



# **MEI INDIA WATCH**

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

---

**No. 2**

**February 2010**

---

Compiled by

Smruthi R

---

Note: Official materials relating to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Saudi Arabia from 27 February to 1 March 2010 were covered as a special issue of **India Speaks**. This can be accessed at:  
<http://mei.org.in/indiaSpeaks/India%20Speaks%2004-S.pdf>

---

## **Political Issues**

### **Bahrain**

#### **1. Bahrain supports India-Pakistan talks**

Tuesday, 16 February 2010

New Delhi: Bahrain which has friendly ties with India and Pakistan, welcomed their move to hold Foreign Secretary level talks on February 25. Minister of Foreign Affairs Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa observed that even if all issues were not covered, the two neighbours should 'engage and warm up' their relationship. He further stated that a serious commitment from both parties was essential and that terrorists and enemies of these countries were the beneficiaries of an impasse between India and Pakistan. The prospects of better bilateral relations between Bahrain and India had also been expressed by the Minister.

**Source: The Hindu, Chennai**

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/02/16/stories/2010021660281100.htm>

---

## Israel

### 2. No Israelis hurt in India Blast

Saturday, 13 February 2010

At least nine people were killed and nearly 50 were injured in an explosion at the German Bakery in the western city of Pune. The café is located on the same street as the Pune Chabad House. The Chabad House director Rabbi Bezalel Kupchik said that no Israelis or Jews were in the bakery at the time of the blast and that there were no Jewish victims in the local hospitals.

*Source: Arutz Sheva Radio*

For full report: <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/135993>

---

### 3. 'We are not frightened, there is no anti-Semitism in India'

Monday, 15 February 2010

The terror bombing of German Bakery in the Indian city of Pune has rekindled concern for safety of Israelis and Jews in the subcontinent especially after the November 2008, Mumbai attacks. The bombing in Pune is believed to be the work of Pakistan based terrorist groups and it might have intended to include the Chabad House down the street from the bombed bakery. The Chabad House Director Rabbi Bezalel Kupchik believed that India was a country without any anti-Semitism and that a terrorist attack could happen anywhere. They also added that the bombing would not scare them away.

*Source: The Jerusalem Post*

For full report: <http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=168715>

---

### 4. India, Israel vow to enhance cooperation in combating terror

Friday, 19 February 2010

Israel: India and Israel have vowed to enhance cooperation in combating terrorism. During his visit to Israel Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jyotiraditya Scindia expressed that India could benefit from advanced Israeli homeland security systems. During his meeting with the Indian leader President Shimon Peres offered his country's cooperation in fighting terrorism.

*Source: The Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/india-israel-vow-to-enhance-cooperation-in/581802/>

---

## Kuwait

### 5. Krishna to seek closer ties with Kuwait

Thursday, 04 February 2010

Kuwait: External Affairs Minister S M Krishna visited Kuwait to give an impetus to energy ties, foster closer relationship with the Gulf country and tap its surplus funds for India's infrastructure sector. Kuwait has been one of India's key energy suppliers. Krishna held talks with the Kuwaiti leaders to boost the ties and explored areas like joint production of fertilisers. Discussions also covered regional scenario in Pakistan and Afghanistan, developments in Iran, Iraq and Middle East Peace Process, reforms in UN Security Council.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/international/article100370.ece>

---

## Palestine

### 6. Manmohan, Abbas discuss fresh bid to open peace talks

Friday, 12 February 2010

New Delhi: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met the visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and discussed fresh efforts to initiate the Middle East peace process. The two sides exchanged views on Abbas' meeting with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia late last year and the need for greater international effort to restart the Israeli-Palestinian talks.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/02/12/stories/2010021260781000.htm>

---

### 7. Gilani likens Kashmir to Palestine

Saturday, 13 February 2010

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani equated the Kashmir issue with the Palestine problem and claimed that peace would remain elusive in South Asia and the Middle East unless they are resolved. According to him, people of Palestine and Kashmir are fighting for their right of self determination. Gilani assured visiting Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas that Pakistan would continue to support the Palestinian people towards realizing their right of self-determination and sovereign state.

*Source: The Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/solve-kashmir-problem/579323/>

---

## Turkey

### 8. Turkey agrees to work closely with India on global terrorism

Wednesday, 10 February 2010

New Delhi: India and Turkey unveiled a joint declaration on terrorism, wherein Ankara has agreed to recognize the need for the conclusion of India-initiated Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). Both countries agreed to work towards developing an action plan with timelines and specific measures in tandem with existing structures like Joint Working Group against Terrorism.

