

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:395
ANSWERED ON:23.08.2006
SECRETARY LEVEL TALKS OF SAARC NATIONS
Chowdhury Shri Adhir Ranjan;Singh Shri Uday

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) Whether Secretary level talks of SAARC nations were held at Dhaka recently;
- (b) If so, the details of the discussions held and the outcome thereof;
- (c) Whether various pending issues were raised with member nations during the said talks;
- (d) If so, the details thereof; and
- (e) The outcome thereof?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) Yes, under the ambit of the 32nd Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC countries, Secretary level talks were held at Dhaka on July 31st-August 1st, 2006.

(b to e) A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

Statement referred in part (b) to (e) of Lok Sabha starred question No. 395 to be answered on 23.8. 2006 regarding Secretary Level Talks of the SAARC Nations

Under the ambit of the 32nd Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC countries, Secretary level talks were held at Dhaka on July 31st-August 1, 2006. The Standing Committee preceded the 27th Council of Ministers meeting on August 1-2, 2006 at Dhaka.

2. The meeting considered matters relating to regional economic cooperation and social development. It, inter alia, reviewed the procedure for better linkages and implementation of decisions of Ministerial Meetings, progress in the implementation of SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol and the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and cooperation with international and regional organisations. The Standing Committee also discussed regional cooperation in disaster management, information and media, activities of SAARC Apex/Recognised bodies and considered India's proposal for a SAARC Car Rally to be organized in the run-up to the 14th SAARC Summit. It considered the procedures and other formalities to be completed with regard to Afghanistan joining as the eighth member of SAARC.

3. While discussing the progress in regional economic cooperation, the Standing Committee discussed the implementation of the SAFTA Agreement.

4. A framework agreement on SAFTA was signed during the 12th Summit in Islamabad. SAFTA has come into effect retrospectively from January 1, 2006. SAFTA will be fully operationalised by 2016, through a phased Trade Liberalization Programme which covers all tariff lines except those kept in the sensitive (negative) list by each member country.

5. The Government of Pakistan in its Notification (SRO No 695(I)/2006) on July 1, 2006, regarding tariff concessions for SAARC member countries under SAFTA, has limited SAFTA tariff concessions for India only to items on the existing bilateral "Positive List". We regard this action as negation of the Agreement and going against the very essence of SAFTA.

6. During the Standing Committee we forcefully raised our concerns regarding non-implementation of SAFTA by Pakistan. The issue was further discussed in the 27th Council of Ministers Meeting, where it was agreed that the SAFTA Ministerial Council would have to resolve this before the next session of the Council of Ministers "with a view to ensuring smooth implementation of the Agreement".

7 We also raised our concerns on terrorism and drew attention to the need for cooperation among all SAARC countries in facing the challenge of terrorism in the region. The Standing Committee urged Member States to enact additional enabling legislation, where necessary, to implement all the provisions of the SAARC Convention on Terrorism and Additional Protocol.

8. The SAARC Member countries accepted India's proposal for the SAARC Car Rally, as a curtain raiser to the 14th SAARC Summit to be held in New Delhi in April 2007. A meeting of the Organizing Committee of representatives from all SAARC Member countries

is scheduled to take place shortly. India has offered to host the first meeting of the Organizing Committee in New Delhi.

9. The modalities for the SAARC Disaster Management Centre which is to be located in New Delhi were approved. The Centre will become operational after the first Governing Board meeting in October 2006. The Standing Committee observed that all SAARC activities relating to natural disaster management should be focused through the Centre to avoid duplication of effort and proliferation of forums; and that existing Regional Centres would continue to supplement the SAARC efforts in natural disaster management.

10. It was decided to establish an Inter-Governmental Group on Transport at the level of Secretaries to consider a SAARC Study on Regional Multimodal Transport. The Group's recommendations would be considered in the preparatory meetings preceding the 14th SAARC Summit.

11. The Standing Committee considered the procedure and other formalities to be completed with regard to Afghanistan joining the association. The SAARC leaders at the beginning of the 14th Summit would sign a Joint Declaration. An Inter-Governmental Group would be set up to finalize all relevant issues with the Government of Afghanistan by 31st December 2006.

12. The recommendations of the 32nd Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC were presented to the 27th Session of the Council of Ministers at Dhaka

(August 1-2, 2006). India was represented by Shri E. Ahamed, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs. The Council approved the Report of the 32nd Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC.