

Welcome Address by the Honorable Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat
Minister of Finance of Nepal
Seventh SAARC Finance Ministers' Meeting
Kathmandu, Nepal
August 20, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

The Right Honorable Prime Minister Mr. Sushil Koirala,

His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary-General of SAARC,

Honorable Finance Ministers,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to address the inaugural session of the 7th Meeting of the Finance Ministers of SAARC. On behalf of the Government of Nepal, I welcome you warmly to Kathmandu. We gather here today in our collective quest to build solidarity through regional cooperation.

We are honored to have the Right Honorable Prime Minister as the Chief Guest this morning. His presence is symbolic of the importance his government attaches to the vision and objectives of SAARC. The 18th Summit hosted in Kathmandu last November adopted the theme of deeper cooperation for peace and prosperity. We see this meeting as a milestone in bolstering that agenda.

We meet after a gap of two years since the 6th SAARC Finance Ministers Meeting held in Colombo. That meeting focused on the way forward for intra-regional and inter-regional integration. It identified three priority areas: tourism promotion, food security and common regional voice in international forums. We should take stock of progress made in these areas so far.

Let me briefly touch upon the major thrust of this meeting. We will consider the report of the Finance Secretaries as well as review the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the 6th Meeting. Our deliberations will also focus on preparations of the proposals to allow for greater flow of financial capital and intra-regional long term investment. Likewise, we will discuss the draft SAARC Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment as well as matters related to SAARC FINANCE.

Excellencies,

Let me take this opportunity to also brief you on the emerging political development here in the host country. A new constitution is imminent that we hope will formally end the long political transition. We then expect to enter a new era of economic transformation for which economic growth across South Asia will provide impetus.

Before the devastating earthquake that we experienced in April this year, the Nepali economy was gearing up for a higher trajectory of growth. We made a

transformative leap in the energy sector by signing a landmark power trade agreement with India, and power development agreements with prominent multinational companies from the region. We were pursuing the next generation of economic reforms to sustain the gains made so far. We have met most of the Millennium Development Goals, and were on track to graduate from our status as a Least Developed Country, possibly by 2022. The natural disaster upsets this momentum.

But we are not deterred, and it is against the backdrop of this determination to march ahead that we host this important meeting in Kathmandu. We hope the venue reinforces our shared values, and the systemic mechanisms we have put in place to confront the common challenges posed by natural disasters and poverty.

I am confident that we in SAARC will recognize the evolving economic trends around us and appreciate the urgency for expedited progress towards deeper regional integration through economic and financial cooperation. The lofty goal of an eventual economic union begins with the mundane hard work we do to harmonize our standards, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, boost connectivity, and promote intra-regional investment.

Let me end by reiterating my gratitude to the Right Honorable Prime Minister, and to you all for being with us at a time when we are seeking to project a sense

of normalcy in Nepal. I wish us all a successful meeting of SAARC Finance Ministers in the collective interest of the 1.7 billion people we have the solemn privilege to represent.

Thank you.