



The leaders of the seven SARC nations at an informal consultation among them at the

SARC heralds new era of trust

Summit opens

By A Staff Correspondent

Seven South Asian leaders begin their historic meeting in Dhaka to give final shape to the plan for cooperation among their countries from a common platform today (Saturday).

The five-year trek in quest of cooperation will thus acquire a concrete form as the draft declaration for a structured frame of collaboration has emerged. The trek for turning the zone into a cooperative unit has been arduous. Five years ago Bangladesh proposed to convert this occasionally strife-torn South Asian region into a zone of prosperity through mutual appreciation of each other's problem and cooperation.

In the process it has achieved in concrete terms agreements on which the South Asian seven would work for improving the quality of life of one fifth of the world population, most of whom live under poverty line.

Even though suspicion has been expressed by many quarters about the functional ability of the forum in the context of existence of contentious bilateral disputes between nations of the region, robust optimism by the leaders of the seven countries make it amply clear that the infrastructure of regional cooperation will be laid in the summit meeting.

The forum will acquire a formal name, an emblem, approval of integrated programme of action and hopefully a secretariat.

No immediate gains should be anticipated. If the bilateral issues do not creep in to impair the spirit SAARC may turn into a healthy forum for cooperation. The launching of the forum

was once threatened when Sri Lanka refused to attend the Foreign Ministers meeting in Thimphu when Tamil issue was at its height. Sri Lanka had protested remarks by the then Indian State Minister of External Affairs. Sri Lanka finally changed its mind after intensive persuasion mainly by Bangladesh.

The way to the summit was preceded by five meetings at the Foreign Secretaries level and four meetings at the Foreign Ministers level.

SARC should be an effective forum for South-South cooperation.

The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia is not new. Countries of the region have collaborated under the umbrella of forums like ESCAP, NAM and the Commonwealth.

But these efforts never exploited the enormous potential of regional cooperation. Late President Ziaur Rahman explained the possibility of organising the regional cooperation for the common good of the peoples of the region in course of his visits to Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka during 1977-80. He received encouraging res-



Bangabhaban in Dhaka on Friday.

today

ponse.

Late Zia subsequently addressed letters to heads of government of the countries of South Asia namely, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and the regional nations agreed to form an association.

BSS adds: South Asian heads of state and government all of whom have already assembled in Dhaka will begin today (Saturday) morning the first ever

5 leaders arrive

Heads of state and government from Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan arrived in Dhaka on Friday to a warm and hearty welcome to attend the first summit of the seven South Asian nations beginning in Dhaka today (Saturday), reports BSS.

President Hussain Muhammad Ershad received the distinguished guests at the Zia International Airport when King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India, President Maumoon Abdul Gavoom of the Maldives, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal and President Ziaul Huq of Pakistan arrived.

The Sri Lankan President Juvius R. Jayewardene arrived in Dhaka on Thursday afternoon.

King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal and President Ziaul Huq of Pakistan were accompanied by their wives. The Nepalese Queen and Pakistani First Lady were received at the airport by Begum Raushan Ershad.

regional summit meeting to formally launch the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

At the two-day summit they will reiterate the SARC spirit kindled on May 2, 1980.

One's vision of cooperation has now spread to a region which in the past saw distrust, conflicts and hostilities.

The seven nations—the abode of a billion people—one fifth of the world population, are today set on the path of cooperation which as has been acknowledged, is even influencing the bilateral relations of the seven countries—Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

(See page 16 Col. 4)

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(From Page 1 Col. 5)

Lanka and Bangladesh. Mutual respect, sovereignty, equality and shared benefits would be the basis of mutual understanding, trust and friendship. The regional heads of state and government are going to declare to reiterate the SARC spirit.

The formal launching of the SAARC will be reaffirmation by the top regional government leaders of the determination to cooperate regionally, to work together to find solution of the common problem of poverty.

Permanent secretariat for SAARC

By A Staff Correspondent

The seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will have a permanent secretariat.

The two-day first ever SAARC summit beginning today (Saturday) morning will give its seal of approval to the proposal.

The Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries in their fifth meeting held on Wednesday in Dhaka set up a working group to look into the organisation, functions, staffing and funding modalities of the SAARC secretariat. The group will submit its recommendations to the sixth session of the Standing Committee to be held in the first quarter of next year.

The Standing Committee felt that with the formal launching of the SAARC by the summit a permanent secretariat would be come necessary to coordinate sectoral and cross-sectoral activities, prepare manual, calendar, activities and documentation for various meetings. These services are currently being provided by the host country.

The secretariat will be placed either in Nepal or in Bangladesh. It was learnt from a reliable source.