



MEI INDIA WATCH

(Monthly survey of India's relations with the Middle East)

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Compiled by

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Political Issues

PM to ink 9 pacts in Riyadh Visit

Saturday, January 30, 2010

New Delhi: As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh plans yet another trip to Saudi Arabia (two previous attempts had to be aborted), Saudi Arabia said it had "delivered" on its promise and had replaced the UAE as the prime source for India's crude oil imports.

Speaking to reporters, Saudi envoy Faisal H Trad said after King Abdullah promised India that the kingdom would take care of India's oil imports, over the past three years, India had shifted its primary source to Saudi Arabia. He said India now took \$23.5 billion (or close to 600,000 barrels a day) worth of oil from Saudi Arabia.

The forthcoming visit by the PM, a sort of return visit after the king was chief guest at the Republic Day in 2006, will see India and Saudi Arabia signing some nine agreements, including an extradition treaty and one on transfer of sentenced persons...

...The shift to Saudi Arabia comes with some real and hoped-for political advantages. Saudi Arabia, as the biggest oil supplier in the Middle East, should essentially be India's biggest partner, specially since about 1.6 million Indians visit Saudi either as tourists or as workers, who send back about \$5 billion as remittances back home...

...While the PM is expected to take along a big business delegation, there is also expected to be a big interest in Indian technical and scientific development, with two pacts scheduled to be signed on this. Two more agreements will be signed on education, for linkages between different universities...

Source: The Times of India, 30 January 2010

Link: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/PM-to-ink-9-pacts-in-Riyadh-visit/articleshow/5514469.cms>

Saudi Arabia: I don't have to worry about Muslims in India

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Q&A: Faisal-al-Trad, Saudi Ambassador to India

Many security-related agreements will be signed between India and Saudi Arabia during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the country, Saudi Ambassador to India **Faisal-al-Trad** tells...

...What are you proposing for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit?
Many agreements are to be signed. One will be on security issues between the Ministry of Home Affairs and our interior ministry. This relates to Indian under trials and prisoners. We find Indians by-and-large law-abiding. Of all prisoners in Saudi Arabia, only 0.01 per cent are Indians — I think there are 700 awaiting trial and 700 convicted. So we will sign an extradition treaty and also one that will enable Indian under trials to undergo trial in India...

The other agreement will be an extradition treaty to send wanted or criminal elements to India. Saudi Arabia respects human rights. We don't just arrest people and keep them in jail without trial. But, subject to human rights regulations, an extradition treaty will also be signed (during Prime Minister Singh's visit).

Then we will set up a joint private sector investment fund with a corpus of \$750 million.

And, we hope to increase the number of Saudi students studying in India. Currently, there are about 350 Saudi students here.

You had recently tightened visa laws only for Indians. You wanted them to produce a police verification document...

We did not tighten laws; only reviewed them. In India alone, we issue 600,000 visas for visits and employment. I am not counting visas for Hajj, which is 170,000. There are 365 recruitment agencies that are listed with our Embassy in New Delhi, besides over 400 in

Mumbai. We have to undertake thorough investigations whether these agencies are genuine or not — we found some existing only on paper. And, there is the verification of those they send to our country. So police verification is one way. This is not new.

Yes, but earlier it was self declaration. Now you want the police to do the verification.

Yes, but when we seek visas from other countries, we even have to give our thumb prints! All we're asking for is: when you get your passport, you get a police verification certificate. Get them to sign as part of the visa request...

...India's Muslims have gone through some tumultuous times. Do you worry about Muslims in India?

In the world's oldest democracy, I don't have to worry about Muslims.

Source: Business Standard, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/i-don%5Ct-have-to-worry-about-muslims-in-india/384134/>

India protests to Turkey for not getting Istanbul meet invite

Friday, 29 January 2010

New Delhi: India has lodged a protest with Turkey for not being invited to a conference of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours held in Istanbul this week and that country [Turkey] was "apologetic" over the action.

"It was unfortunate that India was not invited to the conference. We have taken up the matter with the Turkish government....They were very apologetic," highly-placed sources said here [New Delhi] today [29 January]...

...According to reports, India's absence at the conference of Afghanistan and its six immediate neighbours, held on Tuesday, stemmed from Pakistan's objection conveyed to the Turkish side.

It was attended by Pakistan president Asif Ali Zardari, Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai and senior diplomats and ministers from the UK, the US, Iran, Tajikistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan, the UAE and Russia among others...

