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Note: 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. This can be accessed at:

<http://mei.org.in/indiaSpeaks/India%20Speaks%2004-S.pdf>

Bilateral

a. Bahrain

1. Visit of H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 10 February 2010

H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, will be arriving on Wednesday, February 10, 2010. He will call on the Minister of External Affairs, Mr. S.M. Krishna on 12 February.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/mediaadvisory/2010/02/10ma01.htm>

2. Visit of H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Republic of India, 10 to 12 February 2010

His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, was on an official visit to India from 10th to 12th February 2010. His Excellency met his Indian counterpart His Excellency Mr. S. M. Krishna on Friday 12th February and vowed to boost their two billion dollar energy and trade ties. His Excellency Shaikh Khalid also discussed various issues with His Excellency Mr. S. M. Krishna to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries. The two leaders also held parleys on scaling up trade and investment and also discussed about the Indian expatriates in Bahrain. The discussion was warm and marked with cordiality. H.E. Mr. S. M. Krishna hosted lunch for the Bahraini delegation at Hyderabad House, which was also attended by Honourable Minister of State for External Affairs Dr. Shashi Tharoor.

On 12th February His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa called on Honourable Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and discussed various issues of common concern. His Excellency the Minister presented a letter to the Honourable Prime Minister from His Royal Highness Prince Salman Bin Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

His Excellency the Minister earlier in the day held meeting with H.E. Dr. Shashi Tharoor and later in the day with National Security Advisor Mr. Shivshankar Menon. His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa also held Media Interaction with Indian newspapers.

His Excellency also had meeting with Mr. Manish Tewari Honourable Member of Parliament and Congress Spokesperson on 11th February and discussed issues of mutual interest.

Source: Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, New Delhi

<http://www.bahrainembassyindia.com/pressrelease-visit-of-h.e-shaikh-khalid.html>

b. Egypt

3. Strengthening Relations with African Countries, 25 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

...

(b) the agreements signed with African countries recently;

...

Answer: The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Dr. Shashi Tharoor)

...

List of Agreements signed by India with African Countries during 2009-10:

Egypt: A Joint Action Plan (JAP) for cooperation between the Egyptian Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Indian Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 338 asked by Mr. Govindrao Adik

<http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

c. Iran

4. Foreign Secretary's visit to Iran (2-3 February 2010), 3 February 2010

Mrs. Nirupama Rao, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, accompanied by Mr. Y.K. Sinha, Joint Secretary (PAI) visited Tehran on 2-3 February 2010 for the 7th round of Foreign Office Consultations/ Strategic Dialogue at the invitation of her counterpart H.E. Dr. Mohammad Ali Fathollahi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia & Oceania of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During her stay in Tehran she called on H.E. Manouchehr Mottaki, Foreign Minister of Iran; H.E. Dr. Seyed Shamseddin Hosseini, Minister for Economy and Finance and H.E. Dr. Saeed Jalili, Secretary, Supreme National Security Council.

Foreign Secretary held extensive discussions on bilateral relations with her Iranian interlocutors. It was agreed that the next meeting of the India-Iran Joint Commission will be held in New Delhi at an early date. She also exchanged views with the Iranian side on the regional situation, including on Afghanistan, the menace of cross-border terrorism and other matters of regional and global relevance.

Source: Indian Embassy, Tehran, Iran

<http://www.indianembassy-tehran.ir/pressreleases-en.html>

5. Agreement between ONGC and Hinduja Group, 23 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) and Hinduja Group have done any agreement with Iran for extraction of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from the Persian Gulf;
- (b) if so, the details of major features of the agreement; and
- (c) the benefits to India from this agreement?

Answer: The Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas (Mr. Murli Deora)

(a) to (c) The Iranian side has offered certain participation interest to Indian side in the proposed Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project based on commercial considerations. Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC)/ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) is presently preparing to carry out due diligence of the Project.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 125 asked by Mr. Lalit Kishore Chaturvedi

<http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

d. Iraq

6. Iraq offers increased long term crude oil supply arrangement to India; Indian companies invited to invest in Iraqi refining sector, 10 February 2010

The Minister of Industry and Minerals of the Republic of Iraq Mr. Fawzi F. Hariri has offered more supply of crude oil to Indian refineries stating that Iraq is ramping up its current crude oil production capacity substantially in next few years. Speaking during a meeting with Mr. Murli Deora, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas here today, Mr. Hariri invited Indian companies to invest in the refining sector in Iraq with assured supply of crude oil. He also said that long term crude oil supply arrangement could be made for Indian refineries. Iraq is one of the major crude oil supplier to India.

Mr. Murli Deora offered the utilization of upcoming crude oil storage facility in India by Iraq. The visiting Minister expressed keen interest in the proposal as the crude oil could be conveniently supplied to various importing centres from the Indian locations.

Mr. Deora also proposed utilization of the services of leading engineering and consultancy firm, Engineers India Limited (EIL) by the Government of Iraq in developing oil sector infrastructure. He informed that most of the Indian refineries have been built by EIL in addition to the infrastructure in upstream and downstream sectors of the country. Presently, EIL is implementing among others a major Greenfield refinery project at Bhatinda, Punjab which is progressing quite well.

Mr. Hariri invited Mr. Deora to visit Iraq for taking forward the cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector.

Source: Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas Press Release, Press Information Bureau, New Delhi

<http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=57745>

e. Israel

7. Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Hon'ble Minister of State for Commerce & Industry's visit to Israel (February 16–18, 2010), 17 February 2010

Mr. Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Hon'ble Minister of State for Commerce & Industry is currently leading a Ministry of Commerce and Industry delegation on a two day visit to Israel [February 16-18, 2010]. He held meetings with Israeli leadership in Jerusalem today [February 17, 2010]. He paid a forty-five minute call on President Shimon Peres and discussed various aspects of India-Israel bilateral cooperation. Ambassador Navtej Sarna was also present during the meeting. The bilateral trade figure for the last fiscal (2008-09) was US\$ 3.55 billion with exports from India amounting to US\$ 1.5 billion and imports to India amounting to US\$ 2.09 billion. Bilateral trade increased at a compound annual growth rate of 15 percent over the last five years.

2. Mr. Scindia conveyed to President Peres that Government of India had decided to go ahead with negotiations on a free trade agreement between India and Israel which is expected to give a major boost to trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. President Peres and Mr. Scindia also discussed possibilities of developing further cooperation in high tech areas including IT, Bio-technology, and Nanotechnology to take advantage of mutual core competencies. They also exchanged views on the global challenge posed by terrorism and ongoing cooperation between the two countries in the area of homeland security. The two leaders also agreed to continue to place emphasis on cooperation in the application of science and technology particularly in areas related to agriculture and water management.

3. Later, Mr. Scindia met Israeli Minister of Industry, Trade & Labour Mr. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. The Chief Scientist of Israel Eli Oppen was also present during the meeting. The Israeli side welcomed Mr. Scindia's announcement regarding the FTA. It was mutually agreed that the next meeting of the Joint Trade and Economic Committee should be held at an early date in New Delhi. The Minister underlined the fact that research and development constitutes a fundamental basis for core competence in multiple industrial areas for both countries. He further added that cooperation in R&D would pay rich dividends in diverse areas including water management, agriculture, high tech and homeland security. Mr. Scindia proposed that a practical step to enhance high tech cooperation would be to set up a Government to Government joint technology incubator initiative in India with representation from both sides including the private sector. This proposal was warmly received by the Israeli side. The Israeli side also informed the visiting Minister that the SHAVIT programme being implemented by the Israeli Export Institute would expand to include Water Management and Agriculture.

