

# SAARC pvt sectors' common initiatives stressed for regional integration

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Former SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries president Salman F Rahman speaks at a roundtable jointly organised by the SAARC CCI and the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the Sonargaon Hotel in the capital Dhaka on Sunday. SAARC CCI president Suraj Vaidya was present, among others. — New Age photo

Private sectors of the SAARC countries should take some common initiatives for South Asian regional integration, experts and business leaders said in Dhaka on Sunday.

They recommended establishing a SAARC economic zone and a regional power grid to tap geographical potential of the South Asian countries.

Chamber bodies of the SAARC countries will have to take lead roles for the regional integration and they will have to talk to their respective governments on the issue, former caretaker government energy adviser M Tamim said in a roundtable jointly organised by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

‘Energy is the main part of the growth engine and we have to have a regional power grid for generation and distribution among the South Asian countries,’ he said at the event titled ‘Unleashing South Asia: Imperative for Action’ held at Sonargaon Hotel in the city.

Tamim also recommended building trust among the SARC countries.

Salman F Rahman, former president of the SAARC CCI, said the region remained highly protected across the world but lagged far behind in opening the vistas of foreign competition, trade facilitation, free movement of goods and services and attracting foreign direct investment.

He said that each country in the region was doing very well independently. ‘For, example, India is a fast growing country and others are not lagging behind. Even Afghanistan is also growing,’ Salman said.

‘If the private sectors of the South Asian countries work together, it will change the quality of life of our people,’ he said.

Suraj Vaidya, president of the SAARC CCI, said 95 per cent of South Asian people had faith in SAARC and all the countries in the region needed investment.

‘Unfortunately, SAARC has yet to deliver its promise to fulfil the high aspirations of its people in the face of current global economic and financial crises,’ he said.

Suraj said SAARC would have to change its ways and its structure and would have to make efforts to revitalise itself.

‘SAARC’s new vision could be seen as a bridge between East Asia, rich in its human resources and technology and West and Central Asia, rich in natural resources and finance,’ he said.

As many as 99.99 per cent people of South Asia are very good and only the rest 0.01 per cent are involve in terrorism, opined Suraj.

The good people are facing problems due to the 0.01-per cent people in the region, he said.

‘It’s a concern for the region that there are differences between India and Pakistan and both the countries are nuclear-equipped. Pakistan and India should soothe their unrest,’ Suraj said.

Kshitiz Dahal, research officer of South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment, Nepal, recommended a special economic zone for the SARC countries.

Kithmina Hewage, research officer of Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka, said that South Asia Free Trade Agreement was the great potential for the regional integration but the South Asian countries were not getting benefits as the agreement was yet to be implemented.

He said bilateral trade was progressing but SAFTA was not getting pace and political consensus was important to implement the agreement.

Md Shafiqul Islam, additional secretary, commerce ministry of Bangladesh, said that physical connectivity was important for regional trade and business.

He said to increase the trade and business, regional countries would have to simplify the rules of origins and to remove non-tariff barriers.

- See more at: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/13621/articlelist/323/Caroon#sthash.Fhw6svFP.dpuf>