

# Call to remove food trade barriers

REPUBLICA

KATHMANDU, Feb 25

A two-day consultation meeting of South Asian civil society representatives on Friday urged the governments in the region to remove barriers to trade in agricultural and food products in order to achieve food security.

The meeting, which was attended by 45 experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, particularly called for strict elimination of export restrictions on goods that are criti-

cal for food security during emergencies like production and price shocks, and natural disasters.

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) that hosted the meeting said it along with its member institutions would formally hand over the recommendations of the meeting to the agriculture ministry of respective countries soon.

The meeting that was held with the objective of identifying a set of recommendations for SAARC agriculture ministers, who are meeting

in Dhaka on March 3, has also called for an independent regional institution for the effective operationalization of the SAARC Food Bank.

It also demanded that regional guidelines for the application of intellectual property rights in agriculture as well as for the protection of farmers' rights be developed through the exchange of views and experiences of member countries and lessons learnt from India's experiences.

"There exists an urgent need for proactive and defensive initiatives to curb

biopiracy and misappropriation of traditional knowledge," reads the statement issued at the end of the program Friday.

The meeting also identified some two dozen regional and sub-regional projects in the areas of agriculture, climate change and food security for consideration by the SAARC agriculture ministers. The projects include issues such as role of media in the realization of the right to food and significance of focusing on neglected and underutilized crops and livestock in the region.