

# \$1.3m budget proposed

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member countries, hosting 10 regional Saarc bodies, for legal coverage for their smooth functioning.

The meeting that ended yesterday also recommended about 100 guidelines for the technical committees, working groups and regional centres to rejuvenate Saarc activities.

The Saarc Standing Committee, comprising the foreign secretaries of the Saarc countries, will review the proposals and submit them for the consideration of the Council of Ministers at its meeting on November 11.

“The regional centres were having problems as those were functioning without any agreement with the host countries,” Ruhul Amin, director general (DG) of Saarc, said at a briefing at Hotel Sonargaon after yesterday’s meeting.

Although some officials of the member countries at first opposed to adopt the format and suggested sending it for experts’ opinion, they unanimously finalised and adopted the format upon Bangladesh’s insistence.

Bangladesh is the headquarters of two Saarc bodies on agriculture and meteorology.

The meeting also emphasised on the solution of funding, “a big problem for

the implementation of different Saarc programmes in the region,” Amin, who chaired the meeting, told reporters.

The Saarc finance ministers will meet in Islamabad in the first quarter of 2006 to formulate the financing mechanism, the meeting decided.

Instead of proliferated funds there should be a single fund under an umbrella, Amin said, adding that the committee recommended constituting SDF instead of South Asia Development Fund (SADF).

On relaxing visa regime, the Saarc DG said the meeting decided to liberalise the visa regime, facilitating easy people-to-people contact to boost interaction among the South Asians.

“But we did not go into specific,” he said, adding that higher Saarc committee will take decision in this regard.

The committee also discussed enhancing people’s conduct, exchange of professionals’ views and involving the civil society bodies in Saarc activities, and agreed to launch a website on Saarc agricultural information.

Ruhul Amin said the meeting agreed to have a television documentary titled “Saarc in the New Millennium” and other joint productions on TV and radio

in observance of South Asia Tourism Year 2005. The documentary is to be broadcast simultaneously in the region in December as a campaign for promoting tourism.

On Saarc preparation for facing Tsunami, Amin said the member countries have appreciated Bangladesh’s building of the Meteorological Research Centre while all Saarc members decided to develop its capacity.

The committee decided to hold Saarc ministerial meetings on agriculture, finance and planning, environment and commerce after the summit.

The commerce and environment ministry meetings will be held in Bangladesh while the finance and planning meetings will be held in Pakistan after the summit.

Expert groups will meet in Dhaka next month to discuss regional framework mechanism for early warning system and disaster management.

Zahirul Haq, DG of External Publicity Wing of Bangladesh foreign ministry, and Reaz Hamidullah, Saarc director, were present at the briefing.

# Foreign secys

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including the agenda of the November 12-13 summit, reports of the drafting group, Dhaka Declaration, and other draft documents relating to the agenda items of the 26th Council of Ministers’ meeting to be held tomorrow.

Chaired by Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, the informal meeting held at Sheraton Hotel was attended by Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, Pakistan Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammed Khan, Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka HMGS Palihakkara, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Maldives Ms Aminath Mohamed Didi, Acting Foreign Secretary of Nepal Nabin Bahadur Shrestha and Foreign Secretary of Bhutan Ms Neten Zagmo.

The Standing Committee meet is to begin this morning at Sheraton hotel and continues till evening.

The committee comprising the foreign secretaries is entrusted with the task of overall monitoring and coordination of the programmes, approving various projects and modalities of financing those, determining inter-sectoral priorities and ways of mobilising regional and external resources, and identifying new areas of cooperation.

It will submit its report to the Council of Ministers’ meeting.

The committee is authorised to form action committees comprising member states concerned with implementation of projects.

Meanwhile, Saarc foreign ministers have started arriving in the capital to attend the meeting tomorrow. Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk arrived yesterday and had a meeting with Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

Foreign ministers of India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka will arrive here by this afternoon and begin informal consultations at Sheraton Hotel. They will

finalise tomorrow the items on the agenda prepared by the Programming Committee and Standing Committee.

The Council of Ministers will also finalise the draft of Dhaka Declaration, review the progress of various Saarc activities and the decisions to be taken by the Standing Committee.

