

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:513
ANSWERED ON:13.08.2014
TIES WITH SAARC COUNTRIES
Sreeramulu Shri B.;Thota Shri Narasimham

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether India proposes to augment/boost bilateral ties with all the SAARC countries;
- (b) If so, the details of the strategy and action plan chalked out for the purpose;
- (c) whether any changes have been made/proposed to be made in India's erstwhile diplomatic exchanges with SAARC countries; and
- (d) If so, the details in this regard?

Answer

HE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ)

(a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) to (d) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 513 REGARDING "TIES WITH SAARC COUNTRIES" FOR ANSWER ON 13.8.2014

India's relations with SAARC countries are based on shared partnership and mutuality of interests. India has enhanced its engagement with all SAARC countries both bilaterally and through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It has also called for increased trade and connectivity links through land, air, sea and waterways for accelerating regional integration and greater people-to-people contacts. It has also initiated several projects and programmes like the tele-medicine programme, the South Asian University in New Delhi, the SAARC Food Bank to meet food contingencies and the SAARC Development Fund for social projects.

India has proposed to host the SAARC Culture Ministers Meeting in September 2014 and SAARC Education Ministers Meeting in October, 2014 in New Delhi. Similarly, it is hosting senior officials meeting to finalise the SAARC Railways and SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement.

All SAARC leaders attended the Swearing-in-Ceremony of the new Government. On that occasion, individual meetings with the leaders took place where bilateral and regional issues were discussed. India conveyed its unequivocal support for efforts at regional integration through SAARC as well as bilaterally.

We have endeavoured to deepen our bilateral relations with our neighbours. Our Prime Minister visited Bhutan and Nepal recently. Similarly, I have undertaken visits to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and held talks with the leaders at the highest level reviewing the entire gamut of our bilateral relations. These successful visits have brought new energy and dynamism in our relations.

In all our interactions we have emphasised people to people contacts, development of projects which affect common people of the region including in trade, energy, security, tourism etc. Our development assistance to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka was reiterated during these interactions. India is committed to resolve all outstanding issues through peaceful bilateral dialogues. This was reiterated during Pakistani Prime Minister's call on our Prime Minister. Foreign Secretaries of the two countries are scheduled to meet in Islamabad on August 25, 2014.