

# Information for Peace Progress and Cooperation

# SAARC INFORMATION MINISTERS' MEETING

DHAKA 25-26 APRIL 1998

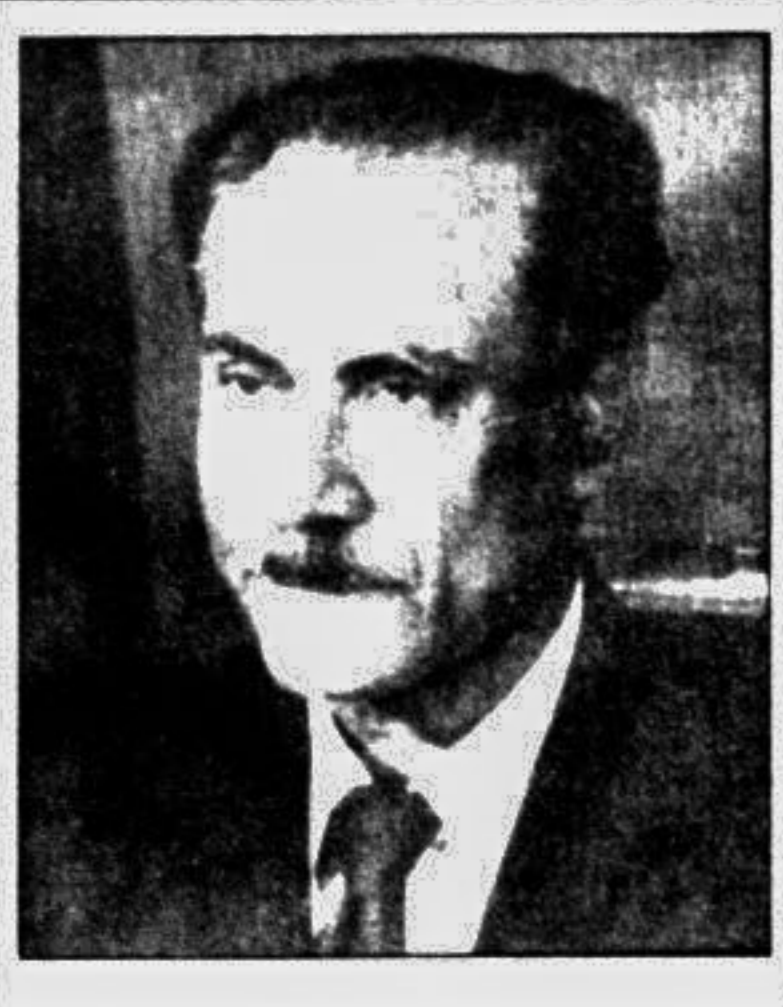
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## Information Flow and Exchange for Peace and Progress in SAARC Region



**PRESIDENT  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC  
OF BANGLADESH  
DHAKA**

25 April 1998

### Message

I am happy to know that the first two-day Meeting of the Information Ministers' of SAARC countries is going to be held in Dhaka. I welcome the initiative.

In the age of present information revolution, the uninterrupted flow of information helps not only to know each other but also plays an active role in the efforts towards national development. The democratic-minded people of the SAARC countries are very much eager for successful development of democratic norms and values. Flow of information is indispensable for the success of democracy. I hope, this meeting of SAARC Information Ministers' will open a new horizon towards strengthening the foundation of democracy which the people carefully reared for long.

I wish the Conference a success.

*Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed*

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

The regional arrangement began long after the second World War to gain popularity since a large part of South Asia which was structured as one single political and administrative unit witnessed a period of intense upsurge of self-assertion depending on religious, linguistic and ethnic differences. Even among some independent states suspicion, mistrust and open hostility were identified in their waning relationships. Traditional exchange and interactions among those states including flow of goods, communication materials like books, papers, magazines and movement of people as well had been obstructed. In fact, most of the nations of the region had been more concerned with focusing on their distinct identity and image than working together for a common purpose. The prevailing atmosphere was, thus, not in favour of

forming an association of any regional framework. The nations of South Asia, which once shared the credit of being the cradle of much of the cultural and civilization heritage recorded in history, Pran Chopra and others state, plunged into mutual confrontation and conflict rather than cooperation and came to be proverbially known as a region of mistrust.

region viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. About a fifth of world's population live in South Asia which occupies about three percent of the world's land surface, and about half of its total area is not suitable for cultivation. The ratio of population to resources is very unfavourable and some of the poorest nations in the

of self-reliance mutual assistance among the member states. Programmes identified within the broad subject areas by the organization are only a dozen and a half. These include Agriculture and Forestry, Health and Population Activities, Meteorology, Rural Development, Postal Services, Transport, Science and Technology, Sports, Arts and Culture, Telecommunications, Women in Development, Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Abuse, Prevention of Terrorism, Organized Tourism, Documentation Centre, Audio-visual Exchange, SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships, Youth Volunteer Exchange and International Economic Issues. Of all these important areas, telecommunications and audio-visual exchange have some role to play for better communication and understanding between the countries.

