

Sheila Dixit welcomes SAARC car rally participants

After covering some 7,000 km and four countries, the fleet of 28 cars taking part in the maiden SAARC car rally were given a rousing welcome by the Delhi government on the eve of the regional summit here.

'It is a great moment for Delhi. I think these kinds of rallies should be held on a regular basis to spread the message of friendship and brotherhood. It also helps to break down barriers,' said Chief Minister Sheila Dixit, while welcoming the participants at India Gate.

A colourful programme was also held to mark the occasion and singer Kailash Kher had the audience dancing to his music. A splendid firework display was organised.

'It's a wonderful feeling to come back to the country after a gap of 16 days. People from different nations and communities coming together and spending days and nights together is a great experience,' said Mumbai's Adam, who is one of the eight Indians taking part in the rally.

The event is non-competitive and the idea to hold it was mooted by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to foster brotherhood and overall economic and human development in the SAARC fraternity.

The rally will be covering seven of the eight SAARC countries and was flagged off at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh March 15. It is slated to culminate in the Maldives April 14, by when the participants and their Tata Safaris would have covered 8,200 km.

About 120 persons from all the eight member countries of SAARC are taking part in the rally.

From Cox Bazar the participants drove to Thimpu, the capital city of Bhutan March 19, and then to Kathmandu March 23. The fleet of cars reached Pakistan March 28 and entered India via the Wagah border amid much fanfare Saturday.

The participants were given a rousing welcome complete with garlands, while college students performed folk dances.

They will be flagged off again from Delhi Tuesday morning by the heads of all the eight nations.

The group will go to Jaipur, Udaipur and [Mumbai](#) from where the participants will fly down to Colombo Sunday while their cars will be shipped there.

The rally has ushered in a friendship movement among the participants and they feel the event should be made into an annual affair.

'This is my first visit here and it's a completely different feeling. I'm getting to know a lot about people of different countries. The organisers have managed it really well,' said Faisal Ahmed, an army man from Maldives, who is taking part in the rally.

The Pakistan experience has been a wonderful one for the Indian participants and the chairman of the rally Ajay Khanna said that the effort should help bring down the barriers and encourage people to people interaction in both countries.

'On Friday we were taken to Taxila where our Pakistan counterparts had organised a show on the Indus Valley civilisation. It included stories on Ashok and how he spread Buddhism. Can people from our country really believe this? Misconceptions are cleared when we interact with the common people. I feel this event should take place on a regular basis,' said Khanna.

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