

12.13½ hrs.

[English]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOOD, CIVIL SUPPLIES AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

Seventh and Eighth Report

SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA (Amritsar) : I beg to present the following Reports (English and Hindi versions) of the Standing Committee on Food, Civil Supplies and Public Distribution :-

- (1) Seventh Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Fifteenth Report of the Committee on the subject of "Sugar".
- (2) Eighth Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Seventeenth Report of the Committee on the subject of "Edible Oils."

12.14 hrs.

[English]

PETITION RE : DOWNGRADING OF PAY SCALE OF ENGINEERING EMPLOYEES OF AIR AND DOORDARSHAN

SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO (Dhenkanal) : I beg to present a petition signed by Shri P.N. Kohli, President, Association of Radio & Television Engineering Employees, Post Box 422, New Delhi and others regarding downgrading of Pay Scales of Engineering Employees of AIR and Doordarshan, as a result of recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission.

12.14½ hrs.

[English]

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER

RE: Ninth SAARC Summit, Male

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL) : I have the honour to present before the House a *Suo Motu* Statement on my participation in the 9th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which was held in Male from May 12-14, 1997.

Cooperation amongst the 7 Member States of SAARC has been increasing in recent years and the Summit further exemplified the strength of the Association.

For the information of Hon. Members, I would like to summarise the principal development at the Summit :

An earlier decision of SAARC was to work for a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) preferably by the year 2000 but in any case before 2005 AD. The 9th Summit has now agreed that SAFTA should be realised by the year 2001, thus advancing the final target year by four years. This is an important decision which reflects the growing sentiment among the Member countries to consolidate economic interaction speedily.

Another significant step was the decision to set up a Group of Eminent Persons in order to develop a long range vision for the SAARC. There was general agreement amongst the Heads that SAARC was now in a position to strengthen its activity in core economic sectors, for which an agenda should be developed.

The question of sub-regional cooperation in South Asia came up. Prior to the Summit, some differences of opinion had been expressed on the appropriate relationship between sub-regional cooperation and the regional structure of SAARC. Whereas our preference from the start was that projects for sub-regional cooperation should be developed within the SAARC, as specifically provided for under Article 7 of the Charter, some other countries had initially felt that it was better to keep sub-regional efforts outside the SAARC.

Happily, the issue was resolved of the complete satisfaction of all parties by agreeing that specific projects for sub-regional cooperation would be developed and processed through the Secretariat and endorsed inter-governmentally through established processes of SAARC prior to their implementation. This has made it possible for a number of useful projects involving some but not all of the members, including a quadrilateral initiative involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal based on a Nepalese proposal, to be developed in a manner that will enhance the flexibility and strengthen the functioning of the SAARC.

Particular emphasis was placed at the Summit on the problems faced by women and girl child in the society, particularly the girl children in especially difficult circumstances. It was decided that the decade 2000-2010 would be designated as the 'SAARC Decade for the Rights of the Child'. SAARC will also pay particular attention to the