

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1342  
ANSWERED ON:30.07.2003  
SAARC FOREIGN SECRETARIES MEET  
AJAY SINGH CHAUTALA

**Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:**

- (a) the details of the agenda at the SAARC Foreign Secretaries meeting held in Kathmandu recently;
- (b) whether any agreements were reached among the SAARC Countries during the above meeting;
- (c) if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) the gain likely to be accrued to India from these agreements?

**Answer**

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH)

(a) The Fourth Special Session of the SAARC Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries was held in Kathmandu on July 9-10, 2003 to discuss activities related to the SAARC process, consider reports and recommendations of SAARC institutions and approve budget proposals of SAARC Secretariat and Regional Centres.

(b)&(c) The Committee emphasised urgency in finalising the draft treaty on creation of SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) before the next Summit. It called for the completion of procedural formalities pertaining to SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement) on a priority basis, and recommended launching the Fifth Round of Trade Negotiations in 2004. All delegations emphasized the importance of making progress in the areas of trade and commerce. The Committee also reached consensus on the proposal of the Government of Pakistan to host the 12th SAARC Summit on January 4-6, 2004 in Islamabad.

(d) During the deliberations, India laid emphasis on the need for constructive and positive cooperation among SAARC members and that intensification of trade and commercial exchanges between member countries would be in keeping with the mandate given by the 11th SAARC Summit. This process would enhance India's trade prospects with member countries.