Source: Daily News and Analysis, 29 January 2010

Link: http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_india-protests-to-turkey-for-not-getting-istanbul-meet-invite_1340783

Energy Issues

ONGC, Hinduja spar over stake in Iran gas field

Monday, 25 January 2010

New Delhi: ONGC feels Iran offered the stake to India because of its expertise and hence it deserves three-fourths of the share.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Hinduja Group are at loggerheads over a stake in an Iranian gas field, with the London-based group seeking half of the 40 per cent interest assigned to India but the state-owned company willing to concede only one-fourth.

Hindujas want the stake in Phase-12 (SP-12) of the giant South Pars gas field to be split equally between its subsidiary Ashok Leyland Projects Services (ALPS) and ONGC Videsh (OVL), the overseas arm of ONGC, sources in know said...

...After years of tough negotiations, Iran last month signed agreements to give the ONGC-Hinduja combine a 40 per cent stake in SP-12. ONGC and ALPS, along with Petronet LNG, also signed a pact to buy 20 per cent stake in Iran LNG that is building a \$4.32-billion plant on the southern coast to convert gas from SP-12 into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for exports.

The division of the stake within the Indian group was to be decided internally, the source said. Hinduja also wants 10 per cent stake in the LNG plant and the balance to be split equally between ONGC and Petronet.

ONGC, on the other hand, is seeking a greater role even in LNG project...

...Iran will also sell 6 million tonnes a year of LNG to India to meet its growing energy needs.

Sources say Iran does not give foreign firms ownership of oil and gas and instead pays a fixed fee on the investment made. Indians would, however, get LNG in return.

SP-12 is to produce 3 billion cubic feet per day of gas, two-thirds of which is to be converted into LNG for exports...

Source: Business Standard, 25 January 2010

Link: <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/ongc-hindujas-spar-over-stake-in-iran-gas-field/383581/>

India moves on Iran's South Pars gas field

Monday, January 25, 2010 12:42hrs, IST

New Delhi: State-owned Indian Oil Corp. is asking the government in New Delhi to back a proposal to purchase at least a 20 percent interest in Iran's South Pars gas field.

IOC along with Petronet LNG and the Hindujas group moved on broad agreements to develop liquefied natural gas projects with Iranian authorities in December.

Iran said it would supply India with LNG on a long-term basis. Iran offered the group a 40-percent stake in South Pars and a 20 percent stake in an LNG terminal.

Sarthak Behuria, the chairman of the IOC, said his company has been pursuing LNG deals with Iran "for a number of years," the Economic Times of India reports.

Iran has lobbied for a deal with New Delhi to join a pipeline project with Pakistan to transport South Pars gas. Islamabad is expected to sign onto the deal in the coming weeks, though India's participation remains in doubt.

Meanwhile, the Indian government ordered national energy companies to double their domestic gas production during the next five years.

A final agreement between Iran and India is expected by March.

Source: United Press International, 25 January 2010

Link: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2010/01/25/India-moves-on-Irans-South-Pars-gas-field/UPI-41561264441345/

Deora seeks to resolve OVL payment dispute:

Monday, January 25, 2010

Khartoum: On his maiden African Safari, Petroleum Minister, Mr Murli Deora on Monday pitched for more oil acreage for ONGC in Sudan while seeking resolution of dispute over payments for a pipeline that the state owned firm built in the oil rich nation.

Mr Deora...raised the issue of payment defaults on the pipeline ONGC Videsh (OVL) built in the African nation with the Sudanese Minister for Energy and Mining, Mr Awad Ahmed Al Jazz.

Sudan, which had in 2007 defaulted on payment of instalments towards the cost of building 741-km pipeline from Khartoum to Port au Sudan, agreed to form a working group to resolve the issue within a month, official sources said.

The overseas investment arm (OVL) of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) built the project at a contracted price of \$194 million. Repayments to OVL were to be made by Sudan over a period of nine years in 18 half yearly equated instalments, the first instalment being due on December 30, 2005.

OVL, which has interest in four blocks in Sudan which gives it 2.4 million tonnes of crude oil annually, wants to consolidate its operations and acquire more acreage in the African country.

Sources said Sudan invited the Indian firm to view data for exploration acreage it will be offering in licensing round this year [2010]. It offered exploration blocks to OVL. – PTI

Source: Hindu Business Line, 25 January 2010

Link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blnus/14251715.htm>

Sudan, India discuss energetic cooperation

Tuesday 26 January 2010

Khartoum: Sudan and India discussed ways to develop joint cooperation and investment in oil and electricity as well as gas.

