

China have underscored the importance of maintaining peace and tranquility in all areas of the India-China border region in the larger interest of the overall development of bilateral relations.

BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC

2118. SHRI MANISH GUPTA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Bay of Bengal Institute for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) can be an alternative to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), if so, the details thereof;

(b) the areas of cooperation envisaged in BIMSTEC, along with the details thereof;

(c) the progress BIMSTEC has made since its inception, with details thereof; and

(d) whether BIMSTEC fits into the agenda for a greater role for India in the Indo-Pacific region also, if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) BIMSTEC and SAARC are two separate regional organizations of which India is a member, BIMSTEC region brings together 1.67 billion people and a combined GDP of around US\$ 3.71 trillion. It is a regional organization comprising seven member states around the Bay of Bengal region. These countries are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) brings together 1.81 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$ 3.46 trillion. These countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

(b) and (c) BIMSTEC has identified 14 priority areas, viz., Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime; Transport and Communication; Tourism; Environment and Disaster Management; Trade and Investment; Cultural Cooperation; Energy; Agriculture; Poverty Alleviation; Technology; Fisheries; Public Health; People-to-people contacts and Climate change.

Four summits have been held so far at Bangkok (2004), New Delhi (2008), Nay Pyi Taw (2014) and Kathmandu (2018). A BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and Leaders' Retreat was also held in Goa in 2016 to carry forward cooperation in identified areas.

- (d) BIMSTEC region falls within the larger Indo-Pacific region.

Legislation for welfare of Non-Resident Indians

2119. SHRI A. MOHAMMEDJAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is considering to take steps for the welfare of Non-Resident Indians working in various countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is no national policy or legislation regarding the welfare of Non-Resident Indians; and

(d) whether Government has received any proposal for making any legislation or policy in this regard from any corners?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) and (b) Yes. The welfare and protection of Indians working abroad is among the highest priorities of the Government. Government has made concerted efforts towards putting in place a robust institutional framework that ensures the welfare and safety of our nationals abroad. These include:

- (i) Awareness and information sharing through media awareness campaign to promote safe and legal migration titled "Surakshit Jao Prashikshit Jao" and Pre-Departure Orientation Training for workers going abroad.
- (ii) Promoting legal migration by compulsory registration on e-Migrate portal for all workers going to ECR countries. Further, e-Migrate portal is being integrated with counterparts in GCC countries to provide greater security to Indian migrant workers.
- (iii) Grievance redressal mechanisms, primarily the on-line MADAD portal such that emigrant workers and their family members can register consular