

Inaugural Address of Mr. Oscar Fernandes, Honourable Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India in the First Meeting of the SAARC Heads of the Statistical Organisations held on 26th May 2005 at Kolkata.

Today, the 26th May 2005 is a red letter day for the Statistical fraternity in SAARC region as all of us here have gathered for taking the first step towards regional cooperation amongst the Statistical Organisations of various countries in the Region. All of you, the Heads of the Statistical Organisations of 7 countries are meeting here under the SAARC banner for the Statistical development in the Region for the first time. I feel honoured to be associated with such an auspicious event. My joy knows no bounds for the reason that Kolkata the “**city of joy**” has been chosen as the venue of the first meeting. Kolkata is a place well known for its contribution to the Statistical System in general and to the Indian Statistical system in this region in particular.

I recall the name of the famous Director General of Statistics Mr. W. W Hunter under whose leadership the first Statistical Office namely, Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics was set up at Kolkata in 1871. The development of the Statistical System in independent India also started from this city when the great Statistician Late Professor P.C. Mahalanobis became the Honorary Statistical Advisor to the Govt. of India and under whose dynamic leadership the Indian Statistical Institute was set up in this city. It is he who created the world’s biggest sample survey organization –the National Sample Survey Organization more than half a century back. We are proud of Kolkata for its Statistical heritage.

The month of May seems to be lucky for SAARC. Quarter of a century back, in May 1980, the idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first conceived, which fructified on 8th December, 1985 as The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) when its Charter was accepted by Governments of the seven countries in the Region. Now in May 2005, you are sowing the seeds of statistical forum in SAARC. The objectives of the SAARC as indicated in its Charter are well defined but for a meeting of this nature, I would highlight some of those relevant for statistical cooperation. These are: (i) to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia; (ii) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development ; (iii) to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia; (iv) to contribute to understanding and appreciation of one another’s problem; (v) to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields; (v) to strengthen cooperation among the Member States in international forums on matters of common interest; and (vi) to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes on terms and conditions acceptable to us. Through your two day deliberations, I am confident; SAARC will use this new platform for achieving the objectives set in its Charter.

Gentlemen, Statistics is a dynamic subject. Its role and need is always changing depending on the national and international requirements. With the growing needs for data for

many emerging areas we are facing, we have to address many new conceptual issues and need to address them collectively. These are not for a particular country or a nation. It is for the entire region. You would agree with me that in the SAARC Region our problems are quite similar. Poverty is our biggest enemy - be it economic poverty or non-economic poverty. Our Health Information systems are similar - may be with marginal variations. The Statistical communities of SAARC Region understand and speak in the same language- the language of scientific statistical methods. It understands only one culture- the culture for development of reliable and comparable database. It is my firm belief that we, the Statistical community of SAARC Region, should sing with uniform tune of harmonized statistical concepts, standards and methodologies.

The need of having a reliable and comparable database unites the practicing Statisticians and mathematical statisticians on the same platform. This is true everywhere. India is no exception and that is why the Indian Statistical Institute and my Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation work together. One complements the other. In the region, we need to learn many things from each other. There are things which we can share for our mutual benefits. And here lies the need for development of a framework for SAARC Forum for Cooperation in Statistics (SFCS).

I am not a Statistician by profession. But I do sincerely believe that Statistical Science and Official Statistical System play a pivotal role in the development policies of all countries. Our Nation States are no exception. The “important steps you take today and tomorrow” will bring out excellent regional cooperation in Statistics under SAARC platform.

With these words, I deem it an honour for me to inaugurate the First Meeting of the Statistical Organisations of SAARC Member States. I wish you all, fruitful deliberations during these two days.
