

# PHURO INNOVATIONS

## POLITICAL PEACE

### Dialouge



Understanding  
Attempt at it  
Together



# Politics – An Important Tool in the World Peace Process

## India | Nepal | Bhutan | Balochistan

Minutes of Meeting | 20 November 2021

Phuro Innovations hosted its first virtual discussion on Pursuit of Political Peace. Debuted on November 20, 2021 as a series of year-long engagements/ innovative solutions and research-oriented approach, the virtual meet brought together the thought processes of leaders from India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Balochistan; on the subject of “Politics - An Important tool in the World Peace process”.

The discussions were very fruitful and following solutions/ innovative ideas were presented by the stalwart leaders. There was a breakthrough of thoughts and out-of-box thinking, which is the real need of the hour.



### Rachna Sharma | India

*Founder of Phuro Innovations, Co-Chair of HAE India, and Alumnus of Harvard Business School*

With the demographic dividend, SAARC can be the next powerhouse by adding a structured framework/ institution which will advise the region on conflict resolution and peace treaties in the future. So Phuro Innovations wants to be that institution, structured framework and the torchbearer of advocacy bringing together the organizations, leaders, and shared philosophies that could help the region in maintaining peace. No other superpower can help us. E.g. the United Nations was established to stop world wars, however, if that is correct then there wouldn't have been wars that continue till today such as in Syria, Afghanistan & Lebanon to name a few. They are most concerned with Europe and America and have ignored the emerging nations' conflicts for a long period of time now. As a founder of Phuro Innovations, Ms. Rachna Sharma mentioned that ‘when I talk about Peace, I specifically talk about positive peace, which is attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies’.



### Chhaya Sharma Pant | Nepal

*Former Member of Parliament of Nepal, President of ABWCI, Member of the Advisory Committee of SAARC Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs Council, and awardee of the Ambassador of Peace by Universal Peace Federation*

Ms. Sharma began on a note that despite of the existence of a special relationship between Nepal and India, the two sides have not been able to appreciate the historic bond. She underscored that the root cause of the friction between two nations is the sensitivity of the borders shared by Nepal with China, which creates susceptibility in India. In her views, bilateral negotiations is the way to solve the issues, coupled with strengthening the people-to-people and business-to-business relations given the commonality in language and culture of the two countries.

In regard to SAARC, she mentioned that people of the member states are not aware of the political, social, and economic dynamics of each other, which needs to be addressed to enhance peace

within the region. Upon being asked about the role of women in peacebuilding, Ms. Sharma mentioned that women are born with the attributes for peace, and gifts of perseverance, commitment, empathy, and mindfulness. Quoting the research that participation of women in peace process can lead upto 24% decrease in violence, she emphasised the need for increased women participation in decision making roles for greater good.

Highlighting that ballet is more powerful than bullet, Ms. Sharma opined that we'll never make everyone happy but we should first try and make everyone peaceful because only then we can discuss if there is happiness or not. She further said that wasting a lot of time fighting only brings destruction, hurt, and pain to the nations; and we should take up dialogue and negotiation as a tool to increase the efficacy of the peace process. She asserted that and finally it is only with peaceful argument that any war or conflicts can be ended and SAARC nations do not always need to depend upon outside interventions, rather peace talks should be initiated internally for faster resolutions.

Shedding light on her learnings during her training "Conflict Transformation across Cultures" at SIT, Vermont, she said that we all understand the meaning of mediation and conflict resolution, but do not understand the process. In light of the same, she recommended that governments should form special committees for conflict resolution and take them to the places which have gone through similar turmoil in their regions and have been to pull out their countries out of conflict.

Mentioning that it's high time for both the sides to review the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, she underlined that it was the recognition of cooperation and will of friendly nations that led to the formation of SAARC. Ms. Sharma further opined that SAARC nations must focus on free trade zone, collective economic security and reducing their dependency on non-regional powers. Appreciating the strengthened relations between Bangladesh and India, she emphasised on the need for India and Nepal to open border for travel and work without visas, and show greater cooperation in the education sector.