The acquiescence of Turkey on CCIT is considered significant by India, because of Turkey's membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). India feels that the CCIT once adopted and finalised would be an important contribution against terrorism. Besides this, bilateral issues between the two countries and possibilities of a free trade agreement were discussed in the meetings Turkish President Abdullah Gul had with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and External Affairs Minister S M Krishna.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/international/article103944.ece>

---

## Energy Issues

### 9. Can't wait indefinitely on pipeline project: Iran

Wednesday, 10 February 2010

New Delhi: Iran hoped that India would join the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project soon but pointed out that there should be time limits to arrive at a decision. Speaking to the journalists on the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of victory of Islamic Revolution Iran's Ambassador to India Syed Mehdi Nabizadeh said that the negotiations on IPI are still alive. He further pointed out that the discussions on the pipeline had been on for fifteen years and that Iran could not wait indefinitely.

India stopped attending trilateral meetings since 2007 and has not engaged with Iran bilaterally for over a year. The requirements from the Indian side are an Iranian guarantee of uninterrupted supply of gas via Pakistan and a stable pricing mechanism. Further, Nabizadeh expressed that important role India and Iran could play in stabilizing Afghanistan.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.hindu.com/2010/02/10/stories/2010021060111100.htm>

---

### 10. OIL-IOC combine launches hydrocarbon hunt in Libya

Thursday, 4 February 2010

Kolkata: The consortium of Oil India Ltd and Indian Oil began drilling in five onshore blocks in Libya in January. They acquired the five exploratory blocks in Area 86 and 102 during bidding rounds in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Besides exploratory interests, the OIL-IOC duo has numerous non-operating interests in different places.

*Source: The Business Line, Chennai*

For full report:

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2010/02/05/stories/2010020550840200.htm>

---

## **11. India's BPCL buys Algeria, Libya crude oil sources**

Tuesday, 16 February 2010

New Delhi/London: Bharat Petroleum Corporation bought one million barrels each of Algerian and Libyan crude for oil loading in April. BPCL being India's second largest refiner, operating several crude processing units including Mumbai and Kerala bought nearly three million barrels of crude oil in March.

*Source: Reuters India, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://in.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idINLDE61F1IN20100216>

---

## Economic Issues

## **12. India-Arab trade to double by '14: Sharma**

Tuesday, 9 February 2010

New Delhi: India has expressed hope that bilateral trade and investment ties between India and the Gulf region would double from the current turnover of US\$ 114 billion. Speaking at the Second India-Arab Investment Projects Conclave Minister of Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma exclaimed that based on India's high domestic consumption and demand, the economy is expected to grow by 7.5 percent this fiscal year. An early conclusion of the India – Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Agreement was advocated for by Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs, to boost bilateral economic engagement.

*Source: The Financial Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/indiaarab-trade-to-double-by-14-sharma/577347/>

---

## Israel

## **13. India, Israel to hold free-trade talks**

Friday, 26 February 2010

India and Israel feel that the time is ripe to formalise trade. The sides are beginning negotiations on a free trade agreement. A new agreement would expand bilateral trade to commodities, investments and services rather than focusing only on certain sectors. Jyotiraditya Scindia, India's Minister of State for Commerce and Industry made these

observations following his meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres in Jerusalem. Water technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology were identified as key areas in which collaboration could be expanded.

*Source: Ha'aretz, Tel Aviv*

For full report: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1152264.html>

---

## United Arab Emirates

### **14. UAE investment house sells 13% in Spicejet**

Friday, 05 February 2010

New Delhi: The UAE-based investment house Istithmar PJSC has sold most of its entire 13.39 percent holding worth Rs 1.690 billion in India's domestic carrier Spicejet. Istithmar still holds about \$12 million worth of foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCBs). The Dubai liquidity crunch was the prime reason for the company to sell its stakes.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://beta.thehindu.com/business/companies/article101659.ece>

---

### **15. CIAL to join hands with UAE airports for business models**

Sunday, 14 February 2010

Nedumbassery: Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) is set to join hands with two international airports in the UAE. CIAL is in consultations with the Ras-al-Khaimah and the Fujairah international airports with regard to infrastructure development and resource optimisation. Preliminary round of discussions with either airport managements were held in the Dubai Air Show. The CIAL team also had discussions with five other international carriers and corporate investor companies.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/02/14/stories/2010021455951500.htm>

---

### **16. ITC plans to enter UAE food market through partnership: Report**

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

Dubai: Based on a news report, ITC a multi business conglomerate is planning to enter the food market of the United Arab Emirates and Gulf Cooperation Council through a partnership with the Al Seer group. The products ITC plans to market include wheat biscuits, cookies, crackers, candies, etc. A range of confectionary products were displayed by ITC in the Dubai World Trade Centre.

