

30-POINT SAARC DECLARATION ADOPTED

Nations to work for better regional connectivity

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, *New Delhi*

Development cooperation, stronger counter-terror collaboration and increased people-to-people contact in the region dominated the 30-point Delhi Declaration of eight South Asian leaders adopted at the end of the 14th Saarc summit in New Delhi yesterday.

Leaders of the eight member states, including the new member Afghanistan, also signed inter-governmental agreements to create a South Asian University in India and a Saarc Food Bank, to mitigate food crises in the region at times of natural or other disasters.

The eight leaders also decided to hold the next summit in Maldives capital Male, in 2008 and designate 2008 as the "Saarc Year of Good

Governance," at the leaders' retreat.

The declaration also welcomed Iran's association as an observer to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

The Saarc leaders committed to quickly operationalise the Saarc Development Fund (SDF) with the summit taking the fund to an advanced stage but it could not be launched as the member states failed to reach a consensus on the funding, structure and operations of the fund.

The heads of states also agreed to hold meetings this year to sketch out counter-terror collaboration in the form of a Saarc Convention on Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters and also to implement the

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From left, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Bangladesh Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Bhutanese Prime Minister Khando Wangchuk, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa are seen at the concluding session of the 14th Saarc Summit in New Delhi yesterday.

CA's bilateral talks yield assurances from members

Afghanistan wants to take skilled people, Sri Lanka for investment in pharma sector, Pakistan to provide \$10m wheat

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, *New Delhi*

Saarc's new member Afghanistan has expressed interest in recruiting skilled manpower from Bangladesh while Sri Lanka has said it wishes to invest in Bangladesh's pharmaceuticals sector.

Besides, Pakistan has promised \$10 million worth of wheat to Bangladesh.

The assurances were made when Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed met the leaders of these countries in bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Saarc Summit in New Delhi in the last two days. He also held bilateral talks with the heads of state of Nepal and the Maldives.

During the meetings, Fakhruddin informed the five heads of state that the caretaker government of Bangladesh is engaged in wide-ranging reforms to create a level playing field for holding a free,

fair and credible election.

Afghanistan President Karzai in his meeting with Fakhruddin yesterday at Hotel Taj Palace in New Delhi said that he is keen on recruiting Bangladeshi construction workers, doctors and nurses. Besides, Afghanistan is also interested in Bangladesh's help in the social sector. Syed Fahim Munaim, press secretary to the CA, said at a later press briefing.

Bangladesh would soon reopen its embassy in Kabul, he said. Fakhruddin offered Bangladesh's assistance in reconstructing Afghanistan, after Karzai described the destruction of infrastructures from years of war and violence in his country, Fahim said.

The Afghanistan president appreciated Bangladeshi NGO activities in his country, particularly micro-credit and other social-sector operations by Brac.

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Next summit in Maldives

BSS, *Dhaka*

The 15th Saarc summit will be held in Male, the capital of the Maldives, in 2008.

Indian Prime Minister and Saarc Chairperson Manmohan Singh made this announcement at the concluding session of the two-day 14th Saarc Summit at Vigyan Bhawan here yesterday afternoon.

He said the decision to hold the next summit in the Maldives was taken unanimously by the heads of state and government of the Saarc member countries.

SQ Chowdhury, Shamim Osman, Mamun sued

ACC to file cases against Harris, Mamun today

STAR REPORT

Separate cases were filed against BNP leader Salaudhin Quader Chowdhury, former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shamim Osman and Giasuddin Al Mamun, close friend and business partner of Tarique Rahman, in the last two days.

Besides, the Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) will file cases with a Dhaka court today against Mamun and Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, for not submitting their wealth statements within the stipulated timeframe in February.

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Eng peg SL back

STAR SPORT MONITOR

Sri Lanka were 175 for four after 39 overs in their World Cup Super Eights match against England at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in St John's yesterday.

Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene was out for 37 while Chamara Silva was joined at the crease by Russell Arnold after

opener Upul Tharanga departed, scoring 62.

Jayawardene was the last man out when the report was filed as he surrendered meekly to the slow-medium pace of Collingwood for 56 off 51 balls with four boundaries.

Sanath Jayasuriya, making a world record 385th one-day appearance, was the first man out.

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JMB PATRONAGE Witnesses name ex-state minister Alamgir Kabir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

Alamgir Kabir, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader and former state minister for housing and public works, was named one of the patrons of militants by six witnesses of three cases in connection with atrocities by the JMB militants.

The witnesses of the three cases made the accusation on Sunday in separate judicial statements before a court in Naogaon.

In the case filed by torture victim Golam Mostafa Chowdhury of Atrai upazila, statements of three witnesses -- Swapna Choudhury, Abdul Hakim and Abdul Matin

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4 Bangladeshis in Kuwait down with bird flu

AFP, *Kuwait City*

Preliminary tests for bird flu on four Bangladeshi workers who had been culling chickens infected with the disease were "positive," a Kuwaiti medical source told AFP yesterday.

If confirmed, they will be the first cases of bird flu affecting humans in Arab nations of the Gulf.

"The first test on the four men was positive," the source said, requesting anonymity. "We have taken blood samples for a second test to reconfirm the initial results. We expect the outcome within hours."

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CEC asks govt to lift embargo on indoor politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday asked the caretaker government to withdraw the embargo on indoor politics.

The CEC made the request so that the Election Commission can hold dialogue with the political parties seeking their opinion on planned electoral reforms.

On the CEC's request made at a meeting with Law Adviser Mainul Hossain, the adviser later told newsmen, "The proposal has merit and it will be raised at the council of advisers for taking a decision."

Emerging from the meeting, the CEC said he proposed to the government withdrawal of the embargo on indoor politics.

"We are ready to start dialogues with political parties and civil society

bodies as soon as the government withdraws the embargo on indoor politics," the CEC said.

The EC has already drafted a set of proposals for electoral reforms, Shamsul Huda said. "The proposals will be finalised after holding dialogues with the political parties and civil society. Then we will send those to the law ministry to take necessary steps... But we cannot

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Campus politics to be banned for good

Govt brackets politics of students, teachers as major hurdles for education; UGC drafting law

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has initiated a move for a permanent ban on politics of students and teachers in public universities and colleges, in a significant bid to restore proper atmosphere for education.

Since January 11, all political activities have remained banned under the emergency rules while the University Grants Commission (UGC) is drafting a law that will restrict politics in educational institu-

tions even after the state of emergency is withdrawn, sources said.

The education ministry that directed drafting the law, identified students' and teachers' politics as a major obstacle to suitable atmosphere for education.

A seven-member high-powered committee headed by UGC Chairman Prof M Asaduzzaman and comprising educationists and legal experts, which is preparing the draft law, is likely to submit it to the education ministry early next month.

Apart from imposing a ban on

students' and teachers' politics, the draft will include some provisions to ensure accountability of the teachers by introducing a system to evaluate the teachers' performance by the students.

"No students' and teachers' organisations will be allowed to use party slogans and carry out any political party sponsored activities on the university campuses. The law will also be applicable in case of

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