

# **INDIA SPEAKS**

(Monthly Digest of Official Indian Statements on Middle East)

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## **BILATERAL ISSUES**

### **a. EGYPT**

#### **1. Flag Hoisting on Republic Day, Cairo, 10 January 2016**

All members of the Indian community and friends of India are cordially invited to attend celebrations of the 67th Republic Day of India on Tuesday, 26 January 2016 at 0845 hrs at the India House, 19, Mohamed Mazhar St, Zamalek, Cairo. Ambassador Sanjay Bhattacharyya will hoist the national flag and read out the President's message on the occasion.

*Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,*

[http://www.indembcairo.com/enus/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt\\_656\\_param\\_detail=454](http://www.indembcairo.com/enus/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=454)  
27

#### **2. India celebrates Republic Day, Cairo, 27 January 2016**

The 67th Republic Day of India was celebrated in Egypt on 26 January with traditional gaiety and fervour. The Indian community and Egyptian friends participated in the celebrations in large numbers despite exceptionally cold and rainy weather.

In the morning, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Indian Ambassador to Egypt hoisted the national flag at India House and read out the address to the nation by President Pranab Mukherjee. A jubilant crowd including children, filled with patriotic zeal and enthusiasm were seen sporting Indian attire, the national colours, balloons and flags. "I feel very proud and delighted to be here. Of course, rain will not stop us from being a part of this gathering" said one of the Indian students studying in Al-Azhar University.

While the participation of the Indian community has always been enormous, the interest shown by the Egyptian friends was impressive. One of them came all the way from Alexandria, 250 kilometres away and expressed the hope that there would be more academic exchanges. "I'm very enthused by the fact that a lot of Egyptians showed active interest in this event. We had a number of TV and newspaper interviews and people have been very excited about the

significance of this event. I think our Egyptian friends see a close connect between our traditions and theirs," Ambassador Bhattacharyya explained.

In the evening, a grand reception of the Republic Day was held at a prominent hotel in Cairo attended by a large number of dignitaries including Yasser Al Kady, Minister of Tele-communication & IT, Ahmed Zaki Badr, Minister of Local Development, Ahmed Darwish, Chairman, General Authority for Suez Canal Economic Zone, Ambassador Yasser Morad, Assistant Foreign Minister, Maged Osamn, President of Egypt-India Friendship Association and former Tele-communication & IT Minister and Dr. Nadia Zakhary, former Scientific Research Minister. A large number of MPs, celebrities, dignitaries from diplomatic missions, along with members of the Indian community and the Egyptian friends as well as intellectuals and prominent people from arts, culture, and the media also joined.

Ambassador Bhattacharyya said, "The year 2015 had been an outstanding year for India-Egypt bilateral relations. The meetings of Prime Minister Modi and President Sisi and the visit of External Affairs Minister had imparted new momentum to the relations. Happily, there had been progress on all fronts of our engagement with new Indian investments in Egypt and closer cultural contacts. We are now poised for a new partnership in the new era". The Ambassador also congratulated the successful Indian community for their efforts to integrate in Egypt while keeping alive their traditions.

The Republic Day reception transported the guests to an enthralling experience of India. The guests were treated to an assortment of Indian dance and music, food and culture and even a photo opportunity wearing pagri (Indian turban) with the Taj Mahal in the backdrop. A 'Kalbeliya' performance by visiting Rajasthan folk dance troupe, with dancers in colourful costumes and artful dances and traditional lovely music mesmerized the audiences. An exhibition of paintings done by Egyptian school children from the "Glimpse of India" painting competition was displayed; these paintings will later be auctioned with proceeds going to the Cancer Hospital for children.

Ambassador Bhattacharyya shared that the year 2016 will be even more exciting with a busy calendar of high level exchanges, business meets and cultural events. As the evening drew to a close, the guests departed with the flavour of spicy Indian food and freshly made jalebi and rabri and armed with Yoga calendars to give them company for the rest of the year.

For more information, please follow us on Facebook (India in Egypt) or Twitter (@indembcairo).

*Source: Embassy of India, Cairo,*

[http://www.indembcairo.com/enus/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt\\_656\\_param\\_detail=45443](http://www.indembcairo.com/enus/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=45443)

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## **b. IRAN**

### **3. India welcomes the lifting of international sanctions against Iran, New Delhi, 19 January 2016**

Following the lifting of international sanctions against Iran on 16 January 2016, the Embassy of India in Tehran issued the following Press Release:

India welcomes the announcement of lifting of nuclear-related sanctions against Iran. The milestone represents a significant success for patient diplomacy, and signals a new chapter of peace and prosperity.

India looks forward to further developing its longstanding, close and mutually beneficial economic cooperation with Iran, including in the spheres of energy and regional connectivity.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26278/India\\_welcomes\\_the\\_lifting\\_of\\_international\\_sanctions\\_against\\_Iran](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26278/India_welcomes_the_lifting_of_international_sanctions_against_Iran)*

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### **c. ISRAEL**

#### **4. Pavan Kapoor appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Israel, New Delhi, 7 January 2016**

Pavan Kapoor (IFS: 1990), presently High Commissioner of India in Maputo, has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Israel.

He is expected to take up his assignment shortly.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26259/Pavan\\_Kapoor\\_appointed\\_as\\_the\\_next\\_Ambassador\\_of\\_India\\_to\\_Israel](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26259/Pavan_Kapoor_appointed_as_the_next_Ambassador_of_India_to_Israel)*

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#### **5. Visit of External Affairs Minister to Israel (17- 18 January 2016), New Delhi, 12 January 2016**

External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj will pay an official visit to Israel from 17-18 January 2016. She will be accompanied by Secretary (East) and other officials from MEA. This is the first visit of EAM to Israel and comes after the State visit of The President of India to Israel in the month of October in 2015. India and Israel share a close and multi-faceted relationship.

During the visit EAM will hold discussions with the Israeli leadership and review the entire gamut of India-Israel bilateral relations. The two sides share firm belief in the values of democracy and free market economy. India and Israel also share close relation in the fields of agriculture, science & technology and education. EAM will also interact with the Indian community in Israel during her visit. The visit will augment India's bilateral relations with Israel and further strengthen the linkages between the two sides.

India's relations with Israel are part of its engagement with the broader Middle East region and are independent to its relations with any country in the region.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26264/Visit\\_of\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_to\\_Israel\\_January\\_17\\_18\\_2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26264/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_to_Israel_January_17_18_2016)*

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**6. Cultural evening in the Embassy, Tel Aviv, 28 January 2016**

The Embassy organized a classical music evening at the Library Hall on 28 January 2016. Benny Djubass, an outstanding Sitar player and Daniel White, renowned tabla player performed at the event. Students of Benny viz. Hadas Shanti and Shai Elimelech also performed. The musical evening was well received by the audience which numbered more than 80.

*Source: Embassy of India, Tel Aviv, [http://www.indembassy.co.il/events.php?event\\_id=97](http://www.indembassy.co.il/events.php?event_id=97)*

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**d. KUWAIT**

**7. Announcement by the Ministry of Interior, Kuwait regarding grant of partial amnesty to residency violators, Kuwait, 12 January 2016**

On 10 January 2016, the Ministry of Interior, Kuwait had announced special dispensation (partial amnesty) for all illegal residents in Kuwait. As per the announcement, residency violators will be allowed to pay their fines and either legalize their status or leave the country without being black-listed. But this would apply to those who voluntarily participate in the above scheme and that the Residency Affairs Departments across the country are ready to receive violators in order to rectify their legal status, for payment of fines for leaving the country.

There are approximately 28,000 Indians illegally staying in Kuwait due to residency/visa violations. All Indian illegal residents are urged to avail the above dispensation to either legalize their status or leave the country after payment of fines without being black-listed. They should contact the concerned Residency Affairs Department of Kuwait with available documents to rectify their status or for payment of fines for leaving the country to avail the above opportunity.

The Embassy is ready to provide all necessary assistance to all those seeking the above special dispensation by issuing Emergency Certificates (travel document) expeditiously if required by the local authorities who are processing their documents under above scheme. The requirement for issue of Emergency certificate is as under:

- (a) Prescribed format for issue of EC (copy enclosed)
- (b) Three recent passport size photograph;
- (c) A copy of the passport (relevant pages)
- (c) Payment of KD 5.000 consular fee for EC

For any query/clarification in the matter, please contact A. K. Srivastava, Second Secretary (PIC/CW) Tel. No. 22531716 and Mobile No. 97229914 or B.K. Sinha, Assistant (CW) at Mobile No. 97164067 and Mohammad Ashfaq Durrani, Local Staff member, Mobile-66680031.

*Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=901>*

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### **8. Indian Embassy celebrated 67th Republic Day of India, Kuwait, 27 January 2016**

The 67th Republic Day of India was celebrated with traditional enthusiasm and patriotic fervour in Kuwait at the Embassy premises by unfurling of the national tri-colour Flag by Ambassador Sunil Jain. More than 3,000 Indian nationals participated with great joy and enthusiasm.

After singing of National Anthem and the reading out the message of the Honourable Rashtrapati by Ambassador, several patriotic songs were sung on this joyous occasion. The performances of the Bohra Band held everyone spellbound. The highlight of the event was participation by Indian Cultural Society, Art of Living, Salmiya Indian Model School, Integrated Indian School and D'elites Music Band. There was an Open House grand reception for all, serving hot chhole and bhature, steaming hot idlis with sambar, gulab jamun, tea and juice.

*Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=905>*

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### **9. Indian embassy participated in Hala February festival, Kuwait, 31 January 2016**

The 17th edition of Hala February Festival was inaugurated on 29 January 2016 and will last till 1 March 2016. The festival was organized with much zeal and enthusiasm near Kuwait Towers on Arabian Gulf Street. Hala Festival is being annually organized in Kuwait since February 1999 mainly to promote tourism and culture. The festival offers arts, sports, live carnival shows, entertainment events and display of vintage vehicles and motorbikes during the month. The carnival started with a colourful performance by Kuwait Navy and Air Force.

The Embassy of India joined in the celebrations by participating in the opening ceremony. The Indian pavilion was exquisitely decorated with “Incredible India” posters, tourism material and other items. One of the highlight of the event was India’s Bohra Band which held the audience spellbound by their performances. Many of them, especially children, took the opportunity to take photographs posing with the members of the Bohra Band and enjoyed the show.

*Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=906>*

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## **e. OMAN**

### **10. Indian Embassy Hosts ‘Invest In India’ Seminar to Promote Omani Investments into India, Muscat, 21 January 2016**

An important pillar of India’s strategic partnership with Oman is the growing mutual investment and trade. Mutual investment between the two countries has been growing and is estimated at over US\$ 7.5 billion. The first tranche of India-Oman Joint Investment Fund of US\$ 100 million has already been invested and discussions are underway to finalize the second tranche of US\$ 300 million. There is a huge un-tapped potential. The fundamentals of India’s economy remain strong and it is poised to grow at a fast pace in future. The fast-growing economy of India offers immense opportunities for foreign direct and portfolio investments from Oman.

