

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No. 3562
TO BE ANSWERED ON 02.01.2019

RELATIONS WITH SAARC COUNTRIES

3562. SHRI GODSE HEMANT TUKARAM:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether frequent meetings of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries have strengthened India's relations with these neighbouring countries; and
- (b) if so, details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) & (b) An informal meeting of SAARC Council of Ministers was held on the sidelines of 73rd UNGA Session in New York on 27 September 2018 which was attended by the External Affairs Minister. India also participated in other meetings of SAARC including SAARC Programming Committee Meeting, sectoral meetings and meetings of SAARC's regional centres/specialized bodies. However, the 19th SAARC Summit that was scheduled to be held in November 2016 in Pakistan was postponed, as several SAARC Member States including India expressed their inability to participate due to concerns arising from increasing cross border terrorist attacks in the region and growing interference in the internal affairs of members states by one country.

India has continued its commitment to regional cooperation with initiatives such as launch of South Asia Satellite, extension of India's National Knowledge Network and continued support to South Asian University and SAARC Disaster Management Centre (Interim Unit).

India enjoys excellent bilateral relations, bolstered by close cultural and historic ties with SAARC countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Our bilateral relations with these countries have grown and expanded in recent years in line with Government's policy of 'Neighbourhood First'. The Government desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan and is committed to addressing all outstanding issues bilaterally and peacefully in accordance with the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. However, any meaningful dialogue can be held only in an atmosphere free from terror, hostility and violence. The onus is on Pakistan to create such a conducive atmosphere.
