



# **MEI INDIA WATCH**

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

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Compiled by

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## **Political Issues**

### **Iran**

#### **1. Krishna in Tehran to revive old ties**

Tehran, Saturday, 15 May 2010

External Affairs Minister S M Krishna was in Tehran to represent India in the G-15 summit to be held on Monday, 17 May 2010. On the sidelines of the summit, he would meet the Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to 'clarify further' India's position on Iran's nuclear programme. He would also mend the bilateral relations following India's IAEA vote in 2006, which Tehran perceived to be an 'act of betrayal.' Krishna would convey to Mottaki, India's current stand on the nuclear issue and its opposition to sanctions on Iran. The review of India's stand came as a result of its discomfort with Washington's Af-Pak policy, which tended to tilt more towards Pakistan. India has been trying to seek Iran's support for its own role in Afghanistan, and also hinting at its willingness to see Tehran playing a bigger role in Afghanistan. The Indian Minister was quoted as saying 'We belong to the same region and have similar perceptions on regional issues.' Other issues centring the Krishna-Mottaki meet include strengthening energy ties, the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and economic cooperation.

**Source: Deccan Herald, Bangalore.**

For full report: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/69806/krishna-tehran-revive-old-ties.html>

Additional report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/krishna-to-justify-antiiran-nvote/618409/>

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## **2. Af-Pak terrorism a common challenge to India, Iran: Larjani**

Tehran, Monday, 17 May 2010

India and Iran discussed the Af-Pak situation in a meeting between the Majlis speaker Ali Larjani and External Affairs Minister S.M Krishna on 16 May. Noting that terrorism was a common challenge both New Delhi and Tehran shared a common outlook on the issue. While exchanging views on Afghanistan, Krishna spoke of India's undiluted and strategic partnership with Kabul despite attacks on its citizens.

India and Iran also agreed to hold a meeting of the Joint Commission which would cover the entire range of issues including the gas pipeline. Both the sides recalled that the last JC meeting which was held in 2008, was indeed effective in improving bilateral trade and stepping it up to nearly \$14 billion. . On the gas pipeline issue, India had earlier proposed a set of dates in May for discussions to which Tehran did not reply.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/17/stories/2010051761501200.htm>

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## **3. Ahmadinejad, Krishna discuss Af-Pak situation**

Tehran, Wednesday, 19 May 2010

The Af-Pak situation was a part of the discussion between Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and External Affairs Minister S M Krishna in Tehran on 18 May 2010, who was on a visit to Iran to attend the G-15 summit. The Iranian President emphasised on the need for the two countries to work together on regional issues. According to External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, the Iranian President underlined the desirability and need for India and Iran to be in touch and to work together. Ahmadinejad also expressed satisfaction over the decision to hold a meeting of the India-Iran Joint Commission.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/19/stories/2010051963721400.htm>

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## **4. India, Pak may be inducted into SCO; Iran's bid under cloud**

Moscow, Sunday, 23 May 2010

India and Pakistan are likely to be inducted into the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) while Iran may find its doors closed as the country is already under UN sanctions for its nuclear programmes. The foreign ministers of the SCO, at their meeting in Tashkent on 22 May 2010 approved draft procedures and criteria for the admission of new members to the regional grouping which is due to be finalised at the SCO summit next month in Tashkent. Iran has been pushing hard for full membership of the organisation but a Russian diplomatic source was quoted as saying that 'The country aspiring to join SCO should not be under the UN Security Council sanctions'. Iran which is facing a fresh bout of UN sanctions is currently an observer in the SCO along with India, Pakistan and Mongolia.

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/International-Business/articleshow/5965446.cms>

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## Israel

### 5. Let sentence not hang fire, demand kin of victims

Mumbai, Friday, 7 May 2010

The death sentence handed down to Ajmal Amir Kasab for the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008 brought relief to the kin of victims. Local Jews who were witnesses to the terror attack on the Jewish outreach centre in Mumbai saw the awarding of capital punishment to Kasab as an emotional moment. Israeli Consul General Orna Sagiv was quoted saying 'We have been closely following the trial from the beginning. We hope it (the death sentence) is executed at the earliest.' Differing in his opinion was another local Jew, Samsung Mosses who is personally against capital punishment and said that Kasab should be given life imprisonment instead of a death sentence as in Israel where most of the convicts are given life term sentences.