Indian Embassy in Muscat has accorded a high priority to explore and utilize every available opportunity to enhance interactions with the Omani Business Community as well as Indian Business Community in Oman. Even though Omani business community is familiar with the

investment opportunities in India, it has been felt that there is a need to highlight the new initiatives taken by the present Government of India, aimed at making India an attractive place to do business and make investments.

With a view to reach-out to Omani and Indian Business Communities in Oman, the Embassy of India, Muscat organized an ‘Invest in India’ Seminar on 20 January 2016 at the Embassy’s Auditorium. The seminar focused on giving a broad overview of India’s economy, in light of the recent initiatives taken by the Government of India to make India more investor and business friendly. The purpose of the seminar was to inform key Omani enterprises, business houses, investments funds and banks to make them aware of the investment opportunities available in India. It was attended by around 250 Omani businessmen, representatives of Omani representatives of Government of Oman, relevant organizations from the economic, financial, trade and investment sectors, financial institutions, Chambers of Commerce, etc. Honourable Minister of Commerce and Industry, Dr. Ali Bin Masoud Al Sunaidy, was the Chief Guest. ‘Invest in India’ Seminar provided a useful opportunity to learn more about the growing salience of India as an increasingly attractive destination for Omani investments.

There were presentations at the seminar by representatives of ‘Invest India’, which is a joint venture of FICCI and Ministry of Commerce of India, and three key States of India: Gujarat, Kerala and Maharashtra. There were also presentations by the Institute of Chartered Accountant of India (ICAI), Deloitte, Earnst & Young and KPMG. Further, Mohammed Al Barwani, Chairperson, MB Group of Oman shared his experience of doing business in India.

Ambassador in his keynote address underlined that India is the best destination for Omani investment due to geographical proximity between the two countries, excellent relations between them, familiarity with India, large size of India’s market, availability of technical and skilled human resource and the high return on investments which India offers. The seminar was successful in generating interest in India’s investment potential and is expected to give a boost to mutual investment and trade.

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

<http://www.indemb-oman.org/inner.aspx?type=AllPressRelease&id=0>

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### **11. Indian Embassy hosts a session on Health Benefits of Yoga and Ayurveda as part of its celebration of the second International Day of Yoga, Muscat, 19 January 2016**

As part of various Yoga events being organized in run up to the celebration of the 2nd International Day of Yoga (21 June 2016) in Oman, Embassy of India in Muscat, in association with Art of Living, Oman, organized a Yoga Session at the Indian Embassy Lawns on Monday, 18 January 2016 at 1900 hrs.

The theme of the Session was “Work Life Balance & Health: Distress to De Stress”. Iman Mutlaq, a Yoga expert and recipient of the award “Middle East Woman of the Year 2015” was the Keynote Speaker. She demonstrated some basic Yoga Asanas and breathing exercises. It was

followed by an introduction to Ayurveda by Kaushani Desai. There was an exciting Odissi dance performance and screening of a short film on Yoga. The Session was attended by around 800 Omani and Indian nationals, both women and men. The participants enthusiastically participated in doing Yoga asanas and breathing exercises.

The Embassy had earlier associated itself, as part of a series of events being organized in the run up to the second International Yoga Day, with Art of Living in organizing a Yoga Session on mountain top in Muscat to greet the rising sun on 2 January 2016. This event was organized to spread awareness about Yoga and its benefits among the people. There was participation by 108 enthusiasts, who performed the Sun Salutation, Pranayama and meditation.

While addressing the 69th session of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 27 September 2014, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, had urged the world community to adopt 21 June as International Day of Yoga. He had stressed:

"Yoga is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between man and nature and a holistic approach to health and well-being. Yoga is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with ourselves, the world and Nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help us to deal with climate change. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day“.

Thereafter, the United Nations General Assembly had declared on 11 December 2014, through a unanimous Resolution, 21 June as International Day of Yoga. The Resolution had recognized that Yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being and that wider dissemination of information about the benefits of practicing yoga would be beneficial for the health of the world population. It had invited all Member and observer States, the organizations of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and individuals, to observe the International Day of Yoga, in an appropriate manner and in accordance with national priorities, in order to raise awareness of the benefits of practicing Yoga. The First International Day of Yoga (21 June 2015) was observed throughout the world, including in Muscat, by holding yoga sessions, talks, symposia etc.

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

<http://www.indemb-oman.org/inner.aspx?type=AllPressRelease&id=0>

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## **12. MigCall (Connecting Migrants in Distress) a life- saving mobile app for Indians in GCC, Muscat, 1 January 2016**

Indian Ambassador to Oman Indra Mani Pandey, launched a mobile app ‘MigCall’ for the benefit of Indian workers in Oman. The mobile app ‘MigCall’ is the brain child of Rejimon K, an Indian journalist based in Oman, which has been turned into reality by Jose Chacko, an Indian businessperson in Oman. Ambassador thanked them for their useful and timely initiative, which

will help Indian workers in six Gulf countries to seek assistance whenever needed, particularly in emergency situation. Ambassador commented the role of Indian community and voluntary social workers in proving succour to workers in distress.

The mobile app 'MigCall' [based on Android OS platform, file size 2.8 MB] is available at Google Playstore in various Indian languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Bengali and English.

The main feature of this mobile App is that once downloaded it can be used offline in absence of internet connection. Once downloaded, the App will automatically save 10 Helpline numbers in the call list. When a user registers his home country as India and host country as Oman, then, five main helpline numbers available in Oman will be saved in addition to five helpline numbers belonging to India. Similarly, if the user registers his home country as India and host country as UAE, then, five UAE helpline numbers will be saved in addition to five helpline numbers belonging to India.

At present 'MigCall' provides helpline numbers of all six GCC countries. In addition to helpline numbers, the App also provides helpline numbers of passport services, counselling services, local police numbers and hospital numbers. Notably it also provides a facility to send an SOS message to an emergency number, chosen by the user, in an emergency situation. This App will also provide GPS location to its nearest Indian Embassy office.

Around 200 workers, who were present at the time of launch in the Embassy Auditorium, downloaded the App. Ambassador requested them to spread the information about MigCall App to other workers in their camps.

The App can be downloaded from <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.migcall>

Social Network links:

Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/Connecting-Migrants-559032610914253/?ref=hl>

Twitter: @migrantscall

Gmail: migrantscall@gmail.com

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

<http://www.indemb-oman.org/inner.aspx?type=AllPressRelease&id=0>

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## **f. PALESTINE**

### **13. Visit of External Affairs Minister to Palestine, Ramallah, 12 January 2016**

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will visit the State of Palestine on 17 January 2016. EAM will be accompanied by Secretary (East) and other officials from MEA. This is the first visit of the EAM to Middle East region and Palestine is the first destination in the region which in itself reflects the importance India holds for Palestine in its engagement with the countries of the region. The visit also comes after the state visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015.

During her visit the EAM will meet with the Palestinian leadership and review India-Palestinian bilateral relations. India shares traditionally close relations with the State of Palestine and contributing actively through capacity building and human resource development initiatives with Palestine. The visit will also reaffirm India's continued political, diplomatic and developmental support to Palestine. The EAM will also inaugurate the Palestine Digital Learning & Innovation Centre in Ramallah. The visit will further deepen the mutual understanding at the political level and boost bilateral engagement with Palestine.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26265/Visit\\_of\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_to\\_Palestine\\_January\\_17\\_2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26265/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_to_Palestine_January_17_2016)*

#### **14. Remarks by External Affairs Minister at inauguration of India-Palestine Digital Learning and Innovation Centre, Ramallah, 17 January 2016**

President of the Al Quds University,

Dr. Imad Abu Kisk

Deputy Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Tayser Jaradat,

Members of the Faculty and the academic community,

Distinguished guests,

Salam Alekum! Namaste!

I thank the President of the Al-Quds University for his generous words for India and for me.

We value your kind words as a sign of friendship and regard of the people of Palestine for India.

I am very happy to inaugurate the India-Palestine Digital Learning and Innovation Centre today.

This is yet another example of India's commitment to help its brothers and sisters in Palestine.

Friends, I am coming here after fruitful discussions with President Abbas and Foreign Minister Riyad Al Malki on a wide range of bilateral, multilateral and regional issues.

In my meetings, I was happy to see that we shared views on issues and there is great warmth in our friendship.

We also discussed India's capacity building assistance to the people of Palestine of which this Centre is a shining example.

Let me thank Al Quds University for establishing this Centre of Excellence.

You are playing an important role in fostering India-Palestine relations through initiatives like this. I would also like to thank the University for its gesture of conferring Honorary Doctorate on President of India, Pranab Mukherjee recently.

I am also very happy to note the University will soon host an Indian Studies Chair and that it has institutionalized academic and research cooperation with the prestigious Jamia Millia Islamia University of India.

The University's efforts in strengthening India-Palestine partnership in the field of IT are also commendable.

India's strengths in IT and IT-enabled services could immensely benefit the Palestinian economy and society.

We are ready to assist Palestine in IT, as well as other sectors, as much as we can.

On the lines of this Centre at Al-Quds University, we are committed to build another Centre for Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Gaza city.

We are also developing a Techno-Park in Ramallah. President Abbas views the Techno-Park as a transformative project. I am aware that Al Quds University intends to contribute in developing the Techno-Park. I welcome your offer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is my first visit abroad in 2016 and Palestine is my first destination. This in itself reflects the importance Palestine holds for India.

The fact that my visit is taking place shortly after the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, also reflects our keen interest in further deepening the very rich and historic relationship that we have with Palestine.

India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its principled support to the Palestinian cause is rooted in our own freedom struggle.

Over the years our approach to Palestine has crystallized into a policy with three core dimensions:

solidarity with the Palestinian people;  
support to the Palestinian cause; and  
support to Palestine's nation building and capacity building efforts.

The entire Indian political leadership remains steadfastly committed to these policies.

We have also started to put in motion the framework suggested by our President for the future of our partnership during his visit. Accordingly, we are working for closer political interaction and deeper economic engagement with Palestine.

We are also looking at ways and means to further increase academic collaboration between India and Palestine.

It is also important that we further intensify our cultural contacts and people-to-people exchanges, which are the bedrock of our relationship. Over the years hundreds of Palestinian

students have studied in the best of Indian institutions. We must harness their experience in furthering our friendship.

Friends,

Let me end by reiterating that India's empathy with the Palestinian cause and our friendship with the Palestinian people remain undiluted.

This is an integral part of our foreign policy. We will also continue to support the developmental aspirations of the Palestinian people by all possible means at our disposal.

Thank you.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26271/Remarks by External Affairs Minister at inauguration of India Palestine Digital Learning and Innovation Centre January 17 2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26271/Remarks%20by%20External%20Affairs%20Minister%20at%20inauguration%20of%20India%20Palestine%20Digital%20Learning%20and%20Innovation%20Centre%20January%2017%202016)*

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## **g. QATAR**

### **15. Embassy Open House on 31 January 2016, Doha, 10 January 2016**

The monthly Open House to address urgent consular and labour issues/cases of Indian nationals in the State of Qatar was held at the Embassy on 31 January 2016. Ambassador Sanjiv Arora, Deputy Chief of Mission R.K. Singh and other officials met all the complainants, discussed their problems and assured them that the Embassy would actively follow up their cases with the authorities concerned in Government of Qatar. Arvind Patil, President of Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), an active community association working under the aegis of the Embassy for the welfare of Indian workers, also attended the Open House.