She concluded by saying that we all get to know the thoughts of business leaders or political leaders or activists and other societal and spiritual leaders; but we as leaders should also know what people want and what do they think. Peace is our innate capacity and it is time for the world leaders to take action and learn to listen to the voice of the people, fulfil your commitments, and implement your policies. Do not play with sentiment of people, do not divide them and rule for your own personal gains.



## **Kinga Tshering | Bhutan**

*Founder of the Institute of Happiness Bhutan, Former Member of Parliament of Bhutan, and an alumnus of Harvard Kennedy and Divinity schools*

Starting with brief history of the foundation of democracy in Bhutan, Mr. Tshering comprehensively described the constitutional equation of Gross National Happiness (GNH), GNH being the ultimate goal of Bhutan as a nation. Compiled by his Institute of Happiness (IOH) based in Bhutan, he described that the constitutional equation has three parameters, namely X, Y, and Z, where x and y are the two inputs (donating Environmental space & Stages of Life respectively) which go into achieving the end goal of peace & happiness (compassion, joy, and kindness as mentioned in Buddhism) leading to infinite space as z axis. He further explained the relevance of the three axis in relation to the articles mentioned in the constitution of Bhutan. He also mentioned that the constitutional equation is an attempt made by IOH to reduce the complexity of the long constitution, compiled and depicted the

simplest manner, with infinite and boundless measurement of peace and happiness as the end goal common to any society or nation or region or world at large.

In response to the query in regard to value of educational exchange across SAARC countries, Mr. Tshering emphasised that peace across the borders will result in saving the military expenditure for all the nations which can be capitalized on human development in areas such as education, healthcare etc. Further he underscored the need of the regional countries to come together and grow as a global power.

Mr. Tshering pointed out that the conflicts in SAARC region can be reduced by first acknowledging its complexity and thereafter taking steps to reduce the complexity. He underlined the importance of transparency amongst the member states and a need to break individual powershare for the common greater good of the region.

Referring to the Tip of the Iceberg model, Mr. Tshering in his concluding remarks said that Mr. Tshering said that we as humans, societies, or nations for 90% of the iceberg which is underneath the surface. In his views, we need to acknowledge this as a universal human fact which will enable us to consciously bridge the differences in our belief systems across religions, geographies and nationalities. He congratulated Phuro Innovations for pioneering the act of bringing together the leaders from SAARC nations and concluded that peace is possible by reducing the complex issues to simple issues which will enable to the leaders to choose the agendas in an easy manner and resolve the conflicts in an efficient manner.



## **Jamal Nasir Baloch | Balochistan**

*Politician & Thought Leader, Head of the Foreign Affairs Department for the Free Balochistan Movement party, Masters in constitutional law and a degree in politics and government from the University of London*

Mr. Nasir started by describing the major problem of Balochistan in his view being its occupation by force and the major roadblock in conflict resolution being non-recognition of Balochistan as equal by Pakistan.

Upon being inquired about the role of the United Nations in conflict resolution in regard to Balochistan, he argued that post the formation of the United Nations, within six months Balochistan was occupied which makes one of the first cases of occupation of a foreign land. In his view, the United Nations has been reduced to a talking plot of powerful nations which incapacitates it from resolving major conflicts in the world.

Shedding light on the dynamics of post-independence of India, he mentioned that when Bengalis aspired to form an independent nation, India came to its help whereas Balochistan was not paid heed while it asked for help from India and Afghanistan despite of the historic relations. He further underscored that colonization of Balochistan is worse than the colonization of India, given the fact that freedom fighter in India were able to live within India but people believing in the idea of freedom for Balochistan have to live in exile owing to the genocide carried out by Pakistani military, limiting them from participating in the political process.

Raising question on the political process in Balochistan, Mr. Nasir quoted that election process in the region is not just. In his views the handful leaders who want to stay with Pakistan are empowered, given an instance where the present Chief Minister of Balochistan got less than 600 votes which was in his term also reported by media. He opinionated that the world does not even know what actually the Baloch people want owing to a corrupt electoral process. He further

stressed upon the need for Baloch people to be heard and their opinion being recognized with equality.

