

Tornado kills 130 in West Bengal

CALCUTTA, Apr 10: A powerful tornado hit five villages in an eastern state, killing more than 130 people and injuring about 370, newspapers reported Saturday, says AP.

Police confirmed only 57 deaths but local dailies said many were trapped under the debris of houses flattened by the strong winds on Friday.

With no power, rescuers worked through the night using old-fashioned gas lamps and car headlights.

The storm uprooted electric poles and bent transmission towers out of shape in the Murshidabad district, the worst-hit area 180 kilometers (110-miles) north of Calcutta.

"I saw the storm coming and took shelter at a roadside house. Suddenly, there was a deafening noise and the house collapsed with all of us trapped inside," said Nasreen Begum, 35.

Nasreen and other injured residents were taken to hospital in an open truck. With no ambulances available, local authorities requisitioned police vans, trucks and even rickshaws to get the injured to the closest hospital, 40 kilometers (about 22 miles) away.

Residents of Kandi, one of the five villages, said the tornado swept away hundreds of thatched huts and ripped through two-story concrete buildings in 15 minutes of havoc.

A huge cone of spiralling dust rose from near the Dwarka river that flows through Murshidabad and headed towards the village, witnesses said.

A bus carrying 80 passengers was blown off the highway, killing many of the travellers, police said.

Rain and gales have been lashing the open river-basin area for three days.

More than 125 were still in hospital Saturday, police said.

SAARC: Fresh thrust

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Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and Begum Zia, were given separate guards of honour on their arrival at the centre.

Continuing her key-note address, Begum Zia commended the work done by the Independent Commission on Poverty Alleviation, formed during the Colombo Summit. "We must seriously examine its findings and recommendations, we must now seek comprehensive action programmes to take up in the next phase."

She emphasised the need to provide adequate safety-nets for the vulnerable groups, specially the children and women, by setting up institutions and legal frameworks with a built-in bias for the poor.

Advocating a pro-poor direction with definite poverty alleviation goals in all development programmes, Begum Zia said: "We must take bold and imaginative steps to implement the dal-bhat or basic needs approach I proposed earlier."

The leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Sheikh Hasina, Deputy Leader of the House Professor A Q M Badruddoza Choudhury, members of the Cabinet, Parliament Members, leaders of political parties, Judges of the Supreme Court, the three services chiefs, heads of diplomatic mission, senior officials, business leaders and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Underlining the urgency of making gradual move for appreciable progress in hard core economic areas, the Prime Minister said cooperation in this area could only be ignored to the detriment of national interests.

Referring to the proposal for establishment of a South Asia Development Fund, she said Bangladesh would constructively participate in all our common actions on this and other related subjects.

She noted with satisfaction that good progress had been achieved in working out details of a SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA). "It now remains for us to reach an agreement on this important issue", Begum Zia said.

She said it is an ambitious goal to approach in view of the differences of size, levels of development and degree of diversification in our countries.

The Prime Minister called for taking decisions on this important matter on the clear recognition of mutual interests and benefits of all our countries. "We must also make conscious efforts to promote great complementarities among economies by carefully implementing selective steps".

