

Staff reporter

The fifth edition of the Saarc Business Leaders Conclave (SBLC) is set to begin in New Delhi on Friday with a focus on strengthening trade relations and regional integration apart from enhancing people-to-people contact.

The Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry is hosting the two-day event with the theme 'South Asian Country: Progressing towards Regional Integration' in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed will attend the event at the invitation of Indian Commerce, Industry and Textiles Minister Anand Sharma, said an official at the Commerce Ministry.

Issues relating to the South Asia Free Trade Area (Safta) and establishing a duty-free region by 2016 in light with Safta will be discussed in various sessions of the conclave.

Tofail Ahmed will also attend the ministerial round talks on 'Taking Stock of the South Asian Economic Integration Process' as one of the panelists.

The SBLC is a biennial event of Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SAAC CCI) and is addressed by eminent personalities, business leaders and policymakers from across the region. About 300 delegates from across South Asia are expected to participate in the conclave.

The inaugural session will be followed by a ministerial round 'Taking Stock of the South Asian Economic Integration Process' during which the commerce or economic affairs ministers from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will share their visions to foster a regional integration process in South Asia.

In addition to five sessions on important issues such as energy cooperation, entrepreneurial development and South Asia in the 21st century, the conclave also includes dedicated session on the youth.

In addition to Indian Commerce Minister, the inaugural session will be addressed by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Secretary General Ahmed Saleem, President Saarc CCI Vikramjit Singh Sahney, FICCI President Sidharath Birla and FNF Regional Director Siegfried Herzog.

The fourth edition of the event was held in Katmandu, Nepal arranged in cooperation with the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) with the theme 'Peace and Prosperity through Regional Connectivity.'