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2-day summit in Delhi concludes

# SAARC states pledge to ensure market access

NEW DELHI, Apr 4: South Asian leaders Wednesday concluded their two-day summit meeting by adopting a comprehensive declaration with commitment to ensure market access by all SAARC member-countries and also collectively combat poverty, diseases, disaster and terrorism, reports UNB.

Furthermore, the declaration

emphasized the need for developing, at an early date, a roadmap for South Asian Customs Union and a South Asian economic Union in a planned and phased manner.

The 14th SAARC Summit, in its declaration, stressed smooth implementation of trade-liberalization programme and directed the SAFTA bodies to re-

view "on a regular basis" the progress on making the free-trade regime fully operational.

The SAARC leaders emphasized that SAFTA should be implemented in letter and spirit, as its successful implementation will "catalyze other areas of regional cooperation".

In the 30-point Delhi declaration, adopted in the concluding

session of the meet at Vigyan Bhaban in the afternoon, the heads of state or government articulated their resolve to collectively overcome the challenges of poverty, diseases, natural disaster and terrorism.

"South Asian countries must work together to deal with the challenges to secure the region's collective prosperity," they emphatically said in the declaration.

The SAARC leaders underlined that terrorism is a threat to peace and security in the region and

condemned the targeted killing of civilians and terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations "wherever and against whomsoever committed".

About corruption, seen as a problem concomitant with acts of terrorism, they noted that it is also an issue of

serious concern and agreed to exchange information on national experience in combating the menace effectively.

They reaffirmed their commitment to implement all international instruments.

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## SAARC states

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tional conventions related to combating terrorism to which the SAARC member-states are respectively parties.

They also renewed their resolve to execute the SAARC Regional

Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional convention dealing with the prevention and suppression of terror financing.

The South Asian nations agreed to work on the modalities of implementing the provisions of the existing SAARC conventions to combat terrorism, narcotics and psychotropic substances, traf-

ficking in women and children and other trans-national crimes.

In the declaration, they expressed their commitment to take every possible measure to prevent and suppress, in particular, the financing of terrorist acts by criminalizing the provision, acquisition and collection of funds for such acts, including through front organizations, and also to counter illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, persons and illicit arms.

The heads of state or govt reiterated the need for law-enforcement authorities of the member-states to

enhance cooperation in the prevention, suppression and prosecution of offences under these instruments.

They appreciated the initiative of India to prepare a draft of SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka to hold a meeting of Legal Advisers to examine the idea of a draft convention before the second meeting of SAARC Interior/Home Ministers scheduled for October 2007 in India.

In this regard, the summit meet-also attended by observers from developed countries beyond South Asia-issued a directive for ensuring regular follow-up and implementation of the decisions taken.

They noted with satisfaction that timely ratification of the SAFTA agreement by all member-countries and

stressed that to realize its full potential, SAFTA should integrate trade in services.

The leaders called for finalization of an agreement in the services sector at the earliest. They also directed that the agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection be finalized.

The heads of state or government underlined the importance of implementing trade-facilitation measures.

specially standardization of basic customs nomenclature, docu-

They directed that a comprehensive agreement on harmonizing customs procedure be finalized. They also

noted that harmonization of technical and phyto-sanitary standards and their implementation in a

trade-friendly manner is important in boosting intra-regional trade.

They appreciated the establishment of SAARC Standards Coordination Board that would function as a precursor to the SAARC Regional Standard Body.

The heads of state or government complimented the SAARC Finance Ministers for finalizing the framework of cooperation on financial issues in the region and expressed satisfaction at work of inter-government expert group on