4. Mr. Scindia's visit concluded with a firsthand experience of a BioMed incubator dealing with infrastructural support for start up companies along with an India-Israeli joint venture dealing with drip irrigation. He also met top Israeli industrialists over lunch to discuss promotion of trade and commerce between the two countries and delivered a Keynote Address to a select audience of top Israeli management on the subject "*Indian Economy in the Next Decade – an Engine for*

Growth” at a seminar jointly organized by the Israeli Export and International Cooperation Institute and the Embassy of India.

Source: Embassy of India, Tel Aviv, Israel

[http://www.indembassy.co.il/Additional%20files/Press%20Release-MOS\(C&I\).doc](http://www.indembassy.co.il/Additional%20files/Press%20Release-MOS(C&I).doc)

8. Jyotiraditya Scindia meets Israel President- discusses possibilities of developing further cooperation, 18 February 2010

Mr. Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Minister of State for Commerce & Industry presently on a two day (16-18 February) visit to Israel, called on President Shimon Peres and discussed various aspects of India-Israel bilateral cooperation. Mr. Scindia stated that the proposed free trade agreement between India and Israel is expected to give a major boost to trade and economic cooperation. Mr. Scindia also discussed possibilities of developing further cooperation in high tech areas including IT, Bio-technology, and Nanotechnology to take advantage of mutual core competencies. The two sides also exchanged views on the global challenge posed by terrorism and ongoing cooperation between the two countries in the area of homeland security. Both the leaders agreed to emphasize on cooperation in the application of science and technology particularly in areas related to agriculture and water management.

Later, Mr. Scindia met Israeli Minister of Industry, Trade & Labour Mr. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. The Minister underlined the fact that R&D constitutes a fundamental basis for core competence in multiple industrial areas for both countries. Mr. Scindia proposed that a practical step to enhance high tech cooperation would be to set up a Government to Government joint technology incubator initiative in India with representation from both sides including the private sector.

He also met leading Israeli industrialists to discuss promotion of trade and commerce between the two countries and delivered a Keynote Address on “*Indian Economy in the Next Decade– an Engine for Growth*” at a seminar jointly organized by the Israeli Export and International Cooperation Institute and the Embassy of India.

The bilateral trade figure for the last fiscal (2008-09) was US\$ 3.55 billion with exports from India amounting to US\$ 1.5 billion and imports to India amounting to US\$ 2.09 billion. Bilateral trade increased at a compound annual growth rate of 15 percent over the last five years.

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry Press Release, Press Information Bureau, New Delhi

<http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=57965&kwd=>

f. Jordan

9. Vast potential for expanding trade between India and Jordan, Says Jyotiraditya Scindia, 18 February 2010

Mr. Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Minister of State for Commerce & Industry, during his visit to Jordan on February 15-16, 2010 met the Minister of Industry & Trade, Mr. Amer Hadidi; Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nasser Judeh and Minister of Energy & Mineral Resources, Mr. Khaled Anis Irani and discussed the possibilities for exploring and enhancing trade between the two countries. The talks between the two sides focused on ways to augment the bilateral trade and also covered issues of mutual interest.

During his interactions, Mr. Scindia observed that there is a vast potential for expanding trade between the two countries in sectors such as leather, information technology, pharmaceuticals, construction material and automobile sector. Both the sides recalled the 8th Session of Indo-Jordan Trade and Economic Committee held in New Delhi in August 2006 and agreed to hold the next Session in Amman as early as possible.

The trade turnover between the two countries in 2008 was at US\$ 1.785 billion and US\$ 934 million in the first eleven months of 2009. Jordan's imports from India was US\$ 503 million in 2008 as compared to US\$ 469 million in 2007. India's main items of exports to Jordan consist of electrical machinery and equipments, engineering goods, organic chemicals, aircraft and parts, etc. India's main items of imports from Jordan are phosphates, phosphoric acid, fertilizers, inorganic chemicals aluminium, lead etc.

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry Press Release, Press Information Bureau, New Delhi

<http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=57953>

g. Kuwait

10. Visit of Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs S.M. Krishna to Kuwait, 1 February 2010

Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs of India Mr. S.M. Krishna will be visiting Kuwait from 3-4 February 2010 at the invitation of His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs. He will be accompanied by a number of senior officials.

India and Kuwait enjoy traditionally close and friendly relations, based on historical linkages that have deepened and diversified over time. Geographic proximity, ancient trade ties, and cultural affinities, continue to sustain and nurture our long-standing friendship.

Kuwait is an important trading partner for India and India-Kuwait trade was US\$ 8.4 billion in 2007-2008 and is estimated at US\$ 10.5 billion in 2009. Indian companies are active in the petroleum and power sectors. Kuwait is an important partner in Indian's quest for energy security.

The presence of a large concentration of Indian nationals in Kuwait is another vital aspect of our bilateral ties.

The visit to India in June 2006 of the Amir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was a landmark event that imparted a strong momentum to our bilateral ties. The visit to Kuwait by the Hon'ble Vice President of India from 6-8 April, 2009 built upon and further reinforced this friendship between India and Kuwait, to mutual benefit.

During the visit, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister will call on the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah and the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al Ahmed Al-Sabah and will have substantive discussions on areas of mutual interest with his counterpart and the Kuwaiti leadership. He will also be meeting a cross section of Indian community which is nearly 600,000 at present and their role and contribution is widely appreciated by the people of Kuwait.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://www.mea.gov.in/pressrelease/2010/02/01pr01.htm>

11. Arrival of H.E. Mr. S.M. Krishna, EAM, 1 February 2010

H.E. Mr. S.M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs of India along with his delegation was received on arrival at the International Airport Kuwait by the Deputy P.M. and Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Sheikh (Dr.) Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The External Affairs Minister Mr. Krishna called on the Amir of State of Kuwait H.E. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister of State H.E. Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah.

Source: Indian Embassy, Kuwait

<http://www.indembkwt.org/press/03feb10.htm>

12. Remarks by Minister of External Affairs S. M. Krishna at the Indian Community Meeting, 3 February 2010

Secretary Latha Reddy,

Ambassador Ajai Malhotra,

Distinguished representatives of the Indian community in Kuwait:

I am extremely pleased to come to Kuwait on my first official visit to the Gulf since taking over as India's Minister of External Affairs.

India-Kuwait relations go back many centuries and have traditionally been close and friendly. They have been sustained by our geographical proximity and cultural and civilizational affinities. During the 19th/20th centuries, Kuwait's dhow trading fleet was one of the most impressive in the Gulf and regularly visited the ports along our Western coast. Moreover, the beautiful pearls that came from this region were treasured across India. Many Kuwaiti families, including the ruling Al Sabah family, have had long-standing and close association with India.