Continuing the conversation, he expressed his opinion that Pakistan instead of fixing its own territory, always has an outside interest outside causing disharmony in the whole SAARC region. Mr. Nasir further referred to the foundation of Pakistan based upon Two Nation Theory which in simple terms can be called Political Islam, regardless of any ethnicity or race but only a religion. In his view, this is the reason that there is a clash of identities between Balochistan and Pakistan in the historical and communal context. He underlined that in SAARC nations people want to rule people, which needs to be stopped and open dialogues have to be initiated.

Mr. Nasir concluded by saying that the stakeholders of the region and the researchers around the world are trying to find solutions to the conflicts in Balochistan in particular and SAARC at large by adopting the western methodologies, whereas SAARC as a region is unique in sense of its conflicts. The stakeholders of SAARC need to frame an indigenous approach for conflict resolution, starting right from a conviction for peace as the first step.



## **Anshu Khanna | India**

Columnist and Author, Craft Revivalist, and Communications Expert

Ms. Anshu Khanna co-hosted the meeting by engaging the panelists in thought provoking discussions and but added several relevant suggestions to the panel. Ms. Khanna has won several accolades for her work one of them being the Nari Shakti award to revive the art, culture, and heritage of princely India. She has been able to find a perfect cord between the Royalties of India to a common man on the ground, connecting them via public events, which was not a thing in the past.

# Dialogue – An Important Tool in Political Peace

India | Bangladesh | Maldives

Minutes of Meeting | 29 January 2022

Phuro Innovations hosted its second virtual discussion on Pursuit of Political Peace on 29 January 2022, as a series of year-long engagements/ innovative solutions and research-oriented approach. The virtual meet brought together the thought processes of leaders from India, Bangladesh, and Maldives on the subject of “Dialogue - An Important tool in Political Peace”.

The discussions were very fruitful and following solutions/ innovative ideas were presented by the stalwart leaders.



## Rachna Sharma | India

*Founder of Phuro Innovations, Co-Chair of HAE India, and Alumnus of Harvard Business School*

Beginning with a view on peace and politics, Ms. Sharma stated that the roots of violence lies in the traditional approach of politics, a subject which people fear to talk about. In her argument, she established the need for constructively participating in the peace building process by beginning to talk about political peace peacefully.

Further, Ms. Sharma pointed out that the onus lies on the people of SAARC region to solve problems peacefully because the people of the region are naturally unified given the shared histories, cultures and to some extent the genes. Calling SAARC the potential next powerhouse owing to the region’s demographic dividend, she argued that SAARC doesn’t need to solely depend on international institutions, but create a structured framework suited to the needs of the region in order to resolve conflicts locally.

She further highlighted the vision of Phuro Innovations to act as a torch bearer of advocacy, bringing together the organizations or leaders or shared philosophies which could help the region in maintaining peace. She emphasised on the need of leaders of SAARC region to keep half a day in a month for thinking and another half a day for calling other leaders around the region, just to say hello. As per her, that would solve half the problems, and rest would automatically fall in place.

She concluded by mentioning that violent leadership relies on the absence of power to gain and sustain power, and violence arrests time and movement which is fundamental for human evolution. Calling this approach as an age-old way of gaining power through manipulation of neural connections, she underlined the need for public awareness on the science and epistemology of peace.





## **Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya | Bangladesh**

*Macro Economist & Public Policy Analyst, Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Dhaka, Former President – Governing board of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to WTO and UN Offices in Geneva and Vienna*

Dr Debapriya began by emphasising the need for ‘Just Peace’ rather than ‘Positive Peace’. He maintained that if you do not have “just peace” within your own country, then you cannot have it in cross-border relations either. He argued that, if there is no respect for human rights, evidence-based discourse, space for public reasoning and opportunity to solve social and political conflicts through peaceful means within a country, then harmonious relationships should not be expected in cross-border issues.

Dr Debapriya pointed out that a country’s external overtures are essentially an extension of its internal policy. The major reason why SAARC has become dysfunctional is because democratic polity has been diminished within our respective countries.

Dr Debapriya in his intervention underscored the need for a shared framework for regional cooperation. One of the basis for it could be our collective allegiance to the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which allows space and voice to all stakeholders. A second element could be the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” as it is a handy mechanism to regenerate the South Asian spirit of regional cooperation.

