

INDIA SPEAKS

(Monthly Digest of Official Indian Statements on Middle East)

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. IRAN

1) Trade with Iran, New Delhi, 30 November 2015

Will the minister of commerce and industry be pleased to state:-

- a) Whether the Government has agreed to sign any free trade agreement with Iran?
- b) If so, the benefit likely to be accrued as a result thereof along with the time by which it is likely to be implemented?
- c) Whether Iran has shown interest in the trade of tea, pharma and edible items with India?
- d) If so, whether trade of all these items are likely to be covered under oil agreement?
- e) If so, the details thereof?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Independent Charge) Nirmala Sitharaman

(a) & (b): No, Sir. However, in the 17th Session of the Joint Commission between India and Iran held in May 2013, it was agreed to commence preliminary consultation between the concerned Ministries of both sides for a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA). In the first meeting of Joint Working Group on Trade and Commerce held in April 2015, in Tehran, both sides agreed to examine the scope and the feasibility of entering into a PTA. In the second meeting of the Joint Working Group held on 18-19 November 2015 in New Delhi both sides agreed, inter-alia, to open up a channel for exchange of information, etc for this purpose.

(c) Yes Sir.

(d) and (e): The Rupee payment arrangement with Iran is in place to (i) ease payment in respect of imports of oil and (ii) help facilitate payment to exporters in rupees.

Source: Lok Sabha (Council of People), Unstarred Question No.193, asked by Kaushalendra Kumar,

<http://164.100.47.192/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=24061&lsno=16>

b. ISRAEL

2) Israeli Commander of Air and Space Forces Meets Chief of the Air Staff, New Delhi, 30 November 2015

Major General Amir Eshel, Commander of Israeli Air and Space forces called on Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha at Air Headquarters, today.

India-Israel relations have grown steadily. In the recent years, India-Israel defence co-operation has grown into multifaceted defence level exchanges in diverse areas of defence co-operation. On its part, Israel views India as a strategic ally and has displayed willingness to co-operate on all fronts. The Indo-Israel defence relations comprise mainly of purchase of military equipment, MoD level dialogue, technology collaboration and service to service defence co-operation through service level staff talks.

India-Israel defence co-operation has improved rapidly in the last few years with Israel providing state-of-the-art military hardware to India at reasonable cost. Israelis have been at the cutting-edge of R&D in advanced technologies in a wide range of fields such as telecom, software, biotechnology, medical, electronics, agriculture and defence. Israel undertakes joint industrial R&D projects with several advanced countries including India.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

b. KUWAIT

3) Attestation of employment contracts for Indian workers, Kuwait, 4 November 2015

The Embassy has been attesting employment contracts for Indian workers, both in domestic sector (Visa No. 20) as well as in private sector (Visa No. 18).

2. Work contract attestations done by the Embassy during the years 2014 and 2015 in respect of domestic workers (visa No. 20) and private sector workers (visa No. 18) to Kuwait are as under:

3. The sharp drop in arrival of female domestic workers in 2015 is due to the differences on the bank guarantee issue.

4. The Embassy has implemented E-Migrate (web-based attestation system) procedure since June 2015. This is a transparent system wherein all documents about work contract, visa copy, credentials/contact details of sponsor and the employee as well as emigration clearance documents are available on the E-Migrate system for the benefit of all stakeholders in the emigration cycle. The system protects and benefits both the employer and the employee as the emigration clearance is obtained through the on-line system. The Embassy has opened a Help desk for work relating to E-Migrate for the benefit of sponsors/employers in Kuwait who are

registering themselves with the system for employing workers from India with the help of above user-friendly system.