Dear friends,

The short time that I have spent in Kuwait has convinced me of the genuine warmth and goodwill that the leadership of this country entertains towards India and Indians. Soon after my arrival in Kuwait today morning, I had an opportunity to pay my respects to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait and His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait. I have also had very comprehensive discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kuwait, my counterpart Sheikh Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. I must share with you that the leadership of Kuwait has a very positive opinion about India and Indians and the Indian community is held in very high esteem. There is also a sense of gratitude to you for so ably contributing to the economic well being and development of Kuwait over many, many decades. India has traditionally been an important partner in Kuwait's economic development and I have informed my interlocutors that we looked forward to a further strengthening of our close and mutually beneficial ties.

The Indian Community in Kuwait has grown from 160,000 in 1990, to 393,000 in 2003, to 600,000 at present. You are easily the largest expatriate community in Kuwait and, as Ambassador Malhotra just mentioned, you have earned a reputation for being disciplined, hard working, and law-abiding. You are a microcosm of India, reflective of its vibrant diversity and its talents. We are proud of your achievements and contribution to the development of Kuwait, even as you have brought benefits and progress to yourselves and your families. Indians are considered by the host country as the community of first preference in Kuwait. On your behalf I have expressed to His Highness the Amir our gratitude for the benevolence and care extended to the Indian community in Kuwait.

The visits of His Highness the Amir to India in 2006 and of our Hon'ble Vice President to Kuwait last April were important milestones for India-Kuwait relations. They helped bring our two friendly countries even closer together. During Vice President M. Hamid Ansari's visit in April 2009 it was acknowledged that there was a need for regular bilateral exchanges for further deepening and consolidating our relationship. It is in this context that I am visiting Kuwait.

India and the countries of the Gulf are, in a very real sense, a part of each other's extended neighbourhood. In fact, it may sometimes take about the same time to fly from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, maybe longer, as it would to fly from Mumbai to Kuwait! The well-being of India and that of this region are interlinked. We have a vested interest to see that we live in surroundings that are calm, where our peoples have the opportunity to develop and prosper in the shadow of peace.

Each one of you has come here driven by your own initiative, and not because the government has sent you. Your work was appreciated, you carved a niche for yourself, and you are today a valued member of this society, contributing effectively to it. Some of you have been here for over five decades. I would like to thank each one of you, individually and collectively, for keeping our reputation so high and for contributing to the fine global profile of Indians, which is being appreciated in ever increasing measure worldwide.

It is also very satisfying that there are no political issues over which there are differences between our two countries. Instead, our ties are characterized by warmth, mutual respect and understanding. It is also satisfying that India-Kuwait trade has grown at a good pace and exceeded US\$ 10.5 billion in 2009. We will continue to tap unexploited potential. Kuwait is an important long-term partner in India's quest for energy security. It provides 11 per cent-12 per cent of India's annual crude oil imports. A significant component of our non-oil trade consists of Indian food exports to Kuwait, particularly rice, eggs, fruits and vegetables. We are committed to enhancing bilateral cooperation in the sectors of petrochemicals, fertilizers, power generation and infrastructure. We have today agreed on setting up an India-Kuwait Joint Mechanism on combating International Terrorism.

In spite of the global downturn, the Indian economy grew at nearly 7 per cent in 2009 and there is considerable scope for profitable Kuwaiti investment into India, especially in infrastructure.

Friends, the message I bring is that India is keen to be an active partner in promoting its bilateral relationship with Kuwait. We will explore every avenue available so that the India-Kuwait relationship, that is already strong and very substantive, can progress to a qualitatively new level. In this, your cooperation and contribution will be critically important.

Thank you very much for being here today I wish you and your families happiness, success, and prosperity and I look forward to interacting with you over dinner.

Source: Indian Embassy, Kuwait

<http://www.indembkwt.org/press/04feb10.htm>

13. Indians workers in Foreign Countries, 24 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether a large number of Indians are working in overseas countries;
- (b) if so, the details of the workers including unskilled and semi-skilled, country-wise;
- (c) whether the current debt crisis would have an adverse impact on the employment and livelihood of Indians working/settled in Kuwait; and
- (d) if so, the steps taken by the Government to protect the Indian population in Arab countries?

Answer: Minister of External Affairs (Mr. S. M. Krishna)

- (a): Yes, Sir.

(b): Exact details are not available. However, there are an estimated 4.5 million Indian workers in the GCC Countries. A large proportion of them are low skilled workers.

(c) & (d): No Sir, the emigration clearance granted to the workers going to Kuwait for employment has gone up to 42,091 during 2009 in comparison to 35,562 during the year 2008.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No. 282 asked by Mr. Purnmasi Ram

<http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/psearch/QResult15.aspx?qref=81762>

h. Oman

14. Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr. Shashi Tharoor to Oman (5-7 February 2010), 4 February 2010

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs will be visiting Oman from 5-7 February 2010 for Strategic Dialogue and Consultations at the invitation of His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Al Busaidi, Secretary-General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman. He will be accompanied by an 11-member business delegation mounted by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Apart from substantive discussions on areas of mutual, bilateral and regional interest, Hon'ble Minister will meet His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs and other dignitaries. Dr. Tharoor will also give an address at the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on "Indian Foreign Policy Imperatives in the 21st Century".

India and Oman enjoy warm and cordial relations, which can be ascribed to historical contacts as well as contribution made by the Indian expatriate workforce numbering over 556,000 for the development of Oman.

Pursuant to the historic visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister to Oman in November 2008, relationship between the two countries moved to a strategic partnership. The trade between the two countries is on the upswing despite recessionary global trends. India ranked as the 5th largest source of imports into Oman in 2009. Oman investments in India have exceeded US\$ 200 million primarily in refineries, tourism, pharmaceutical industry and home furniture. In 2008, major Indian companies, independently or in collaboration, bagged contracts worth US\$ 836 million.

The visit of the Hon'ble Minister of State is expected to further strengthen and deepen the strategic relationship to our mutual advantage.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/04pr01.htm>

15. IAF Volleyball teams wins the friendly Volleyball Match Series between Royal Air Force Oman (RAFO) and Indian Air Force (IAF), 26 February 2010

The friendly Volleyball Match Series 2010 between the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) concluded today. The IAF volleyball team won by 3-1 (25-21, 20-25, 25-15, 25-14) at Rajputana Rifles Indoor Stadium at Delhi Cantonment today. Air Marshal Naresh Verma, Director General (Works & Ceremonies) gave away prizes to the participating and winning team.

The RAFO volleyball team was on a four day visit to India from 23 Feb 2010 to play the friendly volleyball match series.

Source: Ministry of Defence Press Release, Press Information Bureau, New Delhi

<http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=58599>

i. Palestine

16. Visit of the President of the Palestinian National Authority, H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas (11-12 February 2010), 14 February 2010

The President of the Palestinian National Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, is paying a working visit to India on 11-12 February 2010. He is accompanied by Foreign Minister Dr. Riyad Al-Malki, other Ministers and senior officials.

His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas met Prime Minister on 11 February and shared his views on recent developments in the Peace Process in West Asia. Prime Minister thanked President Abbas for keeping India informed and reiterated India's commitment to the Palestinian cause in line with our support for United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 calling for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and UN Security Council Resolutions 1397 and 1515. He also reiterated India's support for the Arab Peace Plan, and urged concerted action for achieving a durable, just and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict.

