

Actively engage to build connectivity

Hasina urges other Saarc leaders

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, from Kathmandu

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday sought active support from the Saarc leaders for the development of regional connectivity by putting aside all differences in a bid to increase trade in South Asia.

"Physical connectivity is important in ensuring overall peace, progress and stability across South Asia. Bangladesh approaches connectivity in a wider context. We believe in connecting ideas, knowledge, technology, culture, people, road-rail-air, movement of goods, services and investment," she told the inaugural ceremony of the two-day 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital.

The PM's call came as Saarc failed to sign three key deals-- Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic amongst Saarc Member States, Regional Railways Agreement, and Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity).

Turning to regional trade, she said, "Early and effective implementation of Safia remains important. We will particularly need to address the non-tariff and para-tariff barriers."

Hasina identified seven issues that require urgent attention and collective action of the Saarc nations. These include poverty, youth population, science technology innovation, climate change, regional agreements, and global development agenda.

She also underscored the need for effective operation of Saarc Food Bank and Seed Bank

"We need support in health, agriculture, food and climate change technologies. Bangladesh would call for deeper cooperation in these areas."

The PM said the Saarc countries needed to secure

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South Asian heads of states and governments at the inaugural session of the two-day 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. From left, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen, Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa. PHOTO: BSS

Infrastructure pressing need

Says Modi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said infrastructure was the South Asian region's "greatest weakness and its most pressing need."

Addressing the 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu, he said, "I want to set up a Special Purpose Facility in India to finance infrastructure projects in our region that enhances our connectivity and trade."

Making out a strong case for greater economic integration and physical connectivity in South Asia, the Indian PM announced a slew of unilateral initiatives including 3-5 years business visa and immediate medical visa for people in the region.

"India will provide immediate medical visa for the patient and an attendant," he said.

Pointing to India's huge trade surpluses with all Saarc countries, Modi said "this is neither right nor is it sustainable" and "India is not happy with (the) trade surplus".

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Let's fight common scourges, not each other

Says Nawaz Sharif

Unb, Kathmandu

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday called on the Saarc nations to fight the common problems instead of fighting each other.

"My vision for our region is a dispute-free South Asia, where instead of fighting each other, we jointly fight poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnourishment, and unemployment," he told the inaugural session of the 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu.

Though the region is

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Firmly address poverty

Urges Rajapaksa

CITY DESK

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday said the Saarc member states should firmly address the issues of poverty, exclusion, and the widening rich-poor and rural-urban gaps.

"South Asia, with a population of over 1.6 billion people, still has 24.5 percent of its population, living in poverty, and we cannot remain satisfied," he told the inaugural session of the two-day 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu.

He stressed co-operation in energy, communication, railway and disaster management sectors.

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Develop common vision, work together

Says Sushil Koirala

CITY DESK

Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala yesterday called on the South Asian leaders to develop a common concept and vision and co-work to move ahead collectively.

"There are numerous challenges for development of this region and we need to mitigate them together," he told the 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu.

"South Asia has strategic geography, rich demographic profile with growing middle class, young, dynamic and hardworking

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Climate change, its effect main problem

Says Abdulla Yameen

CITY DESK

Maldives President Abdulla Yameen yesterday said the journey of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) was more than three decades old now but trust has not been established among the member nations.

Appropriate initiatives need to be taken to address poverty and boost up trade in this region, he said, adding that climate change has been affecting this region, of late, and it needs to be tackled jointly.

Sustainable peace dev pre-requisite

Says Ghani

CITY DESK

Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani yesterday said effective co-work was required among Saarc member states to achieve sustainable peace, a pre-requisite for development of the region.

The co-operation needs to be realised in practice, so that all forms of terrorism would be eliminated from this region, he told the 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu, calling the region the centre stage of Asia.

Pointing at the Indian and Pakistani leaders,

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Food security, terrorism main challenges

Says Tshering Tobgay

CITY DESK

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay yesterday identified poverty, food security, energy crisis and terrorism as the main problems of South Asia, which were holding back successes despite the region's potentials.

"Poverty is our region's unfinished task," he told the 18th Saarc Summit in Kathmandu.

The Bhutanese leader said terrorism was emerging as the latest challenge and all nations needed cooperation on this front.

Stressing the power of the

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Jamaat clashes with cops in Gazipur

5 activists hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police and Jamaat-Shibir men clashed at the Joydevpur intersection in Gazipur city on Wednesday afternoon, injuring at least five activists.

The clash ensued when the activists tried to vandalise vehicles while they were in a procession on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, claimed Joydevpur police Officer-in-Charge Khandaker Rezaul Hasan.

Police fired five rounds of bullets to disperse them and arrested a Jamaat man, Jalal Uddin, he said.

SM Sanaullah, secretary of the district Jamaat, said the procession of the party's city unit was peaceful demanding punishment for former minister Abdul Latif Siddique, who commented on Hajj and Prophet (Pbuh), hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims.

It was police who attacked them when they tried to stage a rally there, triggering the clash, he said.



Ruling Awami League-backed Jatiya Sramik League has set up an office on a footpath in Notun Bazar of the capital forcing pedestrians to walk on the street, and contradicting its government's move to remove hawkers and makeshift stalls off footpaths and its ongoing drive to keep pedestrians on footpaths. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh prone to militancy's rise

Samprodayikota-Jongibad Birodhi Mancha, Sammilita Samajik Andolon discussion told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is one of the countries more prone to the future rise of militancy and terrorism as fundamentalist quarters here have connections with their international allies, discussants said yesterday.

All pro-liberation and progressive forces must remain united to resist the rise to build Bangladesh in the spirit of the Liberation War, they viewed.

Samprodayikota-Jongibad Birodhi Mancha, a platform against communalism and militancy, and Sammilita Samajik Andolon jointly organised the discussion, "Militancy-context world and Bangladesh" in the capital's Liberation War Museum.

Eminent academician Prof Syed Anwar Husain focused on building social, political and economic resistance and demanded banning religion-based politics.

The andolon President Ajoy Roy pro-

posed raising awareness at grassroots by organising district-level discussions and public campaigns.

The museum Trustee Sarwar Ali stressed strengthening social movement and forming national unity to uproot the menace. Another trustee, Ziauddin Tariq Ali, demanded confiscating militancy's financial sources and expediting the war crimes trials.

Prof MM Akash of Dhaka University's economics criticised the government for not banning Jamaat-e-Islami despite repeated calls from pro-liberation and progressive forces.

Jamaat can be banned on two grounds, it is a terrorist and criminal organisation for the role in the Liberation War, he viewed.

Women rights activist Rokeya Kabir said fundamentalist quarters were always trying hold back women's progress and

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 423 victims in October alone

Says Canadian high commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 423 women were victims of violence across Bangladesh last month alone, said outgoing Canadian High Commissioner Heather Cruden on Tuesday.

Citing a Bangladesh Mahila Parishad report, she said of these females, 103 were raped, 94 were murdered, 11 were victims of acid throwing and 12 were forced into early marriage.

Cruden was addressing a programme organised by the high commission and Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) at her official residence in observance of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

"One-third of all women and girls worldwide are subjected to violence in their lifetime," said Heather Cruden, adding, "Such violence occurs at home where women should feel safest."

Irrespective of age, race, religion and nationality, women, including those from a developed country like Canada, suffer violence of some kind or the other, said Cruden. Selina Ahmed, ASF executive director, said acid throwing in the country has declined this year compared to previous years, but it has not stopped.

After 1999, when ASF was founded, the rate of acid

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