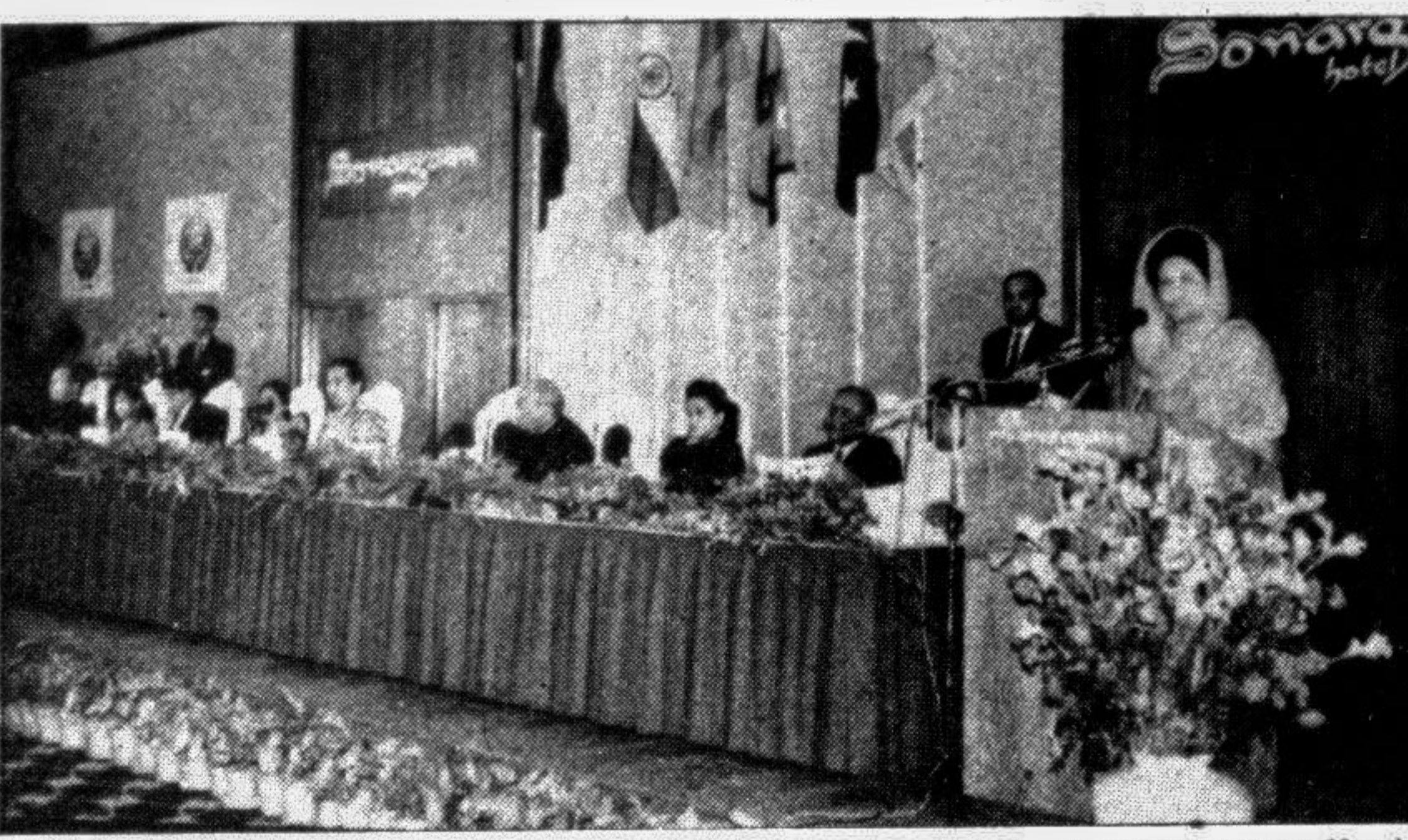
Dwelling in brief on the urgency of conserving environment, Begum Zia noted with satisfaction that SAARC had completed a number of important studies on environment and natural disasters.

A strong partnership must be forged among our governments and people to go ahead with concrete actions in these areas. She suggested a close

Resolution

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constituted for secular and universal human values. This development is endangering communal harmony and affecting adversely the environment for achieving the goals of fruitful co-operation, genuine understanding and friendship between the members of states of the association, it added.

The meeting called upon the SAARC to ban communal politics which is posing a threat to the lives and property of vast number of people and imperilling regional peace and stability.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia speaking at the banquet she hosted last night at Hotel Sonargaon in honour of the SAARC guests. —PID photo

A break aboard Ostrich

The seven South Asian leaders went on a retreat in the river Meghna to have the glimpses of the scenic beauty of the riverine country, reports BSS.

King of Bhutan, Presidents of Sri Lanka and The Maldives, Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Nepal and the Summit host Prime Minister of Bangladesh got together in the 'Ostrich' for the river cruise.

Earlier the seven leaders went to Char Bheta, situated on the southern side of Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge, to board the traditional steamer 'Ostrich'. Char Bheta was decorated with the big size portraits of the seven SAARC leaders and the national flags of the member countries.

The steamer 'Ostrich' departed Meghnaghat after the boarding of the seven regional leaders and sailed towards the down stream Meghna.

The steamer then reversed its course and returned to Char Bheta.

During the two-hour voyage the distinguish guests enjoyed the picturesque beauty of the villages on both sides of the River Meghna.