Prime Minister announced a grant of US\$ 10million as budget support to the Palestinian National Authority and reassured President Abbas of India's support to their efforts aimed at economic and social development. President Abbas expressed his sincere appreciation for India's consistent political and material support to Palestine. Prime Minister hosted a dinner for President Abbas and his delegation.

On 12 February, Minister of State for External Affairs Dr. Shashi Tharoor will call on President Abbas.

Source: Indian Embassy, Cairo, Egypt

<http://www.indembcairo.com/Web%20Pages/Archives%20Eng%202010/Feb.%2014.htm>

j. Saudi Arabia

17. Extradition Treaty with Saudi Arabia, 25 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is actively considering to have extradition treaty with Saudi Arabia to deny underworld fugitives any hideouts;
- (b) if so, the present status of the agreement and the time by which it is likely to be finalized;
- (c) whether Government has taken up the matter of underworld dons on whom Government of India proposes to take legal action but hiding in Saudi Arabia; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

Answer: The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Dr. Shashi Tharoor)

- (a) to (b) Yes. The Republic of India and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are actively considering signing an Extradition Treaty at the earliest possible to ensure the availability of criminals for trial.
- (c) to (d) No. So far the Ministry of External Affairs has not received any such extradition request from any agency/Ministry to be forwarded to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 317 asked by Dr. Janardhan Waghmare

<http://164.100.47.4/newrsquestion/ShowQn.aspx>

18. Saudi Arabia could help us with Pak: India, 28 February 2010

Saudi Arabia, with its close ties with Islamabad, could be a "valuable interlocutor" in improving India's ties with Pakistan, India's Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor said in Riyadh on Sunday.

"We feel Saudi Arabia has a long and close relationship with Pakistan and that makes Saudi a more valuable interlocutor to us," Tharoor told Indian journalists in Riyadh.

He was responding to a question on whether India will seek Saudi Arabia's support to influence Pakistan to address India's concerns over terrorism emanating from Pakistani territory.

Tharoor added that Saudi Arabia has its own issues with Al Qaeda.

"We expect to have a constructive conversation on the issue. The tentacles of terror have already spread from Afghanistan to Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and latest is Yemen," he added.

...

Source: IBN Live, New Delhi

<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/saudi-arabia-could-help-us-with-pak-india/110836-3.html?from=search>

19. Clarification by Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr. Shashi Tharoor on his remarks in Riyadh, 28 February 2010

A section of the media has misread the remarks made by me in Riyadh last evening.

What I basically said was that Saudi Arabia is a valuable interlocutor for India. Any other interpretation was neither meant nor warranted.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/28pr01.htm>

k. Turkey

20. State Visit of H.E. Mr. Abdullah Gul, President of the Republic of Turkey to India, 5 February 2010

His Excellency, Mr. Abdullah Gul, the President of the Republic of Turkey, accompanied by spouse Mrs. Hayrunnisa Gul, will be paying a State Visit to India from 7th to 11th February 2010. The President's delegation will include, H.E. Mehmet Aydin, State Minister and co-Chairman of the Joint Economic Commission, H.E. Prof. Dr. Recep Akdag, Minister of Health and H.E. Mr. Binali Yildirim, Minister of Transportation, Members of Parliament, other senior officials and a large number of business persons.

During his visit, the President of Turkey will be meeting the President and the Vice President and will hold delegation level talks with Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The President will also host a Banquet in honour of the visiting dignitary. The Minister of External Affairs and the Leader of Opposition will call on the President of Turkey.

The Turkish President and his delegation will also visit Agra and Mumbai. The Turkish President will also inaugurate the Turkish Consulate in Mumbai and attend business interactions organized by FICCI and CII in Delhi and Mumbai.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/05pr03.htm>

21. Joint Declaration on Terrorism between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of India, 9 February 2010

On the occasion of the visit of the President of the Republic of Turkey to India, both sides:

Recognizing that terrorism poses a grave threat to global peace and security;

Noting that the forces of terrorism are nourished by extremist ideologies;

Stressing that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group;

Recognizing further that terrorism seeks to weaken, in particular, democratic societies and polities that are based on the rule of law and committed to inclusive growth;

Denouncing those who sponsor, abet and instigate terrorism and provide them safe havens;

Affirming their common commitment to fight terrorism and recognizing that their counter-terrorism efforts constitute an important part of the international community's efforts to eradicate terrorism;

Calling upon the international community to comply with all the provisions of international counter-terrorism conventions and protocols as well as other related international instruments and strengthen international cooperation in this regard;

Recognizing the need for the conclusion of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism as a vital component of the international legal framework in the global struggle against terrorism; calling on the international community to conclude the Convention without further delay;

Decided to enhance their cooperation in this field;

To this end, their officials have been tasked to work towards developing an action plan with timelines and specific measures. For this purpose, the officials will take into account the existing structures of cooperation such as the Joint Working Group against Terrorism;

Agreed to work together and with other like-minded States for the finalization of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the earliest

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/09pr03.htm>

22. Joint Declaration on Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of India, 9 February 2010

On the occasion of the visit of the President of the Republic of Turkey to India, both sides:

Considering the importance of science and technology for the economic and social development of our countries,

Desiring to develop and expand cooperation in the field of science and technology in areas of common interest,

Noting that, together with economic and commercial relations, cooperation in science and technology offer great potential as a driver of bilateral relations,

Recognizing that cooperation in science and technology will not only advance the state of science and technology to the benefit of both countries but also strengthen the bonds of friendship and understanding between our peoples,

Reaffirming the Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Science and Technology between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of India signed on 17 September 2003,

Declare that, the two countries, hereby launch an Advanced Science and Technology Dialogue which:

Will strive to promote the maximum use of the opportunities that have risen for mutually beneficial interaction in the field of science and technology which would add to the strength of the two national economies, and to the welfare and prosperity of the two peoples,

Will strengthen this interaction with special emphasis on high-technology and frontier areas of research and application,

Will encourage and support broadened and expanded relations between the scientific and technological communities in both countries by creating favourable conditions for cooperation,

Will encourage cooperation through exchange of ideas, information, skills and technologies; exchange of scientists and technical experts; the convening of joint seminars, scientific conferences, and meetings; training and enhancing the skills of scientists and technical experts; the conduct of joint research projects and studies and other forms of scientific and technological cooperation as may be mutually agreed upon,

Will actively study the possibilities of working together in mutually identified projects in areas such as telecommunication, computerization, information technology, space research, biotechnology and environmental technology.

Will actively explore the possibilities for joint research and development activities making use of best practices in this field,

Will encourage, facilitate and support the development of direct contacts and cooperation between government agencies and organizations, universities, science and research centres, institutes and institutions, private sector firms and other entities of the two countries.

We also agree, therefore, that Turkey and India convene a joint workshop in 2010 among designated representatives to elaborate and bring into being the Advanced Science and Technology Dialogue in accordance with this Joint Declaration.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/09js02.htm>

23. Visit of H.E. Mr. Abdullah Gul, the President of the Republic of Turkey to India, 9 February 2010

H.E. Mr. Abdullah Gul, President of the Republic of Turkey, accompanied by Mrs. Hayrunnisa Gul, is on a State visit to India from 7th-11th February 2010. The President's delegation includes H.E. Mr. Mehmet Aydin, State Minister and co-Chairman of the Joint Economic Commission, H.E. Prof. Dr. Recep Akdag, Minister of Health and H.E. Mr. Binali Yildirim, Minister of Transportation, Members of Parliament, senior Government officials and over a hundred business persons.