*Source: The Pioneer, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.dailypioneer.com/254200/Let-sentence-not-hang-fire-demand-kin-of-victims.html>

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## Kuwait

### 6. GCC-Indian relations ever-growing

New Delhi, Sunday, 23 May 2010

At a gathering in New Delhi of GCC diplomats and members of the Indian industrial union organised by Sami Al-Suleiman, Kuwait's Ambassador to India it was affirmed that India-GCC relations were growing especially in the commercial and economic sectors. 'GCC-Indian economic and commercial relations are on an upward trend to the point that GCC region became India's number one commercial partner in 2009', said the Ambassador. He added that the Indian representatives of the industrial union expressed eagerness to enhance further relations with the GCC in all possible areas.

*Source: Kuwait Times, Kuwait*

For full report: [http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read\\_news.php?newsid=ODA4MDA2MzI0](http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=ODA4MDA2MzI0)

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## Oman

### 7. Did Omani carry out Mumbai recce for 26/11 before Headley?

New Delhi, Friday, 14 May 2010

Investigation into the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai revealed that some of the logistical support for the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) might have come from the Gulf region. An Omani national, Abdul Aziz al-Hooti aka Ali, currently in the custody of Omani authorities, might have played a major

role in assisting the LeT in executing the operations. It has also been noted that the Indian security establishment were in touch with the Omani authorities for further cooperation. Investigators believe that Ali had provided some of the mobile SIM cards for the terrorists in the Mumbai attacks in 2008. However, his deeper involvement is suspected, including possibilities of providing recce and local logistics. Ali is believed to be involved in actively recruiting expatriates for LeT from the Gulf region.

*Source: The Times of India, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Did-Omani-carry-out-Mumbai-recce-for-26/11-before-Headley/articleshow/5927524.cms>

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## **8. Oman deadline for overstaying Indians**

Dubai, Tuesday, 25 May 2010

Indians overstaying in Oman were asked to complete the finger-printing formalities by 31 May 2010, the deadline set by the country's manpower Ministry. The appeal was issued by Indian Social Club in Muscat.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/25/stories/2010052560560800.htm>

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# Tunisia

## **9. Tunisia sends condolence to India over air crash**

Tunis, Sunday, 23 May 2010

Tunisian President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali sent his condolences to his Indian counterpart Pratibha Patil on 22 May 2010 following the plane crash in Mangalore, Karnataka. An Air India airliner had crashed outside the Mangalore airport after overshooting the runway killing 158 out of the 166 passengers. He expressed 'his compassion and sympathy in these painful circumstances, wishing her, along with families of the victims and the friendly people of India, patience and solace.'

*Source: People's Daily Online, Beijing*

For full report: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90855/6995285.html>

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# UAE

## **10. Thuraya supplier sent in police custody**

New Delhi, Wednesday, 12 May 2010

On 11 May 2010 a Delhi court remanded Sajjad Sheikh, who was extradited from Dubai in connection with allegedly supplying satellite phones, wireless sets, explosives and detonators to terror outfits in Jammu and Kashmir. He is wanted in a case relating to the seizure of communication equipment which included Thuraya satellite phones, among other things, from

Jeddah that landed in New Delhi's IGI Airport's cargo complex in 2005. Sheikh who is in police custody in India was also detained in Dubai for four and a half years for similar activities in supporting terrorists. The extradition formalities between India and UAE were completed last month.

*Source: Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/thuraya-supplier-sent-in-police-custody/617651/>

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### **11. Indians on death row in UAE: Appeal on May 19, kin pray**

Ludhiana, Monday, 17 May 2010

An appeal against the death sentence to 17 men for the murder of a Pakistani national in UAE was scheduled to be heard on 19 May 2010. Balwant Singh Ramoowalia of the Lok Bhalai party was quoted as saying that the 'Indian Embassy has hired lawyers to argue the case. We may not get the result on May 19 as it can take more than one hearing...'

