

INDIA SPEAKS

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. BAHRAIN

1. Official Visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain to India, New Delhi, 19 February 2015

H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain is paying an official visit to India on 22 February 2015 at the invitation of Sushma Swaraj, Honourable Minister for External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs. He will be co-chairing the first meeting of the India-Bahrain High Joint Commission with Sushma Swaraj.

India and Bahrain enjoy cordial and friendly relations, marked by close people to people contacts and regular high-level political exchanges. His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain paid his first State visit to India in February 2014.

Bahrain is an important partner for India in the Gulf with bilateral trade in 2013-14 exceeding US\$ 1.3 billion. Over 400,000 Indian nationals work and contribute to the development of Bahrain. Their positive and well-appreciated contribution in the development of Bahrain has been an important anchor of our excellent bilateral engagement.

During the forthcoming visit, the two sides would discuss bilateral, regional and other issues of mutual interest.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/24784/Official_Visit_of_Minister_of_Foreign_Affairs_of_the_Kingdom_of_Bahrain_to_India_February_22_2015

2. Prime Minister meets the Foreign Minister of Bahrain, New Delhi, 23 February 2015

Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the Foreign Minister of Bahrain Shaikh Khalid Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa. He is visiting India for the first meeting of the Joint Commission between India and Bahrain which is co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister.

Prime Minister recalled the visit of His Majesty the King of Bahrain to India in February 2014 that had provided new vigour and momentum to the bilateral relationship. He appreciated the continuous support and cooperation being extended by the Government of Bahrain to over four lakh members of the Indian community in Bahrain.

The Foreign Minister of Bahrain extended a letter of invitation from the His Royal Highness the Prime Minister of Bahrain to the Prime Minister to visit Bahrain. He recalled the deep emotional bonds of friendship that are felt by the people of Bahrain towards India. He conveyed the commitment of the Government of Bahrain to deepen bilateral relations, including in the areas of defence, security, counter terrorism, trade and investment.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115682>

b. EGYPT

3. India Day at Al Shams Club on 5-6 February 2015, Cairo, 01 February 2015

Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC), Embassy of India, will be having an India Day at Al Shams Club, Heliopolis on 5-6 February 2015. The day-long celebrations will include an introductory Yoga session, screening of documentary films on India, crafts exhibition and glimpses of Indian tourism. The former ex-Deputy Prime Minister Yahiya El Gamal will be the Chief Guest who will also speak about the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in the 21st Century. The event will also include performance by MACIC artistes. MACIC will also be conducting Yoga demonstration and lecture on 6 February along with the screening of a famous Indian movie, *Three Idiots*.

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) was established in 1992 and is located at 3, Abu El Fida Building (Second Floor), Zamalek, Cairo. It holds languages classes in Hindi and Urdu, meditation classes, Yoga classes for Beginners and Intermediate level on a regular basis. The Indian Cultural Centre also conducts lectures, symposia, exhibitions on India, and dance classes. MACIC also does outreach activities with educational institutions and cultural centres both within and outside Cairo.

For regular updates and information follow us on Facebook at Indian Embassy Cairo or write to us atmacic@indembcairo.com or info.cairo@mea.gov.in

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=43237

4. Lecture by Dr. Mustapha Kamel Al Sayyid on 'Gandhi's Humanitarian values, Cairo, 8 February 2015

On occasion of 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa to India, the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) in collaboration with the Egypt-India Friendship Association (EIFA) will organize a lecture by Dr. Mustapha Kamel Al Sayyid, Professor of Political Sciences, Cairo University who will deliver a lecture titled 'Gandhi's Humanitarian Values' at the new premises of the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture at 3, Abu El Fida St. Zamalek, second Floor on Thursday, 19 February 2015 at 6:00 P.M.

The Indian Ambassador Navdeep Suri, and the President of the Egypt-India Friendship Association Dr. Magued Osman will deliver opening remarks. Dr. Mustapha will talk on mass civil disobedience, *satyagraha*, and the philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance.