### Dr. M. Golam Rahman

Following some positive developments in the region, Bangladesh proceeded with interest and enthusiasm to convey the need of constituting a regional organization which will help promote their economy, science, culture and communication. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had articulated his vision of a conflict-free and prosperous South Asia as back as in 1972. The justification was that many nations of the world had established regional arrangements for consultations on matters of mutual concern and thus had derived benefits from them. But South Asia was among the few areas, which did not have any such platform to make sharing of ideas, knowledge, expertise or materials of mutual benefit. Regional cooperation was, however, felt necessary among the countries of the

world belong to this region. The economy of South Asia is small; on the contrast, the agglomeration of population is massive. The per capita incomes of these countries are among the lowest in the global chart. The literacy rate, calorie intake, consumption of energy, and condition of health speak of endemic poverty and gross underdevelopment. Facing these formidable challenges the Charter of the organization has simply recognized the possibility that increased cooperation, contact and exchanges would contribute to the promotion of friendship and understanding among the member states and promote the welfare of the people of the region. SAARC was established aiming at accelerated economic growth, societal progress and cultural development and promotion

The facts are tantalizing if we look back to some instances of information flow among the South Asian countries. It is evident from a study that in almost all the newspapers studied 80 to 90 percent of international news are non-regional, where as regional news occupy 10 to 20 percent space. Among the newspapers of the six countries viz., Bangladesh, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Indian newspapers carried comparatively more regional news, amounting 30 percent. Eight newspapers under study carried no news about Burma, the Maldives and Bhutan. Newspapers of Bangladesh reported international news concerning Pakistan and India only and no news about Sri Lanka, Nepal and Burma. Sri Lankan newspapers published no news about its close neighbour, the Maldives. Most of the



**PRIME MINISTER  
GOVERNMENT OF THE  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC  
OF BANGLADESH**

20 April, 1998

### Message

It gives me immense pleasure that the SAARC Information Ministers' Meeting begins in Dhaka on April 25, '98.

The meeting is of special significance as the mass media of the SAARC countries have an important role to play in achieving the goal of friendship, cooperation, unity and progress. The media can help create awareness among the people of the region in meeting our challenges ahead.

I am confident, the meeting will strengthen the unity of the SAARC Nations in their journey towards prosperity.

I wish the occasion all success.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever

*Sheikh Hasina*

Sheikh Hasina

## Informatization : The SAARC Scenario

**Dr. Shaikh Abdus Salam  
Director General, Press Institute of Bangladesh**

To Wilbur Schramm, mass media in any country can facilitate development as a 'great multiplier' Media vis-a-vis communications can thus help countries to reach them the point of self sustaining stage of development. Apart from development point of view, the role of mass media are nowadays being perceived from other dimensions too. Those dimensions are: people, infrastructure and economy. A renowned author ECY Kuo had combined those dimensions and termed them as 'informatization'. To be informatized a nation must have the prerequisites of some attributes like literacy, a better educated people, mass media use, a higher propensity to introduce and use telecommunications and achieve competence to apply computer technology. This article is aimed at analyzing the general level and recent trend of technological development among the SAARC countries and thereafter to assess the economic prospect and compare the countries as potential hubs in the information superhighway against the background of their infrastructure development.

have no option but to enter the information superhighway to compete the 'material global' economy. Countries like Singapore and Malaysia have now become the capitals of Southeast Asia in respect of information technologies. Asean countries are sharing this benefit mutually and are almost ready to center the information superhighway corridor within a very short time. The countries without this technological blessings and information links can not effectively participate even in the running of their state affairs. Bangladesh in particular and other SAARC countries in general are lagging far behind in operationalising new technologies and thus remain poor in every sector of economic, political, social, organizational and administrative spheres. In respect to many other countries of the world we are still remaining without entering into the race of commercialization, privatization, deregulation and internationalization. SAARC as the seed of cooperation and advancement among the member countries, can address the issue in a proper manner. Before we go into that discussion let us first be introduced with some indicators of the media vis-a-vis communication scenario of the countries in

this region. A number of authors have offered a few dimensional models to measure the process and level of informatization by identifying relevant indicators. Those dimensions are-people dimension; infrastructure dimension (mass media, telecommunications, computerization) and economy dimension. Let us now present those dimensions with indicators prevailing in SAARC countries and discuss in general.

From the Table-1 it appears that the basic demographic and economic indicators for SAARC countries the real growth (GDP) varies from country to country with significant margin. In respect to GDP i.e. real growth it ranges between 2.3 to 6.6. The general literacy indicator supports some countries real strength (Sri Lanka and Maldives) and, again show the weakness of others (Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh).

Table - 2 provides us the picture related to infrastructure dimension of mass media in SAARC countries. These are also relevant in determining each country's general mass media penetration.