Indian Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Murli Deora arrived yesterday [25 January] to Khartoum met today [26 January] with his Sudanese counterpart Al-Zubair Ahmed Al-Hassan, to review progress on the existing projects and discuss ways to expand it.

ONGC's overseas arm of the state-owned ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) has a 24.125 per cent stake in Sudan's Block 5A. OVL also has a 25 per cent stake in Sudan's Greater Nile Oil Project (Block 1, 2 and 4), which produces 280,000 bpd.

OVL, which entered Sudan in 2003, already has three oil blocks in Sudan. It has also built a 741-km-long multi product Pipeline linking Khartoum Refinery to Port Sudan.

Al-Zubair, welcomed the visiting minister stressing Sudan is opened for new Indian investments. He also praised an agreement signed last December on expanding ties in the oil and gas sector during a two-day India-Africa Hydrocarbon conference adding it can play an active role in increasing oil production in existing wells of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC)...

...Omer Mohamed Khair, Secretary General of the Ministry of Energy and Mining, encouraged India to making use of its experiences in optimizing the use of gas found in the block (8) and in the Red Sea.

India is the fourth largest global consumer of crude oil, consuming over 2.8 million barrels per day. India imported crude worth \$75 billion in 2008-09...

...The Indian minister Shri Deora offered Indian expertise to modernize and upgrade the Sudanese oil refineries besides training its technicians. Sudan would send teams to India this year for training in these disciplines.

The India press reported that the visiting minister raised the issue of payments of the pipeline ONGC Videsh built in Sudan.

OVL completed the pipeline connecting Khartoum refinery to Port au Sudan in August 2005 at an investment of \$194 million. This included a \$15 million component for financing of pumping stations etc. As per agreement with OVL, Sudan's ministry of energy and mining was to pay back investment in 18 half-yearly equated instalments of \$14,134,790 each.

Source: Sudan Tribune, 26 January 2010

Link: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33910>

Saudi Arabia eyes India to enhance its oil technology

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Abu Dhabi: Saudi Arabia has decided to take advantage of strong ties with India and its proximity to the region to seek technological assistance to support a massive expansion drive by its state oil operator, the company said yesterday [30 January].

Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil producing firm, said it had set up a company in New Delhi to oversee increased imports of oil equipment and expertise for its expansion projects in crude oil, refining and petrochemicals.

"Saudi Aramco underlined its commitment to India not only as a growing market for oil and gas, but also as a leading source of goods, equipment and expertise by opening a new Aramco Overseas Company (AOC) office," the oil firm said...

..."Taking into consideration India's phenomenal economic growth and development, both India and the Saudi Arabia – the world's largest supplier of energy – are movers and shapers of trends that will determine the world's future energy outlook," he [Abdulrahman Al Wuhaib, Saudi Aramco's Senior Vice-President of Operations Services] said.

In another statement published on Aramco's website, another company official said

India's proximity to the oil-rich Gulf would allow companies from the Subcontinent to play a key part in meeting Saudi Arabia's development needs...

...The office is located in Gurgaon, the industrial district of India's capital city New Delhi, and falls directly under the responsibility of AOC's purchasing, logistics and contracting manager for Europe and the Far East.

Saudi Arabia is already one of the world's largest markets for Indian products, with its imports standing at around \$4.5 billion (Dh16.5bn) during 2008-2009 fiscal year...

...In a recent lecture in Abu Dhabi, an Indian minister said New Delhi is seeking an enduring relationship with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC nations involving stable oil supplies in the long term and investment in the subcontinent.

Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee said it was time for the GCC countries to shift their emphasis from Western markets towards India and other Eastern nations, mainly to the fast growing economies in Asia.

Source: Emirates Business 24/7, 31 January 2010

Link: http://www.business24-7.ae/Articles/2010/1/Pages/30012010/01312010_fc5aaad99476494eb1adf095c6f07ad3.aspx

OilMin considering gas import from Middle East via deep sea

Sunday, 31 January 2010

New Delhi: With the proposals for a natural gas pipeline via Pakistan getting bogged down with security concerns, the Petroleum Ministry is considering a proposal to bring the gas from the Middle East through the deep sea.

The ministry plans to appoint state-run GAIL India — India's nominee in the talks for the two on land pipelines — as the nodal agency to pursue a sub-sea pipeline to import gas from Iran and Qatar, sources said...

... GAIL has a Principle of Cooperation with South Asia Gas Enterprise Pvt. Ltd (SAGE) which has revived a decade-old project to build deep-sea gas pipeline linking the Middle East with India.

Tripathi's rationale was that "such on land pipeline projects take some time to fructify" and that there was a need to explore other options, including the SAGE pipeline.

