

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:4794

ANSWERED ON:18.04.2001

REVIVAL OF SAARC

DR. KIRIT SOMAIYA;RENUKA CHOWDHURY;SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether senior officials of SAARC Countries had met in Sri Lanka recently to rescue the body from the limbo that has afflicted it since the heightening of India-Pakistan tension following the 1999 Kargil intrusion;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken particularly by India so far for the establishment of Free Trade Area in South Asia as set out in the Colombo declaration?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI U.V.KRISHNAM RAJU)

(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The SAARC Senior Officials' Meeting was convened by the Secretary General and the Sri Lankan Government (being the current Chairman of the SAARC) to address outstanding issues relating to the budget, administration, housekeeping and scheduling of the Technical Committees, as also other specialized meetings. The SOM successfully finalized the calendar for holding various meetings including the SAARC Technical Committees, the 4th Round of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), Expert Level Meeting to draft a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Treaty, Inter-Governmental Expert Group Meeting on the SAARC Social Charter, and others.

(c) Under the three rounds of SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) negotiations held so far, India's contribution to the promotion of trade and economic cooperation and speeding up the transition to SAFTA has exceeded that of any other country. India notified tariff concessions on over 3000 product lines under the third round of SAPTA in November 1998 and took the bold initiative to unilaterally lift all Quantitative Restrictions for SAARC countries in August 1998, thereby substantially enhancing access for these countries to the Indian market. Under the Colombo Declaration a Committee of Experts (COE) for drafting a comprehensive SAFTA Agreement was set up. The COE held its First Meeting in Kathmandu in 1999 at which terms of reference of the Committee were discussed.