

**Remarks by Foreign Minister Khurshid M. Kasuri
at the Opening of the High Level Expert Seminar on 5th April 2005**

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai,
Honourable Foreign Ministers,
Dr. Ishrat Hussain, Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and the Chairperson of
the High Level Seminar,
Distinguished Seminar participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to inaugurate the High Level Expert Seminar on
“Economic Cooperation in Asia”

At the outset, let me extend a warm welcome to you. We are honoured to have
amongst us such a galaxy of eminent experts and distinguished Foreign Ministers.
I am confident that your presence promises a stimulating discussion and your
collective wisdom would lead to a substantive outcome.

I also welcome participants from the civil society, the business community and
the media.

Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The ACD is an evolving process, the process that was started in 2002 on the
initiative of Thailand towards promoting regional integration through establishing
Asia-wide linkages and dependencies and forging strategic partnerships.

There is a common desire to open a new chapter of Asian prosperity that reflects
our diversity and recognizes the commonalities in our objectives and aspirations.
It is our common desire to pool our strengths and talents to reach new heights and
set new directions in the Asian cooperation and towards regional integration.

The principal catalyst of this integration is economics. Asian economic dynamism, expanding trade, and the growing financial strength have led to emergence of sub-regional groupings and a web of Free Trade and other economic Agreements across the region.

ASEAN's Bali Concord II concluded on the basis of 27 years of successful experience of economic cooperation in East Asia is a source of inspiration for the Asian nations.

ASEAN + three process is another critical building block especially the proposed East Asia Summit expected to take place by the end of this year.

The SAARC region is due to operationalize the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) next year. A significant number of other bilateral and multilateral economic partnerships have nourished Asian economies.

The emergence of the ACD is a region wide process reflecting our common desire of self-reliance, consolidation and of building a partnership from the individual strengths of each of our states. The trail for regional integration has been set ablaze.

Distinguished Participants,

I am aware that regional integration is much more than the sum of its parts. Though it is driven by economics, it is not merely an economic process. Asia also is far more diverse than any other continent.

We have a unique history of our relations with one another. We have our problems, our conflicts and our differences also. Some of these are complex and long standing. But collective progress is not about looking at the past. It is about looking to the future. We can and must steer this diversity and differences towards shared collective values and objectives. It is only then that we can succeed.

The ultimate barometer of success is to realize the vision of a common greater Asian neighbourhood consisting of peaceful and prosperous societies co-operating with each other in harmony in diverse fields for their common good, progress, prosperity and happiness of their peoples and capable of contributing to the civilization of the 21st century.

To realize the vision of an Asian Community necessitates defining what steps we must take, both in the short and the long term and to develop conducive conditions and essential building blocks which would act as a factor of stability and promotion of cooperation amongst the Asian countries. The Asia Cooperation Dialogue should act as the main facilitator in forging these essentials of cooperation.

The task may be intellectually and politically challenging but so should be our resolve to set new markers, throw additional wheels in motion and stage new regional actors in key economic areas for enhancing cooperation especially in agriculture, trade, finance and energy.

Among others, some of the steps in these areas could include creating an ACD Agricultural and Agro-based Industries Council, institutionalising meetings of the Finance and Trade Ministers, Heads of the Central Banks, and regular consultations amongst the Chambers of Commerce and Industries and Stock Exchanges.

Distinguished Participants,

Asia is on the rise. Its economic and political strength is being increasingly felt across the globe. The rise of Asian economic might – starting from Japan in early 60s to East Asia, China, South Korea in the present - has led to a new balance of global economic power. Some political pundits have termed it as a shift in the center of gravity of world affairs from the West Atlantic to Asia. This places greater responsibility on us - the Asian leadership.

The age old dictum “Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere” must be the guiding principles. We, therefore, need to steer this cooperation towards embracing all the sub-regions of the continent, sharing the fruits of our progress, prosperity and best practices.

Distinguished Guests,

This seminar is about us and about our people living in Asia. It's about those building blocks which would help people of this vast continent to realize their potential. Their future is a trust in our hands and so is the future of this continent. We can let the events dictate our future or we can shape events for a better future and translate this century into an Asian century. The choice is certainly ours.

I am confident that today, our deliberations would result in delineating those synergies which touch new horizons of partnership, cooperation and unity amongst our nations.

I thank you all.