“Further, the deep-water pipeline is planned to be routed through the exclusive economic zone of the transit countries thereby ensuring the security of supplies which is a major issue for the onland pipelines,” he wrote.

Despite years of talks, the IPI and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipelines have not got off the ground because of New Delhi’s concerns on Islamabad’s ability to protect the pipeline...

...Tripathi’s second argument for following the deep-sea route was the progress in pipeline technology that had resulted in 2,150-metre-deep Blue Stream Russia-Turkey pipeline and 1,127-metre-deep Green Stream Libya-Italy pipeline.

The SAGE pipeline is expected to transport 30 million cubic metres of gas per day, the same volume as what Iran has earmarked for India in the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline. SAGE will only charge a transport fee of around \$1 per million British thermal unit, he wrote.

Source: Indian Express, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/oilmin-considering-gas-import-from-middle-east-via-deep-sea/573532/>

Economic/Trade Issues

India, Israel discuss free trade pact

Tuesday, 12 January 2010

New Delhi: Israel continued its push for a free trade pact with India during meetings between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Israeli Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour here [New Delhi] today. Bilateral trade between the post-world war II sovereignties grew exponentially from \$200 million in 2001 to \$1.4 billion in 2008. Israeli officials are confident that continued cooperation could push bilateral commerce beyond \$12 billion by 2015.

“I hope it will happen very soon. It is one of the aims of my visit here to try and push it as much as possible... it is progressing quite well,” Israel Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour Benjamin Fuad Ben-Eliezer said at a FICCI function here [New Delhi]. “Israel wants an FTA with us yesterday [11 January],” said Commerce Secretary Rahul Khullar. During today’s dialogue, Ben-Eliezer pitched partnerships between the two nations in the fields of water and agriculture, information technology, security, science and medicine and bio and agro-technologies.

“India has a large capacity to absorb new technology and it provides a larger market base than China for collaboration in the area of R&D in sectors such as pharma, life sciences, etc,” said Commerce Joint Secretary Sumanta Chaudhuri. Israel Ambassador to India Mark Sofer said bilateral trade is expected to grow fast once commerce is liberalised between the two countries.

Source: Indian Express 12 January, 2010

Link: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/india-israel-discuss-free-trade-pact/566267/>

Punjab to start joint ventures with Sudan Government

Sunday, 24 January 2010

New Delhi: Punjab would initiate joint ventures with Khartoum State of Sudan in Agriculture, Education, IT and Industrial sectors.

An assurance to this effect was given by the Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal to a high level delegation of Sudan Government led by Governor of Khartoum State (Sudan) Dr. Abdulrehman A.Al-Khidir here at Kapurthala house this morning [24 January].

The visiting Governor was accompanied by Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan in New Delhi Mr. Khidir Haroun Ahmed, Minister Plenipotentiary cum- head of Economic, Trade & Investment Elsa dig Abdalla Elias Diab, and Agriculture Minister of Khartoum State of Sudan Mr. Siddig Moh, Ali Elshaikh.

Taking part in the deliberations, the Governor of Khartoum State (Sudan) had shown keen interest to start bilateral trade and business with Punjab and invited Mr. Badal to lead a delegation of the Punjab farmers to their state to explore the possibilities to start joint ventures in the fields of agriculture and other farming and business activities like Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, Poultry, Dairy Development, Food Processing, Education, Technical Education, Agriculture implements and Cycle Industry...

Source: Punjab Newslines, 24 January 2010

Link: <http://www.punjabnewslines.com/content/view/22801/38/>

Wadhwa: Omanis welcome to invest in India's infrastructure

Monday, 25 January 2010

Muscat: Terming India and Oman as emerging economies, Anil Wadhwa, Indian ambassador to the Sultanate, stated that both the countries hold promise for mutual

benefits. He pointed out that the people-to-people contacts coupled with strong cultural bonds will drive the future of Indo-Oman relationship.

In an interview with 'Times of Oman' in connection with the 61st Republic Day of India, the ambassador said, "India hopes that there will be more Omani interest here this year and in the years to come. We have laid the ground work and have worked hard for it."

Adding that India offers investment opportunities, he explained, "India is a good bet because of the returns it offers. Besides, infrastructure in India is badly in need of investment. I believe Omani investors can think of investing in infrastructure in India."

Though the global recession took its toll, leaving no industry or county unaffected, Wadhwa said trade between the two countries was not affected. ..

...On whether the recession resulted in job losses for Indians, he said, "We have heard of a very few job losses in Oman. It has happened in specialised sectors and may be in smaller companies which were employing about 20 people and not the established companies."