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**Table : 1 (For people dimension)  
[Basic Demographic, Economic and Literacy Indicators]**

Selected Indicators	Total area in sq. km (000)	Population in millions mid 1996 (est)	Urban Population (per cent)	GUP 1995 in \$ billions (Purchasing Power Parity)	GDP 1995 per capita income \$ (PPP)	GNP 1996 per capita income \$	GDP : real growth	General Literacy per cent of those aged 15 and above
Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Bangladesh	144	123.08	17.7	145.5	1,130	340	4.6	38.1
Bhutan	47	1.82	6.2	1.3	730	415	6.0	42.2
India	3,287.6	952.11	26.5	1,408.7	1,500	335	5.5	52.0
Maldives	0.3	0.27	26.6	0.39	1,560	900	6.6	93.2
Nepal	140.8	22.09	13.1	25.2	1,200	200	2.3	27.2
Pakistan	803.9	129.27	34.1	274.2	2,100	465	4.7	37.8
Sri Lanka	65.6	18.55	22.1	65.6	3,600	660	5.0	90.2



**Prof. Abu Sayeed  
State Minister  
Ministry of Information  
Govt. of the People's  
Republic of Bangladesh**

23 April, 1998

### Message

We are proud and delighted to organise the first meeting of Information Ministers of the member-countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

At this happy juncture, I recall with deep respect the sacred memory of our great leader the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who founded the independent and sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh through a long and arduous struggle for independence and also initiated the process of reconciliation and cooperation among the nations of South Asia for regional uplift. Recipient of the Julio Curie award for world peace, this great Bengalee leader expressed his resolve to build up rapport, mutual cooperation, friendship, and peace among the countries of the region in different international forums including addresses at the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September, 1974, and the Commonwealth Summit held in Kingston, Jamaica, on 6 May, 1975. His illustrious daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is now playing a leading role in the same sphere of regional development and cooperation.

As we stand on the doorsteps of the 21st century, free flow of information and culture has been accelerated in the global society through radical improvements in information technology. At this critical juncture of time, this meeting of the SAARC Information Ministers is undoubtedly appropriate and timely. We are hopeful that this meeting will be a landmark in enhancing exchange of information within the SAARC region which will in turn open up a new horizon in the global information superhighway of the new millennium.

Joi Bangla  
Joi Bangabandhu  
Long live SAARC

*Prof. Abu Sayeed*

Prof. Abu Sayeed



**GOVERNMENT OF THE  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
BANGLADESH  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION**

### Message

We are very happy that the first ever Meeting of the Ministers' of Information of the SAARC countries is going to be held in Dhaka on April 25-26, 1998. Recent development in information technology has created a free flow of information across the globe. This has a tremendous impact on the development of the nation states around the world. The revolutionary development in information technology has brought the people all over the world closer and in a sense, this planet of ours has assumed the proportion of a "Global Village".

The first ever SAARC Information Ministers' Meeting in Dhaka, will hopefully extend to us a momentous opportunity to devise ways and means to effectively utilise the present-day information technology for promoting peace and development in the region.

I wish this august Meeting a grand success.

*M. A. Husain*

M. Akmal Husain  
Secretary

regional news items under that study were about India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. News of Sri Lanka and Nepal were very small in volume. It is also evident from the same study that the regional newspapers do not focus their attention adequately on the regional problems and interests.

Another study showed that Indian newspapers as foreign countries of which Pakistan accounted for 37.1 per cent of total news items covered 25 countries of Asia. No other country of South Asia got even five per cent of coverage (N. L. Chowla 1983). The source-wise analysis of news flow in the countries of South Asian region showed that international news agencies were the major source for news coverage. Bangladesh covered 71.49 percent news items, India covered 41.94 percent, Nepal covered 85.37 percent, and Pakistan covered 55.79 percent, while Sri Lanka covered 93.42 percent news items coming from Reuter, AFP, AP, and UPI.

In South Asian countries the state of news agency journalism is very much conditioned by the socio-political and cultural pattern of each country. While the news agencies in English provide a common service to South Asian region some countries also put a second language service in its own boundary. The technological advancement (e-mail/Internet, Fax) of agency has also made headway by providing computerized news service to some countries in the region. The development of agency journalism can make a common platform for news exchange with broader outline among SAARC countries. Because we have lessons of Asia-Pacific News Network (ANN) or non-aligned news pool, we can frame a better working scheme. South Asian News Agency (SANA) has been formed. The common fields of interest as identified by SAARC have already made some marks achieving a common goal of the concerned nations. The nations of this region should plan their own communication policies, network, structures, and products in the context of their developmental needs. The press, broadcast service and audio-visual media, as part of the total communication infrastructure in the South Asia region should, however, contribute towards national integration and elimination of tensions discarding negative impulses for the betterment of the quality of life of individuals. The governments of the concerned countries need to give paramount importance to the press freedom to assist the media in nation building and human resource development. The assertion of the fundamental rights of freedom of thought and expression in the constitutions of the South Asian countries need

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