An Embassy team visited the Central Prison and Deportation Centre this week to enquire about the welfare of detainees from India. The total number of Indian nationals in the Central Prison and the Deportation Centre currently is 90 and 172, respectively.

During the current year, the Labour and Community Welfare Section of the Embassy have received a total of 369 complaints so far. The number of complaints received during 2015 was 4132.

The number of deaths registered in the Embassy in January 2016 is 19. The number of deaths registered during 2015 was 279. The same number of deaths was registered during 2014 also.

On the basis of requests received from Qatari authorities for travel documents for Indian nationals in the Deportation Centre, the Embassy has issued 22 Emergency Certificates (ECs) in January 2016. The Embassy also issued 18 air tickets to Indian nationals in distress for their return to India in January 2016.

Indian Community Benevolent Forum [ICBF] continues to help Indian workers through various welfare measures, including provision of air tickets, financial assistance and medical help. The

assistance given by the ICBF to Indian nationals during January 2016 includes four air tickets for destitute workers.

Ambassador inaugurated a free Medical Camp, organized by the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) with the support of the Embassy and in association with Indian Doctors Club and Aster Medical Centre for low-paid workers of Indian as well as other nationalities at the Aster Medical Centre premises in industrial Area in Doha on 22 January 2016. Nearly 400 workers benefited from the Medical Camp at which voluntary service was rendered by several Doctors and paramedics; Indian community organizations; students of Indian Schools and Embassy officials. Ambassador interacted with a large number of workers and volunteers. An official of National Human Rights Committee of Qatar was also present at the Camp. During the Medical Camp, webcast of the programme of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas [PBD] celebrations held in New Delhi on 9 January 2016, including the address of Sushma Swaraj, Honourable Minister of External Affairs [EAM] and EAM's Q&A Session with Indian diaspora, was screened in continuation of the PBD event organized by the Embassy in cooperation with apex community bodies in Doha on 9 January 2016. The Embassy also operated a 'Help Desk' to attend to any urgent consular and labour issues of the workers.

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

[http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press\\_release\\_detail.php?id=147&page=1](http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press_release_detail.php?id=147&page=1)

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#### **16. Republic Day Flag Hoisting, Muscat, 26 January 2016**

To celebrate the 67<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India, Flag Hoisting will be held at the Embassy of India [No. 19, Street No. 828, Wadi Al Neel, Al Hilal Area, Doha] at 800 hrs on Tuesday, 26 January 2016. Sanjiv Arora, Ambassador of India will hoist the National Flag and read the Address of Hon'ble President to the Nation. Students of Indian schools will participate in the programme. Refreshments will be served.

All Indian nationals are cordially invited to attend the Flag Hoisting function. Kindly show a photo ID at the entrance.

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

[http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press\\_release\\_detail.php?id=144&page=1](http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press_release_detail.php?id=144&page=1)

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#### **17. Visit of Indian Coast Guard Ship SANKALP to Qatar during celebrations of India's 67th Republic Day, Doha, 29 January 2016**

In the framework of the deep-rooted friendly ties and multi-faceted and growing cooperation between India and the State of Qatar, Indian Coast Guard Ship ICGS Sankalp will be visiting Doha Port from 24-28 January 2016 in conjunction with the celebrations of India's 67th Republic Day (26 January 2016). Doha is the first port of call by ICGS Sankalp during her upcoming overseas deployment to the Gulf region covering Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman.

ICGS Sankalp, the fifth Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessel (AOPV) of the Indian Coast Guard, was indigenously designed and built by M/s Goa Shipyard Limited and commissioned on 20 May 2008. Sankalp, meaning Determination, is a projection of Indian Coast Guard's will and motivation to strive for excellence.

ICGS Sankalp has 16 officers and 97 other personnel under the Command of Deputy Inspector General Mukul Garg. The ship is based at Mumbai, under the administrative and operational command of Coast Guard Regional Commander (West), Mumbai.

The 105 meters AOPV is equipped with state of the art navigational and communication sensors and other equipment and is capable of embarking Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and Chetak helicopters. At economical speed, she has an endurance of 6500 nautical miles and can stay at sea for 25 days without any replenishment, thus sailing up to her motto – 'Extending the Horizon'. The sustenance and reach, coupled with the latest and modern equipment and systems, provides her the capability to perform the role of a command platform and accomplish all Coast Guard charter of duties.

ICGS Sankalp has been extensively deployed on the Western seaboard from Gujarat to Kerala coast, International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) patrol and surveillance off Lakshadweep and Minicoy (L & M) group of islands. The ship has also visited many foreign ports on goodwill visits during overseas deployments, which include a maiden voyage by any Coast Guard vessel to Australia.

The visit of ICGS Sankalp is the third visit by an Indian Coast Guard Ship to Qatar in the last three years; ICGS Samudra Prahari and ICGS Vijit had made friendly voyages to Doha port in February 2013 and December 2014 respectively. The visit of ICGS Sankalp during the celebrations of India's 67th Republic Day will further strengthen the time-tested friendship between India and Qatar and defence cooperation between the two countries.

*Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,*

[http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press\\_release\\_detail.php?id=145&page=1](http://www.indianembassyqatar.gov.in/pages/press_release_detail.php?id=145&page=1)

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## **h. SAUDI ARABIA**

### **18. India Pavilion Inaugurated At 2016 Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Centre, Riyadh, 18 January 2016**

Hemant H. Kotalwar, Charge d'Affaires inaugurated the India Pavilion at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Trade Exhibition for Plastics, Petrochemicals, Printing and Packaging Products & Technologies being held at Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Centre (RICEC) from 18-21 January 2016.

Over 40 prominent Indian companies from plastics and allied industries sector are participating in this prestigious event under an exclusive 'India Pavilion' showcasing India's strength and expertise in manufacturing plastic products of world class quality, the latest machinery and the

technological advancement made by it in this sector. The India pavilion is also exhibiting a wide range of household and industrial plastic products, medical devices and related machinery.

The Indian plastic industry - comprising of over 30,000 processing units, 2,000 exporters and providing employment to over four million people - is one of the largest industries in the country. It produces plastic raw materials as well as semi-finished and finished goods. The local availability of raw materials, excellent infrastructure, huge potential in terms of capacity, and availability of skilled and un-skilled labour are some of the major strengths of Indian plastic industry. Exporting a wide range of quality plastic items and offering customized products in line with the need of the end users, India has become one of the most promising exporters in this plastic and allied industries sector. Indian exports from this industry amounted to nearly US\$ 9 billion in 2014-15. The plastic industry in India offers tremendous scope for investment especially under Make in India initiative.

Embassy of India in Riyadh, in coordination with the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), is organizing a B2B interactive session for the participating Indian companies at RCCI premises on 19 January where businesspeople from both the sides would interact with each other for mutually beneficial opportunities of collaborations and enhancing trade in this sector.

India and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enjoy excellent economic and commercial relations. Today, the Kingdom is India's 4<sup>th</sup> largest trade partner with an annual bilateral trade of around US\$ 40 billion.

*Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,*

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

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**19. Hemant Kotalwar, will be hoisting the National Flag on Tuesday, 26 January 2016, Riyadh, 18 January 2016**

On the occasion of the 67<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India, Charge d' Affaires Hemant Kotalwar, will be hoisting the National Flag on Tuesday, 26 January 2016 at 0900 hrs, at the Indian Embassy.

All members of Indian community in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and friends of India are cordially invited.

*Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,*

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

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**20. The 67<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India was celebrated today in the Embassy of India, Riyadh, 26 January 2016**

The 67<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India was celebrated today in the Embassy of India, Riyadh with great joy and enthusiasm. Charge d' Affaires Hemant Kotalwar hoisted the Indian National Flag followed by rendition of National Anthem and patriotic songs by the students of the International Indian Public School in Riyadh. Students of International Indian School, Riyadh also presented several colourful dance performances on the patriotic songs. Charge d' Affaires Hemant

Kotalwar read out the President's Message to the gathering of over 500 members of Indian community and officials of the Mission.

*Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,*

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

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## **i. SYRIA**

### **21. Syrian Foreign Minister meets India's External Affairs Minister, New Delhi, 13 January 2016**

Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid al-Moallem discussed on Tuesday with his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj means to enhance relations between Syria and India, mainly in relation to electricity, petroleum, agriculture, technical and academic cooperation. Both sides agreed to remove all obstacles standing in the way of boosting bilateral cooperation and work to hold the Syrian-Indian joint committee meeting as soon as possible.

As he briefed the Indian Minister on the situation in the region and the crisis in the country, al-Moallem affirmed that Syria is going ahead with its efforts to combat terrorism and find a political solution to its crisis, and that it is cooperating with the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to that effect.

He held the supporters of terrorism, mainly Saudi Arabia and Turkey, responsible for prolonging the crisis, saying "a great deal of the crisis will end if Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other terrorism backers respected the UN Security Council relevant resolutions and ceased their support to terrorism."

Al-Moallem asserted that it is the right of the Syrian people alone to determine their future.

"Syria will not let the terrorists who failed to achieve their goals by means of force to gain them through the political talks," he said.

For her part, the Indian Foreign Minister renewed India's support to Syria for combating terrorism, expressing welcome of the Russian-Syrian coordination in this field.

Swaraj also voiced her country's support to the Syrian government's efforts on both the political track and that of combating ISIS and other terrorist organizations.

Al-Moallem arrived in India on a 4-day visit to hold talks with Indian officials about the current situation in the region and means of enhancing bilateral relations between New Delhi and Damascus.

Later, al-Moallem affirmed that the Syrian government is determined to know the names of opposition delegation that would be negotiated in Geneva before going there late this month.

"We have shown our readiness to attend Geneva meetings on the Syrian-Syrian dialogue... the UN Envoy to Syria di Mistura was satisfied with the outcomes of his visit to Damascus and there

is a need to know the names of opposition figures as our delegation would not go to hold talks with ghosts,” al-Moallem told SANA correspondent in New Delhi.

He added “during my meetings in India, I heard a support for the Syrian stance, government and President Bashar al-Assad,” affirming that India can play an important and active role in combating terrorism and the track of political solution to the crisis. “I am very happy with the results of constructive, promising talks with Indian Foreign Minister as both countries took the decision to boost relations and deepen them in all sectors, particularly in oil, gas, electricity, industry and agriculture,” al-Moallem said.

He added that the Indian Foreign Minister showed her support to the Syrian efforts in combating terrorism and the political track and “we proposed holding a security cooperation to protect the two countries, security and stability in the world.”