Professor Mustapha Kamel Al Sayyid is the Director of the Centre for Study of Developing Countries, Cairo University and a member of prestigious associations like the Egyptian Society for Political Economy, American Political Science Association, Arab Political Science Association and the Egyptian Human Rights Association.

For more information please contact the Embassy at info.cairo@mea.gov.in or the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) at macic@indembcairo.com or follow us on Facebook at Indian Embassy Cairo.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,

http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=43239

5. Launch of the new premises for Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture, Cairo, 9 February 2015

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture, under the Embassy of India in Cairo will open its doors to its new premises in Zamalek at 6 P.M. on Thursday, 12 February 2015. To celebrate the event of inauguration, a painting exhibition of young artist, Ahmed Khairy titled 'Celebrities from Egypt and India' will be held at the same time.

The new premises, located at second Floor, Abu El Fida Building, No: 3, Abu El Fida Street, Zamalek, will include a main hall for exhibitions, performances, and film/documentary screenings, a library with 7,000 books on India, and classrooms for Hindi/Urdu courses. "The new premises of the Maulana Azad Centre will expand the scope of the strong cultural relations that exist between India and Egypt. The expanded facilities and easy accessibility for visitors will be a boon for cross-cultural understanding between our ancient civilizations." Ambassador Navdeep Suri said.

MACIC was set up in Cairo in 1992 to promote cultural cooperation between the two countries, through the implementation of the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP). The Centre, in addition

to popularizing Indian culture through Hindi, Urdu and Yoga classes and the screening of movies, also organizes the annual festival of arts and culture: India by the Nile every spring. The next festival is scheduled to be held between 27 March and 15 April 2015.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), a distinguished scholar, educationist and statesman, was the first Education Minister of India. With Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad fought for India's freedom. A symbol of the pluralistic and secular ethos of India, Abul Kalam Azad laid the basis for independent India's educational and cultural policies and contributed significantly to the foundation of centres of scientific and cultural methods of inquiry. He made a significant contribution to Islamic studies and wrote a brilliant commentary of the Quran "Tarjuman Al-Quran". He founded the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and encouraged cultural cooperation between Asia and Africa. He visited Egypt and had a special affinity for Egypt's great civilization. It is in recognition of Maulana Azad's special contribution to culture and his affection for Egypt that the Centre of Indian Culture in the Arab world has been named after him.

For more information please contact the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) at macic@indembcairo.com or the Embassy at info.cairo@mea.gov.in or follow us on Facebook at Indian Embassy Cairo.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,

http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=43244

6. Opening of new Premises for the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 15 February 2015

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture, under the Embassy of India in Cairo opened its doors to its new premises in Zamalek on 12 February 2015. To celebrate the event of inauguration, a painting exhibition of young artist, Ahmed Khairy titled 'Celebrities from Egypt and India' was inaugurated. An Egyptian family –Fatima and her two daughters sang the Indian composer A.R. Rehman's rendition of Vande Mataram ("I bow to thee, Mother") , India's national song. Ambassador Navdeep Suri, while welcoming the guests said that "the new premises of the Maulana Azad Centre will expand the scope of the strong cultural relations that already exist between India and Egypt. The emphasis of the Centre will be collaborations and partnerships, much as the Egyptian artistes showed tonight."

The new premises, located at second Floor, Abu El Fida Building, No: 3, Abu El Fida Street, Zamalek, will include a main hall for exhibitions, performances, and film/documentary screenings, a library with 7000 books on India, and classrooms for Hindi/Urdu courses. MACIC was set up in Cairo in 1992 to promote cultural cooperation between the two countries, through the implementation of the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP). The Centre, in addition to popularizing Indian culture through Hindi, Urdu and Yoga classes and the screening of movies,

also organizes the annual festival of arts and culture: India by the Nile every spring. The next festival is scheduled to be held between 27 March and 15 April, 2015.

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Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,

http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=43244

7. Indian Foreign Minister says India stands with Egypt in its moment of grief, Cairo, 17 February 2015

The External Affairs Minister for India Sushma Swaraj has written to her counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt to condemn the horrific and brutal murder of 21 Egyptian citizens in Libya at the hands of the terrorist group ISIS. In her letter sent on 17 February 2015 she says "our heartfelt condolences go out to the bereaved families of the victims, and we stand with your Government and the people of Egypt in this hour of grief."

