

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2834
ANSWERED ON:05.12.2007
14TH SAARC SUMMIT
Bhagora Shri Mahavir

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the decision taken and agreements signed by India during the 14th SAARC Summit concluded in April, 2007;
- (b) the benefits likely to accrue as a result thereof;
- (c) whether India proposes to set up a South Asian University; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof alongwith the names of the countries which supported the proposal, the location for the said University and the time by which it is likely to be set up?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE)

(a)-(d) The 14th SAARC Summit held in New Delhi on April 3-4, 2007 was a landmark Summit in many respects. Salient outcomes of the 14th SAARC Summit were:

For the first time in its history, SAARC expanded its membership to welcome Afghanistan as its eighth member. Again, for the first time, five Observers – China, Japan, ROK, EU and US attended the Summit. The leaders also decided to give observer status to Iran.

The Summit adopted a comprehensive and a forward-looking Declaration, to promote regional co-operation. It underlined the collective vision of the Heads of State/Government of SAARC countries of an interconnected South Asia where there was a free flow of people, goods, services and ideas.

There was a recognition that in its third decade of existence, there was a need to move SAARC from a declaratory to an implementation phase. The focus of SAARC would be on implementing collaborative projects that would bring concrete benefits to the people of the region. In this context, SAARC countries committed themselves to early operationalisation of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF).

It was agreed to improve intra-regional connectivity, particularly physical, economic and people-to-people connectivity. The full benefits of an integrated regional multi-modal transport system were recognised. It was agreed that the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study would be extended to Afghanistan. It was also agreed that pilot projects for improving connectivity would be identified and implemented.

During the Summit, two important Agreements on the establishment of the South Asian University and the SAARC Food Bank were signed. The Food Bank is an exemplary model of regional cooperation to meet collectively the region's food shortages in times of emergencies and natural calamities. The South Asian University will be developed as a centre of excellence in higher education for the entire region.

There was agreement that SAFTA was one of the most successful outcomes of SAARC's collective efforts. To realise its full potential, SAFTA should integrate trade in services. The importance of implementing trade facilitation measures was also underlined.

The SAARC countries agreed to work together on a roadmap, inter alia, in the fields of poverty alleviation, food security, energy, water, environment, climate change, trade and transport, information and communication technology, tourism, education, culture and counter- terrorism.

The SAARC countries committed themselves to combat terrorism and agreed to consider India's proposal to work towards finalising an Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.

2. Implementation of the decisions taken at the 14th SAARC Summit will move SAARC from the declaratory to the implementation phase especially after the operationalisation of the SAARC Development Fund and South Asian University. These decisions are also intended to boost intra-regional trade and investment; increase co-operation in issues relating to trans-national crimes, particularly terrorism, narcotics & psychotropic substances and on trafficking in women and children; enhance understanding through increased people-to-people contact and promote cultural exchanges and travel within the region. As a follow up of the Summit, the three Ministerial Meetings on Transport, Home and Finance hosted by India have enhanced cooperation in these crucial areas. The

SAARC Cultural Festival and the SAARC student exchange programme being organised by India will increase people-to-people connectivity.