2. Delegation level talks were held today with Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister, who was assisted by Mr. S.M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Kamal Nath, Minister of Road, Surface Transport & Highways, Mr. Murli Deora, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Mr. Anand Sharma, Minister of Commerce & Industry, Mr. Pallam Raju, Minister of State for Defence, Mr. Shivshankar Menon, NSA (National Security Adviser), Mr. T.K.A. Nair, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, and other senior officials.

3. The two sides had cordial discussions on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.

4. PM told President Gul that his visit to India, after the visit of Prime Minister Erdogan in November 2008, is an important milestone to review the state of our bilateral relations and to chart a forward-looking agenda for advancing our multi-faceted cooperation. PM said, "We believe that our relations stand on their own footing, and should be progressed in that spirit". He pointed out that despite having several frameworks and mechanisms for bilateral cooperation and two-way trade crossing US\$ 3 billion in 2008, the relations are far below their true potential and that we are ready for a much deeper and robust partnership with Turkey. In this context, he referred to the Joint Study Group for a Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that held its first meeting in New Delhi in January 2010. Welcoming the increased participation of Turkish companies in infrastructural projects in India, PM called for expanding cooperation in areas such as science & technology, culture, education and tourism.

5. President Gul said that the two countries were rediscovering each other and that the frequent high-level exchanges, including his own visit, was a reflection of the political will to work closely with India on political, economic, science & technology and cultural fronts.

6. The two sides discussed recent developments relating to Afghanistan. President Gul recognized that India's contribution to Afghanistan is very important and expressed the desire to work together with India in bringing stability to that country.

7. During detailed discussions on enhancing cooperation in different areas, the two sides agreed on the following:

(a) Joint Declaration on Terrorism

(b) Joint Declaration on Science & Technology Cooperation

8. The Joint Declaration on Terrorism recognizes that terrorism poses a great threat to global peace and stability, denounces those who sponsor, abet and instigate terrorism and provide them safe heavens, decides to enhance cooperation in this field by developing an Action Plan with timelines and specific measures. Both sides agree to work together with other like-minded States for the finalization of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the earliest.

9. The Joint Declaration on S&T Cooperation launches an advance science and technology dialogue, offers to actively study the possibilities of working together in mutually identified projects in areas such as telecommunications, computerization, non-technology space research, bio-technology and environmental technology and convene a joint workshop in 2010.

10. Both sides agreed to continue to work together in G-20 and other international fora including the United Nations.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/09pr05.htm>

24. The President of Turkey Meets the President, 9 February 2010

The President of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Abdullah Gul met the President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil at Rashtrapati Bhavan on February 9, 2010. The two discussed bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. The President later hosted a Banquet in honour of the visiting President.

Source: Office of the President of India, New Delhi

<http://presidentofindia.nic.in/re090210.html>

25. Speech by the President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the banquet in honour of the President of the Republic of Turkey, H. E. Mr. Abdullah Gul, 9 February 2010

Your Excellency, Your Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gul, President of the Republic of Turkey, Madame Hayrunnisa Gul, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to welcome you on your first official visit to India, which we are confident, will cement and deepen our bilateral relations.

Our countries have deep and rich historical connections. The influence of the Turkic civilization on Indian art and architecture is well known. The exchange of embassies between the Mughal and the Ottoman courts in the 15th and 16th Centuries, and the enthusiasm of the people of India in supporting the foundation of the Turkish Republic, testify to the longstanding links between our two countries. The Sufi tradition of Islam represented by Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi has always had a deep resonance in our country. Both our countries draw inspiration from his mystical poetry on universal love and brotherhood, and his cosmopolitan outlook, at a time of strife and upheavals. Rumi said and I quote:

*Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of living,
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.*

Both India and Turkey are modern democracies based on ethnic, religious and linguistic plurality. We believe that it is time to translate these historical assets and contemporary synergy, to work together to enhance bilateral cooperation, and address contemporary global challenges.

Excellency,

Economic and commercial ties between India and Turkey have gained momentum in recent years. However, the volume of bilateral trade and investment remains much below the potential of our two economies. To some extent, this is due to the impact of the recent global financial crisis. As members of the G-20, India and Turkey worked together for a coordinated response to the global downturn, and are contributing to a new architecture for international economic and financial interaction.

As the world comes out of this financial crisis, we are confident that India-Turkey trade will once again begin to flourish. India and Turkey have started exploring the possibility of negotiating a free trade agreement. We hope that this process will be expeditious and smooth. We should increase investment levels. There are great opportunities for Turkish business and industry in India in sectors like infrastructure development, energy and services. Indian companies are investing in mining, steel, irrigation equipment, tractors and automobiles in Turkey.

Both India and Turkey have developed centres of excellence in Science and Technology, as well as in higher education. We are happy that recently a first-ever micro satellite from Turkey was

launched by an Indian space vehicle. We look forward to more such cooperation in the future and also welcome the exchange of students, scholars and scientists.

The foundation of India-Turkey bilateral relations can be consolidated by institutional linkages such as between Parliaments and political parties of both countries. I am happy that a multi-party delegation from the Indian Parliament led by the Indian Minister of Parliamentary Affairs visited Turkey recently and was warmly received by you.

As victims of international terrorism, both India and Turkey, have a vital stake in eradicating this menace and threat to our democracies. We both firmly believe that terrorism is a crime against humanity and it should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Our bilateral mechanism in this regard could be further enhanced and updated by developing an Action Plan with timelines and specific measures. Fighting terrorism at various levels requires active international co-ordination amongst like-minded countries. I am happy that India and Turkey will work together in convincing others to come on board for the early finalization in the UN of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would request you to join me in raising a toast:-

- to the continued health and well being of His Excellency President Abdullah Gul and Madame Hayrunnisa Gul;
- to enhanced cooperation between India and Turkey, and;
- to the further strengthening of friendship between our peoples.

Source: President's Secretariat Press Release, Press Information Bureau, New Delhi

http://www.pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page1.asp?relid=57739

26. Discussion on Afghanistan in Istanbul, 25 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the outcome of the recent meeting of certain countries on Afghanistan which took place in Istanbul;
- (b) the countries that attended the meeting;
- (c) the reasons for excluding India from such a meeting;
- (d) whether Government has taken up the issue with the host country; and
- (e) if so, the response thereto?

Answer: The Minister of External Affairs (Mr. S. M. Krishna)

(a) to (b) Turkey hosted the fourth trilateral Summit of the Presidents of Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan on January 25, 2010. A Regional Conference was held in Istanbul on January 26, 2010

with participation from Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey. A number of other countries/organizations were invited to be observers and included the US, UK, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, OIC, Italy, UN, NATO, EU and ECO.

(c) to (e) Government has taken up the issue of exclusion of India from the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan. The Turkish Government has told us that they would have liked India to participate in the Conference. However, the Conference had evolved from a trilateral meeting involving Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan, and it was not possible to evolve a consensus on India's participation. The Turkish side further acknowledged India's positive role in Afghanistan's economic development.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Starred Question No. 57 asked by Mr. Tiruchi Siva

<http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

27. Bilateral Summit on Afghanistan, 25 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- a) the agenda of deliberation during the recent bilateral summit between India and Turkey that took place in Delhi;
- (b) whether Government took up the issue of India's exclusion from the recent meeting on Afghanistan that took place in Istanbul;
- (c) if so, the response of the Turkish side; and
- (d) whether Government has taken a view of the outcome of the said meeting in Istanbul?

