

People's SAARC Seminar

Sunday 23 January 2011, by [People's SAARC](#) (Date first published: 19 January 2011).

Press release, Dhaka, 18 January 2011

People's SAARC Seminar

Leadership urged to shun traditional politics to curb out a new South Asia

Human right activists and civil society leaders from all eight SAARC countries at a seminar in the city today held soul searching discussions on how to expedite regional integration breaking apart the shackle of elite run traditional politics.

The civil society leaders also laid emphasis on evolving a new growth strategy and alternative models for development over the neo-liberal models having the globalization and economic exploitation of the poor nations by industrialized nations and of the poor by the rich within a nation, especially in South Asian region.

They spoke critically of the ongoing globalization process saying trade liberalization is only destroying local capacity and job market. It has taken the form of commercial hegemony instead of fostering prosperity to the poor.

They also spoke of creating a secular South Asia through building democratic institutions in respective nations. The two-day seminar taking place at BRAC Center will end tomorrow with adoption of a declaration. This is part of a process titled "Envisioning New South Asia from the People's Perspectives" organized by a regional civil society network called "People's SAARC".

About 30 civil society leaders from seven SAARC countries are taking part in it, in addition to large number of civil society leaders from host Bangladesh. They include a senator from Pakistan, a retired navy chief from India and such other high profile personalities from the member states.

The inaugural session of this seminar was moderated by noted Indian human rights activist Kamala Bhasin. Among the panelists in this session were Prof Anisuzzaman, trade union leader representing Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Karamat Ali, and former Human Rights Commissioner of Nepal, Kapil Shrestha. All of them emphasized that the sub-continent can only deliver the full potentials of prosperity within the framework of a People's Union of South Asian.

There is no alternative to it and sooner or later it will come true. Karamat Ali said, the region had in fact lost an opportunity of making the union in 1970-71 and had it been done, the genocide in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka would not have taken place. He begged apology of his country's role in Bangladesh in 1971 reiterating the demand that he favoured the trial of Pakistani war criminals and their associated that Bangladesh is now holding for its own perpetrators of war criminals. He said he would continue the demand for trial of his country's war criminals until they are brought to justice.

Prof Anisuzzaman said people have lost confidence in the SAARC process of integration because it is basically based on promoting the interest of the elite and corporate business. He laid emphasis on promoting people's regionalism to facilitate people to people contact and bring the benefit of economic prosperity to common people.

Kamala Bhasin said there should be alternative approach to expedite regional integration apart from official platforms. She said people should be encouraged to ignore narrow national identity, border and such other obstacles which are used now as divider to the much sought unity of the region.

Kapil Shrestha laid emphasis on greater involvement of common people in rights movement and protests actions to get the people's voice heard.

Sender

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury

Dhaka Peoples SAARC seminar

Second and last day day press release

Democratization of state essential to combat extremism.

Discussants in the People's SAARC seminar today laid emphasis on increasing democratization of state to invigorate the development of a secularism at all levels to combat the growth of religious extremism in the society.

They also laid emphasis on creating a SAARC parliamentary forum to bring the legislators all countries together to envision a common future of the region.

They said the situation in the South Asian countries are only deteriorating with large number of people joining hands to violence and extremism from being devastated in socio-political life run by the national elite. Income inequality, control of economic resources by the rich and the rise of corporate interest dominating the state institutions are only adding new tensions destabilizing the nations. Greedy politicians are only exploiting the situation to perpetuate their power.

It explains why there is war in Afghanistan and Pakistan which is now taking the form of Balkanization to sweep over the entire region and even Indian may not be spared from its devastating impacts at the end.

Former Indian Naval Chief M Ramdas said the world saw the trading of US\$ 1200 billions worth of armament last year and 30 percent of it went to India followed by 14-15 percent purchase made by Pakistan. So the region must try to keep out of external influence to allow destabilization taking place from outside sources. But it should try at the same time to keep the domestic forces keeping the balancing role to bring prosperity and growth to the door step of the poor and marginalized people.

Discussants also laid emphasis on remodeling the education system to induce the spirit of democracy and secularism in school test books so that the madrasa education and its impacts on younger mindset can be marginalized.

New Age editor Nurul Kabir said secularism along with an equitable distribution of wealth and income in the society can provide the basis of a sustainable state. The time for nation based is over, he said pointing out democratic tolerance and pluralism can only satisfy the need of the nation state. It may also provide the basis of a South Asian union, he suggested.

Some discussants underscored that tribal people's rights in the state should have the constitutional guarantee so that majority in a society can not exploit their situation to force them taking extremist stands.

They said state should become people centric to support all its citizen and this can only safeguard peace and stability in all SAARC countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and others, they said. Kamal Chenoy, Hsasil Bejonjo, Bishunu Shrestha Mohd Latheef, Lalitha Ramdas, Keramat Ali and Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Netra Timsina, Najma Sadeq, among others spoke on the occasion.

The discussions today were centered on conflicts, ethnic diversity and climate change issues.

Sender

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