Attestations Done For Visa No 20 (Domestic Workers)

Category	January-December 2014		2015 (up to 31/10/2015)	
	Male workers	Female workers	Male workers	Female workers
Domestic workers	34,450	19,676	22,234	7 (seven)

Attestations Done For Visa No 18 (Private Sector Workers)

Category	January-December 2014		2015 (up to 31/10/2015)	
	Individual	Bulk recruitment	Individual	Bulk recruitment
Private Sector Workers	10,120	32,211	7,554	58,010

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=876>

4) Indian EPC companies in Kuwait, Kuwait, 5 November 2015

During last two years, the Indian EPC companies have been awarded projects worth over US\$ 5 billion in Kuwait. In 2014, leading Indian companies viz. Larsen & Toubro (Ministry of Electricity and Water project and KOC's Gas Gathering Centre GC 30 project), Shapoorji Pallonji (Al Sabah Hospital as well as Kuwait University Project), Dodsal (Gas Gathering Centre Project), Punj Lloyd (KNPC's project of revamping the Ahmadi Fuel Depot) and Simplex Projects (for construction of Service Centres in Sabah Al Ahmad City) were awarded EPC contracts worth over US\$ 4.15 billion in Kuwait.

In May 2015, Larsen & Toubro signed a contract worth US\$ 77 million with Kuwait National Petroleum Corporation (KNPC) to replace an old power substation at Al-Ahmadi Refinery in Kuwait. In October 2015, Essar Projects Limited, in a joint venture with Italy's Saipem S.p.A has won a contract worth US\$ 1.57 billion from Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) for setting up Al-Zour Refinery Project (ZOR), Package-4. Many Indian companies are actively participating in the developmental projects of Kuwait, strengthening further ties between India-Kuwait.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=877>

5) Phasing out of Hand-Written Passports, Kuwait, 10 November 2015

All Indian nationals in Kuwait holding hand written passports are advised once again to apply for urgent re-issuance of new passports, in lieu of handwritten passports, under the following circumstances:-

(a) The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has set a deadline of 24 November 2015 for globally phasing out of all non-Machine Readable Passports. From 25 November 2015 onwards, foreign Governments may deny Visa or entry to any person travelling on a non-Machine Readable Passport.

(b) The Government of India has been issuing Machine Readable Passports since 2001. The Passports, however, issued before 2001 and particularly those issued during mid 1990s with a validity of 20 years will fall in the category of non-MRPs. All handwritten passports with pasted photographs are also considered non-MRPs.

(c) Indians living in Kuwait holding handwritten passports as explained in Para (b) above, with validity beyond 24 November 2015 are advised to apply urgently for re-issue of their passports well before the deadline in order to avoid any inconvenience in obtaining valid visa for international travel.

(d) For more details related to passport services, visit the website–

<http://www.indembkwt.org/Pages/Passport.aspx> or call Sanjeev Saklani, Attaché (Consular) at Mob: 97295728 or K. K. Pahel, First Secretary (Consular) at Mob: 97229948

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=878>

6) Protocol amending the Agreement between India and Kuwait for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, New Delhi, 18 November 2015

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval for the protocol amending the Agreement between India and Kuwait for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The Protocol provides for internationally accepted standards for effective exchange of information on tax matters including bank information and information without domestic tax interest. It is further provided that the information received from Kuwait in respect of a resident of India can be shared with other law enforcement agencies with authorization of the competent authority of Kuwait and vice versa. India and Kuwait signed the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) signed in 2006 for the avoidance of double taxation and for the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, through the Protocol.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

7) New guidelines with regard to linking of validity of Residence Permit with the validity of the Passport, Kuwait, 30 November 2015

The Ministry of Interior of Kuwait has decided to implement the new guidelines with effect from 1 January 2016 applicable to expatriates residing in the country with regard to the linking of validity of Residence Permit with the validity of the Passport. The new guidelines are as under:-

1. The duration of the Residence Permit cannot be for a longer period than the duration of validity of the passport.
2. Residence Permit shall expire on the same date of the expiry of passport.
3. The decision to link the validity of residence with the validity of the passport is applicable with effect from 1 January 2016.
4. Please avail the remaining period till 1 January 2016 to renew the passport to avoid violation of Residence Permit Law for foreigners.
5. Approach Department of Residence Affairs (as per address given in the Civil ID) to register and transfer the data from the old to the new passport.

B. All Indian nationals in Kuwait are advised to ensure that their passports are renewed so as to avoid any violation of the Residence Permit Law in Kuwait for Foreigners.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=884>

c. OMAN

8) President of India's message on the eve of National day of Oman, New Delhi, 17 November 2015

The President of India Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the Government and people of the Sultanate of Oman on the eve of their National Day (18 November 2015).

In his message to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said, Sultan of Oman, the President said "On behalf of the Government, the people of India and on my own behalf, it is my pleasure to extend warm greetings and felicitations to Your Majesty and to the people of the Sultanate of Oman on the occasion of your National Day.

India deeply values its close and friendly relations with the Sultanate of Oman which is anchored in shared interests and extensive people-to-people contacts. Our mutually beneficial ties are marked by exceptional warmth and goodwill. I firmly believe that our bilateral cooperation will further deepen and strengthen in the years ahead for the mutual benefit of our two peoples.

I take this opportunity to convey to Your Majesty my best wishes for your personal good health and well-being, and for the progress and prosperity of the friendly people of the Sultanate of Oman."

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130545>

9) Joint Sail Voyage by Indian Navy Sail Training Ship Tarangini and Royal Navy of Oman Sail Training Ship Shabab Oman from Muscat to Kochi, New Delhi, 24 November 2015

Tall ships of Indian Navy and Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) set sail together from Muscat to Kochi to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries as well as to

retrace the historic sail ship voyages undertaken by Dhows, and sail trading ships from both countries to each other's ports, taking advantage of seasonal winds. These seasonal winds are called 'Mausam' in Arabic. The flourishing trade of spices and garments from India and dates and gold from Oman, nurtured the two civilizations, developing cultural and trade linkage over many centuries. Since then, over five lakh Indians have made their home in Oman strengthening cultural linkages between the two nations.

Indian Sail Training Ship Tarangini had earlier reached Muscat on 22 November 2015 and a host of activities including media interaction were conducted by the Indian High Commission at Muscat. Rear Admiral SK Grewal, Flag officer Sea Training (FOST) attended the events at Muscat. The ship also embarked 'Distinguished' personnel for short duration during the sail out on 24 November 2015. A Flag Officer from Indian Navy is planned to be deputed for the event at Muscat.

In consonance with the spirit of the event, cadets and young officers from Royal Navy of Oman will embark Indian Sail Training Ship and a few officers and cadets from Indian Navy will embark STS Shabab Oman during sail together from Muscat to Kochi.

On arrival of both Sail Training Ships at Kochi, a grand welcome and a befitting closing ceremony to this endeavour are planned from 4-7 December 2015. Various events such as Distinguished Visitors Programme (DVP), media interaction, reception hosted by both ships, cultural/ heritage tour for RNO personnel, sports fixtures and visit to Indian Naval facilities at Kochi by RNO personnel are planned.

The event, celebrating 60 years of establishing diplomatic relations, as well as one of the first major event under 'Project Mausam', will further strengthen diplomatic and maritime linkages between the two countries and pave the way for more such endeavours.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=13185>

d. PALESTINE

10) Indian Prime Minister's message to the Palestinian people on the international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people, Ramallah, 18 November 2015

The international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people is an important occasion for us to reaffirm our support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend heartiest congratulations to the people of Palestine on the historic installation of the national flag of Palestine at the United Nations on 30 September 2015. It is a step towards Palestine becoming a Member-state of the United Nations, which India fully supports.

India's ties with the friendly people of Palestine are rooted in our common history. India has always stood by the Palestinian people in pursuit of their legitimate goals and their efforts aimed at economic and social development with dignity and self-reliance. India has been extending political and diplomatic support to Palestine bilaterally as well as at international fora. We also extend budgetary support and render assistance in capacity building and human resource development initiatives of Palestinian government.

The President of India Pranab Mukherjee visited Palestine in October this year. This first ever state visit by an Indian President provided us an opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the Palestine and to review overall developments in the region. We remain hopeful that talks and Israeli- Palestinian negotiations will resume soon, leading to a comprehensive peace process and an amicable resolution of the conflict.

I take this opportunity to convey my greetings and best wishes to the friendly people of Palestine.

Source: Representative Office of India, Ramallah,

<http://www.roiramallah.org/adminpart/uploadpdf/97828INDIADEL%20NEW%20YORK%20-%20PALESTIN%20LTR.pdf>

e. QATAR

11) Prime Minister speaks to the Emir of Qatar, New Delhi, 2 November 2015

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to the Emir of the state of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who had called and invited Prime Minister to pay a visit to Qatar.