*Source: Embassy of India, Damascus, <http://eoi.gov.in/damascus/?4612?000>*

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## **22. Al-Moallem discusses with India's National Security Adviser counter-terrorism, means of solving crisis in Syria, New Delhi, 11 January 2016**

Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid al-Moallem affirmed Syria’s readiness to cooperate with India against terrorism in a way that serves the interests of the two countries, international peace and security amid the mounting danger posed by terrorism in all countries.

Al-Moallem was speaking at a meeting with India’s National Security Adviser Ajit Doval as talks dealt with the political situation in the Middle East and the efforts exerted to combat terrorism and means of finding a political solution to the crisis in Syria as well as enhancing bilateral relations.

He called for forcing countries which support terrorism to stop backing it because this support represents a serious plague which poses a threat to the stability and security of the world and reveals the non- respect of these countries for UN Security Council’s relevant resolutions.

For his part, Doval affirmed his country’s interest in combating terrorism and realizing a political solution to the crisis in Syria, saying that terrorism poses a threat to the two countries, the region and the entire world.

Al-Moallem arrived in India on a 4-day visit to hold talks with Indian officials about the current situation in the region, and means of enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries.

*Source: Embassy of India, Damascus, <http://eoi.gov.in/damascus/?4607?000>*

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## **j. TURKEY**

### **23. India condemns suicide attack in Istanbul, New Delhi, 13 January 2016**

The Government of India strongly condemns the suicide attack that occurred in Istanbul yesterday. India unequivocally opposes terrorism in all its forms and expresses solidarity with

the Government and the people of Turkey. We extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families and wish a speedy recovery to those injured in this despicable act.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26266/India condemns suicide attack in Istanbul January 13 2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26266/India%20condemns%20suicide%20attack%20in%20Istanbul%20January%2013%202016)*

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## **MULTILATERAL**

### **24. Remarks by Secretary (East) at 2nd Annual West Asia Conference - India's Links with West Asia: Policy, Prospects and Challenges, New Delhi, 22 January 2016**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to be here amidst this august audience to discuss issues of topical importance for all of us. I would like to thank IDSA for organizing the Second Annual Conference on West Asia, the timing of which is apt from the regional perspective and will help us better appreciate the complex nuances of the evolving developments in a cohesive manner. The year just gone by had witnessed enhanced escalations of tensions with sectarian overtones. We also had extensive engagements with the region, with various high level visits. To recap, our Rashtrapatiji concluded a successful State visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan in October 2015, Prime Minister Modi was on official visit to the United Arab Emirate (UAE) in August 2015 and the External Affairs Minister concluded her visits to Egypt in August 2015 and to Palestine and Israel this week. In a few days from now, she heads for the First India Arab League Ministerial meeting to be held in Manama. India also received high level dignitaries from the region throughout the year – Foreign Minister of UAE visited us in September 2015, Foreign Minister of Iran in August 2015 and we ended the year with the 18th India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting last month. India held summit level talks with the North African countries as a part of its larger engagement with the whole of Africa during the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit in October 2015. We have continued this engagement more extensively in the New Year with the incoming visit of the Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. This reflects the continuation in the trend of India's continued strategic engagement with this vital region.

India shares deep historical, cultural and civilizational links with West Asia. India's civilizational links to this region can be traced to the very beginning of the recorded history. There is a continuum of interactions between the two sides from Indus/Dilmun civilization in ancient time to the shared belief in anti-colonialism in modern times. In the second half of 20th century, these ties were further reinforced as the two emerged from their colonial part and started weaving new realities, building new bridges of understanding and synergies to deal with the common developmental problem and new challenges of 21st century. Security through dialogue and consultation forms the basic framework of the shared belief in our commitment to achieve, preserve and enhance international peace and security. For India, West Asia is part of our extended neighbourhood and as such continued peace and stability in the region is in our strategic interest.

To underscore the depth of our multidimensional engagement with West Asia, the region is home to more than seven million Indians, who contribute around US\$ 40 billion in remittances annually. Our economic and commercial engagement with the region is around US\$ 186 billion per annum (2013-14), making it the largest trading regional block. The region is a source for more than 60 per cent of our oil and gas requirement, critical for our energy security. The Maghreb region is a major source of phosphate and other fertilizers, a significant factor in our food security. The sizable Sovereign Wealth Funds of Gulf countries can offer significant platform for operations of Indian companies, particularly in infrastructure, important for our socio-economic development and other national initiatives like 'Make in India' 'Digital India' 'Smart Cities', etc. There is an increased air connectivity and tourism prospects between the two sides. Industry figure illustrate that there are 700 flights a week between India and UAE. Air connectivity is robust and vibrant, increasing every month. India has also been participating in important UN Peace Keeping Missions in the region especially in Lebanon, Syria and South Sudan.

After almost five years of 'Arab Spring' in the region, the earlier exaggerated expectations of progress towards democracy have turned out to be misplaced. On the whole, developments over the last few years have exacerbated the regional fault lines, accentuated regional rivalries with competing ideologies and skewed the regional balance of power. The year has begun with an escalation of rivalry in the Gulf region with Saudi Arabia and Iran severing diplomatic ties. It has further sharpened sectarian divide with a few Gulf monarchies openly taking sides in the conflict. The armed conflict continues unabated in Syria with mounting refugee and humanitarian crisis. Despite calls by major global powers to bring peace to this war torn country, the developments on the ground do not appear promising. The Islamic State in Iraq and ash Sham (ISIS) continues to control territories in Iraq, Syria and Northern Africa, despite global efforts to end their control. The recent horrific attacks on civilian targets in Paris and Beirut are testament to the global menace of the organizations. The fighting continues in Yemen with no signs of resolution on the horizon. Despite UN led efforts to bring a political resolution to the Libyan crisis, the conflict continues with intensified militia warfare between Islamists and pro-government forces in Tripoli, Benghazi and other parts of the country. ISIS gaining foothold in Sirte has further made the situation complicated. The easy mobility of extremists and rising number of foreign jihadis in the region has increased fears of the possibility of spread of radicalism in the home countries of foreign fighters. These challenges continue to cast fear on the peace and security of the region and have the potential of spill over to other parts of the world.

India's policy in the region remains rooted in our traditional long-standing ties with the region and is non-prescriptive and non-judgmental. Despite ever changing political environment, our bilateral relations with virtually all countries of the region have been progressing structurally and we have managed to insulate our core interests from the negative fall-out of regional developments. India acknowledges that the political future discourse taking into account popular

aspirations in the countries has to be determined from within and without any external interference or influence. While India is not in the business of exporting democracy, promotion of democratic values may be in alignment with India's belief in these principles. This requires tactful approach in pursuing our interests and avoiding negative fallout of conflict in our own country.

On the policy option front, there are multiple challenges for India. We fully acknowledge that the complex regional situation requires a multi- pronged approach and hence our efforts to reach out to a whole cross-section of society, including think tanks, universities, academics and media towards evolving a consolidated policy formulation. I will now highlight briefly some key elements of our policy options:

i. It needs to be understood that "old order neutrality" is not construed as absence of decision-making or political passivity. In fact, we are more engaged in the region than in the past. India has been asked to play more active role in the Middle East but we need to assess this based on our strategic leverages and realistic consideration of our strengths and limitations. We would not wish to create parallel mechanisms that will affect our bilateral relations.

ii. India remains cautious that our approach towards the region should not be misconstrued as being partisan or sectarian, as India has stayed out of any regional alliance based on sectarian or other similar considerations. We need to be sensitive to the perceptions of our own religious and ethnic mix in the population. At the same time, given the sectarian volatility in the region, we should remain prepared for any fundamental/sectarian backlash emanating from the region.

iii. India is strengthening its high-level G2G contacts with all the countries in West Asia keeping in view our larger diaspora, energy and security interests in the region. There have been high-level state/official visits to and from the key countries of the region in the recent past, as I have mentioned in the beginning of my remarks. This regular exchange of high-level visits has further cemented our bilateral relationships and helped the two sides to better appreciate and understand mutual concerns.

iv. The Government is committed to protect the interests of Indian expatriates in the Gulf and Middle East countries. These steps include, inter alia, working closely with the local authorities and employers, putting in place requisite institutional mechanisms, community outreach, initiation of Indian Community Welfare Funds and rendering regular consular assistance. We have made concerted efforts to enter into bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with all the major destination countries to enlist the commitment of the host governments to ensure better protection and welfare of Indian emigrants. There are MoUs with UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. An agreement on labour cooperation for domestic workers recruitment was signed with Saudi Arabia.

v. The recent set of events involving escalation of tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the ensuing diplomatic brinkmanship being carried out by the allies of each side, represents a new high in the escalation of regional tensions, which does not augur well for the region as a whole. It requires careful monitoring and continuous assessment of the situation for preserving our vital stakes and interests while avoiding the risk of entanglement.

vi. India remains strongly committed to a stable, peaceful and democratic Yemen, which is in the interest of global and regional peace and security. India has urged all concerned parties in the conflict to resolve their differences amicably and abide by the relevant UN resolution, the terms of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. India had successfully carried out the evacuation of 4,741 Indian nationals as well as 1,947 foreign citizens from 48 countries through 'Operation Rahat' which I was personally associated with over six weeks. This earned a lot of goodwill for India among the comity of nations.

vii. We have noted with satisfaction that the situation is slowly stabilizing in Egypt. There is a commitment on the part of its leadership for political stabilization and economic revival. We are encouraged at the implementation of political transitional roadmap with the adoption of new Constitution, conduct of Presidential elections and recent conclusion of Parliamentary elections. The commitment of its political leadership to economic reforms and investment friendly policies are commendable and have already started showing early signs of revival.

viii. India is deeply concerned at the ongoing violence in Syria and the loss of human lives. India supports a UN-backed, Syrian-led comprehensive political settlement taking into account the aspirations of the Syrian people in Syria. We firmly believe that there can be no military solution to the crisis. India participated in Geneva-II and has contributed financially towards humanitarian assistance and destruction of chemical weapons. We support the efforts of UN Special Envoy for Syria in the peaceful resolution of the conflict. We are also providing humanitarian and relief assistance to Syrians in distress.

ix. India has consistent policy on Israel-Palestine. India's policy is that of extending strong support to the Palestinian cause, while maintaining good relations with Israel. India supports a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue, leading to a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant UNSC Resolutions. We have called on both sides to resume the stalled peace process. In fact, Palestine was the first destination of EAM's visit to the West Asia region, reflecting its importance in India's engagement with the region. On his regional tour to Jordan, Palestine and Israel a few months back, Rashtrapatiji articulated India's support for Palestine in all these countries. Apart from strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international, regional

and bilateral levels, India has been contributing budgetary, economic and developmental assistance to Palestine.

x. We have expressed our firm support to Iraq in its fight against international terrorism and efforts to preserve its unity and territorial integrity. We are hopeful that an inclusive political arrangement will help easing the conflict. In view of the security situation, the government has assisted over 7,000 Indians in returning from Iraq. However, the safety of the 39 Indian nationals in captivity remains a matter of foremost concern, and the government is making all efforts for their release.

