

India requests for fresh meeting dates

SAARC Summit postponed for second time

NEW DELHI, Feb 2:—India has requested for working out fresh dates for holding the 13th SAARC summit in Dhaka, already postponed once in January in the wake of the Tsunami calamity, as it will not be able to attend on the February 6 and 7, Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said today, reports BSS.

Saran told a news briefing that India has taken the decision "in the backdrop of recent developments in our neighbourhood."

He said that he talked to his Bangladesh counterpart Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury this afternoon to convey India's decision.

Saran said, "we have not indicated fresh dates. But we have indicated to Bangladesh and current SAARC Chair Pakistan that fresh dates needs to be worked out on the basis of consensus."

"We have formally communicated to the government of Bangladesh that India would not be able to attend the forthcoming SAARC summit in Dhaka on the scheduled dates," he said.

The Indian foreign secretary listed the developments in Nepal, having a direct bearing on India as the reason as well as yesterday's explosions in Dhaka, including in front of the high security Sheraton Hotel, as the reasons for India not to attend the already rescheduled dates in February.

"The decision has been taken against the background of recent developments in our neighbourhood, which have caused us grave

concern," he said.

He said the security situation in Dhaka has deteriorated in recent days following the fatal attack on former Finance Minister S A M S Kibria.

Replying to a question he said that "there is no danger of India getting isolated" for its unilateral decision to avoid the summit for which Bangladesh already put in lot of expenditure and worked twice and all the rest of the SAARC

members, including King Gnyanendra of Nepal, were to attend.

Asked whether this would affect relations with Bangladesh Saran replied in the negative stating that this decision of India was "not directed against any country."

"We have taken this decision. We have taken our own decision. India made its own independent assessment of the situation. We shared our decision. There is no danger of isolation," said Saran.

Asked whether it was correct for India to take such a decision with regard to SAARC with the possibility of getting isolated when all the other countries were willing to attend he said, "it's not relevant."

Asked why and how Indian head of government should feel threatened when none of the other heads of state and government felt so for attending the summit, Saran said, "India has taken its own decision on the basis of its own assessment."

Replying to another question he said there was "no question of

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India behaving the big brother' in taking the decision on SAARC summit.

Shyam Saran also did not consider it unusual that India took the decision only a day after Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan had announced in Dhaka that Dhaka would go ahead with the summit and all the leaders of South Asia were attending.

He denied that India's decision on not attending the SAARC summit was provoked by the developments in Nepal.

Replying to another question he said that India's decision on not to attend the summit was also not borne out of its unwillingness to share the same platform with the King and the Queen of Nepal, who too were to attend.

Replying to a question whether the situation in Dhaka was worse than when former Indian Prime Minister Atal behari Vajpayee attended the SAARC summit in Islamabad in January last year in the wake of threats to life on President Pervez Musharraf, the Indian Foreign Secretary said he would not compare the situation in Dhaka with either Pakistan or any other country.

Replying to another question he said that the Indian security team had not returned from Dhaka and "we have taken the decision in the light of the report it had sent."

Asked what specific threat to the Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh prompted the Indian decision while all the other

top leaders of South Asia expressed their desire to attend the summit in Dhaka Saran said, "we can't take decisions on behalf of others. Obviously the decision has to be made in the light of three explosions that took place in Dhaka yesterday, including the one in front of the high security Hotel Sheraton."

He said the summit would yield the desired outcome in an environment free from political turmoil and violence.

"I am not here to compare the situation in Bangladesh with that of Pakistan or Nepal," he said replying to whether the situation in Dhaka was worse than when former Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee attended the 12th SAARC summit in Islamabad soon after there were attacks on the life of President Pervez Musharraf.

Saran said despite its best efforts India could not so far establish communications with the Royal Government of Nepal for which it had not been possible to convey its decision to avoid the summit in Dhaka.

He said neither the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu could establish contacts with the Nepalese Foreign Ministry nor the Defence Attache of India could establish links with the Royal Nepalese Army.