

“Look at shared future leaving behind the divisions of the past” president tells SAARC nations

The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee delivered the Cavalry Memorial Lecture organized by the Cavalry Officers’ Association on (November 18, 2015) in New Delhi.

Speaking on the occasion, the President said in the long history of world diplomacy, relations between countries have seen many ups and downs. Europe was the arena for two World Wars. Major European powers fought battles with each other for centuries. However, in the second half of the previous century, they imbibed lessons from history and decided to work together. They created a common market and common currency. They created a European Union and a European Parliament. One of the most important inventions which have changed the world is the Internet, which is a product of the peace dividend in Europe.

The President said the SAARC was established on December 8, 1985. In the last thirty years, we have created many mechanisms and institutions on the model of the European Union. It is however widely accepted that the full potential of SAARC is yet to be realized. We can change our friends but not our neighbours. It is for us to decide if we want to live in a state of perpetual tension or develop together in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. We must look at a shared future leaving behind the divisions of the past.

The President said India-Bangladesh relations is a good example of progress in looking at a shared future. India-Bangladesh relations today are the best ever since 1974. They are based on mutual benefit, equality and respect for sovereignty.

India and Bangladesh are not just neighbours. We are two nations bound by the threads of history, religion, culture, language and kinship. Our growing cooperation is a picture of shared prosperity amongst neighbours. India attaches the highest importance to bilateral relations with Bangladesh. We have always believed that strong, stable and prosperous neighbours are in our interest. With Bangladesh, we now need to recapture the spirit of the Liberation War of 1971 to build a new future.

The President said connectivity is the catalyst for deeper engagement. We have launched three bus services that will connect our citizens more easily. Connectivity by road, rail, rivers, sea, transmission lines, petroleum pipelines and digital links must increase. Regional connectivity and cooperation between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal must also be deepened. Mutually beneficial arrangements allowing movement of goods from Bangladesh through India to Nepal and Bhutan and from mainland India through Bangladesh to India’s North-east have been worked out. These are significant steps forward which have been enabled by the close cooperation and frequent interaction of senior leaders of the two countries.

The President said we must move towards greater economic integration. South Asia should become an integrated market. A seamless assembly line as well as regional value chains for global markets should be created. Indian and Bangladesh businessmen are already collaborating in fields such as readymade garments, textiles, leather and pharmaceuticals. There exists huge potential for doing same in food processing, light engineering goods, ship building and auto components.

The President said Indian investments in Bangladesh will help to create jobs and upgrade technology. These will make Bangladesh economy more competitive and increase exports. Indian investments in Bangladesh will help to create jobs and upgrade technology. These will make Bangladesh economy more competitive and increase exports. It is for this reason that the two Governments have agreed to cooperate to set up an Indian Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh. This is another big step forward towards restoring historic connections between our business communities, which will serve both well.

The President said Bangladesh and India must come together as large consumers to develop and

purchase cheap and clean energy. There is huge untapped potential to develop renewable energy like solar and wind. As our economies get more integrated and our people better connected, our nations will become more prosperous. It will also open new economic doors for India's Northeast. It will enable our two countries to integrate South Asia and connect it with the dynamic East.

The President said he was confident that India-Bangladesh relations will always remain special and unique in the annals of South Asian history. The stage is now set for a quantum jump in our relations. He expressed confidence that the coming days will see a significant intensification of co-operation to eradicate poverty, enhance growth, promote trade and investment as well as fight the forces of terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism.