

**Fourth High-Level Conference on
Asian Economic Integration:
Towards an Asian Economic Community**

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Opening Remarks

By

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Honorable Dr. Shri K. Natwar Singh, Minister, Government of India; Honorable Dr. Arjun Sengupta, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries; Distinguished Participants and Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me join the other earlier speakers in wishing you a very good morning and a warm welcome to this 4th The Fourth High-Level Conference on "Asian Economic Integration: Towards an Asian Economic Community." It is indeed a great privilege for me to make a few remarks to such a distinguished gathering.

First of all, on behalf of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, I would like to thank Honorable Dr. Shri K. Natwar Singh for his generous support in inaugurating this conference. For the record, I would like to express our highest appreciations to our friends in RIS and its network of think tanks for their concerted efforts in organizing this intellectual gathering in N. Dehli. In particular, we are deeply thankful to Honorable Dr. Arjun Sengupta, RIS' Chairman, and Dr. Nagesh Kumar, for their intellectual visions and strong commitments for promoting economic integration process in creating an Asian Economic Community. I am also very delighted and grateful to see many distinguished scholars attending this very timely and relevant meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation shares your visions and commitment in promoting a mutual-benefited prosperous Asia. We are very conscious of the increasing inter-dependent of Japan and the rest of the world in general and Asia in particular. Without any doubt, we believe multi-tiered linkages between Japan and its neighbors are not dividable, instead they are continuing to expand and to deepen in the coming period. Let me suggest two examples to prove this point.

Firstly, the Asian economic crisis in 1997-98 demonstrated that mutual efforts helped us to overcome the crisis. Secondly, Indian Ocean tsunami illustrated the imperatives for mutual assistance and cooperation in overcoming the aftermath of natural disaster. In these regards, Asia is further awakened of the necessity of solidarity within the region in facing multi-dimensional issues. From these two recent events, people in Japan are becoming increasingly aware that—more than ever, Japan must work side by side with its neighbors in creating a mutual beneficial Asia. Lead by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the government of Japan is committed the creation of East Asian Community, and Japan also believes that trade, investment, finance, infrastructure, energy and technology transfer are surely the key drivers for a integrated regional community in Asia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to highlight that, in spite of various impressive efforts by the Government of Japan, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, which is a private and non-profit organization, is very proud to be a pioneer in advancing closer cooperation in Asia by expanding its focus from East Asia to India and other countries in South Asia region. More specifically, during the past years, we have supported activities such as providing platform for collaborative policy research, people exchange and networking, capacity building related activities in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. These activities have started to cross fertilize, and these results may have partly contributed—on a Track 2 basis—to the gradual emergence of an Asian Economic Community, of which is the subject of deliberations in this meeting.

Distinguished participants,

In concluding my remarks, I would like to stress that although this integration process will be long and slow, but it will surely be accomplished. This distinguished gathering of so many eminent scholars has indeed strengthened my belief towards this cause. I very much look forward to hearing your deliberations.

Thank you very much for listening.