development, for example attainment of gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment. The end of the Sixth Plan coincides with the terminal year for the MDGs (2015). This provides an opportunity to take stock of progress with MDGs so far and undertake corrective actions in areas where progress is lagging. A review of progress shows that Bangladesh has covered significant grounds and can safely be said to be on track in relation to most of the targets. Bangladesh is making strides in reducing poverty, already brought down the poverty gap ration to 6.5 against 2015 target of 8 with the rate of poverty reduction being 1.44 percent in relation to the required rate of 1.23 percent.





The Pakistani Parliamentarians delegation comprising of Dr. Nafisa Shah, Dr. Attiya Inayatullah, Abdul Rasheed Godel, Ms. Kishwar Zehra, Ms. Shagufta Sadiq, Ms. Imrana Saeed, Ms. Bushra Gohar, Engineer Khurram Dastagir Khan, Ms. Asiya Nasir, Ms. Nuzhat Sadiq, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor and Ms. Shehnaz Wazir Ali during the General Assembly meeting contributed in the discussion. "As we have floated the idea of strengthening participatory democracy, therefore the nations and countries of this region should not import different versions of democracy but on the contrary we should redefine this term democracy which incorporates with our, regional, cultural, social, religious, economical and ethnical values, and only serve the interest of the people of this region.

To mobilize and support this idea we need to strengthen people to people contact. Democracy is all about decision making. The decisions taken by few of us today will matter the lives of coming generation.

South Asia is one of the most populous, but also one of the most diverse regions in the world – a region that has engendered philosophies, created religions both ancient and very new, inspired mass



movements of people led by ideologies of identity and ethnicity.

South Asia's experience with statehood and nationhood is indeed both old and new, with this area known for hundreds of small monarchical states is now rebuilding its polity into the modern states on the principles of democratic governance.



We are gathered today not speaking to our community, constituency or our country, we are speaking to the region, and this is a giant leap forward. From here we can forge closer ties, come up with a common vision on issues that face the millions of men, women and children in our areas, and work with each other to make our own role more effective, and give a voice a South Asian collective identity, a very powerful idea indeed.

All this would ultimately give strength to representative politics, and to democracy.

Democracy envisages inclusion and participation of all. However structural historical and social factors that have led to systematic exclusion and marginalization of our peoples poses a great challenge and remain the most significant.

How do we ensure there is no

race, ethnicity, class, employment? This is fundamental to all politics. Politics in my view is not just about power, it is also about qualifying, distributing, and sharing this power. Therefore the primary challenge before us, as politicians, and as legislators, is to ensure equality of opportunities, access and rights. This indeed is the best form of power.

Affirmative actions are the steps we take to remove structural societal discriminations to promote equality. In Pakistan, combating discrimination on the basis of sex and religion have been our foremost concern as democracy gains ground.

Women provide the most essential numbers to democratic set ups, as half of the voters, as a very large number of political activists and finally as elected representatives. Despite being essential to democratic culture, women here have been victim of structural, socio-cultural inequalities as in the rest of South Asia.

Pakistan has effectively used quotas as affirmative action for giving representation, visibility and voice to women. Reservations for women have been instrumental in increasing the numbers of women in political and



legislative forums all over the world. In Pakistan, we are 22.5 per cent in the lower house, and we aspire to reach 33 per cent.

This visibility has given us the strength to promote the agenda of social and political justice in the parliament and we have been able to take forward the rights agenda with great speed leading to some exemplary



legislations against gender violence.

There have been also several important policy measures that have been taken to promote women's rights. For instance, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto created special institutions to empower women. The Womens police stations, and the Womens bank were created to empower women socially and economically. There today are job quotas for women, and there are constitutional quotas that provide for reservations for them in both houses of the parliament. In Pakistan, today, in addition, recognizing that poverty has a female face, millions of women are being targeted for a focused intervention on poverty alleviation



through cash transfer – the Benazir Income support Program. In our Southern province of Sindh, women are being given land as an entitlement spurning the age old cultural norm of depriving women of right to property.

Similar steps have been taken to ensure participation of religious minorities by creation of constitutional quotas both in the Upper and the Lower Houses and we are now legislating to

However these quotas can only be temporary measures. Although women's participation in legislative business is impressive, the very fact that women are not directly elected from constituencies, has been a point of contest and has made women somewhat of lesser equals in the parliament. Similarly minority quotas have been effective in giving voice to the non religious minorities, but that has not yet encourages members of religious minorities to contest on general seats.

The ideal before us therefore should be mainstreaming and affirmative action should only be a temporary measure towards this ideal. Parliaments can effectively voice mainstreaming mechanisms which have to be total and comprehensive. Our emphasis on mainstreaming should not only for strengthening democracy and social justice, it should also about good effective and responsive politics.



While quotas are essential to making marginalized visible, institutional changes in political parties, electoral politics, are the final guarantee to ensuring women's or minorities political empowerment. But mainstreaming of marginalized groups of people is a much more difficult proposition than affirmative action. And here is where parliaments need to get down to business and close all channels where discriminations are engendered.

Our vision should be to create mechanisms and systems where equality is built into our lives and lifestyles, in our schools system, our curricula, our job markets, our political party structures, our firms, our playgrounds, and finally an most importantly in our value systems. It has be in our mindsets, and that we where parliaments need to not only create mechanisms, but inspire a new vision.



## Picture Gallery



# SARC



## Seventh SAARC Speakers Conference to be held in Male, Maldives



The seventh SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians Conference would be held in Male, Maldives, announces Speaker National Assembly Dr. Fehmida Mirza. Speaking in the sixth General Assembly of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians, she said according to the charter of the SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians association, Speaker of People's Majlis of Republic of the Maldives, Abdullah Shahid has been appointed as vice President of the Association. Speaker of the Jatiyo Sansad of the Republic of Bangladesh Abdul Hamid, Jig-May Tshul-Tim Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Republic of India Ms Meera Kumar, Speaker of the People's of Majlis of the Republic of the Maldives Abdullah Shahid and a vast majority of parliamentarians from SAARC countries including Pakistan were present.

### Today's Engagements

#### Tuesday, 6th November

0945 hours  
1000 hours

Delegates/observers assemble  
Fifth Session (Venue: Kehkashan Hall,  
Serena Hotel)  
Discussion on the subject: "Targeting Food  
Security for the Region: Ensuring Parliament's  
role in accomplishing MDGs"

1115 hours  
1130 hours

Tea Break  
Sixth Session:  
Hon. Mr. Sabir Ali Baloch, Deputy Chairman  
Senate of Pakistan will Chair the Session  
Discussion on the subject "Targeting Food  
Security for the Region: Ensuring Parliament's  
role in accomplishing MDGs"

1230 hours  
1240 hours  
1300 hours

Vote of Thanks  
Closure of the Conference  
Lunch hosted by Hon'ble Prime Minister of  
Pakistan  
Venue: PM House

1500 hours

Post-Conference Tour of Islamabad City



#### Islamabad Weather Today

12°C  26°C  
Lo Hi  
Humidity 65% - 75%