xi. Despite UN led efforts to bring a political solution to the Libyan crisis, the conflict continues in a ‘civil war’ like situation, with intensified militia warfare between Islamists and pro-government forces in Tripoli, Benghazi and other parts of the country since July 2014. The government initiated a detailed assistance plan for the safe exit of the Indian nationals trapped in the conflict. So far, of the 6,500 Indians at the time of the commencement of the conflict, around 3,600 have been evacuated. The remaining Indians, despite persistent Embassy Advisories, have refused to leave for economic reasons. Recently, five Indians were detained by militia in Sirte. While the release of two of them was secured promptly, three still remain in captivity. The Government is making all efforts to secure their release and is in touch with various stakeholders.

xii. As for the external players, India believes that US, despite its pivot towards Asia-Pacific region, remains an important player for regional stability (i.e. fight against ISIS, security of Israel). Other countries have attempted to re-engage and may have gained in appeal as a counterweight to the West in the region. The Russian entry in Syria militarily, has boosted prospects of the Regime in Damascus and focused on war against ISIS.

xiii. India has welcomed the successful conclusion of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue called as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as it addresses a contentious issue through peaceful negotiations and mutual agreement. The announcement of 14 July also underlines the success of diplomacy and dialogue, which India has always supported. We are optimistic that the agreement would be implemented in good faith and would lead to a permanent resolution of this long standing issue. Further, we underscore the important role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the agreement’s implementation and the rebuilding of international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear activities.

xiv. ISIS is a new type of virulent terrorist manifestation with global ramifications. India believes that the only solution to this threat can be through a larger political approach requiring a consolidated, rather than fragmented perspective, including intelligence sharing; counter-terrorism; cyber-space cooperation for containment of outbound flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria; developing a legal framework for fighting terrorism at national and international level (including early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism);

tracking of financial flows; and humanitarian assistance. So far, the efforts of ISIS to gain recruits from India has met with limited success largely owing to our own pluralist society and inclusive democratic experience. There are reported to be a small number of Indian jihadi fighters in Iraqi-Syrian war zones, but the Government is taking measures to control this through immigration controls, intelligence sharing, and liaison with state Governments.

xv. In view of the situation in the region, new areas of defence and security cooperation have emerged which include counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, piracy, money laundering, small arms smuggling, financing terror activities, etc. Specific measures for strengthening institutional security mechanisms can include: greater naval presence in the region; regular participation in Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings; stronger regional cooperation through naval assets in the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea for protection of maritime trade.

xvi. India believes that political instability can be offset through greater economic engagement with the region. Such linkages could bring together stakeholders with shared interests in preservation of peace. While India's regional trade volumes have increased, considerable untapped potential remains.

xvii. The Indian diaspora in the region has become the most preferred work force due to their hard working nature and sense of dedication and commitment. Their contribution in the development of their host countries has earned tremendous goodwill for India. It has also helped in furthering our bilateral relations with these countries.

xviii. We remain committed to further our mutually beneficial political, economic and security ties with North African countries including Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan. New areas of economic cooperation include pharmaceuticals, automobiles, infrastructure, power and renewable energy.

xix. We shall continue our cooperation with Somalia on anti-piracy and hostage issue. Importantly, the last of the remaining seven Indian seafarers in captivity in Somalia were released in October 2014, after four years in captivity.

xx. We have laid out a strong foundation for our relationship collectively with the Arab League, through the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation and an Executive Programme in December 2013, covering the fields of political consultations, trade and investments, media and culture. We are working for the 1st India-Arab League Ministerial Meeting in the coming days in Manama where the two sides would renew the Executive Programme for the year 2016-17 and also explore ways and means to strengthen our multifaceted relationship.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that India attaches high priority to its political, economic, and security relations with the countries of the West Asia region. I remain optimistic that our bilateral relations with the countries in West Asia are poised to grow, given the enormous

potential on both sides. However, the broader context in which we seek to pursue our vital interests in West Asia is fraught and unpredictable making our task so much more challenging and daunting.

I look forward to hearing from the learned speakers on this pertinent topic and gain new insights on regional perspective.

Thank you!

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26285/Remarks by Secretary East at 2nd Annual West Asia Conference Indias Links with West Asia Policy Prospects and Challenges](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26285/Remarks%20by%20Secretary%20East%20at%202nd%20Annual%20West%20Asia%20Conference%20Indias%20Links%20with%20West%20Asia%20Policy%20Prospects%20and%20Challenges)*

**25. Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the First Ministerial Meeting of Arab-India Cooperation Forum, Manama, 24 January 2016**

H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Mohammad Al Khalifa, Foreign Minister of Kingdom of Bahrain,

H.E. Dr. Nabil El Araby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

Fellow Foreign Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in Manama for the First Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum. First of all, I wish to express my gratitude to our host H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Mohammad Al Khalifa, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting and the gracious hospitality extended to me and the members of my delegation. I also wish to thank my fellow Foreign Ministers and the League of Arab States for joining me in taking our relations to a new high.

Our meeting here today represents a real turning point in our ties with the Arab world. Today we seek to give new shape, direction and energy to our centuries old relations. Today we have the opportunity of translating the vision of India-Arab solidarity into concrete avenues of cooperation.

Excellencies,

From time immemorial, our two civilizations have been at the forefront of human progress. From the Nile Valley to Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, the cradles of our common humanity sprung forth at the same time. And over the year our lands have been witness to momentous transformations that have shaped the world today. And our seas have given passage to millennia of contacts - our traders, monks and scholars have passed each other light when much of the rest of the world was in darkness.

So, when we gather today across this table we pay homage to our ancestors, and to their fortitude and courage. The seasonal winds of the Arabian sea and the winding caravans of the desert and

the plain have been witness to the riches that we shared. Here on the coast of the Gulf, in Bahrain, much before our nations were formed, your merchants returned with the spices and ornaments of the East, and our traders sought new markets and friendships.

And so, from the rock edicts of Emperor Ashoka found in present day Sharjah, to Indian artefacts on the Red Sea, to forgotten Arab and Indian traders who sailed to lands they had never seen before, not knowing whether they would ever return, the centuries of our interaction have instilled within us a profound respect for each other.

And we see this in our art and our architecture, our music and our food, in the literature that we write and the poetry that we recite. We find this all around us, in the pillared halls of the Diwan-e-Am in the Red Fort in Delhi, to the lyrical strains of the classical Hindustani Gharanas, to the tehzeeb or etiquette of our modes of interaction.

So I am not surprised when I know that the words for crop seasons in India – kharif and rabi – are derived from Arabic roots; or that the lotus is the sacred symbol of regeneration in India and Egypt; or that many distinguished families in the Arab world bear the title al-Hindi, or that Hind itself is a common name amongst women in the Arab world.

In the past millennium, it has been our intertwined histories that have pushed forward the boundaries of science and technology, of knowledge and human progress. The early Islamic traveller Alberuni wrote of Indian Arab interactions and our mutual philosophical journeys, and it was the Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta who rose to high stature in the Courts of Delhi, even when the Caliphate of Baghdad, sponsored the translation of Indian works in subjects ranging from medicine to mathematics, agriculture and astronomy. So today is an occasion for us to celebrate our ancient bonds and deepen our modern partnership.

Fellow Foreign Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ever since our Government assumed office in May 2014, we have paid special attention to our ties with the Arab world. We have also had extensive engagements, with various high level visits. In fact, our very first incoming visitor was the Foreign Minister of Oman in June 2014. And I started 2016 with a visit to Palestine, which was a follow up to the very successful visit of our President to Palestine in October 2015. Prime Minister Modi made a path-breaking visit to the UAE in August 2015. This was the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to UAE after 34 years.

We received the Emir of Qatar in March last year. Apart from Palestine, I have also made bilateral visits to Oman, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt. I have also benefited immensely from the two deliberations we held with the Foreign Ministers of GCC countries on the sidelines of the UNGA. We had the great honour of receiving Arab leaders from Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia during the 3rd India Africa Forum

Summit held in New Delhi three months ago. And today's meeting reflects India's continued strategic engagement with the Arab world.

Just as today marks a turning point for India-Arab relations, we are also at a major turning point in history when the forces of terrorism and violent extremism are seeking to destabilize societies and inflict incalculable damage to our cities, our people and our very social fabric. For so long, the ties that bind India and the Arab world have provided prosperity, enhanced wisdom and enriched our civilizations. It is therefore imperative more than ever before that we stand together and recognize the danger to our world for what it is.

Many centuries ago, a young Indian ruler, in his quest for glory, laid waste to all the lands that he saw in pursuit of his Empire. On the battlefields of Kalinga, in Eastern India, after yet another victory, he witnessed the suffering of thousands of the dying and the maimed, and through it the futility of war, and was fundamentally transformed. The young Emperor Ashoka was to become one of India's most unique rulers, propagating non-violence, respect for all religions, the welfare of ordinary subjects, and the protection and care of animals.

And so it has been that from the days of Mahavira and Buddha, India has sought liberty – whether political, personal or spiritual – through the power of non-violence. It is the spirit that animated the Mahatma in his quest for independence, and it is this spirit that has preserved India's pluralistic ethos and democratic values despite numerous challenges.

As the spectre of terrorism and religious hatred raises its ugly head across the world, particularly in those cherished cities of history, it is time once again to reach back in time and redeem the essence of our civilizational spirit. We must pledge to halt the physical violence that has spread like a plague. But we must recognize that we cannot do so without equally addressing the violence in our minds, a poison that has been spread by terror groups, harnessing the power of modern technology and social media platforms to infect our youth – those ideologies and beliefs that regard one's own brother as a stranger, one's own mother as accursed. We should not underestimate the power of this illusion, clothed in a false interpretation of faith.

Equally, we must delink religion from terror. The only distinction is between those who believe in humanity and those who do not. Terrorists use religion, but inflict harm on people of all faiths. Those who believe that silent sponsorship of such terrorist groups can bring rewards must realize that they have their own agenda; they are adept at using the benefactor more effectively than the sponsor has used them.

None of us can afford to ignore the dangers of radicalization and indoctrination. We do so at our own peril, and that is why I believe India's model of unity in diversity offers an example for the world. We in India have citizens who belong to every existing faith. Our Constitution is committed to the fundamental principle of faith-equality: the equality of all faiths not just before the law but also in daily behaviour. In every corner of my country, the music of the azaan

welcomes the dawn, followed by the chime of a Hanuman temple's bells, followed by the melody of the Guru Granth Sahib being recited by priests in a gurdwara, followed by the peal of church bells every Sunday.

This philosophy is not just a construct of our Constitution, adopted in 1950; it is the essence of our ancient belief that the world is family. Faith harmony is the message of the Holy Quran as well. I will quote only two verses: *La ikra fi al deen* [Let there be no compulsion in religion] and *La qum deen o qum wa li ya deen* [Your faith for you, and my faith for me].

