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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO: 2204

ANSWERED ON: 14.03.2007

MEMBERSHIP OF AFGHANISTAN INTO SAARC

RAMAKRISHNA BADIGA

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:-

- (a) whether Afghanistan has entered into South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC);
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Pakistan has refused to agree free trade with SAARC;
- (d) if so, the implementation of SAFTA among the SAARC countries has been adversely affected as a result thereof; and
- (e) the efforts made by the member-countries to persuade Pakistan to enter into SAFTA?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE)

(a) & (b) Afghanistan will join as the eighth member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

(SAARC) at the 14th SAARC Summit in New Delhi on April 3-4, 2007. According to the modalities finalised by the SAARC member countries, a Joint Declaration would be signed by the President of Afghanistan and the Heads of State/Government of the existing SAARC countries "in the beginning of the Summit", formalising Afghanistan's entry into SAARC.

(c), (d) & (e) Pakistan has singled out India from the agreed SAFTA concessions, in spite of signing and ratifying the SAFTA Agreement. We regard this as a violation of the Agreement. We have raised our concerns regarding non-compliance of SAFTA by Pakistan in SAARC meetings. Other Member States of SAARC have also stressed that smooth implementation of SAFTA is imperative. We shall continue to pursue this matter in the relevant SAARC meetings.