

'Improve trade facilitation, regional connectivity'

KATHMANDU (REPUBLICA): Experts on Friday urged the South Asian leaders to do away with non-tariff barriers, improve trade facilitation and develop roads and air connectivity among the member states to realize the goal of regional integration, something which is considered crucial to improve the lives of millions of poor residing in the region.

They also sought the SAARC leaders to create a Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Integration Fund in South Asia so as to empower relatively poor countries in the region to take advantage of the regional integration process.

Dr Bishwomber Pyakuryal, senior economist from Nepal and Dr Saman Kelegama of Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka, among others, pushed for meaningful actions from the South Asian leaders

while addressing a function organized to release a book *Regional Economic Integration: Challenges for South Asia during turbulent times*.

Commerce Secretary Lal Mani Joshi officially released the book, which was published by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) and South Asia Center for Policy Studies, regional think tanks based in Kathmandu. The book is a collection of revised and updated versions of the articles presented during the 3rd South Asia Economic Summit held in Kathmandu in December 2010. Dr Posh Raj Pandey, executive chairman, SAWTEE viewed that despite the credibility gap, trust gap and capacity gap as well as divergent priorities of the countries, the gradual and steady progress in terms of integration should be taken in a positive light.