

New chapter of peace for 1b people to be written

SARC summit today

By Raquib Siddiqi

The leaders of seven South Asian nations today (Saturday) meet at the summit to write a new chapter of understanding and cooperation for peace and prosperity of a billion people of the region.

The leaders — President H M Ershad of Bangladesh, King Jigme Singe Wangchuk of Bhutan, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India, Mr Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Maldives, King Birendra Bir Bikram

Shah Dev of Nepal, President Ziaul Haq of Pakistan and President Junius Jayewardene of Sri Lanka will stamp the seal of their approval on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The historic city of Dhaka, capital of the youngest nation of Asia, is in festive mood for the momentous event of history that will come along with the affirmation of the compatibility of political heterogeneity with practical and

action-oriented steps for economic development.

The two-day summit meeting of the seven-nation SAARC will begin at 10.30 a.m. at the Plenary Hall of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar with President H M Ershad delivering his inaugural address which will be followed by the election of the Chairman of the meeting.

After the election of the Chairman, Heads of State and Government will make open-

ing statements in alphabetical order relating to names of the countries concerned. The inaugural session concludes at 12.10 p.m. The inaugural session will be telecast live.

The summiteers will go for a tea break of 20 minutes at the VVIP Lounge of the conference venue. The leaders will begin their closed-door working session in a Conference Room at the summit venue. The closed-door session

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will last for an hour, according to schedule.

Earlier, the Heads of State and Government will be flown to Jatiya Smriti Soudha (National Mousoleum for the Martyrs) at Savar to place wreaths at 9.15 a.m. They will sign Visitors Book and plant saplings at the Smriti Soudha premises.

In the afternoon, Heads of State and Government will attend a civic reception at the lush green North Plaza of the summit venue. Maj Gen Mahmudul Hasan, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives and Administrator, Dhaka Municipal Corporation, will deliver an address of welcome. Golden keys and souvenirs will be presented to the visiting dignitaries on behalf of the citizens of Dhaka city. They will also be conferred with the honorary citizenship. The South Asian leaders will attend a banquet hosted by President Ershad and Begum Raushan Ershad at Bangabhaban at 7.30 p.m.

Wives of Heads of State and Government accompanying their husbands will attend inauguration of a handicraft and stamp exhibition by Begum Raushan Ershad at Osmany Memorial Hall at 1 p.m. today (Saturday), besides attending the inaugural session of the summit and civic reception.

On the second day, the summiteers will go for a four-hour-long river cruise starting from Meghna ghat. They will be flown to Meghna ghat by helicopters.

In the afternoon, the leaders will meet in the open concluding session where a charter and a declaration will be adopted and commemorative stamps cancelled.

After the concluding session, the Chairman of the session will address a press conference.

On Sunday night, summiteers

will witness a composite cultural programme of the SARC countries, "SARC Night", at the Osmany Memorial Hall.

The beginning of cooperation among the South Asian Countries on a regional basis may be a positive force in generating a climate of harmony conducive to a better perception of what the countries in the region have in common and the value of this shared heritage.

In spite of these commonalities, the countries of the region are late starters in the movement for regional cooperation. It was Bangladesh which conceived the idea of regional cooperation among the South Asian countries and initiated the process to translate the concept into reality.

During the last two years since SARC was launched the countries of the region have undertaken activities of regional cooperation in as many as nine areas. Considerable headway in identifying the capabilities and needs and mapping out the scope of regional cooperation have been made. A number of regional projects designed to build institutions which can serve as a framework for continuing exchange of experience, solving problems, and putting cooperation on a lasting and continuing basis have also been identified.

In spite of the spurt activities under SARC, the countries of the region recognises that the achievements are still very modest and just a beginning on the road towards fulfilled regional cooperation has been made.