

Dhaka Declaration on South Asia's Environmental Challenges and Natural Disasters (extract)

Thirteenth SAARC Summit

13 November 2005

The Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the King of Nepal, His Majesty Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz; and, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga met at the Thirteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 12 - 13 November 2005.

South Asia's Environmental Challenges and Natural Disasters

32. They further decided to consider the modalities for having a Regional Environment Treaty in furthering environmental cooperation among the SAARC Member States. They expressed deep concern at the continuing degradation of environment and reaffirmed the importance of concerted action in the protection and preservation of environment. While expressing satisfaction at the progress in implementation of the SAARC Environment Action Plan, the Leaders welcomed the decision of the Council of Ministers to establish a SAARC Forestry Centre in Bhutan. They emphasized on the need for the Centre to have a coordinating role in the field of Forestry for exchange of information, expertise, training and formulation of regional projects with emphasis on social forestry.

33. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the Declaration of the Special Session of the SAARC Environment Ministers in Male in June 2005 convened in the wake of the tsunami catastrophe. They endorsed the recommendation for elaboration of regional programmes and projects for early warning, preparedness and management of tsunami and other natural disasters. They called for elaboration of a Comprehensive Framework on Early Warning and Disaster Management.

34. They endorsed the decision of the Special Session of the SAARC Environment Ministers to further enhance the capacity of the existing SAARC Institutions namely, SAARC Meteorological Research Centre and SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre, to carry out their mandated tasks.

35. In view of the extensive loss of life and colossal damage to property as a result of earthquake and tsunami and other natural disasters in South Asia, the Heads of State or Government underscored the urgency to put in place a permanent regional response mechanism dedicated to

disaster preparedness, emergency relief and rehabilitation to ensure immediate response. They directed the concerned national authorities to coordinate their activities in such areas of disaster management as early warning, exchange of information, training and sharing of experiences and best practices in emergency relief efforts.

36. The Heads of State or Government underlined the need for collaborative action in the area of environment, including water conservation, to promote sustainable development. They decided to proclaim the Year 2007 as the "Year of Green South Asia" devoted to a region-wide afforestation campaign. They also agreed to address the problem of arsenic contamination of groundwater and assistance to affected peoples.