

## **ASSOCHAM to boost trade in SAARC region**

New Delhi, Dec 26 (IBNS) ASSOCHAM, Creative Living Foundation of India and Paiman Trust of Pakistan have set up an institutional mechanism called SAARC Women's Initiative for Peace and Prosperity (SWIPP) to form a sustainable coalition of women from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan and Afghanistan.

The objective of SWIPP is to promote economic, educational and cultural cooperation in the SAARC region. The MoU was signed today by D.S. Rawat, secretary general of ASSOCHAM, Harbeen Arora, founder and CEO of Creative Living Foundation, and Mossarat Qadeem, executive director of Paiman Trust.

The initiative plans to empower people with education and economic independence to encourage entrepreneurship in south Asia and provide them a networking platform to pull the masses out of poverty, illiteracy, disease and crime, said Rawat.

ASSOCHAM is mounting a 25-member business delegation to visit Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi from January 9 to 14, 2012 in a bid to boost annual bilateral trade which currently stands at two billion dollars. It is scheduled to meet leaders of political parties, business community, bureaucracy and social organisations.

Arora said formation of women associations and support groups should be encouraged to provide them bandwidth for critical thinking and critical mass. "There is need more than ever before for having

more examples of successful entrepreneurship by women and inspiring role models.”

Business leaders should unleash entrepreneurial urge and forge ahead with economic partnerships among the neighbouring nations to promote core values of unity and peace, said Qadeem. “Space for women in economic and political spheres is essential for equitable development and peace in south Asia.”

Under the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) signed in 2004, all SAARC member countries have to gradually phase out tariffs and other trade barriers on products and services by 2016.