

## South Asia Economic Summit calls for solution to bilateral issues



### **Speakers at 9th South Asia Economic Summit in the city yesterday stressed the need for addressing bilateral problems in the region in a legitimate way to enhance regional cooperation for implementing the 2030 sustainable development agenda, reports UNB**

Noting that political promises about regional cooperation remained unrealised, they said the political leadership in South Asia is not ready for implementing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as the regional cooperation has become uncertain with the postponement of 19th Saarc Summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November next.

They made the remarks while addressing the first plenary session titled “Is Political Leadership in South Asia Ready for Implementing the 2030 Agenda?” of the two-day international summit began in a city hotel.

Centre for Policy Development (CPD) in collaboration with four other regional think tanks — Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan and the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) — organised the summit.

Over 100 speakers from the South Asia joined the summit being held with the theme of ‘Reimagining South Asia in 2030’.

Moderating the 1st plenary session, CPD distinguished fellow Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said enabling environment for fostering Saarc-based regional cooperation has deteriorated during the last couple of years and it has gone to extreme situation with the postponement of 19th Saarc Summit.

“If we fail to contain bilateral issues in the region, we will continue to struggle with the particular situation. So, addressing the bilateral issues in a certain legitimate way has become very important,” Dr Bhattacharya said

Sri Lankan Minister for Special Assignments Dr Sarath Amunugama said the South Asian leadership need to focus on three vital areas- sustainable and rapid economic development, rapid expansion of democracy and growth of good governance- to implement the 2030 agenda.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) president Saber Hossain Chowdhury said there are two major challenges in the regional cooperation. “The biggest challenge we have for South Asia is how do you move from conflict to consensus and how can you move from competition to cooperation and collaboration.”

Bhutanese Member of National Assembly Choida Jamtsho said unfortunately there are some problems in the region – political rivalry caused by some mistrusts, suspicions and competition for self supremacy.

“Pulling out the Saarc Summit is obviously a testimony. Therefore, I would say political leadership in South Asia is not ready for implementing the 2030 agenda.”

Noting that the postponement of the Saarc Summit not only disappointment for Pakistan, but also for the whole region, Member of Pakistan National Assembly Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan said, “dialogue is the only way to overcome the bilateral problems.”

Former commerce minister of Bangladesh Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the integration of people rather than governments is needed in the South Asia. “Saarc did not work as we have not addressed politics of South Asia.”

Indian journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Mediascape Pvt. Ltd Shekhar Gupta said regional cooperation in the next 2-3 years will be determined by India-Pakistan relationship. “There is no future for Saarc unless you settle the feud in the region.”