

SAARC car rally could boost India-Pakistan relations

A mega cross country car rally that entered India from Bhutan will cross over to Nepal Thursday on the next leg of its journey, aimed at connecting people besides promoting trade and tourism in South Asia.

The 31-day SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Car Rally, flagged off from Bangladesh March 15, has passed through Bhutan and India and will touch cities in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka before winding its 8,500 km journey in the Maldives April 14.

'We hope the rally is able to break the ice for the future and help in boosting relations between all the SAARC member countries, especially India and Pakistan,' said the leader of the Pakistan team, Ehteshan Abbas.

'One cannot achieve the journey of a thousand miles in a day and it should begin with one step. Let us hope this is the beginning of a new dawn for better relations between the two countries,' Abbas told IANS.

The 28 cars with about 100 participants was flagged off for its next destination in Nepal from Guwahati, the main city in Assam, by Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi Thursday.

'Let us hope for a single currency for the SAARC countries in the days ahead. This rally will help bring people of the neighbouring countries together, besides opening up avenues for trade and commerce and tourism,' said Mahmood Sajjad, team leader of Bangladesh.

Participants from Afghanistan will also join the rally. The war torn country will be ratified as the eighth SAARC member at the 14th summit of heads of the member countries in [New Delhi](#) April 3.

'The response has been tremendous in Bangladesh, Bhutan and in India's northeast. We hope we are able to submit a concrete proposal to our leaders to make SAARC a strong movement,' Francis Richard de Zoysa, leader of the rally team from Sri Lanka, told IANS.

Organised by India's external affairs minister with support from the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), the rally participants are holding business meetings in every stop to help promote trade between the neighbouring countries.

'There is no border for building relations with people and strengthening business ties. We are sure we would be able to achieve our target of building new bridges of hope and friendship,' added M. Rasheed, a participant from the Maldives.

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