Minister Sushma Swaraj in her message also emphasized that terrorism is a 'trans-national phenomenon' and called for India and Egypt to work closer together and with the international community to eradicate the menace.

For more information please contact the Embassy at info.cairo@mea.gov.in or follow us on Facebook at Indian Embassy Cairo or on twitter (@indembcairo)

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,

http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=43258

c. IRAN

8. President of India's message on the eve of the 36th anniversary of the Islamic revolution of Iran, New Delhi, 10 February 2015

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the eve of the 36th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (11 February 2015).

In his message to His Excellency Dr. Hassan Rouhani, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the President has said, "On behalf of the Government and the people of India and on my own behalf, it gives me great pleasure to extend to Your Excellency and to the friendly people of Iran warm greetings and felicitations on the occasion of the 36th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Our bilateral relations are strengthened by the age-old historical and civilizational bonds between our people.

Over the past several decades, they have flourished and evolved into a multi-faceted engagement in various spheres. We value this relationship greatly and look forward to engaging with Iran on the full range of jointly identified priorities to our mutual benefit. We firmly believe that a strengthened relationship between India and Iran will contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Please accept, Excellency, our sincere wishes for your good health and well being as well as for the progress and prosperity of the people of Iran".

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115312>

d. ISRAEL

9. Defence Minister of Israel calls on PM, New Delhi, 19 February 2015

The Defence Minister of Israel, Moshe Ya'alon, who is visiting India to participate in the Aero India 2015, paid a courtesy call today on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Prime Minister recalled his meeting with Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2014, and with the Agriculture Minister of Israel last month during the Vibrant Gujarat Summit. He expressed satisfaction with the ongoing cooperation between India and Israel in various sectors.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115579>

e. KUWAIT

10. Advisory on death compensation, Kuwait, 3 February 2015

In case of death of an Indian national in a road accident / work-site accident / other accident, the Embassy has been invariably sending an advisory message through a registered letter to the legal heirs of the deceased (copy enclosed for circulation among the Indian community in Kuwait) to appoint the Embassy as their Attorney and forward Power of Attorney and Legal Heirship certificate, duly attested by the concerned authorities in India (i) District Magistrate or First

Class Magistrate; (ii) Authorized officer of the State Government (Home Department); (iii) Ministry of External Affairs, Consular Section, New Delhi or Branch Secretariat of the Ministry of External Affairs (outside Delhi) for filing a claim for death compensation on behalf of the legal heirs. The Legal Heirship certificate and Power of Attorney are required by the Kuwaiti authorities for processing the claim for death compensation. In India, the concerned State Government issues legal heirship certificate in form of “family member Certificate” or “Certificate” which carry the same information which the local authorities required to be mentioned in the legal heirship certificate. Such documents are accepted by the local authorities at par with the legal heirship certificate.

The legal heirs of the deceased can appoint any person of their choice, who is residing in Kuwait or Embassy of India, as their attorney for filing a case for death compensation with the concerned Kuwaiti authorities. According to the local laws, death compensation cases related to work-site accident should be filed within ONE YEAR and traffic accident case should be filed within three years from the date of accident, otherwise it becomes time barred.

The Embassy has five qualified lawyers on its panel whose services can be utilized in these cases. The advocate normally charges ten percent of the total compensation / service dues awarded by the local court / employer as lawyer fee. Apart from this the actual expenses on translation, attestation of documents and court fees (usually 2.5 per cent of the compensation amount) are also charged by the advocate. The remaining amount is transmitted to the concerned District Collector for reimbursement to the legal heirs. It may be noted that the Kuwaiti court does not award any compensation in those cases where the accident/ death was due to negligence / fault of the deceased.

If the legal heirs appoint a private lawyer by their own, then Embassy has no role in claiming insurance claims. The legal heirs should communicate directly to the lawyer in that case.