Leaders plant sapling

The seven SAARC leaders yesterday planted a sapling of 'Bakul' in the lush green premises of Bangladesh Prime Minister's office after they ended the first day session of the two-day Seventh SAARC Summit at the ICC here, reports BSS.



Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina along with Ministers attending the inaugural session of the Seventh SAARC Summit at the International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday. Also seen in picture (front row from left to right) Majidul Haq, Minister of Agriculture, Water Development and Irrigation, Dr A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, Deputy Leader of the House, Mirza Golam Hafiz, Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs and Shaikh Razzak Ali, Speaker of the House. —Star photo

Prodhnan with 18 other demonstrators arrested

By Staff Correspondent
Police yesterday arrested 18 more people including the Chief of Jatiya Gonotantrik Party (JAGPA) from two processions brought out in the city, defying government ban, to protest the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the Seventh SAARC Summit in Dhaka.

Police, so far arrested 36 demonstrators in the city during last two days. Twentyfive of them including JAGPA Chief Shaiful Alam Prodhnan and chief of Islami Shasantantra Andolon Maulana Azizul Haq were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday. Eleven others were detained in the Ramna Police Station.

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Common challenges

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"We must constructively work to solve all our outstanding and emerging problems. We must not hesitate to undertake a critical appraisal of our past achievements... at the same time, also set precise targets to further SAARC objectives," she added.

"This is the single most important challenge before the Seventh SAARC Summit. We must live upto this challenge", emphasised Begum Zia.

She said SAARC is a unique instrument at our disposal to work together common strategies to overcome our development constraints, especially poverty, over population and environmental degradation.

"Our people have reposed great faith in the SAARC process. As we approach the end of this century, we must increasingly utilise SAARC to come up to their high expectations."

The Prime Minister said efforts of the member states must be maximised "through realistic planning, serious follow-up and continued reappraisal."

She reaffirmed Bangladesh's deep commitment to this approach.

Begum Zia, who took over as chairperson of the seven-nation forum, called for redefining to bring SAARC closer to the needs and aspirations of the people. They should commit to live in peace, harmony and friendship and pledge to close ranks and face common challenges together.

Speaking at the Banquet Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao called for combining energies of the people of SAARC member countries with concrete programmes of regional development to achieve common objectives.

"As leaders of a region beset by poverty and blessed with potential, we would be missing a historic opportunity if we do not combine our energies and direct them progressively to concrete programmes of regional development", he said.

He said the SAARC which was created eight years ago showed the members states and the rest of the world that countries of the region could get together to achieve common objectives.

Rao stressed the need for evolving common development strategies in terms of development imperatives to solve common problems of the region.

SAARC countries are determined to provide active collaboration and assistance to each other in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields, he said.

"Internationally, our voice is better heard if spoken in unison... with SAARC, we sought to begin the process of regarding ourselves as part of a wider group whose similarities and complementarities could reinforce each other to reach desired ends."

Rao assured Khaleda Zia, the new chairperson of SAARC, of India's cooperation to strengthen the organisation and its institutions.

The Indian Prime Minister, however, observed that technical and cultural cooperation alone may languish for lack of more solid foundations of co-operation in economic areas.

Rao

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Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Stating that the rate of co-operation among the SAARC countries had been slower than stipulated, Rao said, "We must purposefully forge co-operation in areas of common interest and of more profound relevance to the well-being of our peoples."

"We have to direct our energies to resolve persistent problems of poverty, literacy, healthcare etc. which affect the quality of life of our peoples," the Indian Prime Minister said.

Praising the initiatives to establish South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), Rao assured that his country would join the collaborative endeavour to implement decisions in this regard within the stipulated time-frame.

In his 16-minute speech the Indian Prime Minister referred to the worldwide qualitative changes that took place in the last few years and said that SAARC must evolve meaningful policy approaches to deal with global trends in regional cooperation and economic groupings.

"Our economic well-being and development objectives are subject to the limitations of the disparities in economic, technological and fiscal conditions that exist within our own region", Rao observed.

He added that tasks should be taken for a structured balanced relationship and at the same time sincere efforts should be given to move away from adversary competition.

"Let not our modest beginnings as a regional cooperation movement belie the great potential there is for co-operation," Rao appealed, "If we believe this, the difficulties we face should not deter us from moving purposefully towards the exponential benefits for our peoples that genuine regional cooperation would bring."

