

- (a) whether there are irregularities in huge funds which are earmarked every year for Indian missions abroad to promote cultural ties with other countries;
- (b) if so, the details thereof during the last three years and the current year;
- (c) whether irregularities have been noticed in the usage of such funds, if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) the action taken/proposed to be taken against those found guilty?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) No.

(b) Not applicable.

(c) No.

(d) Not applicable.

Meeting of SAARC countries

†2376. SHRI BASAWARAJ PATIL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether frequent meetings of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries have strengthened India's relations with these neighbouring countries, if not, the reasons therefor; and
- (b) the measures being taken by Government to address it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) and (b) Yes. The regular interaction and frequent meetings held under the SAARC umbrella have made a positive contribution to India's efforts at strengthening relations with its neighbours. SAARC has created an invaluable forum for continual contact between member states, not only at the highest political and official level but also at the people-to-people level. Such sustained interaction has led to improved understanding at the official and technical level, and between the peoples of SAARC countries.

Indian Vedic scholars in US

†2377. SHRI PRABHAT JHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.