We have seen repeatedly that terrorism does not respect national borders. It seeks to subvert societies through its pernicious doctrine of a clash of civilizations. The only antidote to this violent philosophy is the path of peace, tolerance and harmony, a path that was illustrated centuries ago by Buddha and Mahavira and which was taken into the modern age by the Father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi. As he famously said, 'an eye for an eye ends up making the whole world blind.'

But not only do we need to condemn all acts of terrorism but we need to join hands regionally and globally to remove the scourge of terrorism completely. In this context, the passage of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations will remove a significant lacuna in the global community's fight against this menace. We, who represent the stable and civilized world, must meet the challenge, or we risk destroying the most precious inheritance of our forefathers.

Excellencies,

Beyond facing the common challenge of terrorism, India-Arab ties now cover a whole host of sectors. We have substantial common interests in the fields of trade and investment, energy and security, culture and Diaspora. Today the Arab world is collectively India's largest trading partner with bilateral trade crossing US\$ 180 billion. We source 60 percent of our oil and gas requirements from West Asia, making this region a pillar of our energy security. The Maghreb region is a major source of phosphates and other fertilizers which contributes significantly towards our food security. The new and emerging areas of our cooperation include agricultural research, dry land farming, irrigation and environmental protection. In all of these we would be happy to share our experience with our Arab partners.

Over the last six decades India has made rapid strides in economic development which has placed us at the forefront of the global revolution in information technology, pharmaceuticals, and cutting edge research in the areas of nanotechnology and biotechnology. We are proud of our institutes of excellence which have made India into a knowledge and talent hub. We have always been ready to share our expertise in human resource development with our fellow partners on the road to development. We are even ready to provide tailor made courses to LAS member

countries under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and promote academic exchanges.

Similarly, we stand ready to partner all of you in areas such as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), automobiles and Small and Medium Enterprises, biotechnology and space. At a time of global economic slowdown, India has emerged as a bright spot for the world economy. We are today the fastest growing major economy in the world. Our growth, I believe, offers significant opportunities for our LAS partners. The Sovereign Wealth Funds of Gulf countries can be profitably employed in India's burgeoning infrastructure sector. The next India – Arab Partnership Conference in Oman this year can be a real game changer in terms of deepening our economic partnership.

Excellencies,

Beyond Government to Government interactions, the bedrock of our relationship is provided by people to people ties. Over seven million Indians reside in this region and there are 700 flights a week between India and UAE alone! A vast number of people in the Arab world enjoy our films, listen to our music and relish our cuisine. I am confident that the 3rd India-Arab Cultural Festival to be held in India this year will further promote our cultural contacts and cooperation. We also look forward to closer engagement between our civil society and community organizations.

Excellencies,

India and the Arab world face common challenges and have similar opportunities in their quest for peace, prosperity and stability. Today, through the Manama Declaration and the Executive Program for 2016-17, we have taken an important step towards addressing those challenges and utilizing those opportunities.

The famous Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawky, a friend of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, once remarked that the revolution of souls severs our chains, and that the revolution of minds removes mountains. Through the friendship of our civilizations, through the partnership of our nations, I am confident that we can move mountains in our common quest for a safer and more prosperous world.

Thank you.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26289/Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the First Ministerial Meeting of ArabIndia Cooperation Forum January 24 2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26289/Remarks%20by%20External%20Affairs%20Minister%20at%20the%20First%20Ministerial%20Meeting%20of%20ArabIndia%20Cooperation%20Forum%20January%2024%202016)*

## **26. Manama Declaration of the First Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum, Manama, 24 January 2016**

The first Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum took place in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, on 24 January 2016, with the participation of Foreign Ministers of Arab States, Minister of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

The two sides recalled the historic and civilizational ties that exist between the Arab World and India and underlined the contribution of the commercial and cultural ties in binding the two sides together. They hailed the strong foundation, great potential and wide-ranging prospects for the Arab-Indian Co-operation and the role this Forum can play to advance Arab–India relations towards capacious horizons. They confirmed their commitment to maintain international peace and security and to achieve sustainable development and expressed their commitment to work together to tackle political and economic challenges through closer consultation, cooperation and coordination in various fields.

The two sides discussed regional and global issues of mutual concern, including the Palestinian issue, developments in the Arab region and in South Asia, as well as counterterrorism, Security Council reforms, and nuclear disarmament. They stressed the importance of cooperation between them in order to enhance confidence among regional countries and resolving conflicts, thereby bringing about peace and stability in the region and have reached the following understandings:

**Regional Issues:**

Affirming the need to achieve a comprehensive and permanent solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the international legitimacy resolutions, especially UN Security Council resolutions 242 of 1976 and 338 of 1973, the relevant UN resolutions, Madrid Peace conference of 1991 and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative in Beirut, in implementation of the two-state principle on the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestine State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living peace side by side with the State of Israel on the 1967 borders, within secure and recognized boundaries. Seeking a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian refugees' cause in accordance with resolution 194 of the UN General Assembly and the Arab Peace Initiative, in a way that preserves security, stability and peace of all the countries in the region.

Calling on Israel to end its occupation of the Palestinian "Arab" territories it seized in 1967 and dismantle all the settlements built there including the settlements erected in the occupied East Jerusalem on the basis that, according to the international Law, they are illegal and illegitimate. Calling for the holding of an international conference for peace in the Middle East and rejecting the construction of the Separation Wall built inside the Palestinian territories, on the basis of the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2004. Calling on Israel to release all the Palestinian and Arab prisoners and detainees from its jails, halt the aggressions and crimes being committed by the Israeli settlers against the civilian Palestinians, work on providing International Protection for the Palestinian people and put an end to all the procedures that aim to alter the legal status of East Jerusalem with the aim of changing its nature, identity and Arab culture along with the attempts to change the existing historical status of the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque, which all represent clear violations of the International Law, relevant UN resolutions, the four Geneva conventions. Valuing the significant role being played by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Holy city of Jerusalem and its caretaking role in the holy

sites as specified in the historic agreement signed between His Majesty King Abdullah II, the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and His Excellency Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian State, which affirms the Hashemite care for the holy sites in the holy Jerusalem. Hailing the important role undertaken by Mohammed VI, the King of the Kingdom of Morocco, in his capacity as the President of the Quds Committee and affirming the important role of the Bait Al-Mal in providing assistance to the Palestinian people.

Welcoming the outcome of the Cairo Conference on reconstruction of Gaza, held in October 2014, calling on the donor countries to live up to their pledges and calling for lifting the Israel-imposed siege on the Gaza Strip. In this context, the Arab side values the Indian position in support of the Palestinian cause, the financial support it pledged to offer during Cairo Conference in 2014, the role it plays in the development and capacity building the occupied Palestinian territories and its contribution in the UNRWA budget to help it carry out its duties towards the Palestinian refugees. Welcoming Kuwait's hosting of an international conference on Palestinian children's sufferings in the third quarter of 2016 amid the infringement of the Child Right Agreement by Israel. The Arab side appreciated the first state visit of the President of India to Palestine and his stay as first Head of State in Ramallah, interactions between Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine at New York, visit of Indian External Affairs Minister to Palestine and Indian contribution towards Palestinian budgetary support and assistance in various capacity building and human resource development projects.

The sides expressed deep concern regarding the situation in Syria and affirming the need to preserve the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and stability of Syria and the importance to reach a political solution to the crisis that preserves the lives of Syrians and leads to cessation of hostilities and the establishment of a transitional governing body in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, the Vienna Statements of October and November 2015 issued by the International Syrian Support Group and the recently passed UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015). They affirmed their support for the efforts made by UN Secretary General and his Special Envoy. Underscoring the UNSCR 2209 (2015) that condemned the use of toxic gas in Syria and resolution 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014) on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria, called upon the Security Council for the full implementation of the two resolutions. The two sides urged the international community and all governments and international bodies and organizations of the United Nations and its Member States to provide support and assistance to Arab neighbouring countries of Syria: Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt, in addition to Sudan for hosting Syrian refugees. They commended in this context, the role of H.H. Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah the Emir of Kuwait, for hosting the First, Second and Third International Donors' Conference held in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and the participation of Kuwait in preparation for convening the Fourth Conference in 2016.

They reaffirmed their commitment to the national unity, sovereignty, independence, stability and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Calling for the full implementation of all relevant UNSC

resolutions, and calling upon Israel to withdraw from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories and to immediately end all its violations of the Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air. Emphasizing the importance of supporting Lebanon, especially the Lebanese army in confronting the attacks carried out by terrorist groups.

The sides affirming respect to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Iraq and non-interference in its internal affairs and rejecting infringement of such principles, strongly condemned crimes committed by all terrorist organizations, especially those committed by ISIS terrorist organization against all Iraqi people. They urged the international community to lend to the Iraqi government support on its war against terrorism and to implement International Resolutions issued in this regard and adherence to them.

Both the sides reaffirmed their commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya, in accordance to the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs. Expressing deep concern about the expanding activities of terrorist groups in the country, extended support to the ongoing political dialogue and the efforts made in this regard by Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Libya. They welcomed the Sokhirat Agreement on political solution to the crisis in Libya that was initiated by most Libyan political forces in July 2015, and appreciated the efforts of the Kingdom of Morocco in facilitating this agreement. They welcomed the signing of Libya Political Agreement (LPA) on 17 December 2015, adoption of the agreement in UNSC Resolution 2259 (2015) and announcement on formation of Government of National Accord (GNA) on 19 January 2016. They called upon all Libyans to support full implementation of LPA and UNSC Resolution 2259. They noted the efforts exerted by the neighbouring countries to Libya to facilitate the Intra Libyan dialogue.

The sides affirmed their full commitment to safeguard the unity and territorial integrity of Yemen, and respect for its sovereignty and independence, to reject interference in its internal affairs, to stand by the Yemeni people and their aspirations for freedom, democracy and social justice. They reaffirmed the relevant Security Council Resolutions, especially UNSCR 2201 (2015), and 2216 (2015) which particularly emphasizes support of the legitimate Government in Yemen represented by H.E. President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and condemns the unilateral procedures by the Houthi group as it undermines the transitional political process in Yemen. They called upon all Yemeni Parties to settle disputes through dialogue and consultation and to facilitate humanitarian assistance operations in this regard, they welcomed the establishment of "King Salman Centre for Charity and Humanitarian Relief". They affirmed the importance of implementing the GCC initiative and its implementation mechanisms and the outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference. They welcomed the outcomes of Riyadh Conference which was held on 17-19 May 2015, upon the request of H.E the president of the republic of Yemen Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, with the participation of all Yemeni Parties, and asserted support for the United Nations efforts and the role of its Special Envoy to Yemen.

The sides expressed their support to all peaceful efforts, including the efforts of the United Arab Emirates, to reach a peaceful solution to the issue of the Islands of Greater Tunb, Smaller Tunb and Abu Musa with Iran through bilateral negotiations and in accordance with international law.

They emphasized the importance that cooperative relations between Arab States and the Islamic Republic of Iran be based on the principles of good neighbourliness, non-interference in internal affairs, respect of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, resolution of disputes through peaceful means, according to UN Charter and International Law, and refraining from use or threat of force.

