

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

ON THE OCCASSION OF DINNER HOSTED IN THE HONOUR OF SAARC INTERIOR/HOME MINISTERS

- Honorable Ministers of the SAARC Member Countries
- Federal Ministers
- Secretary General SAARC
- Excellencies
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a matter of pleasure for me to extend very warm welcome to our honorable guests to Pakistan. I greatly appreciate your presence in Islamabad for attending the Third SAARC Interior/Home Ministers meeting.

I had the honor of having very useful interaction with your leadership, on bilateral as well as SAARC related matters at the 16th Summit in Thimphu, in April, this year. I would like to avail this opportunity to reiterate here our heartiest felicitations to the Government of Bhutan for its excellent arrangements for making the SAARC Summit a success and according us with very special generous hospitality.

I am also confident that your meeting in Islamabad today was equally fruitful in terms of achieving its objectives. May I assure you of my Government's full support and commitment in implementing the outcome of your discussions.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

While it is gratifying to note that despite numerous challenges that the SAARC is faced with, it has made progress in various fields, specially in dealing with complex issues of social advancement, economic integration, climate change, organized crimes, drug trafficking and terrorism.

I, nonetheless, feel that there is a need to redouble our efforts to put SAARC on ascending trajectory for fostering ever stronger regional cooperation among the member States on every matter and issue of our mutual concern and thus enhancing SAARC's global profile to the level it deserves. In doing so, we must evaluate the results of our joint endeavors in the past and address our shortcomings to make SAARC more visible and relevant, in the future. Regrettably, the South Asia still lags far behind its larger Asian neighborhood, in terms of economic and social advancement.

While other Asian countries especially those of ASEAN, have forged closer robust cooperation for development and are in a position to avail the benefits of globalization, SAARC has remained inward- looking and unable to keep pace with the neighboring regions, in those areas. The key impediment to SAARC's success, I feel, had been the

absence of an enabling political environment for promotion of mutually beneficial cooperation. Our region, unfortunately, has remained mired in disputes and tensions. We have remained far too preoccupied with the management of tensions and differences. This has to change and it is my earnest and sincere hope that the required change would take place sooner rather than later.

Pakistan for its part, let me assure you, remains committed to the SAARC Charter in furthering the goals of close regional interaction and is desirous to see it develop as a successful regional organization. We will continue to attach high priority to contribute towards the strengthening of SAARC. We have and will continue to incorporate various SAARC decisions into our national plans and policies.

Honorable guests,

We must be mindful of the fact that the progress and prosperity of our peoples is closely linked to the security environment of the region. The phenomenon of terrorism has emerged as a huge challenge to the security and prosperity of South Asia as well as the entire world. Terrorism is a menace whose effects transgress national boundaries. It can be fought best through cooperative approach. It is, therefore, our national and collective responsibility to make sincere efforts and implement effective strategies to rid our region of this scourge. Pakistan, being in the front line of war on terror, has suffered more than any other country in the world. Our leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, herself, became a victim of terrorism. Hundreds of our people and security officials have sacrificed their lives.

Terrorism has also severely impacted our economy. It can not be defeated by one country alone. We have to join hands together and fight it as a united front. I am confident that with sustained efforts, undertaken with mutual trust and sincerity, we will be able to eliminate this threat from our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

SAARC had been created quarter of a century ago, with a clear aim of jointly seeking the betterment of our peoples and the region. We, however, still have a long way to go to reach that goal. It is, hence, important to accelerate our joint efforts in finding ways and means to augment the capacity of SAARC to enable it to serve as a catalyst for the economic and social development of our region. We must share best practices under the SAARC umbrella, be it in science, technology, management, agriculture or public service. Due to its limitless potential, great economic promise and rich cultural heritage, there is tremendous global interest in South Asia, which we need to optimize through flows of investment and technology in collaborative arrangements with the international and regional institutions. SAARC has to position itself to engage interested states and international organizations to develop the win-win complementarities for socio-economic progress.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding, I would like to reiterate that SAARC must be seen as a viable regional organization responsive to the aspirations of our masses. They deserve better and we must not fail them by failing to overcome the hurdles on the way of our heightened cooperation in every possible field. I hope that the deliberations, that you had today, would give a new incentive for the multifaceted regional cooperation. Pakistan would always be ready to provide its full support to your endeavors in this regard. I, once again, would like to extend a very warm welcome to Your Excellencies to Pakistan and hope you would have a comfortable stay.

Thank you.