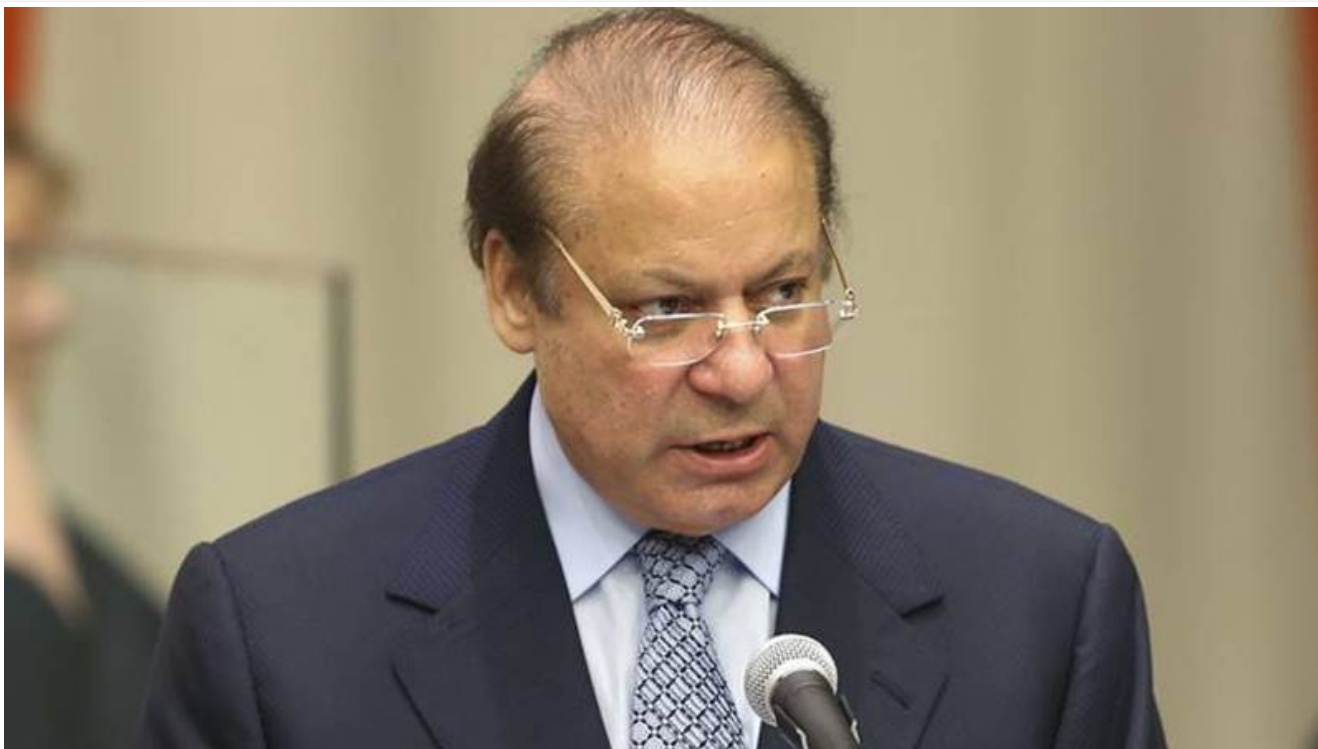


Pakistan promises peace, progress and prosperity to region

PM regrets trade within ECO region is small fraction of trade with rest of world



By: Agencies (<http://dailytimes.com.pk/search/test/17/agencies>) 01-Mar-17 154



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday called for intensified collaboration to exploit enormous potential of ECO to turn the region into a citadel of peace, progress and prosperity.

Addressing the 13th ECO Summit 2017 after assuming its chairmanship, Nawaz said Islamabad Declaration would reflect the consensus and resolve of ECO member states to collectively take on the contemporary economic challenges.

He called for sustained focus on key areas identified for cooperation in the declaration, including trade, transport and energy which could lead to a transformative change across the region.

Nawaz pointed out that meaningful trade in the region cannot take place without better cooperation on transport, infrastructure and connectivity among the member states.

He said time has come for ECO to make momentous advances for practical realisation of the theme of the summit "Connectivity for Regional Prosperity". He said theme of the summit assumes special relevance as more countries of the region are already making huge investment in connectivity projects. Central Asia has emerged as Trans-Eurasia land bridge and oil and gas pipelines are linking our markets with the rest of the world.

The PM said no other project better symbolises Pakistan's conception of win-win cooperation through connectivity than China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It is now being recognised as a catalyst for energy, infrastructure, transport, connectivity and trade in the whole of south and Central Asia.

The prime minister said the ECO region is a vast geographical expanse and constitutes 16% of the world population. He regretted, "Trade within the ECO region is a small fraction of our trade with the rest of the world."

Nawaz said ECO Vision-2025, adopted by the summit, sets pragmatic and realistic goals along with implementation framework.

He said the member states would collectively endeavour to build and promote connectivity in multiple domains. He said the summit has emphasized on the need for regional cooperation in the energy sector focusing on infrastructure development and intra-regional energy corridors.

The PM said ECO has taken steps to promote people-to-people contacts and regional tourism. He said, "Our countries remain committed to strengthening cooperation to address common challenges of climate change and food security."

He said the leaders emphasised the importance of linkages between higher education and research institutions as well as developing partnerships in science and technology.

Nawaz said successful holding of the summit is a manifestation of the desire and commitment of the member states to transform ECO into a vibrant regional block.

He said it is also a testament to Pakistan's commitment to act as a harbinger of positive changes and meaningful development in the region. He said, "The member states would continue to work in harmony for the continued prosperity of our peoples."

Nawaz said Pakistan wanted to join the Lapis Lazuli corridor and the Central Asia-Middle East Corridor.

He said this while meeting with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov who called on him after the conclusion of the 13th ECO Summit.

Nawaz thanked the Turkmen president for participating in the ongoing ECO Summit and making valuable contributions towards its deliberations.

The PM recalled his very productive visit to Ashgabat in November 2016. They discussed the progress of the decisions taken during that visit and expressed satisfaction on the implementation of those decisions.

He reiterated Pakistan's strong commitment to cooperation with Turkmenistan in energy and transport infrastructure.

The Turkmen president thanked Nawaz for the warmth and hospitality extended to him and his delegation.

Separately, Nawaz conferred the ECO awards of excellence on eight prominent figures from different countries.

The nominees had been awarded in recognition of their services in the fields of economics, history, culture, literature, fine arts, science and technology and education.

The awardees had been shortlisted from over 50 nominations.

During the awards distribution, ECO Secretary General Halil Ibrahim Akca accompanied Nawaz.

Those, who were conferred awards, included Seema Rasooli from Afghanistan (for her services in history, literature and fine arts), Pasha Karimov of Azerbaijan (science and technology), Mehdi Najafpur from Iran (science and technology), Malik Gurlibayev of Kazakhstan (agriculture and environment), Anwar Baig from Kyrgyzstan (history, culture and literature), Jamal Shah of Pakistan (arts and social work), Syedov Abdus Sattar from Tajikistan (science and technology) and Hassan Jalal from Turkey (education).



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