

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2331
ANSWERED ON:24.11.2010
OBJECTIVES OF SAARC
Owaisi Shri Asaduddin

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether as per the SAARC Charter of 1985 the fundamental objective of SAARC is to promote the welfare of people of South Asia and improve their quality of life;
- (b) if so, the extent to which these objectives have been achieved by SAARC in its 25 years of existence;
- (c) whether recently a meeting of SAARC countries, under the aegis of Research and Information System of developing countries was held;
- (d) if so, the issues discussed in the meeting; and
- (e) the strategy chalked out to achieve the objective of SAARC?

Answer

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

(a): This is one of the fundamental objectives of SAARC as per its Charter.

(b): A key strategy adopted to achieve this objective has been to work towards enabling freer movement of goods and services in the region. The implementation of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in 2006 was a significant milestone in this regard. Intra-regional trade in South Asia has doubled over the past 5 years and is estimated to have crossed over \$ 700 million. A SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services was also signed in April 2010 which is expected to further strengthen economic cooperation in the region. Increasing regional engagement in core areas of development, including education, health, agriculture, energy and infrastructure have also contributed significantly to delivering the fruits of development to South Asians at the grass roots level. There has also been an increase in people-to-people exchange through cultural and social activities and the exchange of ideas.

(c) to (e): An international conference to commemorate 25 years of SAARC was held in New Delhi on 16-17 September, 2010 under the aegis of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries and the India International Centre.

The meeting discussed a range of issues including progress achieved in SAARC over the last 25 years and the main challenges facing the organization. There were separate technical sessions held on Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, Strengthening Physical Connectivity, Ensuring Energy Linkages, and Implementation of Steps for the Consolidation and Growth of SAARC.