

Welcome Address by Dr. Ramesh Chandra Panda, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, at the First Heads of Statistical Office of SAARC Member States held at Kolkata on 26th May 2005.

Good morning and Greetings from the Government of India to all the dignitaries, delegates, and invitees.

Today is a great day in the annals of regional cooperation for statistical cause among the SAARC Member States. It is indeed a great moment. Our Minister Mr. Oscar Fernandes-ji has guided us in this initiative for memorable regional cooperation. We all welcome Honorable Minister to our midst here having consented to inaugurate this historic Meeting. In this great occasion I welcome Government of India Secretary, Mr. P S Rana ji who has been supporting us in the arrangements for this Meeting. Our heartiest greetings and warm welcome to SAARC Secretary General Mr. Chen Kyab Dorji for convening this Meeting for the statistical Heads of Member States. I extend warm welcome to all the delegates from SAARC Member States, SAARC Officers and our distinguished invitees to this opening Session of the Meeting.

There is a short history for this 1st Meeting. It is necessary for me to recapitulate. The idea to have a Forum of Statisticians among SAARC Member States originated in an informal discussion I organized on 15th January 2004 at Luang Prabang, Lao PDR with delegates of 7 countries. Mr. Md Ehasan E Elahi from Bangladesh, Mr. Kuenga Tshering from Bhutan, Mrs. Aishath Shahuda from Maldives, Mr. Rabi Singh from Nepal, Mr. Yousaf Kamal from Pakistan, Mrs. Sriyane Vineetha Nanayakkara from Sri Lanka and my self from India met and identified the objectives and Plan of action for a SAARC Framework for Cooperation in Statistics. That cherished dream has already materialized and we are all here today to take the cooperation forward.

We thank SAARC secretariat to have chosen Kolkata as venue for this meeting. How nice it is that the city, which produced famous Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen, and a large number of distinguished Statisticians of the world, like Prof. P.C.Mahalanobis, Prof. C.R.Rao, Prof. R.C. Bose. Prof. S.N.Ray and Prof. P. K. Sen, is hosting today the 1st meeting of the Heads of Statistics Organizations of 7 countries of the region.

Kolkata has always remained as a center-stage for education in Economics and Statistics. It is from this city during 1941 formal teaching in Statistics started in India as a part of the post graduate degree from Calcutta University. Subsequently, setting up of Indian Statistical Institute brought sea change in the area of capacity building in Statistics in India and abroad. The International Statistical Education Centre (ISEC) within ISI plays an important role for strengthening the capacity of the practicing Statisticians from Pacific to Atlantic.

The region has earlier played a significant role in the International Statistical System. We have to recognize the paradigm shifts coming up in the national and international policies for which all of us in the SAARC should be prepared to meet the statistical challenges of this century. In this context, this Meeting has great significance.

Next two days we all will discuss on the relevant issues and possibly draw up a long term *road map* for mutual cooperation in Statistics. Let me once again welcome you all to India and more particularly to Kolkata. I am sure the cultural city of Kolkata will soon conquer your heart.
