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Madame Farzana Raja Proposes Setting up a Permanent SAARC Commission to Foster Poverty Alleviation Efforts in the Region;

Emphasizes upon SAARC countries to initiate poverty survey in a similar manner of BISP for better poverty alleviation measures

S M Krishna, Indian Foreign Minister terms BISP exemplary for other South Asian states;

International observers and donors in SAARC Conference appreciate BISP

NEW DELHI: Federal Minister and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Madame Farzana Raja has said that the most important priority for countries of the region is development, which is only possible through peace and stability both in our respective countries as well as in the region. Madame Farzana Raja said this while speaking at the First Meeting of South Asia Forum here on Friday.

She said that the decisions, including intra-regional trade under SAFTA, made at SAARC forum need to be implemented within a timeframe. Besides, a performance evaluation mechanism should be developed to improve the performance of the organization.

She suggested that all the SAARC countries may conduct poverty survey in their respective countries in a similar manner of survey conducted by BISP recently in Pakistan. The process will be instrumental in gathering the correct data of poor population so that their basic issues could be resolved in a more focused approach”, she said.

“The People’s Government for the first time launched a major social safety programme in the country in 2008, which is the largest ever social safety initiative of Pakistan and considered by many to be one of the most transparent safety nets across the globe”, she added.

She informed the participants that BISP’s plans for 2011 and 12 include large scale replication of innovative payment mechanisms for the vulnerable lives that is Smart Cards, Phone Banking and other creative products etc. Launch of a conditional cash transfer programme to support co-



New Delhi: Federal Minister and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Madame Farzana Raja addressing at South Asian Forum “Integration in South Asia: Moving towards a South Asian Economic Union” (Dated: Sep 09, 2011)

responsibility for education of children of beneficiary families, provision of life insurance cover to the bread-winners of families, provision of demand driven vocational and technical training, provision of health insurance and micro-finance.

Madame Farzana Raja added further that we must be cognizant of these vulnerable groups who would be left behind while the rest of the society reaps the benefits of economic growth. They need to be provided decent and dignified “safety nets” to help them maintain at least their present quality of life.

While presenting several suggestions for intensifying poverty alleviation efforts, she said that a series of high profile seminars may be organized in each SAARC country to highlight the efforts made by various countries of the region to alleviate poverty through the setting up of vibrant safety nets. Besides, publishing of case studies on replicable models of safety nets from across the region may be encouraged.

Madame Farzana Raja suggested that a permanent SAARC Commission for poverty alleviation should be constituted and showed her willingness to host the Commission in BISP Secretariat in Pakistan for two years.

“As a top priority SAARC mutual and multilateral trade, Commerce, joint Industry and sources and resources are to be geared in a manner where economic growth should evolve to resolve the poverty factor to promote equality of life and to enhance the quality of life for all SAARC countries’, she concluded. The international observers and donors present in the conference lauded the efforts of BISP on the occasion.

Following the detailed presentation on Pakistan’s efforts on poverty alleviation in the context of BISP by Madame Farzana Raja, it was suggested by a key speaker Prof. Mahendra P Lama, Vice Chancellor Sikkim University India that the programme should be replicated by other SAARC countries. He recommended BISP during his presentation to the full session of the South Asian Forum in New Delhi. The house applauded the suggestion.

Earlier, Madame Farzana Raja held meeting with S M Krishna, Indian Foreign Minister and discussed various matters pertaining to peace and stability in the region, wellbeing of the people and poverty alleviation on the occasion. The Indian Foreign Minister termed BISP as the best programme in the social sector and said that other countries may also emulate this endeavor. He appreciated the efforts of BISP and the government of Pakistan regarding poverty alleviation. S M Krishna expressed goodwill for the President, Prime Minister and the people of Pakistan.