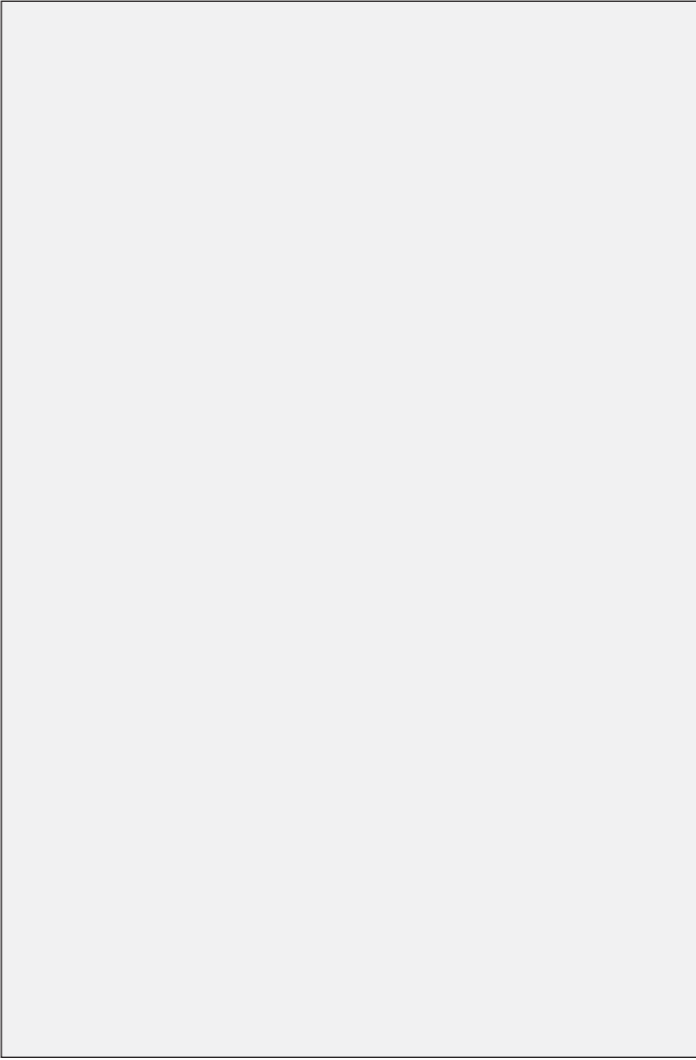
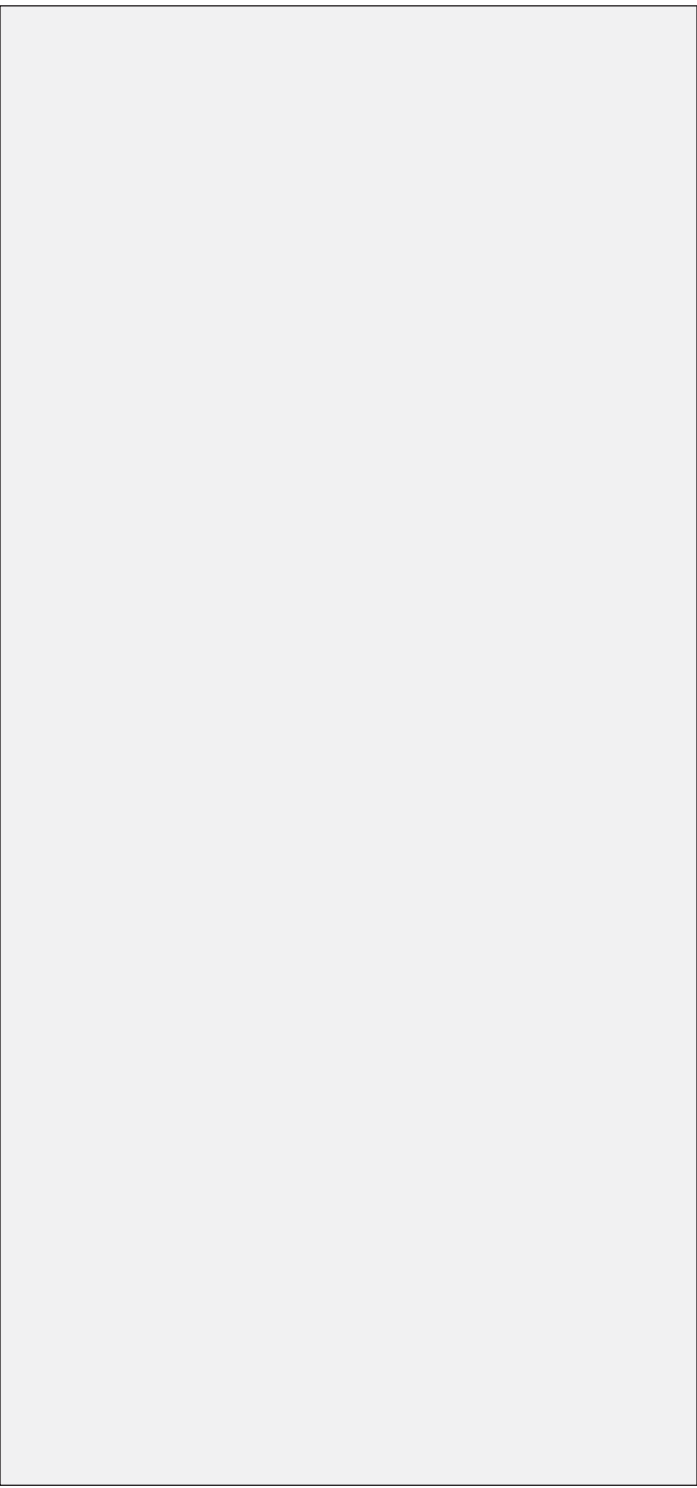
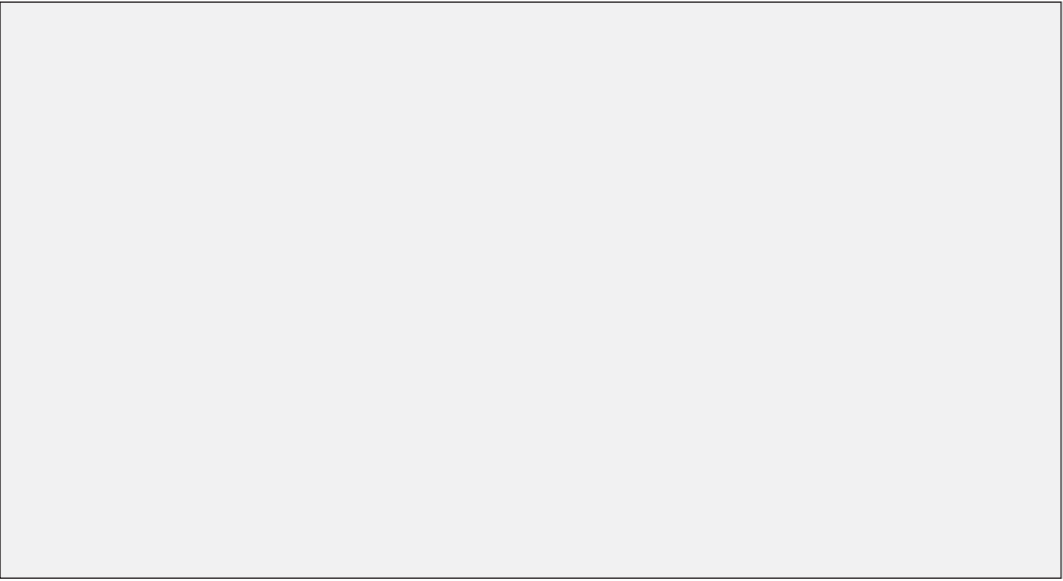
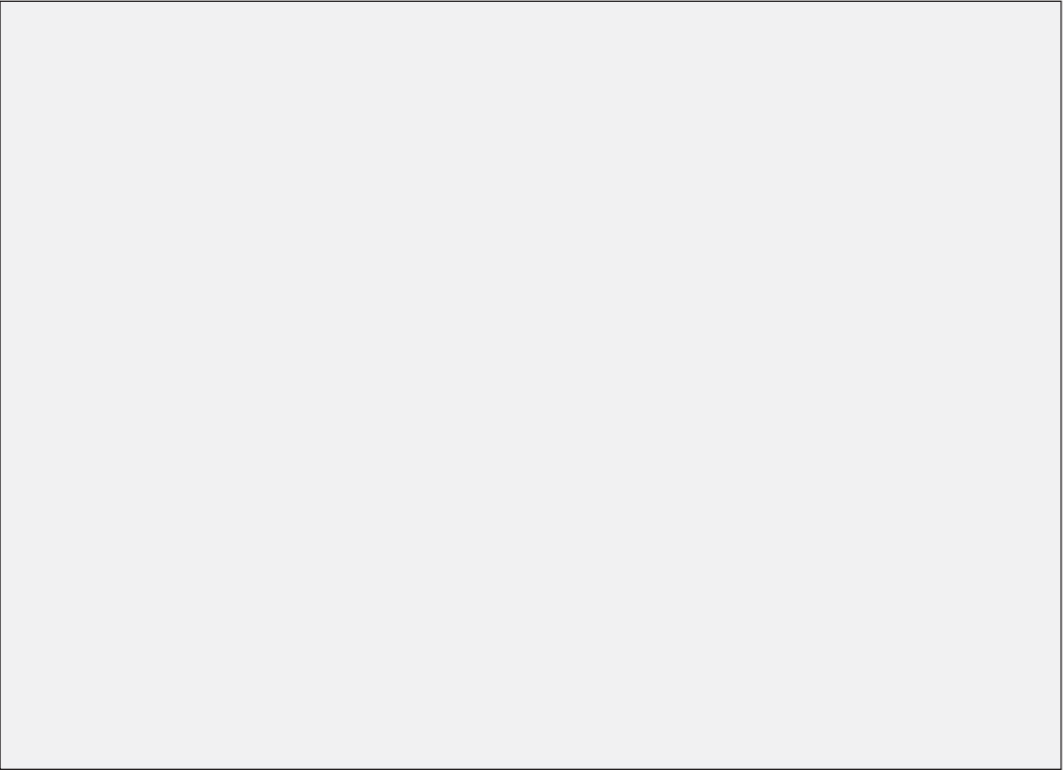
The council is responsible for formulating policies, reviewing progress, deciding on new areas of cooperation, establishing additional mechanisms as deemed necessary, and deciding on other matters of common interest.

## 1,540 more held

**UNB, Dhaka**

Police arrested 1,540 people on various charges from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours ending yesterday.

During the period, the law enforcers also seized eight firearms, six other weapons, 19 bullets and eight explosives, says a police headquarters press release.



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