

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:5308
ANSWERED ON:28.04.2010
RELEXATION OF SAARC NORMS
Reddy Shri K. Jayasurya Prakash

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether relaxation of SAARC norms can boost Asian economy;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the reaction of the Government thereto?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SMT. PRENEET KAUR)

- (a) Relaxation of SAARC norms in the areas of trade, travel, transportation and visas, among others, can boost regional economic growth. However, such relaxation of norms have to be agreed to by all SAARC Member States.
- (b) SAARC Member States have taken several important steps to relax SAARC norms. These include the conclusion and implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the recent decision under SAFTA requiring SAARC Member States to work towards pruning of their existing sensitive lists by twenty percent; the desire expressed by the SAARC Ministers of Transport to increase connectivity in the region, including through agreements in motor vehicles and railways; and periodic review of SAARC visa arrangements, including SAARC visa exemption scheme for businessmen / industrialists, journalists, senior academics and other identified categories, by SAARC Home Ministers at their meetings.
- (c) India shoulders asymmetrical and non-reciprocal responsibility for promoting trade in the SAARC Region, including by unilaterally pruning its sensitive list for the SAARC Least Developed Countries (LDCs) from 744 to 480 items under SAFTA, thereby granting them greater access to the Indian Market.