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Council of Ministers decide on next summit in India SAARC Finance Ministers to meet in Dhaka next year

The two-day conference of the SAARC Council of Ministers, comprising the Foreign Ministers of the region, ended here in Dhaka Sunday with the decision to hold the next summit of the forum in India in November-December, in the coming year the Foreign Minister, Mr Mostasizur Rahman said, reports BSS.

Briefing newsmen at the end of the conference, Mr. Rahman, current chairman of the SAARC Council of Ministers said, "We decided to hold the next session of the council in July 1994, instead of holding it at the time of the summit as would be usual.

The decision regarding the next council session, he said, was taken in view of the fact that the summit will be held almost a year after the just concluded meeting of the Foreign Ministers.

The next council session, he said, will also be held in Dhaka.

The schedules of SAARC summit, stipulated under the regional forum's charter to be held annually towards the end of the year, have been upset since 1991 when Colombo hosted it.

It was also upset when

Dhaka hosted the seventh summit as Indian participation was delayed because of its domestic communal disturbances.

Mr Rahman said that the foreign Ministers of the region, following the suggestion of the SAARC Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, decided that the Finance Ministers of the SAARC member countries

would meet in Dhaka before the next session of the Council of Ministers.

The Finance Ministers of the region, he said, would address the issues of harmonization of natural pro-poor plans with open economy and structural adjustment strategies including broadening of interna-

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SAARC Finance Ministers

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tional macro economic policies to respond to developing countries' concerns which were highlighted by the SAARC summit held in April this year.

Mr Rahman said, we have decided to pay our greatest attention to the issues of economic development of the region, keeping aside the contentious issues, which are mostly bilateral.

"We are taking a pro-poor approach", he said replying to a question, so that efforts could be made to turn South Asia into an area of economic growth.

Spelling out of the important decisions taken by the SAARC Council of Ministers, Mr. Rahman said that the conference covered all 13 points in the agenda.

The conference, he said, took place in a "cordial and friendly" atmosphere and that there were no differences of opinion.

He listed five forward steps for the SAARC since the last summit and said that the first one is that, "We (the council conference) could look into the implementation of the summit decisions."

Secondly, he said, have decided to be serious about South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA). The third is the decision to hold the meeting of SAARC Ministers for Finance and Planning.

"We identified certain areas of cooperation with the EC and we are moving to move closer to the ASEAN," he said, was another development.

"And we want to move positively with SAPTA," he said.

The SAARC secretariat, he told a questioner, has appointed a consultant to study the routes and transit facilities required for preferential trade among the South Asian countries.

He said that there were, however, differences with Pakistan over the proposed preferential trade arrangement among the South Asian countries.

The council session, he said, discussed the issues of terrorism and drugs.

Asked whether the issues of terrorism, which disturbs Bangladesh in the hill districts, was discussed at the SAARC Council of Ministers session he replied in the affirmative. Besides, he said that question of drug abuse also as a regional issue came up for discussion.

Mr. Rahman, replying to a question, said that during his recent visit to Brussels he had discussions with EC officials on possible cooperation between the two regional forums and the EC, had identified several areas of cooperation.

He said the EC was willing to help SAARC organise its secretariat with proper documentation facilities, help it set the SAARC Meteorological Centre in Dhaka, lend support to South Asia Development Fund, provide technical and other assistances to various other SAARC development centres and help set up the SAARC Documentation Centre at Delhi.

Besides, he said, he also discussed with the EC officials about the EC's cooperation with SAARC in its bid to alleviate poverty in South Asia, and industrial and trade cooperation.

He said that the next meeting between SAARC and EC would be held in a year's time.

The SAARC Council, he said, has decided that the negotiations of trade concessions under SAPTA would be completed at the meeting of an inter-governmental group on trade liberalisation to be held in Islamabad during the first half of the next year.