

The Thimpu SAARC Summit

An Overview

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Though the just concluded 16th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Thimphu got a bit overshadowed by the India-Pakistan Prime Ministers' long delayed meeting, the joint declaration "Towards a Green and Happy South Asia," adopted by the countries cannot be underestimated.

After the summit on April 28 and 29, there was a statement on the main theme of climate change, and a promise for planting ten million trees in the region to mitigate deforestation. Also, the leaders of eight SAARC countries (Afghanistan included) agreed to establish an inter-governmental expert group on climate change to monitor regional policy implementations. Besides, the leaders vowed to collectively combat terrorism and expressed concern over the threat which jeopardizes 'peace, security and economic stability' of the region. The Maldives would be the next venue for the next Summit scheduled in 2011.

They also resolved to commission a study, for presentation at the 17th summit, on "Climate Risks in the Region: ways to comprehensively address the related social, economic and environmental challenges". The SAARC leaders sought a fresh approach to global climate talks. They also wanted a observer status for the regional grouping at the Cancun conference in Mexico on global warming to be held later this year. It was decided all SAARC countries will undertake advocacy and awareness programs on climate change promote the use of green technology and best practices to promote low-carbon sustainable and inclusive development of the region.

The statement also stressed on evolving national plans, and where appropriate regional projects, on protecting and safeguarding the archeological and historical infrastructure of South Asia from the adverse effects of Climate Change. A SAARC Inter-Governmental Marine Initiative will be commissioned to strengthen the understanding of shared oceans and water bodies in the region and the critical roles they play in sustainable living to be supported by

the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Center. The member-states also resolved to commission a study, for presentation to the 17th summit, on "Climate Risks in the Region: ways to comprehensively address the related social, economic and environmental challenges". The Inter-governmental expert group on Climate Change shall meet at least twice a year to periodically monitor and review the implementation of this statement and make recommendations to facilitate its implementation and submit its report through the senior officials of SAARC to the SAARC Environment Ministers.

Sri Lanka's role as the current Chairman came for praise by the Bhutan Prime Minister. Manmohan Singh found time to briefly interact with the leaders present in Bhutan. Of course, the highlight of the summit was that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chose to start all over again the dialogue process with Pakistan. On the margins of the Thimphu summit, he agreed to begin talks with Pakistan that were suspended after the Mumbai attack in November 2008. In return, he has got assurances from his counterpart, Yousaf Raza Gilani, that Islamabad will indeed act against the sources of anti-India terrorism on Pakistani soil. A section of the Congress is not sure of the sustained peace process, in the background of Pakistan delinking terror with other issues like Kashmir. Like his two predecessors, Inder Kumar Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the PM believes that a durable peace with Pakistan is critical for the realisation of India's aspirations of peace and prosperity at home, and a larger role in world affairs. There is also the question if India was nudged by the US not to focus on only terror in talks with Gilani. But in a big step, the Foreign Ministers of the two countries are to meet soon.

Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/03/thimphu-saarc-summit-overview>