

(d) The Saudi Government is exercising its prerogative and sovereign right by following this policy uniformly in respect of all foreign nationalities. The matter had also been raised during the visit of the Saudi delegation in July 2017 in New Delhi. The Government has been in regular contact with the Saudi Government towards safeguarding the interests and welfare of the resident Indian community.

#### **New regional grouping in place of SAARC**

1933. DR. K.V.P. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government feels that SAARC has failed to achieve its potential because of Pakistans attitudes towards India ; and

(b) if so, whether Government would consider pulling out of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and consider alternative including floating a new regional grouping to meet India's geo-political and geo-strategic interests?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI M. J. AKBAR): (a) SAARC has been unable to achieve its potential as key initiatives, including in the important area of connectivity, are held back due to lack of response and/or obstructionist approach of Pakistan.

Several SAARC Member States expressed their inability to participate in the 19th SAARC Summit that was scheduled to be held in November 2016 in Pakistan due to concerns arising from increasing cross border terrorist attacks in the region and growing interference in the internal affairs of member States by that country.

(b) Under this scenario, initiatives to enhance connectivity in the region have been pursued at sub-regional level (*e.g.* in concluding the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement). In initiatives such as India's offer of a satellite for SAARC region, where Pakistan conveyed that it would not be joining, the project has moved forward with participation from other SAARC member States.

India remains steadfast in its commitment to regional cooperation, connectivity and contacts but believes that these can only go forward in an atmosphere free of terror. It is important that substantive progress in key initiatives is made to meet people's expectations.

#### **Swarna Pravasa Yojana**

1934. SHRI PARIMAL NATHWANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Swarna Pravasa Yojana to impart skill development for overseas employment to the Indian youth is yet to be implemented;