

VISA FREE SOUTH ASIA

Rights activists in Dhaka urged the governments of SAARC member states to create a visa free South Asia.

They put forward a 16-point demand, including for redesigning and immediate operation of the SAARC food bank so that it could feed the hungry in the region.

The members of the Bangladesh chapter of 'People's SAARC', a coalition of civil society groups, stood side by side, forming a human chain, on the road Sin front of the National Press Club, coinciding with the 16th SAARC summit in the Bhutanese capital of Thimphu, to sensitise the region about their demands.

Omar Tarek Chowdhury and Shamsul Alam Sajjan from BNPS, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury and Shamsuddoha from Equity BD, Monju Rani Pramanik from SUPRO and Faisal Bin Majid from SAAPE, among others, spoke before the gathering.

Terming SAARC summits as nothing more than 'talk-shows,' they said the regional association had failed to fulfil the aspirations of the common people of South Asia.

Shamsuddoha urged the governments in South Asia to establish a SAARC development bank as an alternative to the World Bank and ADB.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury criticised the government of Bhutan, the summit host, for not allowing the civil society to organise, in Thimphu, people's SAARC and similar other programmes during the summit.

He also called upon the Bhutanese government to allow about 80,000 Bhutanese refugees languishing on the borders with Nepal to return.

Karim said if commodities and capital could move freely across border, so should the people, especially the climate change refugees.

Monju Rani demanded of the SAARC member states to come up with a common strategy for tackling climate change impacts.

A Correspondent, Dhaka

KILLINGS IN DANTEWADA

People's Union for Democratic Rights [PUDR] believes that the death of 76 jawans in Dantewada on early hours of April 6th, 2010, is an unfortunate fallout of the government's willful policy of pursuing 'Operation Green Hunt'. We consider the war against the so called "Left Wing Extremists", as a wrong policy at a time when the country has been reeling under unprecedented drought, crop failure and price rise. We have been urging the Indian government that war at home against our own people, under any pretext, should be ruled out as an option, for once and for all, and the issues arising out of tribal people's opposition to MoU's signed by the state governments with mining and other industrial conglomerates and the consequent land grab, forest displacement, river water privatization needs to be resolved peacefully rather than imposed on the people against their will. On either side of the divide it is our own people who fall victim to the bullets.

Since war remains the preferred option of the Indian government they have no one else but themselves to blame if and when combatants die. We wish to

remind them that security forces were returning from three day long operations when the ambush took place. As civil rights organization we neither condemn the killing of security force combatants nor that of the Maoists combatants, or for that matter any other combatants, when it occurs. We can only lament the folly of the Indian government which lacks the courage and imagination to pursue a non militaristic approach which is pushing us towards a bloody and dirty war.

Moushumi Basu and Asish Gupta,
Secretaries, PUDR