*Source: Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/indians-on-death-row-in-uae-appeal-on-may-1/619803/>

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### **12. 'Indian consulate's attitude shocking'**

Chandigarh, Monday, 31 May 2010

Human rights activists who visited the 17 Indian nationals on death row in Sharjah, UAE for the murder of a Pakistani national, criticised the role and attitude of the Indian consulate and demanded a proper investigation. Navkiran Singh, lawyer and human rights activist remarked that the trial 'is a gross violation of international standards of due process in capital punishment cases, as the accused do not follow the language of the trial and have not been given the proper chance to defend themselves.' He further stated that the lack of cooperation from the consulate was rather shocking and that they did not visit the jails and did not provide legal aid.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/31/stories/2010053161661200.htm>

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## **Defence/Military Issues**

### **Israel**

### **13. Indo-Israeli missile successfully test-fired: DRDO chief**

New Delhi, Friday, 28 May 2010

The Indo-Israeli Long Range Surface to Air Missile (LR-SAM) was successfully tested in Israel around the second week of May. Dr Vijay Saraswat, chief of Defence Research and

Development Organisation confirmed the success of the test fire. The second test of the missile would be held in India sometime this year. The LR-SAM missile jointly developed by India and Israel, a project that began in 2006 would be delivered to the armed forces in 2013. The missile also called as Barak-2 would equip the three guided missile destroyers of the Project 15 A class which are to join the Indian navy from 2012.

*Source: India Today, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/99283/India/Indo-Israeli+missile+successfully+test-fired:+DRDO+chief.html>

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## Oman

### **14. Antony to review defence ties during his Oman visit**

New Delhi, Friday, 14 May 2010

Indian Defence Minister A K Antony visited the Sultanate of Oman for two days during 17-19 May. The persistent problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden was one of the important issues discussed between the two countries. The Ambassador of Oman to India Humaid Al Maani was quoted as saying that the minister discussed with his counterpart the issue of piracy and efforts of securing safe sea lanes for trade between the two countries. A review of bilateral defence cooperation was also made, covering defence exports from India to Oman (assault rifle INSAS, tugboats from Goa Shipyard Limited). In the past, following the comprehensive memorandum of agreement signed in December 2005 aimed at strengthening naval cooperation; several bilateral naval exercises have been carried out. Similarly a maritime security arrangement was concluded in 2008 and in October 2009, India and Oman conducted their first joint air exercises at Thumrait, Oman.

*Source: The Financial Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/Antony-to-review-defence-ties-during-his-Oman-visit/618506/>

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## Energy Issues

## Iran

### **15. Iran's IOEC wins \$235 Indian oil tender**

Tehran, Sunday, 23 May 2010

Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction Company (IOEC) has won a tender worth \$235 million for a major Indian offshore oil project, said the IOEC managing director, Ali Taheri-Motlaq on 22 May 2010. A consortium of Indian Essar Offshore Subsea Limited and the IOEC managed to get the lowest tender for India's D-1 field which is located about 200 kilometres west of Mumbai. The project is scheduled to last for twelve months, including the installation of well platforms, pipelines as well as sub-sea cables.

*Source: Iran Energy Project,*

For full report: <http://www.iranenergyproject.org/674/irans-ioec-wins-235-indian-oil-tender>

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## **16. Shale gas, not Iran pipeline, our energy hope**

New Delhi, Sunday, 30 May 2010

During his visit to Iran in mid-May, External Affairs Minister S M Krishna expressed India's interest in the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline however he highlighted his reservations on security ground as well as an important economic reason to oppose the pipeline. The IPI gas price has soared in the light of new technology for extracting gas from shale, a rock found across the world. Since the IPI formula links gas prices to oil prices, India would have to pay large amounts if oil prices rise to \$150 /barrel as in the year 2008. India might not need to have any gas deals with the Gulf countries since the upcoming Krishna-Godavari offshore basin promises to ensure flow of gas in large quantities. Also, it is said that India has massive shale deposits and emphasis in exploiting these has been encouraged.

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/columnists/swaminathan-s-a-aiyar/Shale-gas-not-Iran-pipeline-our-energy-hope/articleshow/5990101.cms>

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## **Kuwait**

## **17. Indian Oil project on track**

New Delhi, Monday, 31 May 2010

Indian Oil Corporation Limited is reviving its Rs 223 billion petrochemical project at Paradip after the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation expressed an interest in its stake. The petrochemical project was stalled due to the fluctuation in global crude prices, economic downturn and revenue loss for selling fuels below costs. The IOC board has in principle agreed to restart the one million tonne petrochemical plant. Dividing the project in to two phases, the IOC would first establish a 15 million tonne refinery to be commissioned in 2012. Oil Minister Murli Deora had offered a stake to Kuwait Petroleum during his visit to the energy meet in Mexico in April. Kuwait accounts for around 10 percent of India's crude supplies and its stake in the project could ensure long term supply contracts to the refinery. Company officials stated that a final decision on Kuwait Petroleum's stake had not been taken.

