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Cultural Affinity among SAARC Nations Conducive for Regional Cooperation and Development—Madame Farzana Raja addresses Inaugural Session of SAARC Conference in New Delhi Dr. Montek Singh, Chairman Planning Commission of India emphasizes SAARC countries to follow best practices of BISP, appreciates Benazir Smart Card.

New Delhi () “To make SAARC a viable and vibrant organization responsible to the aspirations of its people, it must increasingly adopt a project-based approach, co-opting our private sectors, and capitalizing on many win-win opportunities that our region affords.”

This was stated by Madame Farzana Raja, leader of Pakistani delegation in her opening statement at the inaugural session of the first meeting of South Asia Forum on “Integration in South Asia: Moving Towards a South Asian Economic Union” here today.

Describing development as the most important priority for South Asia , the Pakistani Federal Minister said “Poverty alleviation, food security, energy security, women empowerment, health and education are common objectives. Socio-economic disparities within the region have to be addressed to attain these



New Delhi: Federal Minister and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Madame Farzana Raja attending the first meeting of South Asia Forum on “Integration in South Asia: Moving Towards a South Asian Economic Union”. (Dated Sep 08, 2011)

objectives. There is a need for greater coordination between national and regional plans.”

While drawing attention towards the low level of intra-regional trade, Madame Farzana Raja suggested that the SAARC nations should address the issues impeding intra-regional trade including the issues of Sensitive list, Rules of Origin, Technical Assistance to LDCs, and Mechanism for compensation of revenue loss to LDCs due to trade liberalization program. Appreciating the growing number of Observers of SAARC, the leader of Pakistani delegation recommended, “We must find ways and means to enable these and other interested states and regional organizations to engage substantially with SAARC so that South Asia becomes an engine for global economic growth.”

Madame Farzana Raja also stated, “The SAARC Charter of Democracy signed last year is a commendable move. We must join hands to extend support to such initiatives to strengthen democracy in our region.”

She hoped that the Forum, with the gathering of eminent personalities from public and private sectors in the SAARC fraternity, will meet its expectation of serving as an open platform for generation of debate, discussion and exchange of ideas on South Asia and its future development.

Earlier, during inaugural address by Dr. Montek Singh, Chairman, Planning Commission of the Government of India appreciated the efforts made by Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) in Pakistan regarding expansion of smart cards for BISP beneficiaries. He emphasized that SAARC countries should see and follow BISP for transparency in social transfer program.