

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:288

ANSWERED ON:02.03.2005

FAILURE OF SAARC

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Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) Whether SAARC has failed to achieve its aims and objectives for which it was set up;
- (b) if so, the details and the reasons therefor;
- (c) whether the Government proposes to concentrate on other regional groups;
- (d) if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) the achievements of SAARC since its inception in 1985?

Answer

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

(a)& (b) SAARC was established with the objectives of promoting the economic, social and cultural cooperation as well as to promote mutual understanding and strengthen collective self reliance among the peoples of South Asia. While SAARC has fallen short of expectations, it has certainly not failed in its objectives since the activities in SAARC have undoubtedly brought about much greater contact and awareness amongst governments, businesses, cultural and media organizations, scholars, experts, students, and non-governmental organizations dealing with specialized activities. SAARC has also assisted in enabling training and information exchange in a variety of disciplines.

(c)&(d) The Government of India has reiterated its continued and consistent commitment to the SAARC process and to increased regional cooperation among Member States. Government's commitment to SAARC is independent of its commitment to any other regional grouping, since Government is convinced that greater economic integration in South Asia is beneficial to all countries in the region.

(e) Since its inception in 1985, SAARC has contributed to greater understanding, accommodation and information flow, which has led, first to a preferential trading arrangement, SAPTA, and subsequently to the signing of a framework agreement for free trade, SAFTA, currently under negotiation with a view to bringing it into force from January 1, 2006. The success of trading arrangements in SAARC has also emboldened South Asian academics and practitioners of diplomacy to foster a vision of a South Asian Customs Union, common currency areas, etc., leading eventually to a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) to parallel models in the EU and elsewhere. People-to-people contact, one of SAARC's avowed objectives has also increased as non-State actors - NGOs and civil society are playing a dynamic and incremental role in nurturing inter-State cooperation and are activating ideas on distributive justice and developmental objectives. The number of diverse associations and professional bodies seeking recognition and apex-body status has registered manifold increase and includes architects, chartered accountants, doctors, engineers, teachers, town planners, women academics, writers and poets, and professional associations dealing with insurance, law and management development. The increasing role played by national Chamber of Commerce as stakeholders in promoting freer trade among South Asian countries is a healthy manifestation of such involvement. The more SAARC is seen to grow and become more relevant to the region, the greater will be the desire for civil society to associate with it.