*Source: The Telegraph, Kolkata*

For full report: [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100531/jsp/business/story\\_12505129.jsp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100531/jsp/business/story_12505129.jsp)

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## **Economic Issues**

## **18. Bharti starts drawing funds to complete Zain deal**

New Delhi, Friday, 28 May 2010



India's largest telecommunication company, Bharti Airtel has started drawing funds for completing its \$9-billion buy of Kuwaiti telecom Zain's African assets. With Bharti getting approval from each of the fifteen African nations where Zain operates, it expects to close the deal to acquire Zain's African business soon. The \$10.7 billion deal, including \$1.7 billion of Zain's debt was signed on 30 March. The deal would make Bharti Airtel, the fifth largest mobile phone operator in the world and give it a firm foothold in the relatively untapped African market and large revenues.

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/telecom/Bharti-starts-drawing-funds-to-complete-Zain-deal/articleshow/5983082.cms>

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## Oman

### 19. Sharma's gulf visit to push bilateral trade

New Delhi, Saturday, 1 May 2010

India is planning to attract more investments from the Gulf region and this is in addition to the country's efforts to have a Free Trade Agreement with the region. The visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma to the Gulf region would have cooperation with industries from the Middle East as its top agenda. Apart from discussing bilateral trade, joint venture opportunities were also looked at said Oman's Ambassador to India, Sheikh Humaid Bin Ali Bin Sultan Al-mani. The Minister represented India in a two day Indo-Oman Joint Commission meeting, from 5 June to 7 June. Oman which wants to diversify its economy is looking forward to establish a joint fund to invest in India. Further, the Minister was expected to travel to the UAE and review the bilateral trade and encourage more investments in India.

*Source: The Financial Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/Sharma-s-gulf-visit-to-push-bilateral-trade/613607/>

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## Qatar

### 20. L & T wins \$190m Qatar project

Doha, Saturday, 22 May 2010

India's Larsen and Toubro secured an international project worth \$190 million from Qatar Public Works Authority (Ashgal) for advanced waste water treatment and urban reuse. The project based on advanced technology would be implemented through the Water Technology Business unit of L&T and is expected to be operational by 2012. The company said that the scope of work included design, supply, procurement, construction, testing and commissioning of the Doha South Sewage Treatment Works.

*Source: Trade Arabia,*

For full report: [http://www.tradearabia.com/news/cons\\_180209.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/news/cons_180209.html)

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## Saudi Arabia

### 21. Saudi's low cost carrier looks to India for funds

Mumbai, Monday, 3 May 2010

Nasair, a low-fare aviation service from Saudi Arabia is seeking investments for Indian carriers. Nasair launched its service from Mumbai about a month ago and aims to benefit from the large Indian community in Saudi Arabia. It would soon expand services to other cities in India with a special focus on the South from where 30 percent of the population in Saudi comes from. The Saudi airline was in talks with local low cost carriers such as SpiceJet, IndiGo and Kingfisher Red for an arrangement that would facilitate feeding business to each other.

*Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/transportation/airlines/-aviation/Saudis-low-cost-carrier-looks-to-India-for-funds/articleshow/5884737.cms>

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## UAE

### 22. India's Oberoi mulls three hotels in UAE by 2013

Dubai, Thursday, 6 May 2010

Oberoi Hotels and Resorts will open its first UAE hotel in 2011 followed by two other hotels in Abu Dhabi by 2013. The group with a luxury property in Saudi Arabia is looking at further expansion in the region in countries like Oman and Morocco. Admitting to construction delays because of financing, President Liam Lambert said that the hotels in Abu Dhabi and Oman would open by late 2012 or mid 2013. He added saying that the group's target market would include 30 percent leisure market with the rest being corporate and MICE.

*Source: Emirates Business 24/7, Dubai*

For full report: <http://www.business24-7.ae/companies-markets/travel-hospitality/india-s-oberoi-mulls-three-hotels-in-uae-by-2013-2010-05-06-1.241018>

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## Hajj

### 23. 1,206 pilgrims selected for Haj

New Delhi, Wednesday, 26 May 2010

The Delhi State Haj Committee held the draw for the selection of Haj pilgrims for 2010 25 May 2010. As per the Delhi quota allocated by the Haj Committee of India, 1,206 pilgrims were selected out of 6,305 applications while 190 pilgrims who were rejected continuously for the last four years were given confirmed status. Congress Member of Parliament, Mahabul Mishra said that the computerised draw of lots had brought transparency to the selection process.