Prime Minister recalled the state visit of the Emir of Qatar to India in March 2015 that has provided new vigour and momentum to bilateral relations. He emphasized that India attached high importance to its relations with Qatar. He appreciated the steps taken by the Emir and the Government of Qatar for protecting the interests and ensuring continued well-being and safety of Indian community staying there.

The two leaders also discussed measures to further deepen bilateral cooperation, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, security, defence, culture and people to people contacts. The Emir of the state of Qatar reiterated Qatar's interest in partnering in India's economic growth.

Prime Minister appreciated the role being played by Qatar for regional peace and stability. He accepted the invitation to visit Qatar at mutually convenient dates.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

https://www.google.co.in/search?q=PM+speaks+to+the+Emir+of+Qatar&oq=PM+speaks+to+the+Emir+of+Qatar&aqs=chrome..69i57j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8

12) Visit of Petroleum Minister Centre Dharmendra Pradhan to Qatar for the 6th Asian Ministerial Energy Roundtable, New Delhi, 10 November 2015

The Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan visited Doha, Qatar on 9-10 November 2015 to attend the 6th Asian Ministerial Energy Roundtable, which was organized by Governments of Qatar and Thailand in association with the International Energy Forum.

Minister Pradhan addressed the round-table on the theme “Oil markets: a new normal or just another cycle, and what it means for Asia”. The Round-table was attended by Energy Ministers and high-level delegations from twenty Asian countries and Heads of six international organizations. In his address the Minister laid emphasis on the need for Oil suppliers to make earnest efforts for a ‘Responsible and Reasonable Pricing’, which should be sustainable so that “Energy Poverty” gives way to “Energy Justice” in countries like India. He asked for greater transparency and balance in the oil market to ensure that fiscal positions of countries like India are not unduly stretched due to rising prices. He also reiterated the demand to end the practice of charging “Asian Premium” and instead provide “Asian Dividend” to countries like India. He advocated that to achieve a more stable oil market large buyers and large sellers of oil need to develop mutual investment linkages.

On the margins of the roundtable Minister Pradhan called on Prime Minister of Qatar and later held a separate meeting with his Qatari counterpart. He also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Russia, UAE, Malaysia and Brunei during which existing relations and future possibilities of cooperation were discussed. He also held a meeting with Secretary General of IEF.

Minister Pradhan was accompanied by Ambassador, senior officials of MoPNG and CMDs/MDs of IOC, GAIL, EIL and Petronet LNG Limited.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130362>

f. SAUDI ARABIA

13) Phasing Out Of Handwritten Passports, Riyadh, 15 November 2015

Indian citizens living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are advised to urgently replace their handwritten passports (including handwritten observations) with machine readable passports. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has set a deadline of the 24 November 2015 for globally phasing out of all non-Machine Readable Passports (MRPs). Thereafter, foreign Governments may deny Visa or entry to any person travelling on a non-Machine Readable Passport.

2. The following Indian passports are considered as non-machine readable:

- (i) All handwritten passports.
- (ii) Short validity passports revalidated by handwritten entry.
- (iii) Any particulars added or deleted with observation.
- (iv) All 20 years validity passport.

3. Indian citizens residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and holding such passports with validity beyond the 24 November 2015 are advised to apply for re-issue of their passports well before the deadline in order to avoid any inconvenience in obtaining valid visa or international travel. Needless to mention, travel on ICAO compliant machine readable passports will facilitate hassle-free and safe journey.

For more details regarding issuance of passport and list of outsourcing centres, please visit Embassy's website www.indianembassy.org.sa

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

14) Medical Visa, Riyadh, 30 November 2015

Indian Embassy in Riyadh urges the foreign nationals planning to travel to India for medical treatment, to apply only for 'Medical Visa'. Going for medical treatment to India on any other type of visa, such as tourist visa, will result in denial of entry into India. Application for Medical Visa can be submitted through our outsourcing agency VFS Global – Indian Visa Application Centre. It is ensured that Medical Visas are also processed expeditiously and promptly delivered on or before the delivery date, provided the applications are complete in all respects and accompanied by relevant supporting documents - except in a few cases where prior approval is sought from Indian authorities concerned. Saudi nationals and other foreign nationals travelling to India for medical treatment are given a warm welcome to avail the premier health care with state-of-the-art facilities in India.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

g. TURKEY

15) Indian textile companies participated at Texworld Istanbul 2015, Istanbul, 3 November 2015

Indian textile companies participated at Texworld Istanbul 2015, an important fashion fabrics fair organized by Messe Frankfurt from 3-5 November 2015. The Indian companies showcased the entire range of synthetic, rayon, blended yarns, fabrics.