There has been a growth rate in the number of tourist travelling to India...

... "Political relations have strengthened through frequent exchange of high level visits. In the course of the year, you will see high-level delegation exchanging visits. There are several areas where India and Oman can cooperate and work for mutual benefits including in the field of defence, foreign affairs, health, cultural theme and economic ministry, education, science and technology," he said.

In his message on the occasion of 61st Republic Day of India, the ambassador said, "I extend my hearty congratulations to all Indians and persons of Indian origin living in Oman. I also take this opportunity to wish good health and prosperity to our Omani brothers and sisters for the love and warmth that they have shown toward the Indians residing in Oman. ..

...I express my heartfelt wishes to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said for a long, healthy and prosperous life and greater glory in the years to come. I would urge my fellow citizens in Oman to continue to work with sincerity and dedication for the development of the Sultanate and for their own well-being and prosperity."

Source: Times of Oman, 25 January 2010

Link: <http://www.timesofoman.com/echoice.asp?detail=32612>

Jet Airways launches Delhi – Doha service

Monday, 25 January 2010

Doha: Jet Airways, India's premier international airline, recently launched its daily services on the Delhi-Doha sector, aboard a state-of-the-art Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

The new flight is Jet Airways' third daily flight to Doha from India, complementing the airline's existing daily services to Doha from Mumbai and Kochi...

... "Doha has been among the more popular destinations in Jet Airways' international network, and the airline's services to and from India to the capital of Qatar have been much appreciated by travellers," said Nikos Kardassis, Acting CEO of Jet Airways.

"The launch of our daily services to Doha from Delhi will cater to the strong customer demand for direct flights on the route, and will also connect travellers from Doha to Jet Airways' 61-destination strong network spanning the length and breadth of India and beyond."

In addition to Doha, Jet Airways flies from India to eight destinations in the Gulf, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Jeddah, Sharjah and Riyadh.

Source: The Peninsula, 25 January 2010

Link:

http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/Display_news.asp?section=Local_News&subsection=Qatar+News&month=January2010&file=Local_News20100125250.xml

UAE and India to enhance cooperation in new product development

Monday, 25 January 2010

Abu Dhabi: Ministry of Foreign Trade Director General H.E. Abdullah Bin Ahmed Al Saleh called for greater cooperation between the UAE and India on the development of new products during a plenary session held today (25 January), the third and last day of the Confederation of Indian Industry's Partnership Summit running at the Chennai Trade Centre in Chennai, India...

Source: WAM Emirates News Agency, 25 January 2010

Link:http://www.wam.ae/servlet/Satellite?c=WamLocEnews&cid=1264322408188&pageName=WAM%2FWAM_E_Layout&parent=Query&parentid=1135099399852

22 Indian engineers stranded in Saudi Arabia

Thursday, 28 January 2010

Dubai: Twenty-two Indian engineers have been stranded in Saudi Arabia after they were brought by a Saudi company and abandoned without jobs or work permits.

The engineers are highly qualified, some educated in the UK, but now they are struggling for accommodation and food and some of them have been stranded for over a year. No one was available for comment at the Indian Embassy.

One of those affected is 26-year-old Islah Uddin from Uttar Pradesh who arrived in Riyadh on February 24, 2009. He told Arab News that the company, which was not named in the report, refused to hire him and give him salary saying his visa had been stolen but did not do anything to investigate the theft.

"It's been nearly a year since I came to the Kingdom. Me and the other engineers are all stranded without salary or compensation, and neither are we being sent back home," he added.

The Federation of Kerala Associations in Saudi Arabia has taken up their case now with the embassy. All the engineers were brought to the Kingdom by the same company.

Source: My News.in, 28 January, 2010

Link:

http://www.mynews.in/News/22_Indian_engineers_stranded_in_Saudi_Arabia_N36509.html

India, Arab investors to weigh business proposals at conclave

Thursday, 28 January 2010

New Delhi: Business proposals and \$15-billion projects in various sectors are slated to be discussed at the forth-coming India-Arab Investment Projects Conclave next month [February]. The external affairs ministry, FICCI and League of Arab states are jointly organising the second conclave in New Delhi from February 8-9...

...With 17 Arab countries confirming their participation in the meet this year, 10 trade and industry ministers accompanied by high-level business delegation will come to India.

Iraqi minister of industry and minerals Fawzi F Hariri will be attending the conclave for the first time.

