

South Asia Policy Dialogue on Regional Risk reduction  
Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi  
21-22 August

**Welcome Address by Shri P.G.Dhar Chakrabarti Executive  
Director National Institute of Disaster Management, New  
Delhi.**

Respected Shri Shivraj Patil, Hon'ble Home Minister, Gen N.C.Vij Vice Chairperson of National Disaster Management Authority, Shri V.K.Duggal Union Home Secretary, Dr. R.K.Pachauri Director General of The Energy and Resources Institute, Ms Maxine Olson Country Representative of United Nations Development Programme in India, our South Asian friends from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, representatives from various UN organizations, UNISDR Geneva, ESCAP Bangkok, SAARC Secretariat, ADPC, USAID India, ADRC Japan and many other organizations, distinguished resource persons from Ministries, research and technical organizations, national and international NGOs and last but not the least our partners – Practical Action from Sri Lanka and Duryog Nivaran from Pakistan.

A very good morning to all of you and a very hearty welcome to this two day Policy Dialogue on A regional Road map for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management.

South Asia, as you all know, has the dimension of a continent. It has the largest and the youngest of the mountain ranges of the world, the largest of the glacial deposits outside the polar regions, the longest and the densest of the alluvial plains, one of the hottest and coldest habited places, as also one of the most dry and moist regions of the world.

South Asia is also inhabited by more than one fifth of the humanity, but it shares less than one and half percent of the world wealth. Nearly half of the world poor as also half of the world illiterates and mal nourished live in this region, which is also credited to be one of the oldest civilizations of the world.

The combination of all these geo-physical and socio-economic-historical factors have made South Asia one of the most critical natural disaster hot spots in the world. Flood, earthquakes, drought, cyclones, landslides and many other natural calamities affect many parts of South Asia at regular intervals consuming precious human lives and property, creating serious setbacks to the developmental efforts of the countries. It is estimated that

between 2 to 16 per cent of the GDP of different South Asian countries get wasted every year due to natural disasters.

During the past few years, particularly after the devastating earthquakes of Gujarat in 2001, Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and earthquake of Pakistan in 2005, the people and the governments of South Asia have realized that natural disasters do not necessarily follow national boundaries. These have important regional dimensions. The earthquake of Bhuj caused damages to the structures in Karachi. The earthquake of Pakistan devastated parts of Uri and Karnah in India. Floods of Bihar and Assam as well that of Bangladesh and Bhutan have their origin in Nepal and Tibet. Cyclones of Bay of Bengal affect the coastal regions of India and Bangladesh just as the cyclones on Arabian Sea hit the coasts of Gujarat in India and Sindh in Pakistan. Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 caused devastation in four out of eight South Asian countries.

We have realized at a heavy cost that nothing short of strong regional co-operation can mitigate such disasters in any meaningful manner. Shortly after the Indian Ocean tsunami the Environment Ministers of SAARC met at Male and decided that a Comprehensive Framework of Regional Cooperation for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in South Asia be

developed. An Expert Group has prepared such a Framework, which would be considered in the next SAARC Summit in Delhi in April 2007.

Earlier in the Dhaka Summit of 2005, which took place a month after Pakistan earthquake, an Indian proposal to set up a SAARC Centre for Disaster Management in Delhi was approved. The Centre is expected to start functioning from October this year.

Outside the framework of Government organizations a number of South Asian non governmental organizations, individuals, scientists, community leaders and media personalities had been working for such cooperation among people and countries of South Asia.

We feel happy that we have been able to bring together all such government and non-government organizations, individuals, scientists, community leaders and media personalities in one forum to discuss various aspects of disaster risk reduction and management.

We are looking forward to very intense, incisive, thorough and purposeful discussion today and tomorrow to develop a road map on disaster risk reduction and management for this region.

I thank you and welcome you once again.