Answer: The Minister of State for External Affairs (Mrs. Preneet Kaur)

(a) During the State visit to India by Turkish President Abdullah Gul, delegation level talks covered bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.

(b) to (c) The Turkish side suo moto clarified that they would have liked India to be present at the Istanbul meeting on Afghanistan. However, the meeting had evolved from trilateral format involving Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. It was not possible to arrive at a consensus on Indian participation. The Turkish side, however, expressed the hope that India will be able to participate in another meeting on Economic Development of Afghanistan that will be held in Turkey later this year. The Turkish side also acknowledged India's positive role in Afghanistan's economic development.

(d) Government has taken note of the outcome of the meeting in Istanbul.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 318 asked by Mr. B. S. Gnanadesikan

<http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

I. United Arab Emirates

28. M.K. Lokesh appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the United Arab Emirates, 16 February 2010

Mr. M.K. Lokesh has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the United Arab Emirates in succession to Mr. Tamiz Ahmad.

2. He is expected to take up his assignment shortly

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2010/02/16pr01.htm>

Multilateral Issues

29. Sub-Sea Pipeline, 23 February 2010

Question: Would the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas be pleased to state:

- a) whether Government is considering a proposal to bring the gas from the Middle East through the deep sea;
- (b) if so, whether Government has also directed Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) to pursue a sub-sea pipeline to import gas from Iran and Qatar; and
- (c) if so, the present status of the deal and under what terms and conditions the deal is likely to be held?

Answer: The Minister in the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (Mr. Murli Deora)

(a) to (c): In recent years, there have been significant technological advancements in the field of Deep Sea Gas transportation technology. Accordingly, for the last few years, interest has been revived in deep sea gas pipeline route from Middle-East to India. Gas supplies from several gas rich countries of Middle East through Gas Gathering pipeline with hub in Oman (or its proximity) have been proposed, so as to supply gas to Indian Coast through the said Deep Sea Pipeline. GAIL (India) Ltd. has entered into a Principles of Cooperation in the month of July 2009 for developing the pipeline Project. As such, the proposal is at its initial stage.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 123 asked by Mrs. Shobhana Bhartia

<http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspxs>

30. Inaugural address by Minister of State for External Affairs Dr Shashi Tharoor at the International Conference organized by Indo-Arab Economic Cooperation Forum & Institute of Objective Studies, 3 February 2010

I am privileged to inaugurate this 2-day international conference on 'Beyond the Meltdown: Search for Options' jointly organized by the Indo-Arab Economic Cooperation Forum and the Institute of Objective Studies.

2. I applaud the presence of such a distinguished gathering here. The topic of this Seminar is all the more appropriate today because of India's long lasting relations with the Arab countries, in particular in the Gulf region. India has a vibrant presence in the political, economic and cultural evolution of the Gulf. For thousands of years, our ancestors sailed the turbulent waters of the Indian Ocean and exchanged goods, ideas and experiences. This interaction over several millennia has left an abiding mark on our civilizational ethos, giving our peoples a similarity of perceptions and cultural mores. Our engagement has had such sustained resonance primarily because our relations have been continuously refreshed and revitalized by meeting new needs and requirements. For several centuries, India provided several of the necessities, comforts and luxuries needed by the people of the Gulf and occasionally re-exported by them to other markets. Indian foodstuffs, textiles and jewellery constituted the main exports from our country, while we imported huge quantities of dates and pearls from here.

3. Later, in recent years, when this part of the Arab world took up the massive expansion of its infrastructure and welfare institutions, India came forward with its human resources, initially blue-collar but increasingly progressing to professionals. Today, there is no aspect of the Gulf economies which has not been touched by an Indian contribution. Today India is pursuing closer economic relations with all its western neighbours in the Gulf. The bilateral trade between India and the GCC countries has crossed US\$ 100 billion in 2009 making GCC, as a bloc, our largest trading partner. The trade between India and the Arab world as a whole is well over US\$ 110 billion in 2009.

4. From the strategic point of view, India and Gulf countries share the need for political stability and security in the region. India has a vital stake in the stability, security and economic well being of the Gulf. There are many common political and security concerns of India and the Gulf countries, which should translate into coordinated efforts for peace, security and stability in the Gulf region, and South Asia. Emerging common threat perceptions create further opportunities for Gulf-India cooperation in the future. The Gulf States are going through a significant transformation themselves. The space for India to play an increasingly significant role in this transformation is widening. This envisages jointly preparing to meet emerging domestic and regional challenges, foremost being the common threat from terrorism and Islamist radicalism. Thus, both the Gulf region and India need to cooperate and coordinate their efforts to combat such forces to meet the challenge of terrorism and religious extremism. India has instituted a political and strategic dialogue with nearly all the countries in the region and this is being intensified.

5. As a result of high oil prices in recent years, the GCC countries are sitting on colossal disposable revenues (estimated around US\$ 3-4 trillion) amounting to more than half of the global sovereign wealth funds, which are of course intended to be used for investment purposes. There is no doubt that India is a more attractive destination for such investments than other places in the world. Some investments have already started from these countries both through FDI and FII, but it is far less than the potential particularly in the FDI segment. India has received FDI from GCC countries amounting to US\$ 1.59 billion (2009). The 4.5 million Indians in GCC countries transfer about US\$ 30 billion in remittances to India annually. So the difference is apparent.

6. Nearly 75 per cent of our crude oil requirement is met from this region. In 2008-09 India imported more than 92 MMT of crude from the Gulf against our total requirement of about 128MMT. The Gulf region, providing an overwhelming portion of India's oil and gas requirements, plays a crucial role in our energy security and helps accelerate the pace of our economic growth. There is new emphasis on energy diplomacy. India has successfully bid for oil blocks in Yemen, Qatar and Oman. Efforts are ongoing to setup joint ventures in downstream petrochemicals, fertilizer and energy intensive industries in the Gulf and in India. The OMIFCO fertilizer plant in Oman and the Essar steel plant in Qatar are good examples. We are working to replicate OMIFCO models or its variants with some other countries.

7. The Gulf countries provide an excellent market potential for India's manufactured goods and services, especially in project services exports. The trade and investment flows between the two have increased substantially. As I have already mentioned, the oil-rich Gulf States with their massive oil revenues are engaged in an ambitious economic development and modernization programme, which has created a demand in the Gulf States for skilled manpower and labour. India, with its surplus manpower resources, is a major source of supply.

8. The 2nd India-Arab Investment Conclave is scheduled to take place in New Delhi from February 8-9, 2010. The investment project conclave is aimed to seek investments from the Arab countries, mainly GCC member states as well as to identify projects in these countries to invest in. Increased investment has taken place in both the FII and FDI categories. A large number of ministers and business delegations from the Gulf and Arab countries are participating in this conclave which is focusing on around 90 projects valued at US\$ 10-11 billion.