Condemning the attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran, and its Consulate General in Mashhad in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which resulted in intrusions into the diplomatic and consular premises, causing serious damage, with Iranian authorities bearing full responsibility for not protecting the diplomatic premises as stipulated by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

They welcomed the National Dialogue Conference which was launched in Khartoum and called upon the armed movements to stop fighting and engage in this National Dialogue, in response to the initiative of H.E. President Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir. They called upon the international concerned parties to fulfil their obligations towards the exemption of Sudan's external debts for the South of Sudan's post separation phase, in support of economic development and sustainable peace in Sudan. They urged the international community to include Sudan in the initiative of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and to resume development assistance, at the level of other post conflict countries. Calling for lifting of the unilateral economic sanctions imposed on Sudan, which hinders achieving the goals of sustainable development and constitutes a violation of the rights of the people of Sudan to development.

They expressed their support to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia and welcomed the progress achieved on the political process and national reconciliation which would enhance security and stability. They supported all efforts towards sustainable development and building of state institutions and extended full support to the concerted international efforts to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia as well as towards the release of the captive seafarers in Somalia, in effective coordination with the Government of Somalia. Both sides supported the African Union's effort to assist Somali's peace and security through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISON), as well as the Somali National Army. They supported the State of Kuwait's orientation to organize a Donors' Conference for education in Somalia in 2016.

The sides affirmed their respect to the national unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Comoros.

The sides congratulated the Republic of Tunisia on the occasion of awarding Nobel Peace Prize 2015 to the Quartet sponsoring the national dialogue, praising the spirit of compromise and dialogue that prevailed in the democratic transition process in Tunisia.

Both sides noted the essential positive and effective role played by Algeria in hosting the dialogue sessions among the Malian sides that culminated in the signing of the Peace and Reconciliation Accord in Algiers on 15 May 2015.

Both sides noted the efforts exerted by the Islamic Republic of Mauritania to ensure peace and security in the Republic of Mali as part of international mediation.

The two sides noted that regional peace and stability in South Asia requires an atmosphere free from the threat of terror and violence.

They affirmed the importance of supporting the reconstruction and stability in Afghanistan and expressed their support for a genuine Afghan owned, Afghan led and Afghan controlled reconciliation process towards the emergence of a peaceful, stable and strong Afghanistan.

The two sides expressed condemnation and resentment of the kidnapping of a number of Qataris in the South of Iraq as it constitutes violation of their human rights. They also expressed full solidarity with the Government of the State of Qatar and support for the measures it takes to secure their release. They expressed the hope that the communications carried out by the State of Qatar with the Republic of Iraq will yield positive results towards securing their safety and immediate end of their captivity.

The two sides expressed concern at the kidnapping of 39 Indian workers in Mosul in Iraq in June 2014 and 3 Indian workers in Sirte in Libya in June 2015. The Arab side expressed full solidarity with India in all efforts for their early release from captivity.

### **Global Issues**

The sides called for an urgent reform of the United Nations Security Council through expansion in both permanent and non-permanent membership to reflect contemporary reality. They agreed that the current structure of the UN Security Council was not representative of a majority of the people of the world but continued to perpetuate a system that was anachronistic.

The two sides noted the pioneering role played by the Arab countries and the Republic of India in the peace-keeping field as they are one of the largest contributors with forces and partnership in the United Nation's missions. They called for expanding the participation of the countries participating with forces and allowing them a greater role in decisions-making in the peace-keeping domain. Both sides expressed desire to expand joint cooperation in peace-keeping field including training.

The two sides intensify bilateral coordination, and coordination with the Arab Member State in the Security Council, with the aim of reinforcing UNSC credibility and for a balanced handling of all the causes on its agenda.

The two sides condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and rejecting associating terrorism with any religion, culture or ethnic group, emphasized the need for concerted regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and to address its causes and to develop a strategy to eliminate the sources of terrorism and extremism including its funding, as well as combating organized cross-border crime. They supported the efforts of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee [CTC] and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism [CCIT], at the earliest. They welcomed in this context the UNSCR 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014). The sides supported the activities of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations, with the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Late King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They commended the work of the Africa Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism in Algeria, and welcomed the outcome of the International Conference on Fighting Extremism hosted by Algeria on 22-23 July 2015. The sides welcomed the joint presidency of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Kingdom of Netherlands of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF). They welcomed the initiative launched by the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt at the High Level of the 70th Session of the UNGA titled: "Hope and Action for a New Direction" (HAND) to counter Extremism and Terrorism. The sides welcomed the outcome of the International Conference on Fighting Extremism hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2014. They welcomed the outcome of the workshop on Charitable Donations and Combating the Financing of Terrorism and Violent Extremism hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2015. They welcomed the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards forming an Islamic coalition to combat terrorism.

The Arab side aspires to an effective Indian role, in cooperation with Arab States, to enhance peace and security at the regional and international level.

The sides reaffirmed their commitment to verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in an irreversible manner and agreed to strengthen collaboration to achieve this important objective according to relevant UN Resolutions. In this regard, they particularly emphasized the importance of holding the postponed 2012 conference regarding the establishment of a Middle East as a zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction, which will enhance regional and international security and stability. They agreed that nuclear disarmament can be achieved through a practical step-by-step process underwritten by a universal commitment and an agreed multilateral framework.

They welcomed the granting of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding Award to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, in recognition of his contributions and role in

promoting meaningful dialogue among religions and cultures, and mutual respect between all peoples and communities, as well as building trust and understanding and renunciation of hatred. The sides welcomed the outcomes of the Cultures and Civilizations Dialogue Conference hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain in May 2014.

The sides welcomed the outcomes of the 4th GCC-India Business Forum hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in November 2015.

They reaffirmed the necessity for both sides to coordinate their positions on the issue of developing states' debts.

**Bilateral Cooperation:**

The two sides discussed ways and means to enhance cooperation in economic, social and cultural fields, and asserted on the following:

They expressed satisfaction with the progress made to date in the Executive Program of the Forum for the years 2014 and 2015, including holding: the 1st session of The Senior Officials Meeting on 7 November 2014 in New Delhi, the 2nd session of the Arab-India Cultural Festival on 20-27 November 2014 in Algeria, the 4th Session of Arab-India Partnership Conference on 26-27 November 2014 in New Delhi and the Symposium on Arab-Indian Cooperation in the field of Media on 20-24 August 2014 in New Delhi.

The sides stressed the importance of developing bilateral cooperation through concrete efforts in specific sectors aimed towards medium to long term sustainability of the partnership. They affirmed the commitment to implement the Executive Program of the Forum for the years 2016 and 2017, in order to push forward the cooperation in different fields, including holding: the 5th Session of Arab-India Partnership Conference in May 2016 in Oman, the 3rd session of Arab-India Cultural Festival in 2016 in India, the 2nd symposium on Arab-Indian Cooperation in the field of Media in one of Arab countries, the Arab-Indian University Presidents Conference in 2016.

Both sides recognized the need to hold more people-to-people interactions between the two sides particularly exchanging youth delegations to share experiences and ideas about each other's culture and traditions. It was also agreed to promote exchange of women's delegations with a view to promote women empowerment.

They emphasized continuing political consultations between the two sides to coordinate positions on regional as well as global political and economic issues in order to better articulate the views of the developing nations and to this end, to increase consultations on specific topics and issues between the respective Ministries and Departments.

They expressed desire to strengthen future cooperation in economic, trade and investment, within the framework of the existing mechanisms and further developing these mechanisms.

In view of the great importance the two sides attach to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of Energy, they expressed hope to reach a memorandum of understanding in the field of Energy in order to enhance cooperation in this field, especially in the field of renewable Energy.

Both the sides desire to strengthen cooperation in the fields of Science and Technology, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Environment, Agriculture and Food Security, Tourism, Health and establishing the necessary mechanisms to enforce cooperation in these fields to achieve common interest of India and Arab countries.

Both the sides are keen to enhance cooperation in the fields of social development, especially to end poverty, support small-size businesses and producing families, family and childhood development and rehabilitation of disabled and old people.

Both the sides emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation between Non Governmental Organizations, through enhancing exchanges between the two sides on several levels such as academic, scientific, cultural, art, literature, Media, training and human resources fields, in order to enhance mutual understanding between Arab and Indian people.

The two sides expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the Kingdom of Bahrain for hosting the 1st India-Arab Ministerial Meeting and for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to all the delegations and for the good preparations which contributed to the success of this meeting. They also welcomed holding the 2nd India-Arab Ministerial Meeting of the Forum in India.

### **The Executive Program of the Arab-Indian Co-operation Forum for the years 2016 and 2017**

The Member States of the League of Arab States and the Republic of India reviewed the achievements of the Arab-Indian cooperation since the establishment of the Arab-Indian Co-operation Forum in New Delhi on 2/12/2008, and emphasized that this cooperation is in the interest of both sides.

For the principles and objectives stated in the Forum Basic Documents use available web link.

*Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26292/Manama Declaration of the First Ministerial Meeting of the ArabIndia Cooperation Forum January 24 2016](http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26292/Manama%20Declaration%20of%20the%20First%20Ministerial%20Meeting%20of%20the%20ArabIndia%20Cooperation%20Forum%20January%2024%202016)*

### **27. Remarks by M. Hamid Ansari, Hon'ble Vice President of India at Second West Asia Conference organized by IDSA, New Delhi, 19 January 2016**

Turbulence in West Asian State Systems: Road Blocks in the Quest for Participatory Governance

I thank the IDSA and Ambassador Jayant Prasad for inviting me today. Over the years, these annual conferences of the Institute have shed useful light on questions of regional and global security.

The list of participants includes a good many experts who would speak authoritatively on various aspects of the theme of the conference and put forth different perspectives. I would therefore confine myself to a backdrop that might help understand better the context and the challenges emanating from it.

Periods of turmoil, and unexplained happenings, are often depicted as a spectre, an impending danger. Such a spectre today seems to haunt all who look at the region of western Asia and northern Africa. The apprehensions emanate from a dangerous mix of *realpolitik* and professed ideology that challenges the status quo in the region, and has become a threat to regional and world peace.

Two years back the world observed the centenary of the First World War. It was described by a historian as *'the first calamity of the twentieth century, the calamity from which all other calamities sprang.'* One dimension of it was the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 that, together with the San Rimo arrangement of April 1919, brought into existence most of the modern state system in West Asia. In 1945 it acquired its own sub-regional system in the shape of the Arab League.

It is this edifice, of post-World War I states and of newly-induced nationalisms that now seems to be unravelling.

Analysts of the future would record the years 1948, 1967, 2003 and 2010-11 as turning points in the modern history of West Asian lands. The first inducted Israel into the region, the second and its aftermath put an end to political Arabism, the third marked the destruction of Iraq and its resulting immediate and remote consequences, and the fourth signalled the commencement of the so-called Arab Spring or Arab Turbulence that shook the authoritarian order.

