

SAARC SHOULD TAKE A CUE FROM EU, SAYS ABDUL KALAM

February 15, 2013 : Former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on Wednesday said it was time the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) take inspiration from the European Union (EU) and transform itself into a powerful platform devoted to bringing peace and prosperity to the region.

Inaugurating the 12th South Asian Management Forum 2013 organised by the Association of Management Development Institutions in South Asia at Yashwantrao Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA), Dr Kalam said many regional associations had come up in many parts of the world over the years but none had proved to be as efficient and useful as the EU. "The EU comprises countries which were at war with each other for not just 10 or 15 years but for centuries together. But they put all that behind them and came together on a common platform to achieve economic prosperity for their region, Dr Kalam said.

"Now the EU member countries are a peaceful lot with no conflicts. They have their problems but will eventually emerge successful thanks to the sound Constitution they have adopted for themselves," Dr Kalam said.

The former president said it would be more appropriate if SAARC can evolve as a knowledge hub to make all its member countries work together. "We cannot go on talking endlessly about conflicts. We should be connected to each other - economically and peacefully," Dr Kalam said, stressing the need to develop new models of business, technology and leadership.

Dr Kalam said since not all the challenges before SAARC countries are of their making, it was the collective responsibility of each member country to come together and find common solutions to those challenges.

Dr Kalam said in the next seven years - by 2020 - SAARC countries should endeavour to take their per capita income to at least \$ 10,000 from the current \$2700, bring down infant mortality from the current level of 260 per thousand to 10 per thousand, free its population from diseases like malaria, aim at achieving 100 per cent literacy, make quality education available to all and increase employment.