9. We have also a strong relationship with the countries of West Asia and North Africa and our trade with these countries exceeded US\$ 13 billion in 2007-08. Indian companies are actively pursuing sourcing of rock phosphate, phosphoric acid and potash, all of which are fertilizer inputs, from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Jordan. Joint ventures in phosphates and in petrochemicals have been or are in the process of being set up in Tunisia, Egypt and in Jordan. Besides the hydrocarbon and fertilizers sectors, Indian companies have executed or are in the process of completing a variety of projects including those financed by concessional lines of credit. Indian hi-tech companies, including the IT companies, are also active.

10. With growing commercial and people-to-people interaction with West Asian and North African countries, the security of our sea-borne commerce is also an issue of concern, not only in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden but also on the Cape route as ships have been hijacked as far south as Seychelles. We have taken steps necessary to safeguard our maritime commerce, including the safety of our seamen and of our vessels.

11. The Palestinian issue, as you may be aware, has kept the international attention engaged now for quite some time. India desires to see a resolution of tensions in the region through dialogue. Although we do not play a direct role in the peace process in West Asia, we attach immense significance to both the process and the region. India has had a consistent and unwavering record of support for the Palestinian cause. We share the perception that the conflict in West Asia is essentially political in nature and cannot be resolved by force. In line with our support for UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and UNSC Resolutions 1397 and 1515. India has supported the Arab Peace Plan, which calls for withdrawal of Israel to pre-1967 borders, along with recognition of Israel and the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. India has called for an end to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and for an early and significant easing of restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods within Palestine. Over the years, we have extended assistance to Palestine in a variety of areas.

12. After dwelling on India's bilateral relations with the Gulf and Arab countries with which your Forum is mostly concerned with, let me now move on to the other aspect of the topic of the Seminar on which you will be deliberating over the next two days.

13. As you are aware, the global financial and economic crisis was the result of failure of global regulatory and supervisory mechanisms; excessive speculation and greed ('casino capitalism'); and ideological preconceptions of the most powerful actors and policy makers ('market fundamentalism') mainly in the developed countries. The financial crisis originated in the US subprime housing sector meltdown from where the toxic assets were exported to Europe and the rest of the world. This was further aggravated by global imbalances. Therefore, the developed countries have to bear the primary responsibility for this crisis. But it has affected us all.

14. India has grown at 6.7 per cent in 2008-09 following the close to 9 per cent growth during the previous four years. While India is relatively better placed, the developing countries are amongst the most seriously impacted and the worst affected victims of the crisis, and there is a risk that it could push millions of people in developing countries, back into poverty for one full generation. In the Indian context, the impact of the crisis could be seen in the initial impact: uncertainty in Indian software industry, exchange rate volatility, outflow of foreign institutional investments from the equity market, slowing down of investment in tourism, hospitality and health care sectors, pulling down the stocks and commodities market, increase in unemployment by way of lay-offs and wage cuts, etc. These have all been reversed now but there is still much to be done. Any new thinking (including 'out-of-the-box' solutions) for a more sustainable global economic system has to be based on a conscious policy where there is a building up of the capacities of the poorer countries and regions to play a healthy and equitable role in tapping the potential of the free market for their prosperity and advancement.

15. There exists an urgent need to develop a better system of surveillance and regulation which is able to detect early signs of systemic financial and economic imbalances and instability in order to address them effectively and in a timely manner. There should be a better and more transparent regulatory mechanism for banks, financial institutions and capital markets as well as a stronger voice for developing countries. These reforms would also help in a more effective –

and less market-driven – approach to raise the economic standards of the poorer sections of the international community.

16. A more fundamental issue is the comprehensive overhaul of the international financial institutions (IFIs) without any delay to make them more equitable, accountable, transparent and effective. The developing countries, including the emerging market economies, need to have a greater voice and vote in these IFIs to reflect contemporary economic realities. What has been achieved so far by way of reforms was long overdue and is in the nature of “too little, too late”. Much more remains to be done. The future shape of the IFIs, including the crafting of a new global financial architecture is, perhaps, the most far-reaching element of reform for providing global stability and security for the 21st century. India looks forward to working towards this objective, including in close consultation and coordination with like-minded countries.

17. A cohesive and well-coordinated international action is an urgent requirement and the G-20 Summit in November 2008 in Washington produced a blueprint for action which constituted a good first-step. Of course, the Washington Declaration adopted a Christmas-tree approach intended to please everyone. It endeavoured to send out a signal to instil confidence in the turbulent financial and stock markets of the world and to stabilize the global economic turbulence (what some were calling a “once in a century credit tsunami”).

18. India welcomed and actively engaged in the G-20 framework aimed at redressing the current global economic situation so as to bring the global economy back on the trajectory of sustained growth. India also constructively contributed to the process, including as co-Chair of one of the four G-20 Working Groups following the G-20 Washington Summit and leading up to the G-20 Summit in London.

19. The G-20 London Summit convened in April 2009 by the UK was considered a success given the scepticism in the run-up to the event. The London Communiqué (in line with the Washington Declaration) continued the feel good impetus. The Communiqué pledged to instil confidence, restore stability, repair financial system, strengthen regulation, reform IFIs, reject protectionism and build recovery. The Summit agreed to an additional package of US\$ 1.1 trillion to restore credit and growth, which together with national measures constituted an “unprecedented” global plan for recovery, including US\$ 850 billion for developing countries and emerging economies. Briefly, the London Summit package included ambitious stimulus and growth measures, strong regulatory provisions, expansion of the Financial Stability Forum (renamed as ‘Financial Stability Board’ or FSB) and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS), reiteration of commitment against protectionist trends (including trade, investment and services) and commitment to reform of IFIs.

20. Apart from the G-20 process, India participated actively and constructively in the ‘UN Conference on World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development’ in June 2009 in New York. India worked with like-minded countries (including in G-77 and G-20) for the success of the UN Conference. The UN Conference addressed all aspects of the global financial and economic crisis in an inclusive approach involving all countries (G-192) including developing countries and emerging economies which have been some of the worst affected by the crisis. The UN Conference also looked at the crisis from the development perspective. The UN Conference agreed to specific follow-up action. India will continue to adopt a measured and constructive approach with regard to the follow-up mandated by the UN Conference.

21. The third G-20 Summit in September 2009 in Pittsburgh, USA noted the success achieved in tackling the international financial and economic crisis by prompt and effective measures (including creating or saving 7 to 11 million jobs by end-2009). It designated the G-20 as the 'premier forum' for international economic cooperation, a landmark decision for the leading emerging market economies to be included in a major forum for North-South dialogue on an equal footing. The Pittsburgh Summit decided to:

- (i) Foster strong, sustained and balanced growth in the 21st century through sound macro-economic policies that prevent cycles of boom and bust;
- (ii) Sustain strong policy response for growth (in the wake of 'green shoots of recovery') until durable recovery is secured and avoid any premature withdrawal of stimulus while preparing for coordinated 'exit strategies';
- (iii) Implement regulatory measures governing banks, financial institutions, capital markets, compensation standards, risk taking, over-the-counter (OTC) derivatives, credit rating agencies, hedge funds, non-cooperative jurisdictions (including tax havens) as well as put in place a 'peer review' mechanism for all G-20 members;
- (iv) Address the 'reform deficit' of the IFIs by shifting IMF's quota share to dynamic emerging markets and developing countries of at least 5 per cent from over-represented to under-represented countries; adopting a dynamic formula for the World Bank to generate an increase of at least 3 per cent voting power for developing and transition countries that are under-represented; and ensuring that World Bank and regional development banks (RDBs) have sufficient resources to address global challenges;
- (v) Increase access to food, fuel and finance for the world's poorest by reducing the development gap;
- (vi) Fight against protectionism in all its forms covering trade in goods and services as well as investment and financial flows;
- (vii) Send a strong political message for reaching agreement at the climate change negotiations in the UNFCCC at Copenhagen last year, as well as for the successful conclusion of the Doha Round of trade negotiations in 2010, and
- (viii) Hold the following G-20 Summits: Toronto, Canada (June 26-27, 2010) and Republic of Korea (November 2010) and annual summits thereafter starting in France (2011).