**Source: *The Hindu, Chennai***

For full report: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/26/stories/2010052664940300.htm>

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## Miscellaneous

### **24. Twenty-eight Indian workers stranded in Egypt**

Madurai, Saturday, 8 May 2010

Twenty-eight Indians who went to Egypt for work in October 2009 were stranded there without passports, work visas and also with no mobile phones since 3 May 2010 night. One of the victims had conveyed to his friend that they had been ousted from the company and boarding house for having sought better compensation and having revealed their plight to the media. The victim conveyed further, that the management had not paid them salary for ten months and had confiscated their passports, work visas and phones.

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

For full report: <http://expressbuzz.com/states/tamilnadu/28-indian-workers-stranded-in-egypt/171765.html>

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### **25. Call for pan-Asian partnership to benefit from media boom**

Dubai, Wednesday, 12 May 2010

The Editor in chief of The Hindu, N Ram called for all the media outlets in the Arab world, India and rest of Asia to work together to benefit from the media boom. Speaking at the annual Arab Media Forum in Dubai on 12 May 2010, he referred to the successes of print media in India and China. Pointing to the success of Qatar based Al-Jazeera television network, Ram was optimistic about Arab media having great prospects to offer to other media partners in India. Further, he expressed that the commonalities that could bind the Arab media with counterparts in Asian countries such as India and China needed to be identified.

**Source: *The Hindu, Chennai***

For full report: <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/international/article428445.ece>

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### **26. Landing in tragedy**

Dubai, Sunday, 23 May 2010

The early morning crash of Air India Express plane from Dubai on Saturday, 22 May at Mangalore airport that killed 158 passengers left the one million-odd Indian expatriate community in a state of shock. This was the second major air tragedy involving UAE's Indian expatriates, 32 years after an Indian Airlines flight from Mumbai to Dubai crashed killing 260 passengers. Newspaper offices, television and radio stations all over UAE were flooded with calls from anxious relatives and friends of the Indians expats. Also, relatives of the victims were hastily preparing to fly in for cremations and funerals.

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

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/landin-in-tragedy/622516/>

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## **27. CBSE curriculum goes global**

Dubai, Wednesday, 26 May 2010

On 25 May Minister of Human Resource Development Kapil Sibal launched the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum at the Indian High School in Dubai. The new curriculum was initiated in thirty schools outside India this year of which 13 are in the UAE. Apart from the UAE, the same has been introduced in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar. Sibal was quoted as saying that 'the Indian education system needs to move away from the mere percentages in examinations that have engrossed many children in unhealthy competition.' He also added that the new curriculum was ready to compete with international systems such as the International Baccalaureate. The new curriculum that is recognised by universities in the US and UK would pave way for students to be readily accepted for higher studies without pre-requisites.

*Source: Khaleej Times Online, Dubai*

For full report:

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/May/theuae\\_May762.xml&section=theuae&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/May/theuae_May762.xml&section=theuae&col=)

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## **28. Insurance hiked for staff in Kabul, Iraq**

New Delhi, Thursday, 27 May 2010

India has increased the insurance cover of Indian officials and staffers in Afghanistan and Iraq in light of the security threat. Sources in the security establishment revealed that the insurance cover to every official in Baghdad and Kabul has been hiked from 3 million to 5 Million rupees. Also, the heads of missions were to receive two bulletproof vehicles and in the coming months, the security cover might be extended to other officials.

*Source: Indian Express, New Delhi*

For full report: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/insurance-hiked-for-staff-in-kabul-iraq/624189/2>

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## **29. Fake passport industry thrives in Gulf with links in Kerala**

Kozhikode, Thursday, 27 May 2010

The air crash in Mangalore brought to light a major fake passport and visa racket operating via travel agencies. According to Official estimates, twelve passengers who travelled in the aircraft had passports secured through fraudulent means from the Kozhikode passport office. Immigration officials said that a fake passport industry has been flourishing in the Gulf with links in Kerala that provides forged passports, visas and travel documents to the unemployed for jobs in the Gulf. A parallel racket in the Gulf helps expatriates stranded in the Gulf countries to return to the state following ill treatment by employers. Impersonation and photo substitution are the illegal methods adopted. The number of persons arrested with fake passports is increasing every year and a majority was from Kasaragod district, Kerala, said Salim, Emigration Deputy Superintendent, Calicut International Airport.

*Source: The Hindu, Chennai*

For full report: <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/states/kerala/article439160.ece?homepage=true>

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