Specialised Arab trade and business promotion agencies like GUACCIA, GAFI, EDB-Bahrain, Arab Investors Union, Union of Arab banks, Arab Economic Union, Arab organisation for mining and industry, AICTO and OAPEC would also be represented by their senior officials at the meet.

According to MEA officials, ahead of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Saudi Arabia soon (dates are still being worked out), investment proposals would also be discussed when a Saudi delegation headed by their deputy minister for trade comes here[New Delhi] for the meet...

...With India emerging as global economic power imbued with strong and stable economic fundamentals and capacity to build upon its inherent strengths, there has been a rising interests in Arab countries to proactively engage the resurgent Indian economy for mutual benefits.

"Both India and Arab countries have recognised the imperative need for enlarging their trade basket. To remain in sync with the emerging global economic architecture and to retain their economic worthiness, it has become imperative for investors,...

Source: The Financial Express, 28 January 2010

Link: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/India--Arab-investors-to-weigh-business-proposals-at-conclave/572165/>

Vodafone's 40 per cent cut in roaming rates for Dubai fest visitors

Friday, 29 January 2010

Hyderabad: Vodafone Essar, one of India's leading cellular services providers, announced 'unmatched' rates for its customers roaming in Dubai between January 28 and February 28, 2010.

This period coincide with the world renowned shopping festival in the city, a Vodafone release said in Hyderabad on Friday.

The roaming rates have been reduced by 40 per cent on outgoing calls, 83 per cent on incoming calls and 40 per cent on data services.

This limited period offer can be availed by both Prepaid and Postpaid Vodafone customers at no additional rental charge. Customers need to select the DU network in UAE to avail these special rates, the release said.

Kumar Ramanathan, chief marketing officer, Vodafone Essar said, "We are pleased to announce the launch of this offer of our customers travelling to Dubai in this period. This

exclusive offer is excellent value for money and allows seamless connectivity with family and friends while roaming in Dubai".

Source: The Economic Times, 29 January 2010

Link: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/telecom/Vodafones-40-per-cent-cut-in-roaming-rates-for-Dubai-fest-visitors/articleshow/5514484.cms>

\$750-mn fund for Indo-Saudi trade

Saturday, 30 January 2010

New Delhi : A \$750-million (about Rs 3,467 crore) fund will be created to facilitate private sector investment between India and Saudi Arabia when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visits the Arab nation in February or March, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador in New Delhi, Faisal Hassan-al Trad, said in New Delhi on Friday. Of this corpus, \$500 million (about Rs 2,308 crore) will be contributed by Saudi Arabia and \$250 million (about Rs 1,155 crore) by India.

He said several pacts would be inked between India and Saudi Arabia during the visit, including an extradition treaty (that will take account of human rights protections in his country); a provision to enable Indian prisoners in Saudi Arabia awaiting trial to be tried in India; and an MoU on IT and science and technology.

Trad said it was a matter of some satisfaction that trade between the two countries had gone up 300 per cent between 2000 and 2008. Indian imports had gone up sharply mainly because of India's energy needs, he said

Source: Business Standard, 30 January 2010

Link: <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/750-mn-fund-for-indo-saudi-trade/384110/>

Egypt to add more flights from India by 2010-end

Sunday, 31 January 2010

New Delhi: As part of its strategy to attract more tourists from India, Egyptian authorities are planning to raise the number of flights between the two countries by the end of this year

At present, there are three flights between Egypt and India and the plan is to increase it to seven each week.

"We are planning to start operations of the rest of the four flights. Though we hope to start all the four, at least Delhi to Cairo, we expect to start this year," Egyptian Ambassador to India Mohamed Higazy said.

He said the country expects to almost double the number of Indian tourists visiting Egypt to around 1.5 lakhs by the end of this year.

As part of its plan for more tourists, it is looking at adding flights, including from Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

At present, only Egypt Air is operating flights between the two countries, flying thrice a week from Mumbai.

Higazy said discussions are on with private airlines like Jet Airways, Kingfisher and Air India for the service.

"India is our top agenda and as we try to build cultural ties between the two nations, we expect more Indians to visit Egypt. Our aim is to double the number to around 1.5 lakhs by this year," he said.

Source: The Economic Times, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/transportation/airlines/-aviation/Egypt-to-add-more-flights-from-India-by-2010-end/articleshow/5519535.cms>

LIC unit taps Oman with new NRI policy

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Muscat : LIC International is targeting a premium income of at least \$5 million from Oman through its term insurance product aimed at the Indian expatriate community, a top official of the firm said, adding the product would be available for two months from the date of the launch in each of the GCC nations.

