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Renewal of SAARC summitry

We urge quick agreement on date

A decision on when the next summit of SAARC leaders will be held is yet to be made. It is disappointing that foreign secretaries of the region could not agree on a date at their Standing Committee meeting in Kathmandu this month. A proposal for December 28-30 was not acceptable to the Maldives as it clashed with its internal commitments. We have been told that the summit is possible by January next year.

We urge SAARC officials to move decisively and quickly to dispel uncertainties about the 11th SAARC summit. Who can lose sight of the rare window of opportunity that has emerged to revive the process at the highest level? After the takeover in Pakistan by military leader Pervez Musharraf in October 1999, the cycle of SAARC summitry had all but been abandoned. India's refusal to deal with a military regime in Pakistan had placed a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to any breakthrough. But the situation changed dramatically when Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee invited Musharraf to Delhi in July. The dramatic face-to-face meeting between the two leaders sent out a clear signal that one of the key impediments to SAARC had been removed. Now, a reciprocal visit of Vajpayee to Islamabad seems to be on the cards.

The Kathmandu meeting, which was the first tangible step in the revival of SAARC process at the top has raised expectations that a summit is imminent and that regional cooperation is well on its way to being restored to its former level. But without the active commitment of all concerned, especially India and Pakistan, it could stall once again.

We stress upon all concerned the collective responsibility to pursue the immediate goal of holding the long overdue summit. Let us not squander the gains made in the last few months. SAARC must be brought back on track as speedily and as solidly as possible.