Finally, Dr Debapriya opined that for South Asia, its historical past is now more of a “baggage” and our “asset” is our shared future. However, with the upcoming 4th Industrial Revolution and technological advancements, he wondered who would take up leadership in this regard. He held that the emerging youth community in our respective countries, who are much more globalised and outward looking, would lead the future and build a “new” South Asia.

In response to a query, Dr Debapriya reckoned that the Indo-Bangla relationship is undergoing a metamorphosis and it has obtained three major achievements in the recent past, namely the Ganges water treaty, the land boundary treaty and uprooting of cross-border terrorist elements. However, there remains a strong perception in Bangladesh that India has not adequately reciprocated to our needs. On this, Dr Debapriya mentioned two outstanding issues such as stopping border killings and signing of Teesta Water Treaty.

Looking ahead, Dr Debapriya said that the future of Indo-Bangla relationship lies in giving shape to a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), between the two countries.

Dr Debapriya ended with a congratulatory note to Phuro Innovations for acting as a forum for dialogue in SAARC.



## **Abdullah Kamaludeen | Maldives**

*Founder member of Maldives Policy Advocacy Caucus, Former Minister – Home Affairs | Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources | Human Resources, Employment and Labour | Public Works and National Development | Planning and National Development | Environment and Construction; the Republic of Maldives*

Mr. Kamaludeen began on a note that South Asia region isn't the same as it was decades back in terms of political landscape, demographics, and along with a multitude of other factors. He emphasised that South Asia is the fastest growing region in the world and the epicentre in the race for global dominance. And with most of the countries in the region being highly active, he underscored the need for foreign policies to be drawn keeping in mind the long-term strategic goals objectives of a nation in alignment with the common interests of its neighbours and other geopolitical partners.

Further, Mr. Kamaludeen opined on the subject of India-Maldives relationship that both sides must refrain from leveraging their mutual relationship for political reasons. Rather, India-Maldives relations should be stronger than political changes and both sides must establish and maintain good relations with leaders on all sides of the political spectrum and both sides must ensure that the relationship is horizontal and not vertical.

In response to the query on the subject of increased radicalisation in Maldives, Mr. Kamaludeen reasoned that political instability and socio-economic uncertainty form the basis of radicalisation in Maldives, though the scale of radicalisation is not much larger in Maldives as of today the percentage is still relatively small. He further affirmed that there is a thin line between free speech and responsible speech, and with coordinated effort, responsible leadership and calculated measures, Maldives can overcome the challenge of radicalisation.

When asked about the role that Maldives can play in SAARC region, Mr. Kamaludeen highlighted hospitality and resilience as the key strengths of Maldives deep rooted in the nation's history. He mentioned that when it comes to SAARC region, Maldives can play an important role by being a neutral ground for all the national players to ease tension and find common ground through dialogue, in a very similar way that Brussels and Geneva played for Europe. He further pointed out that Maldives is naturally gifted to play this role for regional mediation, dialogue, trade and security.

Shedding light on his vision of creating innovative solutions for the challenges being faced by Maldives in today's time, Mr. Kamaludeen argued that the countries in SAACR region should look at erasing the history drenched in vengeance and open new channels of communication so that we can prosper as a region.

He concluded by saying, "war is costlier, and peace is prosperous. Create dialogue and opportunity. Make an effort to understand and stop fanning the fire." He emphasised on the region to avoid hostile acts towards each other which compels all nations to spend heavily on armaments. Rather we should be looking at collectively solving the humanitarian challenges of the region.





## **Anshu Khanna | India**

Columnist and Author, Craft Revivalist, and Communications Expert

Sharing her vision of linking craft with women development, Ms. Khanna started by mentioning about her active involvement in the conflict ridden state of Jammu & Kashmir to economically empower local crafts women. She soulfully expressed her thoughts on political peace as a chance for women to move freely, to not lose their families, and to be insulated to some extent from the devastation caused by violence.

Referring to views put by other panellists, she emphasised on the need for SAARC nations to introspect and look inwards as a region, as to what is going wrong. She concluded by emphasising on the need of the people and leaders of the region to open hearts, talk to each other and create an ecosystem of collaboration and peace.

