



The Heads of State and Government of the seven South Asian Nations signed the charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Dhaka on Sunday.

SAARC Charter adopted

Pledge to promote friendship

By A Staff Correspondent

December 8, 1985 will go down in the annals of South Asia as a momentous day as the seven heads of state and government signed the SAARC Charter at 4 p.m. (10 a.m. GMT) ushering in a new era of relations for one billion people of the region.

When the first SAARC Chairman President H.M. Ershad of Bangladesh declared with a bang of the gavel that the Charter of the forum has been adopted the delegates and the guests attending the concluding session of the two-day summit greeted the announcement with a one-minute standing ovation. Two Kings, four Presidents and one Prime Minister who

called themselves as "equal brothers" warmly shook hands with one another for their accomplishment. They all affixed their signatures on seven original copies of the Charter to be kept in each capital of the seven-nation SAARC.

The leaders who made the history termed the 10-page charter as the expression of "our common will and desire to work together". They all believed that the Charter would be an instrument for meaningful regional cooperation.

King Birendra of Nepal made the proposal for adoption of the Charter and it was passed unanimously.

The SAARC Charter has eight objectives, three principles and two general provision that said decisions at all levels

shall be taken on the basis of unanimity and bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations. It has ten articles that say the heads of state and government shall meet once a year or more often as and when considered necessary by the member states, Council of Ministers shall meet twice a year the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries shall meet as often as deemed necessary there shall be a secretariat technical committees and action committees comprising member states.

All the member states committed fully to the Charter that symbolised meaningful regional cooperation in spite of differences in foreign policy and security perceptions. After the signing ceremony that lasted six minutes the seven partners in their concluding statements pledged to make the SAARC a living reality. They considered their accomplishment not as a mere local event affecting only South Asia the region of one fifth population of the world but a new

dramatic development through which they can influence the future direction of the global community.

The concluding session witnessed another historic moment at 4.50 p.m. when the heads of state and government passed unanimously the declaration of the summit which they named "Dhaka Declaration". The house hailed the passage of the Declaration by applause.

President Ziaul Haq proposed to adopt the Dhaka Declaration and with full consent of all partners SAARC Chairman President Ershad announced that the declaration has been passed.

SAARC Charter

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ladesh from where the concept of SAARC mooted five years back.

In his concluding statement, SAARC Chairman President H. M. Ershad said "what we have set out to do, we have done". He hoped the summit would "cement institutional and personal ties between our countries". Reciting from his self-composed poem "In Warm Embrace" which he dedicated to the summit, President Ershad reverberated the sentiment of one billion people of the region for a new era of peace, stability and progress.

The Dhaka summit that gave birth to SAARC came to its successful end at 5.08 p.m. when the Chairman banged the gavel and declared it concluded. He along with his six partners for peace then left the hall leaving behind them a history, a memory and a promising future.

Text of Declaration

Following is the text of Dhaka Declaration of the heads of state or government of the member states of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation:

The President of Bangladesh, the King of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of India the President of Maldives the King of Nepal the President of Pakistan and the President of Sri Lanka met in Dhaka on 7 and 8 December 1985.

2. The heads of state or government underscored the historic significance of their first ever South Asian summit meeting. They considered it to be a tangible manifestation of their determination to cooperate regionally, to work together towards finding solutions towards their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual understanding and to the creation of an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits.

3. They recognised that periodic meetings at their level were central to the promotion of mutual trust confidence and cooperation among their countries.

4. The heads of state or government reaffirmed that their fundamental goal was to accelerate the process of economic and social development in their respective countries through the optimum utilization of their human and material resources so as to promote the welfare and prosperity of their peoples and to improve their quality of life. They were conscious that peace and security was an essential pre-requisite for the realisation of this objective.

5. The leaders of the South Asian countries reaffirmed their commitment to the UN charter and the principles governing sovereign equality of states, peaceful settlement of disputes non-interference in internal affairs and non-use of threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of other states. They reiterated that the United Nations constituted the most important forum for the resolution of all issues affecting international peace and security.

6. They also reaffirmed their deep conviction in the continuing validity and relevance of the objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement as an important force in international relations.

7. The heads of state or government acknowledged that the countries of South Asia, who constituted one-fifth of humanity were faced with the formidable challenges posed by poverty, underdevelopment, low levels of production, unemployment and pressure of population compounded by exploitation of the past and other adverse legacies. They felt that, bound as their countries were by many common values rooted in their social, ethnic cultural and historical traditions regional cooperation provided a logical response to these problems. They were conscious of their individual and regional strength their potential as a huge market their substantial human and natural resources and the complementarities of their economies. They were confident that with effective regional cooperation they could make optimum use of these capacities for the benefit of their peoples accelerate the pace of their economic development and enhance their national and collective self reliance. They were convinced that their countries which had made important contributions to the enrichment of human civilization could together play their due role in international relations and influence decisions which affected them.

(Incomplete)

Ship

The summiters termed the declaration as a demonstration of their resolve and will to eliminate suspicion and fear in the region and ensure meaningful regional cooperation. They passed the declaration setting aside their differences, fully respecting each other's sovereignty and freedom of independent judgement, to work together and promote the welfare of their peoples.

Then President J. R. Jayewardene, the eldest among his SAARC partners, proposed the vote of thanks for the successful summit in the soil of Bangladesh. (See page 8 col. 3)