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/cons-products/food/ITC-plans-to-enter-UAE-food-market-through-partnership-Report/articleshow/5611303.cms>

---

### **17. India is top export market for Dubai for second year**

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

Dubai: India had topped the list of export markets for Dubai for the second consecutive year with a share of 40.6 percent or 21.3 billion dirham with India being the largest market for gold. Switzerland comes next to India, followed by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/India-is-top-export-market-for-Dubai-for-second-year/articleshow/5611098.cms>

---

### **18. Indian banks' exposure to Dubai World limited: RBI**

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

Dubai: The exposure of Indian banks to crisis-hit Dubai is estimated to be around US\$ 275-300 million and is said to not have any material impact on sector's performance this year. K C Chakrabarty, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India observed that effective measures have been taken by the Gulf country's government and Central Bank to mitigate the impact of global crisis on UAE and Dubai. A reciprocal relationship is noticed between banks based in India and UAE to establish their respective branches.

*Source: The Financial Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/indian-banks-exposure-to-dubai-world-limited-rbi/583899/>

---

### **19. Indian expats in UAE feel ignored and neglected**

Saturday, 27 February 2010

Abu Dhabi: India's federal budget for the fiscal year 2010 did not do much for the Non-Resident Indians. According to Sudhir Shetty, Chief Operating Officer of UAE exchange, the budget states that foreign investment norms would be simplified but gave no details. However, the budget of Reserve Bank of India mentioned about considering banking licenses to private operators. There was no mention of NRIs in the budget and that the Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has neglected the NRI community, Shetty complained.

*Source: The Gulf News*

For full report: <http://gulfnews.com/business/economy/indian-expats-in-uae-feel-ignored-and-neglected-1.589168>

---



## Miscellaneous

### 20. 'Khan' is overseas king

Monday, 22 February 2010

Karan Johar's latest film *My Name is Khan* starring Shah Rukh Khan has become a global phenomenon. It has broken the record for the biggest initial for a Bollywood movie in the UAE. It is also the first Hindi film to release in Egypt across eight theatres. Similar stories have been recorded across Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. More prints of the movie have been demanded in the Middle East – Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar following the overwhelming collections in the UAE

**Source:** *The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/et-cetera/Khan-is-overseas-king-/articleshow/5601572.cms>

---

### 21. Two Iranian women get bail

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

Bangalore: A magistrate's court ordered the conditional release of two Iranian women, arrested on charges of assaulting a traffic policeman and damaging equipment of a media crew after being stopped for driving under the influence of alcohol and without a valid driving license. The two women Azara Fasle Khode and Farima Fatima were granted bail on a surety of Rs 25,000 each by the court of the XI Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate.

**Source:** *The Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/two-iranian-women-get-bail/583720/>

---

### 22. Qatar Airways launches Doha-Bengaluru service

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

Mumbai: Qatar Airways launched a direct air service between Doha and Bengaluru to cater to travellers in the city. Following the introduction of this service, the airline has increased the frequency of its in and out of India flight to 71 a week spread across eleven destinations.

**Source:** *The Business Line, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blnus/09241532.htm>

---

### 23. Husain has accepted Qatar citizenship, says son

Saturday, 27 February 2010

Mumbai: India's celebrated artist Maqbool Fida Husain has accepted Qatar's offer of an honorary citizenship, his son Owais Husain told media. M F Husain has been living abroad as a fugitive since 2006. He has dozens of lawsuits against him across the country for his paintings of goddesses that some Hindus find sacrilegious. He still faces threats



from fringe groups in the Hindu right. After Qatar had extended the citizenship offer, several of his fans and noted artists demanded that the Indian Government must facilitate his return.

***Source: The New Indian Express, Chennai***

For full report:

<http://expressbuzz.com/edition/story.aspx?Title=Husain+has+accepted+Qatar+citizenship,+says+son&artid=EpFroh34caU=&SectionID=oHSKVfNWYm0=&MainSectionID=oHSKVfNWYm0=&SectionName=VfE7I/Vl8os=&SEO=MF,%20HUSSAIN,%20QATAR>  
[R](#)

Note: Materials relating to M F Husain controversy is available in the 3 March 2010 issue of **India Digest** and can be accessed at:

[http://mei.org.in/indiaDigest/India\\_Digest\\_04.pdf](http://mei.org.in/indiaDigest/India_Digest_04.pdf)

---

***Smruthi R is a Graduate Student at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi***

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

Editor, **India Watch**: P R Kumaraswamy