

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:307  
ANSWERED ON:23.11.2011  
CONNECTIVITY FOR SAARC COUNTRIES  
Singh Shri Vijay Bahadur

**Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:**

- (a) whether India has submitted a draft proposal to link all South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) countries by road and rail;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the responses of other SAARC countries; and
- (d) the perceived benefits of such a rail and road link between these countries?

**Answer**

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

(a) to (d) India attaches great importance to transportation links within the framework of SAARC.

During the XIV SAARC Summit in New Delhi in 2007, the leaders inter alia directed the Inter-Governmental Group on Transport to develop a Regional Agreement on Motor Vehicles and a Regional Agreement on Railways. India offered to hold the Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Transport (SMT). Accordingly, the first Meeting of SMT was held in New Delhi in 2007. The second and third Meetings of SMT were held in Colombo (July 2009) and New Delhi (Nov 2010). As per the directives of the STM, an Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) to discuss the transport related matters and an Expert Group (EG) to Negotiate Draft Agreements on Motor Vehicles and Railways were formed.

The Expert Group met at the SAARC Secretariat on 1-2 February, 2010. The Meeting completed the first readings of draft texts of both Agreements, the initial texts of which were prepared by India. The Second Meeting of the Expert Group was held on 26-27 August, 2011 at the SAARC Secretariat. This meeting focused only on the Regional Agreement on Railways; a separate Expert Group Meeting to discuss the Motor Vehicles Agreement is to be convened by the SAARC Secretariat.

The draft text of the Regional Agreement on Railways was finalized by the countries that participated in the Second Meeting of the Expert Group in August 2011 in Kathmandu, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Pakistan sent a message that the draft Agreement is under active consideration; it hoped to join the negotiations in the next Expert Group meeting in this regard.

When finalized and signed, it is hoped that regional rail and road agreements will enhance transport connectivity with the region, stimulating trade and people-to-people contacts.