# Asia's Young Leadership for Peace

**India | Bhutan | Sri Lanka | Nepal**

Minutes of Meeting | 23 April 2022

Phuro Innovations hosted its third virtual discussion on Pursuit of Political Peace on 23 April 2022, as a series of year-long engagements/ innovative solutions and research-oriented approach. The virtual meet brought together the thought processes of leaders from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan on the subject of "Asia's Young Leadership for Peace".

The discussions were very fruitful and following solutions/ innovative ideas were presented by the young leaders.



## **Rachna Sharma | India**

*Founder of Phuro Innovations, Co-Chair of HAE India, and Alumnus of Harvard Business School*

Ms. Sharma began on a note by expressing the foundational idea behind Pursuit of Political Peace events as being organised with a view point of giving voice to the leaders across SAARC nations and further documenting the same to be presented to the heads of the states.

She mentioned that what our fathers or grandfathers knew was that political leadership was the only hope for their nation or region for any kind of reform; and now there is the present generation which believes in various types of leadership; they believe in leadership in education more than they believed in the political system of this region at the moment.

She further opined that the goal of the present generation is to create a movement in their respective countries for good, some kind of reform, for which they have adopted different routes. Some of them have taken education, some social leadership and social entrepreneurship and are now utilizing the political platforms to raise their voice.

She appreciated the efforts of young leaders on the panel and welcomed them to the event.



## **Tashi Chonjur | Bhutan**

*CEO & Founder, Institute for Excellence and Development | CEO, Edulink Bhutan*

Mr. Chonjur began by emphasising the need for education systems to respond to technological advancements by building capacities to upskill the entire system, teachers, students, youth at large. Referring to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Roadmap laid down by the government called Bhutan Baccalaureate System that takes into consideration 21st Century technologies, he said that our education system cannot and should not respond in piecemeal interventions but rather overhaul the very system, inculcating new technologies as blockchain, virtual reality, robotics, etc. in mainstream education and skill development.

In response to the query in the historical context of destabilization of society by destroying the

education structures by foreign invaders, he opined that we cannot change the past, but future is in our hands. And the future is global, and not regional or local. Because of advancement of new technologies that transcends national borders or cultural barriers, now we have a great opportunity to develop our education system that is “globally competent and locally rooted” as we said in Bhutan. He supported his argument by referring to example set by the adoption of culture infused curriculum called “Educating for Gross National Happiness”.

Mr. Chonjur underscored that none of the SAARC Countries amongst the 20 most peaceful countries in the world according to the Global Peace Index 2021. In continuation to this he said that amongst eight parameters of Positive Peace Index, is the level of human capital in a country which is defined as a country’s stock of skills, knowledge, and behaviours. He held that to start with it is time to reflect on the education system.

He concluded by saying that it is best if we can inculcate the values of peace and development in the young minds by having values education in the schools from early developmental stages. The best way to bring changes is through education.

Ending with a congratulatory note to Phuro Innovations for bringing together like-minded people from SAARC countries for propagating peace in the region and the world in general, he said, “his piece of advice to the world leaders is to be the example to the children, which will automatically help them take the wise decisions.”



## **Vraie Cally Balthazaar | Sri Lanka**

*Politician | Social Entrepreneur | Activist | former Media Professional | Founder, Cally Products*

Ms. Balthazaar began by describing the prevalent economic crisis in Sri Lanka which as per her is the first time in the country which has seen a 30 years of violence, that there’s engagement from the youth, trying to resolve a crisis in proactive way by thinking of different ways marking non-violent protests on the streets through, arts, music, dance, acting etc. In her words, it is an interesting time for the nation to find ways to recreating Sri Lanka.

Upon being asked about the role of women in politics, Ms. Balthazaar opined that women’s engagement in politics in Sri Lanka in specific and South Asia at large is very limited because of the stereotypes prevalent in the society limiting the role of women to households and politics being seen as a non-conducive space for women. She further emphasises that it’s very important for women to build coalitions and work with not just women but also men who understand the importance of having women who can naturally bring values such as empathy and compassion on the table which will add a different perspective to policy making.

When asked about three things she would like to do if given the role of peace builder, she asserted that firstly it is imperative to have at least one language taught commonly across the nation, secondly the role of women should be highlighted in the history, and lastly following an unlearning and relearning process to fully free ourselves from the ideology forced upon our societies during colonisation.

