

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [(GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH)]: (a) There is no proposal for construction of Imphal-Mandalay road.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Economic cooperation among South Asian nations

†1292. SHRI PRABHAT JHA:

SHRI VIJAY GOEL:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is making efforts to see that India is playing a special role to enhance cooperation among South Asian nations, if so, the details thereof;

(b) whether India would support any initiative on economic integration of South Asian nations based on European Model, including single currency; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [(GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH)]: (a) India's engagement with its neighbours is increasing both bilaterally and through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It is engaged in several mutually beneficial projects within the framework of SAARC. India had opened her market for her South Asian neighbours without insisting on reciprocity. Under the South Asian Free Trade Area Agreement, Government of India has reduced the items in the Sensitive List for the Least Developed Countries, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Maldives, from 480 to 25 tariff lines. All other items are importable duty free. India has also initiated and underwritten several important South Asian regional projects including South Asian University, SAARC Development Fund and SAARC Food Bank.

During the recently held Summit on November 26-27, 2014, India has announced several measures unilaterally to boost cooperation within the region, including a Satellite dedicated to SAARC, "Health Care Visas" for nationals of SAARC, SAARC "Business Travel Card Facility", funding for upgradation of SAARC Supra-National Reference Laboratory in Kathmandu, making available e-learning portal/library for SAARC countries, provision of Polio and Pentavalent Vaccines. The SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) was signed at the Summit. This agreement will facilitate

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

cross border electricity exchange and trade, optimal utilization of regional electricity generating resources, enhanced grid security and electricity trade arising from diversity in peak demand and seasonal variations.

(b) and (c) India supports the initiative to achieve a “South Asian Economic Union” (SAEU) by year 2030, in a sequential order of a Free Trade Area, Customs Union, leading to the South Asian Economic Union. SAARC Free Trade Area Agreement is under implementation. SAARC process has its own dynamics and, therefore it is not possible or desirable to follow other regional models including the European Union.

Norms for selection of High Commissioners/Ambassadors

†1293. SHRI RAMDAS ATHAWALE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of High Commissioners/Ambassadors along with officers belonging to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward classes appointed in various countries during the last three years as on date, location-wise;

(b) the details of norms prescribed for selection of High Commissioners/Ambassadors; and

(c) the details of IFS officers along with SC/ST/OBC officers working in the Ministry as on date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [(GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH)]: (a) As on date, during the last three years, Ambassadors and High Commissioners belonging to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes were appointed in Azerbaijan, Brunei, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Iraq, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Maldives, Morocco, Philippines, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Yemen and Zambia.

Also as on date, 47 Scheduled Castes, 41 Scheduled Tribes and 64 Other Backward Classes of IFS officers besides Ambassadors and High Commissioners are posted to various Missions/Posts abroad.

(b) Ambassadors and High Commissioners are selected in keeping with the requirements in a particular Diplomatic Mission, and their overall suitability including experience, seniority and regional and professional expertise.

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