

**CAREC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
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- **Thank you** for the opportunity to join the CAREC Ministerial Conference.
- World Bank and **Asian Development Bank** have a long-standing partnership. Congratulate **ADB on its strong leadership** in the coordination of CAREC as CAREC celebrates its 20th anniversary.
 - At this challenging time, CAREC's role as a convening body and facilitator of **dialogue, information sharing, and financing at the regional level** is critical.
- **Strong regional coordination** is vital during this pandemic and **can lead to better outcomes** at the country level as well as the regional level. Key areas for coordination include:
 - coordination of **travel restrictions**,
 - coordination of efforts to keep trade flowing and **mitigate disruptions of supply chains and food**, and
 - **coordination of vaccination efforts**, which will be essential in 2021 and beyond.
- A **people-centered approach** to economic connectivity in the region is critical to **promote inclusive and equitable growth** and ensure the most vulnerable members of society have access to affordable electricity and digital services.
 - **Role of women** is essential. Women as entrepreneurs, traders, consumers and homemakers have much to contribute and **gain from increased trade and energy access**.
 - **Trade and tourism generate export-driven and high-quality jobs** for women and a growing young and educated population. They have not only economic benefits, but are powerful tools for **people-centered development** and **building mutual understanding and trust**.

- We observe an increasing **appetite for greater trade, transport and energy connectivity** between South Asian countries and Central Asia. Some examples of what these projects could lead to:
 - The **hydropower potential in Afghanistan and Central Asia** could provide much of **South Asia's growing need** for electricity through **renewable energy**.
 - Central Asian countries have the potential to **increase agricultural production to feed many people in South Asia and the Middle East**.
 - **Cross-border digital connectivity** could reduce prices for broadband access in land-locked Central Asia, broadening access to less advantaged communities.

- The **World Bank** is helping advance this agenda through the **development of transport corridors and energy connectivity through targeted projects in CASA**. Among them are:
 - **CASA 1000**, the billion-dollar energy project which will facilitate surplus hydropower exports from Central to South Asia;
 - **Digital CASA**, which hopes to boost **access to affordable internet connectivity** for landlocked CASA countries by **attracting private investment**, giving **people** and businesses across the region **greater access to services, information, and markets**; and
 - **CASA Transport Platform**, established earlier this year, provides technical help for finalizing investment and policy priorities for **transport and trade facilitation** in **Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan**.

- Look forward to **strengthening partnership on CASA with ADB and CAREC countries**. Hope that today's discussions will provide impetus for decisionmakers in CAREC countries to embrace the benefits of regional integration.