She concluded by saying that leaders should start listening to people rather than working for themselves, and she further appreciated Phuro Innovations for acting as a forum of dialogue

bringing together leaders from across the SAARC countries which creates a space for knowledge and value exchange.



## **Pradip Pariyar | Nepal**

*Executive Chairman, Samata Foundation | Young Global Leader, World Economic Forum | Founder President, Nepal Policy Centre | Founder President, Nepal Youth Forum*

Mr. Pariyar began by shedding light on the plight of youth in Nepal who are unemployed in large numbers, a situation similar to other SAARC nations. In his views, there are always two issues concerning youth, violence and security and mostly they are seen as recipients. Rather as per him it is high time that youth should be seen as partner in peace building; political, economic and social reforms. He further affirmed that given the cultural and historic similarities amongst SAARC countries, the regional countries should show more solidarity towards each other rather than finding temporary solutions in the west driven approach.

In response to the query on the root cause of marginalisation of people, he attributed the source in caste based ideology systems in South Asia. He further opined that it is only by making this issue as everyone's issue is how we can find solution to this problem and SAARC can play a leading role in solving this problem which is also slowly engulfing the western nations.

When asked about things he would like to do if given the role of peace builder, he emphasised on the need for SAARC nations to focus on finding commonalities rooted in culture and history rather than building differences. He moreover stressed on opening channels to connect and exchange youth and knowledge across the SAARC region which has the potential to heal differences amongst the nations. He also asserted the need for SAARC region to act like European Union with borders open for trade and tourism.

Appreciating the efforts of Phuro Innovations in bringing together the ideas and philosophies across the SAARC region, he concluded by saying that the future of humanity lies in the hands of today's younger generation which will pass the torch to the future generation. He further mentioned that leaders need to engage the youth and invest in them. And world leaders need to rethink how they are doing things so that we can create a peaceful world.

# Economic Interdependence in SAARC

India | Pakistan | Sri Lanka

Minutes of Meeting | 21 July 2022

Phuro Innovations hosted its fourth virtual discussion on Pursuit of Political Peace on 21 July 2022, as a series of year-long engagements/ innovative solutions and research-oriented approach. The virtual meet brought together the thought processes of leaders from India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan on the subject of “Economic Interdependence in SAARC”.

The discussions were very fruitful and following solutions/ innovative ideas were presented by the stalwart leaders.



## Rachna Sharma | India

*Founder of Phuro Innovations, Co-Chair of HAE India, and Alumnus of Harvard Business School*

Ms. Sharma began on a note that SAARC is ready for peace, given the fact that leaders from SAARC nations are coming forward and documenting their thoughts with Phuro Innovations. She underscored that for generations the SAARC region has faced brain drain, and the support of thought leadership in the region is

a positive sign for peace in the region.

As per her, mundane problems like conflict have eaten up the region and these problems are not new. Historically the world has faced them in different times in history in different ways. However, there were thought leaders to snap nations out of these problems so that they could progress as nations and regions. She cited the example of the historic animosity between Germany and France, which in today's time form the foundation of European Union as a regional force binding nations together.

She further opined that SAARC has a comparatively more peaceful and friendly history and none of the nations were ever enemies. As per her the SAARC nations are merely facing certain constraints which need to be resolved. It is for this purpose that the project of “Pursuit of Political Peace” was initiated through which the regional problems can be documented, and frameworks can be developed to solve the issues.

She underscored that economic interdependence is a proved framework in all violent regions so far and same can be a solution for the resolving conflicts in SAARC.

Post four virtual meetings, Phuro Innovations will culminate the project into an annual event where participation from leaders across the SAARC region is anticipated. She concluded by saying that it is the time for South Asian countries to awaken and stand for our shared roots, history, genetics, culture, and a bright future.



## **Ehsan A. Malik | Pakistan**

*Chief Executive Officer, Pakistan Business Council; Alumnus of Harvard Business School*

Mr. Malik began on a note that he has spent several years working across various nations in SAARC, and in his belief there's more that unites the region than that divide. Emphasising on trade in respect of SAARC, he mentioned that less than six percent of the trade in South Asia happens with each other which is very unfortunate since most of the SAARC countries produce items where they compete with other leaving less space for the countries to export to each other. He further opined that there is a lot of potential of trade between SAARC countries and unless there is trade between the countries, it is very difficult to build relationships even though there are ancient cultural ties between the regional countries.