Generally, the local authority takes 3-4 years time for settlement of death compensation cases. In case, the case file is referred to the Higher Appeal Court, it may take longer period for settlement.

Please circulate this information among the community members after translating in vernacular language so that the family members are aware of the facility available with Embassy and are not duped by local agents who have been promising them unrealistic amount and charging 30-50 per cent of compensation money as their fees.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=722>

11. AIR FM Gold India Global to focus on Kuwait this week, Kuwait, 10 February 2015

The Embassy would like to inform that the next episode of “India Global” on AIR FM Gold will be on Kuwait. This program will be aired on 13 February 2015 at 2.00 P.M. (4.30 PM IST). All those who are interested may be informed that it would also be available on the AIR Website

www.newsonair.com besides the channel on YouTube of the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi at <https://www.youtube.com/user/MEAIndia> and at <https://soundcloud.com/meaindia>

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=724>

12. Nodal agency to promote Indian education abroad, Kuwait, 11 February 2015

The Embassy would like to inform that the EdCIL (India) Limited, a Government of India Enterprise, formerly known as Educational Consultants India Limited (Ed.CIL) has been designated as the “Nodal Agency” to promote Indian education abroad.

EdCIL has been assisting NRIs, PIOs and foreign nationals for pursuing Under-graduate courses, Post-Graduate Courses and Doctoral Programmes in Indian Institutions. Details of assistance provided by EdCIL to Indian Diaspora as well as foreign nationals are available on their website ‘www.edcilindia.co.in’. Those interested may please contact Dr. Shaik Suleman, Head, Placement and Secondment, EdCIL (India) Ltd., EdCIL House-18-A, Sector-16-A, NOIDA - 201301, U.P. (Tel. 0091-120-2515281, Fax : 0091-120-2515372, E-mail : ssuleman@edcil.co.in, placement@edcil.co.in), for further information.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=73>

13. Payment of consular fees through K-Net facility, Kuwait, 11 February 2015

It has been the endeavour of the Embassy to make its services prompt, courteous and easily accessible to all Indian nationals in Kuwait. As part of these ongoing efforts and to facilitate those paying consular fees for various services, the Embassy has started accepting payment of fees through K-Net Facility at the Embassy in addition to the existing system of cash payment. Those interested can avail the facility for payment of consular fees through the K-Net facility through any application counter at the Embassy.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=731>

14. Merger of PIO and OCI Schemes, Kuwait, 15 February 2015

The Embassy wishes to inform that Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card scheme has been withdrawn by Government of India and has been merged with Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card scheme w.e.f. 9 January 2015. Hence as per Government of India Gazette Notification No.11 dated 9 January 2015, all PIO cardholders will be deemed to be Overseas Citizens of India cardholder. Therefore, the Embassy of India will no longer be issuing PIO cards. Fresh applications will be accepted only for Overseas Citizenship of India cards. For any clarification, please contact J.S. Dangi, Second Secretary (Consular) at Telephone No. 22533315, Mobile No.97229947 and e mail sscons@indembkwt.org and D. K. Tripathi, Consular Wing at Telephone No.22530600 Extn-235

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=732>

15. Response of the embassy with regard to various suggestions on the website “Indians in Kuwait”, Kuwait, 20 February 2015

The Embassy would like to respond to the various suggestions/remarks which have been received on “Indians in Kuwait.com” to further improve the services of the Embassy:-