New Jeevan Aastha, as the product is named, offers assured annual returns of 4.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent depending on the tenure of the policies, R. Thamodharan, chief executive officer and managing director of the 20-year old firm told reporters yesterday. "During these times of financial uncertainty, this product offers guaranteed returns on the invested capital amount as well as the returns payable on maturity or even an unfortunate death," he said. ..

...The LIC International, a unit of India's state-run and the country's largest insurer LIC of India, has targeted premium incomes of \$10 million through the same policy in Dubai, \$7 million from Bahrain, \$8 million from Kuwait and about \$3 million from Qatar. The

funds would be invested in the international debt and equity markets with the exposure limit towards the latter being capped at 15 per cent of the total corpus, he said.

The calculations of the funds would be done in US dollar denominations while policyholders can pay in local currencies such as Oman Riyals since the latter is pegged to the greenback, he said. LIC International has sold more than 3,000 policies in Oman since 2006.

Source: Times of Oman, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://www.timesofoman.com/innercat.asp?cat=4&detail=32857>

India may rehabilitate displaced workforce in Oman

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Muscat: Nothing perhaps could have assuaged the frayed nerves of thousands of ‘illegal’ Indian workers in Oman than what the Congress member of parliament from Alleppy in Kerala, K. C. Venugopal, has said.

In an exclusive interview with ‘Times of Oman’ here, Venugopal said the Indian government is exploring possibilities of rehabilitating the workforce after their return.

The parliamentarian, who was on a visit to the Sultanate to partake in the Indian Republic Day celebration organised by the Overseas Priyadarshini Cultural Congress, reiterated that the government of India is aware of the labour problem that arose in the wake of Oman government’s implementation of a new labour regulation.

The issue, he said, has already been taken up at diplomatic levels between the two governments, and the Embassy of India, Muscat, has been asked to expedite safe and smooth return of the workers...

...Rehabilitation of Indian labourers, especially from Kerala, has become a political compulsion for both the ruling Left Democratic Front and the Congress-led United Democratic Front...

Pillai, who was extremely forthcoming in his analysis of the situation, said a section of the local population in Oman too cannot avoid its culpability for the impasse.

Expressing his gratitude to the Indian government and the efforts launched by Indian embassy and some prominent business houses in Muscat for the amicable resolution of the impasse, Pillai said the expected forthcoming visit of the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor, will provide the organisation the right opportunity to brief the minister the magnitude of the situation, which may add an appropriate perspective to Indian government’s efforts towards rehabilitating the displaced workforce.

The quasi political organisation, which has been working in close tandem with the local Indian embassy, however, ruled out immediate possibilities of extending any financial help to these workers for purchasing air tickets...

Source: Times of Oman, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://www.timesofoman.com/innercat.asp?detail=32853>

India to set up mechanism to protect its workers in Kingdom

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Dubai: To ensure safety of its workers in Saudi Arabia and protect them from exploitation, India will soon propose a grievance redressal mechanism.

"The system of grievance redressal will be better than the umbrella agreement, which has been signed by a few Gulf States which the Kingdom is still reluctant to endorse," newly-appointed Indian Ambassador to the Kingdom [Saudi Arabia] Talmiz Ahmad has said.

Ahmad said that the community welfare, especially the grievances of blue-collar workers, would be at the top of his mission's agenda.

Ahmad said he is comfortable with the Kingdom's reluctance on signing the standard labour accord, provided an arrangement is put in place for grievance redressal.

"This will help the mission convey information with regards to labour problems and solve them with the help of Saudi officials," he said.

Saudi Arabia has more than 1.7 million Indian workers.

Source: Indian Express, 31 January 2010

Link: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/india-to-propose-a-grievance-redressal-mecha/573648/>

Abu Dhabi: Thousands of Migrant Workers to Have Lives Tracked in Pilot Project

Sunday, 31 January 2010

Abu Dhabi: Thousands of Filipino and Indian nationals heading to the UAE for work will be studied to improve the quality of life of people moving to the Emirates.

Under a pilot project, backed by groups such as the International Labour Organisation, Arab Labour Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration, 3,000 people will be selected for the long-term research project.

The study will follow the recruitment and arrival of migrants, monitor their living and working conditions in the Emirates, and track their return to and reintegration into their home nations.

Officials at the Philippine and Indian embassies are overseeing the project, the results of which will be presented to the Ministry of Labour in the hope of informing policy...

...There are an estimated 320,000 Filipinos and 1.5 million Indians working in the UAE...

...The project is overseen by a committee made up of representatives from India's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, the Philippines' Department of Labour and Employment and the UAE's Ministry of Labour, along with the International Labour Organisation, the Arab Labour Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration...