Responding to a query regarding social crisis within SAARC countries, Mr. Malik underscored that irrespective of the political differences amongst the regional countries, travel and tourism should be boosted to create connect and communication across multiple platforms such as culture and literature. In respect of India and Pakistan, both the countries can start by allowing people of certain age to be issues visas given the lower risk from a lower risk from a security point of view.

Mr. Malik pointed out that it is important for the regional countries to exchange knowledge and best practices with each other for economic interdependence. Citing the example of exchange of delegations of Confederation of Indian Industry and Pakistan Business Council across the borders, he opined that such discussions to exchange information and knowledge are vital components of economic interdependence amongst the regional countries.

Looking ahead, Mr. Malik said that as per his school of thought, direct trade between India and Pakistan will boost innovation in Pakistan and would reduce the cost of logistics and transportation against the present import of products from China.

Mr. Malik congratulated Phuro Innovations for facilitating dialogue amongst the SARC nations and concluded by saying that till we are talking, we have hope; and when we stop talking, we loose hope. A momentum towards openness and accommodation must be built and all the SAARC countries would benefit.



## **Dr. Rohantha Athukorala | Sri Lanka**

*President, Clootrack – Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan; Former Executive Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism; Former Executive Chairman, Sri Lanka Export Development Board; Alumnus of Harvard Kennedy School Sri Lanka*

Dr. Athukorala on a note that the intra-regional trade in relation to population in SAARC is considerably low as compared to ASEAN, EU and NAFTA. Expressing his concern for the upcoming recession around the globe as predicted by international institutions, he mentioned that it is vital for the SAARC nations rather than looking for debt from foreign nations or institutions,



need to contemplate on the kind of reforms needed within the countries. He further opined that the SAARC region has the best brains in the business world, but what it lacks is the integrated approach of political system and businesses in order to become sustainable economies. Citing the study of World Bank as per which the economic health 61 countries inclusive of countries or federal states within nations in the SAARC countries are going to sink the Sri Lanka way, he emphasised on the immediate need to restructure the systems, for example by reducing defence expenditure and routing the same towards other developmental needs.

Shedding light on the need to remove non-tariff barriers between the SAARC nations, Dr. Athukorala suggested that business should be driven from South of India to the industrial zone in north Sri Lanka and secondly, exports from Sri Lanka should be opened to the middle-income population in India. He also underscored that with upcoming recession in the western world, the SAARC nations should take the opportunity to minimize trading the raw material and rather trade the brands amongst the nations coupled with a political will to do so. He repeatedly emphasised on the need of aggressive thinking in the present minds and bringing structural reforms in the SAARC ecosystem.

Citing the example of the contribution of the youth in the fight against present economic crisis in Sri Lanka, he reckoned that it is time for the young generation to shoulder the responsibility of nation building, provided they are well trained and mentored.

Dr. Athukorala further underscored that the foundational structures are already in place for SAARC, with institutions constitutionalised. All that is required is to operationalize the same. As per him, even if few plans as per SAARC framework are realized coupled with the participation of private sector, they have the potential to bring ripple effects within the region.

In response to a query, he mentioned that India should be the flag bearer of knowledge exchange given the strong education system and industrial landscape.

Dr. Athukorala advised that proper data should be disseminated amongst the neighbouring nations to boost economic interdependence and avoid the rumours disturbing the business dynamics amongst the regional countries. Furthermore, he suggested that tourism should be empowered amongst India and Sri Lanka, especially in regard to spiritual tourism.

In his conclusion remarks, he mentioned that rather than giving aid to Sri Lanka, India should open the line of credit for trade and open export market for Sri Lankan products in India. In relation to Sri Lanka – Maldives relationship, he focussed on the need of boosting tourism between the two countries, and in regard to Pakistan & Sri Lanka, he pointed out the need of further strengthening the free trade agreement. In respect of Bangladesh, he expressed his contentment over the knowledge and talent transfer between the two countries; and to further the bilateral trade and tourism with Nepal.



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# DEVELOPING CULTURE OF PEACE

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