S. No	Suggestion/Remark	Response
1.	To provide a needful help for domestic workers.	Regarding domestic workers who are treated very badly in Kuwait, the Embassy would like to inform that there is a dedicated Labour Wing which looks after the Indian community. The Embassy has been regularly taking up the issue of ill-treatment of domestic workers with the local authorities. The Embassy is providing shelters to distressed male and female domestic workers
2.	To pay for services by Debit and Credit cards	The Embassy has already introduced a system of paying by Debit cards. There is an option to pay either through cash or K-net facility.
3.	To reduce/cancel Indian Public Holidays	There is a system in place to facilitate the work of the people who come for Consular Services on all Gazetted Holidays and also on week-ends. But due to the sensitivities involved, the Embassy cannot cancel Indian Holidays.
4.	Rent for accommodation is increasing day by day.	The Embassy cannot interfere in the matter of rent for accommodation because we have to follow the law of the land.
5.	Allow NRIs to apply for PAN and Aadhar cards.	The Embassy is working out modalities with the concerned authorities in India so that the NRIs can apply for PAN and Aadhar cards. But this will take some time.
6.	Stopping of Indian house maids to Kuwait	Indian housemaids are continuing to come to Kuwait for work through private recruitment agencies over which Ministry of Overseas Indians (MOIA), Government of India has limited control.
7.	Opening of an Indian Bank and NRI quota in various Exams.	The Embassy cannot do anything as regards opening of an Indian bank and NRI quota in UPSC and PSC exams.
8.	Additional counters in the Embassy for quicker Consular Services.	To improve our services, the Embassy is exploring the possibilities of increasing its staff strength to improve our consular services and increased work pressure. Number of working hours (8 hours) cannot be increased.
9.	Introduce E-voting from Kuwait	Being examined for implementation.
10.	Reduce fees of various consular services like Visa, Passport, Attestation etc.	With regard to various charges for Consular services, the Embassy has no control as these are fixed all over the world as per the orders of the Government of India.
11.	Reduction of charges for correspondence courses.	The charges for correspondence courses are perceived to be expensive as Courier and Postal charges outside India are very high, apart from over-head expenses.
12.	Sale of Indian Postal Stamps and Revenue	The Embassy is examining the possibility of the sale of Indian Postal stamps and Revenue stamps.

	stamps in the Mission	
13.	Training embassy staff and to be polite in public dealing.	Training of staff is a continuous process and everyone in the Mission have been advised to be courteous and polite so that the public feels comfortable. Contact details of the staff are available on the Website under heading of “Embassy Team and its Tasks”.
14.	Lack of Parking space in front of Indian Embassy	Regarding parking space, the Embassy has its limitations. But the Mission is trying to solve it with the help of neighbouring Embassies who are based in Diplomatic Enclave.
15.	Introduction of suitable Insurance scheme for Indian Expats	All concerned are advised to get in touch with LIC and Oriental Insurance whose details and other relevant conditions are available on the Embassy’s Website.
16.	Hold public meetings regularly at different locations	The Embassy has its limitations due to shortage of manpower and increased work pressure. But the Embassy has a system of Open Durbars where anyone can come without prior appointment. Details are available on the Embassy’s Website.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=735>

16. K. Abdulla Kollorath, new Social Secretary to Ambassador, Kuwait, 22 February 2015

In a partial re-organization of the work in the Embassy, K. Abdulla Kollorath has been appointed as the new Social Secretary to Ambassador, in place of Hend I K Shiha. Abdulla can be contacted at Telephone No. 22561276 and Mobile: 66577835 and e-mail: ambss@indembkwt.org.

2. All Indian Associations and the members of the Community may please contact Abdulla for fixing meetings with Ambassador or inviting Ambassador for community events.

3. In case of any difficulty in reaching Abdulla, Ashok Kumar Sahoo, PA to Ambassador, may also be reached in Ambassador’s office at Telephone No. 22543000 and e-mail psamb@indembkwt.org and amboffice@indembkwt.org.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=736>

17. Hiring of the Auditorium at the Embassy of India, Kuwait, 22 February 2015

The Embassy has been making available its Auditorium for social, artistic and cultural events since January 2014 to various Indian Associations at a nominal charge. The user charge is being revised as some of the services needed have been outsourced for better quality. The revised change is as under:

Item	Cost without food being served	Cost with food being served
Basic charge for the Auditorium	KD150	KD200
Cost of cleaning (payable to Kuwait Swedish Cleaning Co.)	KD 75	KD 75
Cost of hiring two Local Security Guards	KD 48	KD 48

(payable to G4S Security)		
Honorarium to four local staff involved in events	KD 27	KD 27
Total	KD300	KD350