...The destination countries include the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Yemen. It is not known whether the results of the survey will be made public.

Source: The National, 31 January 2010.

Link:http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=71568&n_tit=Abu+Dhabi+%3A+Thousands+of+Migrant+Workers+to+Have+Lives+Tracked+in+Pilot+Project

Miscellaneous

Tunisian documentary represents Africa and the Arab world in Bangalore

Monday, 25 January 2010

Tunisia Online News: Representing the African continent and the Arab world, Tunisia took part in the 6th edition of the International children's film festival held in Bangalore, India from January 7 to 13, 2010.

Some 70 countries took part in the event.

The Tunisian participation was marked by the documentary "The Samurai of the Sahara", a biography of the Tunisian Martial arts champion, Sadok Kouka.

Aiming at promoting martial arts among young children, the 57 minute long documentary was screened for a week in the town's biggest China's cinema theatres.

Source: Tunisia Online News, 25 January 2010

Link: <http://www.tunisiaonlinenews.com/?p=32951>

Giving the mystic a voice

Friday, 29 January 2010

New Delhi: Sufi is the Persian of 'one with a clean heart' and Baul is the Sanskrit of 'lightness'. Parvathy Baul, the popular Baul singer, says that these two forms of music are same because they celebrate the Siddharthas or the yogis.

Parvathy, along with Baran Music Ensemble from Iran and Sidi Goma from Africa, will be performing at the fourth annual All India Sufi and Mystic Music Festival, Ruhaniyat, to be held in Delhi on January 30. "Baul is the song of the inner body, of the yogis of India that leads to spiritual revelation. The poetry for Baul songs are written by Mahajans (the Great Souls) and they are inspired by Hindu and Islamic traditions," says Parvathy, talking about the Baul tradition of music...

Source: The Times of India, 29 January 2010

Link: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/music/Giving-the-mystic-a-voice/articleshow/5508896.cms>

UAE-based businessman thanks Indian govt for Padma Shri

Friday, 29 January 2010

Dubai: A UAE-based businessman of Indian origin, awarded with Padma Sri this year for his contribution to business, has expressed his commitment to the people of India.

"I am very humbled by this exceptional appreciation of my work not only in terms of the achievements of the Al Fara'a Integrated Construction Group but also in our organisation's significant impact in the enrichment of the India-UAE relations," said J R Gangaramani.

Gangaramani is the president and executive chairman of the UAE's Al Fara'a Integrated Construction Group...

Source: Indian Express, 29 January 2010

Link: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/uaebased-businessman-thanks-indian-govt-for/572987/>

Randhawa, Kapur struggle in Qatar Masters

Saturday, 30 January 2010

Doha: Jyoti Randhawa turned in a horrendous four-over 76 to lie at the bottom of the heap while Shiv Kapur was only slightly better after a one-over 73 in penultimate round of the Qatar Masters golf tournament on Saturday.

Kapur's three-day total stood at three-over 219, while Randhawa was three strokes adrift at six-over.

Kapur stumbled to two bogeys against a lone birdie, which came on the 10th hole, for the third successive day.

Randhawa, however, endured a nightmarish day as he dropped three bogeys and a double bogey against just one birdie.

Two of the bogeys and the double bogey came on the front nine.

Source: The Times of India, 30 January 2010

Link: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/golf/top-stories/Randhawa-Kapur-struggle-in-Qatar-Masters/articleshow/5517969.cms>

Indian doctor wins Arab health award

Saturday, 30 January 2010

Doha: Dr Azad Moopen, Founder Chairman, D M Healthcare which has its Al Rafa Medical Centre and a few clinics in Qatar, received the prestigious award at Arab Health and Innovation awards as a part of Arab Health Exhibition 2010...

This is a second award that Dr. Azad Moopen has received since beginning of 2010. Earlier this month he received the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award, India's top most honour for overseas Indians...

Source: The Peninsula, 30 January 2010

Link: http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/Display_news.asp?section=Local_News&subsection=Qatar+News&month=January2010&file=Local_News2010013015927.xml

Indian community in celebration of heritage

Saturday, 30 January 2010

The unity, diversity and cultural heritage of the world's largest democracy were celebrated by the Indian community yesterday evening at a cultural fiesta organised by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) to mark the 61st Republic Day.

The four-hour event at a packed-to-capacity Doha Cinema was replete with patriotic skits and a variety of dances...

Source: Gulf Times, 30 January 2010

Link:

http://www.gulftimes.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=339986&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views/position of the MEI@ND.

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