Source: Consulate General of India, Istanbul,

<http://www.cgiistanbul.org/Texworld>

16) PM's upcoming visit to Turkey, New Delhi, 12 November 2014

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi will be visiting Turkey from 14-16 November 2015.

In a series of Facebook posts the Prime Minister said:

..... My visit to Turkey for G20 Summit will commence on 14 November. This Summit is being held at a critical juncture, just after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals agenda at the United Nations, and just before discussions on climate change at COP-21 in Paris on 30 November-1 December.

During the Summit, we will review the progress on decisions taken at the Brisbane Summit and take up issues of climate change, terrorism, refugees, weak growth in global economy, strategies for growth and employment, investment strategies, trade, energy and financial sector resilience. Like last year, India's focus on mitigating the menace of black money, tax erosion and bringing greater transparency remains.

There will be several bilateral meetings too with world leaders on the sidelines of the Summit, which will help deepen our bilateral ties.

Also see the Facebook account of the Prime Minister Modi:

<https://www.facebook.com/narendramodi/photos/a.10150164299700165.421791.177526890164/10156316251890165/?type=3&theater>

Source: Prime Minister Office of India, New Delhi,

http://pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-upcoming-visit-to-the-united-kingdom-uk-and-turkey/

h. UAE

17) During his Meeting with his UAE Counterpart, the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley calls for Investment of UAE Sovereign Wealth Funds and Pensions Funds in National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), New Delhi, 16 November 2015

The Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley met His Holiness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Makhtoum, Minister of Finance, United Arab Emirates(UAE) in Zabeel Palace. During the meeting, both the leaders discussed issues of mutual cooperation in field of economic and trade development among others.

Speaking on the occasion, the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley raised the issue of longer visa for Indian businessmen who have made large investment for long duration in UAE. He said that this will help in ease of doing business. At present, the businessmen are given visa at a time for two years which has to be got extended/renewed every time.

The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley also invited large participation and investment in recently constituted National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) by the Sovereign Wealth Funds and Pensions Funds of the UAE region. He said that the investment in NIIF will ensure good returns on investment as the Government will invest these funds in infrastructure projects.

The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley also raised the issue of fresh negotiations among officials of India and UAE for finalizing the terms of reference of the new Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement (BIPA) as the existing BIPA is expiring by December end this year. From January 2016, new BIPA has to come in existence. His UAE counterpart His Holiness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Makhtoum assured the Finance Minister that he will look into all the issues raised by him.

Both the leaders also condemned the recent terrorists attack in Paris in which many human lives were lost. They expressed their concern and sought joint efforts by the countries to tackle this menace of terrorism.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130528>

i. YEMEN

18) Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm ‘Chapala’ Over Arabian Sea to move and Cross Over Yemen Coast , New Delhi, 2 November 2015

The Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm, called ‘Chapala’ is likely to move further westwards during next 12 hours, then west and north-westwards and cross Yemen coast, south of Riyan as a very severe cyclonic storm around noon tomorrow i.e. 3 November 2015. A depression in the Central Arabian Sea had now turned into a Cyclonic storm but moved away from the Indian Coast moving West and North-Westwards initially and then South-Westwards over the last four days.

No adverse weather is expected along and off west coast of India because of this climatic condition.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130147>

Note: The Exact web links for the questions in the Indian Parliament are non-functional due to technical reasons. They can be searched through the question number or the name of the Member of Parliament concerned at the Websites <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/> of Rajya Sabha and <http://loksabha.nic.in/> of Lok Sabha.

1 Crore = 10 million. Lakh = 100,000

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