The above cost structure is for one programme of 4-hour duration. In addition, a refundable Security deposit of KD100 is required to be paid per programme. In case the Auditorium is required for a longer duration than 4-hour, additional user charge is to be paid.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=737>

18. Minor revision of fees related to Indian passport services, Kuwait, 23 February 2015

There will be a minor revision of fees related to Indian Passport services w.e.f. 01.03.2015, enumerated below:-

S. No.	Name of the Passport Service	Present Fees in KD	Fees effective from 1.3.2015 KD
1	New Passport for 10 years	21.250	22.500
2	New Passport for Minors below 18 years	14.250	15.000
3	New Passport in lieu of Damage/Lost Passport	42.400	45.000
4	Birth Certificate/Police Clearance Certificate	7.100	7.500

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=742>

19. Welfare measure from the government of India, Kuwait, 23 February 2015

We receive, on a daily basis, some highly distressed Indian nationals who visit the Embassy for various reasons. Many of them are either runaway housemaids or male domestic workers/workers at farms who have escaped ill-treatment and torture meted out to them by their sponsors in Kuwait. They often seek shelter in Embassy and help in repatriation.

These distressed Indian nationals are often found hungry and dehydrated. As an immediate welfare measure from the Government of India, the Embassy will provide all of them light snacks and soft drink free-of-cost while attending to their personal problems.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=743>

20. Minimum wages for Indian domestic workers, Kuwait, 23 February 2015

At present the minimum wages for Indian domestic workers, houseboys/cooks, and house drivers (holders of Visa No. 20) range from KD 70 to 75 per month.

After studying the labour-market situation in the region, it has been decided to revise the minimum referral wage in the employment contracts being attested by the Embassy to Kuwaiti Dinar 100 per month with effect from 1 March 2015 for all Indian domestic workers coming to

Kuwait on Visa No. 20. The aforementioned minimum wage will continue to remain exclusive of accommodation, food and other amenities stipulated in the Kuwaiti laws and regulations.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=744>

21. President of India's message on the eve of National Day of Kuwait, Kuwait, 24 February 2015

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the Emir and people of the State of Kuwait on the eve of the National Day of the State of Kuwait (25 February 2015).

In his message to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of the State of Kuwait, the President has said, "On behalf of the Government and the people of India and on my own behalf, I am pleased to extend warm greetings and felicitations to Your Highness and to the people of the State of Kuwait on the occasion of your National Day.

India deeply values its friendly ties with the State of Kuwait, marked by close people-to-people contacts. The positive contribution of the Indian community in the development of Kuwait is an important pillar of our excellent bilateral relations. I am confident that our mutually beneficial ties will continue to diversify and strengthen in the years to come.

I take this opportunity to convey to Your Highness my best wishes for your personal good health and well-being, as also for the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly people of the State of Kuwait".

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115693>

22. Indian Embassy holidays for Kuwait national day, Kuwait, 24 February 2015

The Embassy will remain closed on the following two days during the last week of February 2015.

National Day of Kuwait- 25 February – Wednesday

Liberation Day of Kuwait- 26 February- Thursday

As a special gesture, the Embassy will, however, provide Consular, Labour and Attestation Services on Friday (27 February 2015) to the public

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=745>

f. OMAN

23. Official visit of Minister of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs to the Sultanate of Oman, New Delhi, 16 February 2015

Honourable Minister of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs, Sushma Swaraj will be paying her first official bilateral visit to the Sultanate of Oman from 17-18 February 2015 at the invitation of her Omani counterpart, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah. The Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs has earlier visited India in February and June 2014.

India and Oman have enjoyed close and friendly relations based on extensive people-to-people contacts and historical economic and cultural exchanges. Oman is an important trading partner of India in the Gulf region with bilateral trade exceeding US\$ 5.7 billion in 2013-14. The well acknowledged and highly appreciated contribution of over 700,000 strong Indian expatriate community in the progress and development of Oman is an important pillar in the strong and mutually beneficial bilateral ties.