"Our needs, our products and the services that we can orchestrate can be mutually complementary if backed up by positive political will, mutual trust and confidence," the Indian Prime Minister said.

He also called for harnessing unconventional sources of energy and searching and utilising natural resources on land and coastal seas.

He also stressed the need for co-operation in the field of vocational training, agricultural productivity and high technology.

He stressed the need for accelerating the economic growth of the SAARC countries and said the signing of the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangements (SAPTA) will usher in a new and promising era of economic cooperation and intra-regional trade.

He also called for tackling the environmental issues like climate change, global warming, sea level rise, coastal erosion and deforestation on collective basis.

President Gayoom proposed that 1994 be designated as "The SAARC Year of Youth" and proposed to host a meeting of the Youth Ministers of the SAARC countries to discuss the matter.

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The Midnight File

OIC sets up office in Kabul to monitor truce

KABUL, Apr 10: The Organization of Islamic Conference has set up an office in the battered Afghan capital to monitor cease-fire among the warring factions, a spokesman said Saturday. The OIC office will be staffed by 50 to 60 representatives, including military observers and other experts, said Mohammed Ibrahim Bakhar, the group's assistant secretary-general. The OIC, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, represents a group of Islamic states worldwide, reports AP.

Dasrath Deb sworn in as Tripura CM

NEW DELHI, Apr 10: Newly-elected communist (M)-led left front legislators sworn in Dasrath Deb as the new Chief Minister of India's eastern border state of Tripura today. The Tripura state, which used to be predominantly tribal-populated during the pre-independence period and now with tribals constituting 29 per cent of the state's population, will for the first time have a local tribal leader as Chief Minister of the state. Deb, 77, joined the undivided Communist Party of India in 1950 and was elected to the union lower house for four times from 1952 to 1988, reports Xinhua.

Consensus

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two years instead of the existing charter stipulation for at least one meeting a year.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will sum up the outcome of the SAARC Summit and the discussions among the leaders at a press conference today at 9 pm.

All the seven SAARC leaders will place wreaths at the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman this morning.

Gayoom

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tion of the development programmes and threaten the political stability of the countries concerned.

"The possible spill-over effects of such acts of violence in one country to neighbouring countries could jeopardise regional stability and security as well," he said adding that "ethnic tension must be defused, communal hatred must be defeated."

Gayoom said that better understanding and cooperation among the SAARC countries will make the region a formidable growth centre in Asia.

Gayoom, who attended the inauguration of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in 1985, said that the grouping was aimed at a better quality of life for the peoples of the South Asian nations.

"Undoubtedly, economic cooperation, supported by trade liberalisation, is the vital link in the process that lead to the achievement of that objectives", he added.

He stressed the need for accelerating the economic growth of the SAARC countries and said the signing of the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangements (SAPTA) will usher in a new and promising era of economic cooperation and intra-regional trade.

He also called for tackling the environmental issues like climate change, global warming, sea level rise, coastal erosion and deforestation on collective basis.

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One more Pak minister quits

ISLAMABAD, Apr 10: Pakistan's Defence Production Minister Mir Hazar Khan Bjarani resigned today, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said, reports APP.

He is the sixth minister to quit the cabinet of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the ongoing political crisis in the country.

Sharif

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commitment to creating a new and balanced framework for peace and progress.

"We must devote our efforts to generate an atmosphere of understanding that would be conducive to the establishment of tension-free and cooperative ties amongst the member states of our Organisation," Sharif added.

The leader of the 114.6 million people of Pakistan said that peace, security, development and freedom must be generated for all states, regardless of their size and resources.

In his address, the Pakistan Prime Minister lauded the role of Bangladesh in strengthening the SAARC and particularly mentioned late President Ziaur Rahman for his "vision and deep devotion to the cause of regional cooperation."

"We should establish viable structures for regional peace and security based on the principles enshrined in the UN Charter," Sharif added.

He recalled the responsibilities of the SAARC and said that the South Asian nations must actively contribute to the process of a new, just and lasting international order.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, an Islamic state, said that the SAARC-nations "must counter the menace of religious fanaticism and intolerance and seek to establish the supremacy of the rule of law and the principles of justice".

Dubbing trade and economic cooperation "bedrock" for regional cooperation, Sharif said that the SAARC had achieved its first and most important goal through South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA).

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