The new states in the region (with the exception of Egypt) lacked historical legitimacy and needed to create a national sentiment to reinforce the existing tribal, often fragmented, ties of cohesion within their territorial jurisdiction. This local patriotism was sought to be combined with amorphous and romantic sentiments of pan-Arabism some of which were reflected in the 1945 Charter of the Arab League. Neither could develop an ideological underpinning that would bring forth widespread public commitment except as a formality. This was furthered by the fragility of the institutions of the new states; these were patriarchal, authoritarian and hegemonic and evoked fear of the State rather than a commitment to its objectives and ideals.

Thus the domestic impulses for social cohesion were insufficiently anchored, did not accommodate diversity in sufficient measure, and were susceptible to external pressure. This found its reflection in all aspects of governance which remained essentially non-participatory.

The socio-economic backdrop too was not conducive to stability and social peace. Some years earlier, three successive UNDP Arab Human Development Reports highlighted the shortcomings of knowledge, freedom and gender. The Davos Economic Forum reports on Arab Competiveness put the focus on the implications of population growth and youth unemployment and on the need for education and skill development to bring about a shift away from total dependence on a rentier economy. Pervasive rural poverty aggravated the situation.

As a consequence of the erosion of the legitimacy of the broadly secular nation-state, and the ideological vacuum created by it, various versions of Islamist solutions were presented as indigenous, more authentic, and viable alternatives. Nor was this an altogether novel recipe since religion or religious symbolism as a motivating force have been used in many societies for different purposes throughout history. Sociologists have dwelt on it at some length and, making a distinction between different kinds of politics and different senses of religion, have sought to develop a typology to classify these into politically relevant religious action, religiously conditioned political action, religiously relevant political action and politically conditioned religious action.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the use and misuse of this instrumentality currently underway by many extremist groups, a few examples from the recent past can be cited. In the wake of the Egyptian defeat in the 1967 war, a perception took root that ‘the Arabs had turned away from God and God has turned away from them’ and this induced the Government of Egypt to distribute in the armed forces booklets explaining the meaning of Jihad. A similar step was taken by Iraq after its defeat in the 1991 Kuwait war and was visibly reflected in the new Iraqi flag. This trend was reinforced in subsequent years preceding the 2003 US-led invasion. In both instances, the purpose was empowerment. In both, subsequent developments were to show the longer term consequences; credible reports indicate that the fighting and command component of the recently formed DAISH or the Islamic State has within its ranks many officers of the pre-2003 Iraqi army.

Away from the Arab world, the most telling example of religious motivation for a political purpose was the resistance movement crafted to resist the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The United States, several Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan implemented this successfully and in the process gave birth, first to Afghan Mujahedeen, and subsequently to Al-Qaeda.<sup>2</sup>

These external happenings of the past left their mark on Arab societies. The process varied from country to country in response to a multiplicity of impulses; a common thread was the sense of distress and a quest for a psychological refuge. Thus came about a re-Islamization of Arab societies at the grass root level that provided, or sought to provide, solace and an ideological underpinning. A good deal has been written about this process in different Muslim societies; it has ranged from anti-imperialist sentiments and socioeconomic concerns to a re-emphasis on

family values and cultural authenticity and has covered a broad spectrum ranging from traditional segments to the youth, professional classes and the academia.<sup>3</sup> The new channels of communication through the internet and social media furthered the momentum. The latter also had its limitations and was not uniformly productive; one scholar has called it ‘cyber-utopianism.’<sup>4</sup>

## II

Despite this backdrop of an emergent social reality, the Arab Turbulence of 2010-2011 was quintessentially a non-religious, secular, phenomenon that took the shape of a leaderless mass movement seeking dignity, empowerment, political citizenship, social justice and taking back the State and its institutions from rulers and their cronies. Its slogans, interestingly enough, did not resort to calls for Arab unity or advocate Islam as the solution. Its most dramatic impact was the abandonment of the fear of the security apparatus of the state. At the same time, it was not united or harmonious and soon gave way to sectional interests. Uncontrolled rage did not help matters. Prospects of chaos were exploited by the counter-revolutionary forces to prevail and impose even greater control.

Why did this happen?

In a famous passage in his monumental *History of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky had observed that ‘the masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime.’ The political process thus unleashed, he added, results in a ‘guiding organization’ without which the energy of the masses dissipates.<sup>6</sup>

Record shows that in the case of the countries affected by the Arab Turbulence, the emergence of such a guiding organization happened belatedly and inadequately. There was no consensus on the political and economic model to be put in place. It was ‘a tale of three battles rolled into one: people against regimes; people against people; regimes against other regimes.’<sup>7</sup> The objectives of the protesting masses ranged from modest reforms and constitutional monarchy (as in Morocco and Jordan and in a short-lived, muted, manner in Saudi Arabia) to overthrow of the head of state (Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) to a state order based on Islamic principles (Egypt under Morsi). The call for social justice did not, however, bring forth an implementable program of action. While left-leaning groups and unions wanted higher wages and a reversal of privatization, others sought more liberal policies. One observer noted that ‘the political scene in the Arab Awakening is dominated by the socio-political forces of the middle classes looking for a new socio-political system, one that is more just and free’ but added that ‘there was no dominant political or organizational force.’<sup>8</sup>

It is relevant to recall that the Turbulence was not as a single event, but a catalyst for long-term change whose final outcome is yet to be seen. ‘The main legacy of the Arab Spring is in

smashing the myth of Arabs' political passivity and the perceived invincibility of arrogant ruling elites. Even in countries that avoided mass unrest, the governments took the quiescence of the people at their own peril.'<sup>9</sup>

Panic characterized the initial reaction of the traditional Arab establishments whose primary objective was to maintain the status quo. Domestically and across the GCC, 'an authoritarian retrenchment and narrowing of political space' emerged.<sup>10</sup> Some of the GCC states took steps focused on (a) containment of the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, (b) bring about a counter-revolution in Yemen and Bahrain, (c) support the revolution in Syria.<sup>11</sup> The French scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu has ascribed these to the work of the 'Deep State' conducting a 'systematic war of the Arab regimes against their people.'<sup>12</sup>

### III

Some questions arise. What were the principal characteristics of authoritarian systems that were challenged by the two years of Arab Turbulence? What were its immediate and longer term consequences? Did it have a visible impact on patterns of governance? What are its regional and global implications?

According to most observers, the authoritarian order in West Asia and North Africa was and is characterized by lack of transparency, information scarcity, nepotism, political subservience, absence of a sense of equal citizenship, ambiguous accountability, political irresponsibility, and absence of rule of law. The effort in many cases to seek legitimacy through ritualistic references to religious injunctions about rule through mutual consultations and requirement of obedience to 'those charged with authority among you'<sup>13</sup> did nothing to alter this harsh ground reality.

Those who protested against it sought the opposite of these attributes. The response pattern, with local variations, lent credence to Machiavelli's dictum that 'men forget more easily the death of their fathers than the loss of patrimony.' Voluntary abdication from seat of absolute power is a rarity in human affairs and did not happen in West Asian lands.

Three consequences emanated from this; they persist to this day. One was initial gestures of financial largesse to their public along with an immediate resort to 'increasingly harsh measures to restrict the freedoms of their citizens to express themselves and meaningfully to participate politically and hold power accountable.'<sup>14</sup> Another was a decision in some of the GCC states to give generous financial packages to the countries affected by the Turbulence. A third was to intensify their military involvement in the internal conflicts in Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Libya. Details of these are in the public domain.

The continuing intensity of domestic controls has been commented upon by an observer: 'Counter-revolutionary Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain have rejected every pro-democracy

demand raised in January 2011 and have implemented new decrees to ban popular demonstrations intended to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the uprisings.’<sup>15</sup>

A good part of the debate on Arab Turbulence, and official pronouncements from different quarters, has focused on alleged mischief emanating from the sectarian, Sunni-Shia, conflict. Its political origins in recent years can be traced to the geopolitical consequences of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and to the reported 2004 pronouncement of the Jordanian monarch.<sup>16</sup> Some of the GCC states have been its proponents in recent years. According to one scholar, sectarianism became a pre-emptive counter-revolutionary strategy.<sup>17</sup> This, however, clouds rather than illuminates the complex realities of regional politics. A more realistic perspective on this was provided by the Amir of Qatar who, in his UN General Assembly speech on 28 September 2015, described the existing confrontation as ‘political regional Arab-Iranian difference rather than being a Sunni-Shiite dispute.’

The Turbulence in Arab lands was not immune to regional and extra-regional inputs. Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen were subjected to political and or material interventions from across national borders; some of these emanated from within the region, some from immediate or proximate neighbourhood, and some from great or big powers. The objective in each case was and is to prevent, retard or reverse the change sought by a visible majority of the public. Another lecture would be required to mention the litany of ‘sins’ of all sides. It would suffice here to say that regime change initiatives should be autonomous to the citizens of a state; record shows that externally imposed strategies, even if used as a complement to diplomacy and deterrence, are perennially in danger of going down the slippery slope.

The picture at the end of the year 2015 was one of total disarray, a situation in which regional and global powers together with empowered local groups are engaged in political and military action in half a dozen different battlefields. The immediate concern of each is to prevail upon its adversary; little thought, if any, is being given to longer term consequences for the societies in the region. In the process, the rationale for the Turbulence takes the back seat.

It has been said that the failure to understand catastrophes is even deadlier to a people than the catastrophes themselves. The requirement to comprehend the prerequisites and essentials of participatory governance were perhaps not fully comprehended by the protesting public, nor did it have a full measure of the forces aligned against it. The need to combine rage with realism went unappreciated, except in the case of Al-Nahda in Tunisia where the requirement of a wider consensus was appreciated.

With the exception of Egypt, the primary and primordial identity of the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire was essentially tribal with some regional attributes. As independent entities, no organic changes were brought about in their internal tribal structures; instead, the tribal

hierarchies were integrated in the new political structures deliberately by domestic and external forces that, despite protestations to the contrary, ended up being authoritarian. This deprived them of a mass base and genuine public participation through political institutions. Aspects of this deficiency were reflected in the UNDP's second Arab Development Challenges Report 2011 which urged the need for 'a new social contract of mutual accountability (in which) the state becomes more responsive and accountable to the citizen.'<sup>18</sup>

The link between the citizen and the state through the mechanism of accountability (and an implicit social contract going beyond the ruler-subject relationship) is thus critical for domestic cohesion and internal security but has not been sufficiently in evidence. An analysis of the states of West Asia some years back identified among its characteristics the politics of limited association and of an essentially broad urban middle class base in which coercion or co-optation into the state structure rather than (in a) 'durable resilience of the system whose legitimacy is based on the full participation of the people in the body politic.'<sup>19</sup>

Decades earlier, the Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui had spelt out the requirement: 'The democratic principle means that no one in society possesses political truth, that this truth will only gradually take shape through the procedures of discussion and successive elections.'<sup>20</sup>

The failure to imbibe and implement this in sufficient measure is thus central to the crises that have afflicted the region.

Jai Hind.

(For footnotes follow the link)

*Source: Vice President of India, New Delhi,*  
<http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/contents.asp?id=570>

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**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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