During the forthcoming visit, the two sides would discuss bilateral, regional and other issues of mutual interest. India has vital stakes in the security and stability of the Gulf region which hosts around 7 million Indians. The Gulf countries are the source of two-third of India's crude oil requirements and form the largest trading regional block for India accounting for about a quarter of our global trade.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/24781/Official visit of Minister of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs to the Sultanate of Oman](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/24781/Official%20visit%20of%20Minister%20of%20External%20Affairs%20and%20Overseas%20Indian%20Affairs%20to%20the%20Sultanate%20of%20Oman)

g. QATAR

24. Visit of Ajit Doval, National Security Adviser (NSA) of India to Doha, Qatar on 11-12 February 2015

Ajit Doval, National Security Adviser of India had an audience with His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar on 12 February 2015. He conveyed the warmest greetings and best wishes of Honourable President Pranab Mukherjee, Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the Government and the people of India to His Highness the Emir and the Government and the people of Qatar.

2. NSA presented a letter addressed to the Emir of Qatar from Honourable Prime Minister of India, underlining the historically close and friendly relations, and the multi-faceted cooperation between India and Qatar, that has deepened and expanded under the leadership of HH the Emir.

3. In his letter, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed sincere appreciation for the concern of HH the Emir for the welfare of the Indian community in Qatar. Expressing great admiration for Qatar's economic transformation and rapid progress in diverse sectors, the Prime Minister has conveyed that India eagerly looks forward to the visit of the Emir, and expressed confidence that the visit of the Emir will enable both countries to elevate their partnership to a new level.

4. Warmly reciprocating the sentiments expressed in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's letter, the Emir emphasized the importance of Qatar-India partnership, appreciated the contribution of the Indian community in Qatar, and conveyed that he was greatly looking forward to his first visit to India.

5. During his visit to Doha, NSA also called on Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of Qatar, and presented a letter from Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Prime Minister and Minister of Interior conveyed warm greetings to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and exchanged views with NSA on further strengthening the partnership between the two countries in different spheres.

6. NSA also met with Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar. They discussed a number of bilateral, regional, and international issues of mutual interest. Their meeting in Doha took place shortly after they met during the Munich Security Conference earlier this month.

7. NSA also informally interacted with senior Qatari officials and businessmen at 'India House' – the residence of Ambassador of India to Qatar.

Source: Embassy of India, Doha,

http://indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press_release_detail.php?id=103&page=1

h. SAUDI ARABIA

25. Annual Hajj Agreement for Hajj 2015, New Delhi, 04 February 2015

A delegation led by Gen (Dr.) V.K. Singh (Retd.), Minister of State for External Affairs visited Saudi Arabia on 3 February for signing of the Annual Hajj Agreement for Hajj 2015 (1436H). During his visit, the Minister met Dr. Bandar Ibn Muhammad Hajjar, Saudi Minister of Hajj in Jeddah and discussed issues pertaining to arrangements for Hajj 2015. Following the discussion, the Hajj agreement between India and Saudi Arabia was signed. The delegation included Ambassador of India Hamid Ali Rao, Chairperson of the Hajj Committee of India Qaisar Shamim, Joint Secretary (Hajj), Ministry of External Affairs, Ajit Gupte, Consul General of India B.S. Mubarak, CEO Hajj Committee of India Ataur Rahman, Consul Hajj Noor Rahman Sheikh and representatives from Ministry of Civil Aviation.

During the interaction with the Hajj Minister, General V.K. Singh expressed deep condolences on the sad demise of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah and expressed best wishes for King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and fondly recalled the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and King Salman bin Abdul Aziz (then Crown Prince) in Brisbane (Australia) on 16 November 2014.

The Hajj quota for India for the year 2015 would be 1, 36,020 and 100,020 pilgrims would come through Hajj Committee of India and the remaining 36,000 would come through Private Tour Operators. The two Ministers discussed various other Hajj-related issues including need to make cooling system effective in Mina, better buses facilities for pilgrims to move between Jeddah, Mecca and Medina, catering services to pilgrims and standardization of baggage.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/24760/Annual_Haj_Agreement_for_Haj_2015

Compiled by Jatin Kumar

Note: Crore: 1 Crore=10 million. Lakh=100,000

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