22. India will continue to work with its partners (including in the G-20) to achieve the agreed measures. India will pursue the urgent and effective implementation of the Summit decisions. It will also continue to press for far-reaching and comprehensive reforms of the IFIs to design a new international financial architecture and a new global economic order.

23. As the Seminar will now plunge head-on into discussions on onerous economic issues, let me conclude by leaving with you some unfamiliar words of Mahatma Gandhi, who said, and I quote "We can try to canalize economic trends, we can't run against them in a head-on collision." With these rather prophetic words of Gandhiji's, I wish the Seminar all the very best in canalizing rather than colliding with the economic trends you will identify. I am confident that the two days

of deliberations will produce some important and fruitful conclusions in your “Search for Options”, in the post-Meltdown Scenario.

Thank you and Jai Hind.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://www.mea.gov.in/speech/2010/02/03ss01.htm>

31. Keynote address by Minister of State for External Affairs Dr. Shashi Tharoor at the inaugural session of the 2nd India-Arab Investment Projects Conclave, 8 February 2010

My esteemed colleague and distinguished predecessor Mr. Anand Sharma, Hon’ble Ministers, dignitaries and Ambassadors from Arab countries, Excellencies, Chairman FICCI, leaders and captains of industry & business, distinguished guests and friends.

2. I have just stepped off a plane from the Arab world a few hours ago – an overnight flight from Muscat, Oman, to be precise – and it gives me great pleasure to be able to be with you to address this august gathering. The 2nd India-Arab Investment Projects Conclave is both appropriate and topical. The first India-Arab Investment Projects Conclave in 2008 paved the way for stronger trade and investment relations between the two regions. I am certain that this Conclave will provide an enabling institutionalized platform for businesses and investors from India and the Arab countries to cooperate and build partnerships.

3. India and the Arab world share a close and historical relationship marked by similar values. There is a genuine partnership and synergy existing between India and the Arab world, which we are all endeavouring to strengthen further. The paradigm re-alignment that has accompanied changes in the global economic order, particularly after the financial meltdown of 2009, have compelled us towards a major re-think on how we should cooperate to face the challenges in front of us. Happily for both of us, the framework for cooperation is readily available.

4. The Arab world constitutes an integral part of India’s extended neighbourhood and is a region of critical importance to India in political, strategic, security and economic terms. India-Arab relations are a subject close to my heart. In my professional and personal endeavours I have had the opportunity to deal with many Arab people and I have come away very impressed not only with their intrinsic abilities and entrepreneurial skills but also with their deep sense of appreciation of the historic, cultural and civilizational ties that bind India and the Arab countries. These go back well before any of our nations emerged as modern nation states.

5. The history of our links and contacts with each other, which span several centuries, is well known. What the world knows as Arabic numerals came to the Arab world from India. Not only did Arabs and Indians knew each other before the advent of Islam, but it is even said that the Arabs played a crucial role in the emergence of the very notion of “Hindustan” and even in giving a name to the religion of Hinduism. We can argue whether it is to the Arabs, Persians or Greeks that we owe the concept of the Hindu – the people who lived across the river Sindhu or

Indus - but there is no doubt that the people of India were referred to as Hindus by the Arabs long before the Hindus themselves called themselves Hindus.

6. The Arabian Sea, which washes the shores of both our regions, has played a crucial role in the cultivation of our relations. India's cultural links with West Asia can be traced to the early years of recorded history. There is evidence, for instance, of trade links between the Harappan civilization and that of Dilmun in the Gulf. In pre-Islamic times, Arab traders acted as middlemen in trade between Bharuch in Gujarat and Puduchery and the Mediterranean through Alexandria and even through my ancestral area, the Palakkad gap, as evidenced in archaeological finds of Roman coins and artefacts in southern India. On-going excavations in the Red Sea coast continually produce fresh evidence of perhaps even older links. And it is no accident that so many distinguished Arab families in many different Arab countries bear the surname al-Hindi, or that Hind is still a desirable name used by many Arab women.

7. Some scholars trace Indian studies on the *hadith* to the early days of the arrival of Islam in India in the South in the 7th century and in the north in the 8th century AD. Islamic scholars from the turn of the 8th Century AD to *al-Baruni* in the 11th century have, in their writings, documented Indo-Arab cultural links, including Indian contributions to Arab thought and culture. Translations of Indian works were sponsored by the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad where, especially under *Harun al-Rashid*, Indian concepts in secular subjects ranging from medicine to mathematics and astronomy were absorbed into the corpus of Arab scientific writing. Scholars have also documented the compilation of a large number of Indian works in Quranic studies over the last 500 years as also in Islamic jurisprudence over a slightly longer period.

8. The adventures of seafarers who have ridden the waves and tides of the Arabian Sea on their dhows are the stuff of legend. I have even heard the story that it was an Indian seafarer who regularly travelled between Kerala and the Arab settlements on the east coast of the African continent, particularly Zanzibar, who might have guided Vasco da Gama to the Indian coast at Kozhikode. It is for scholars of history to debate the accuracy of this tale, but what is not debatable is that these ties have hundreds if not thousands of years of antiquity and are responsible for the civilizational melting pots which all of us have inherited and thrived in. Recently, to recreate the magic of times gone by, a traditional sailing boat, "The Jewel of Muscat", has been built in Oman, in large part by boat builders from Kerala, as a replica of the 9th century dhows that sailed these waters. I had the great pleasure yesterday of setting foot on the Jewel of Muscat and admiring how, in a desire for authenticity, the builders have sewn the planks together with coir fibre, rather than using nails. The Jewel of Muscat is about to set sail on a journey from Oman to Singapore via Kerala and Sri Lanka, on the route many of our forefathers regularly sailed. I am looking forward to greeting it in Kochi in mid-March and hope many of you will join me to celebrate its safe arrival there, *Insh'allah*.

9. So the Arab world has left an indelible imprint on India's history, on our culture and on our civilization. As a student of history I can argue with confidence that the past has built us an excellent platform for the future.

10. In modern times, this bond between India and the Arab world has been strengthened further. India's approach on issues affecting the Arab world is based on principle, not expediency, and the principles on which we have based our positions have stood the test of time – whether it is related to the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people, the Suez crisis or the Algerian

independence movement. India has endeavoured to follow the spirit of South-South solidarity and cooperation in our dealings with the developing countries of the Arab world.

11. But history also teaches us that the past should never be taken for granted. Just because we have had centuries-old relations does not mean that we do not have to endeavour to sustain and nurture our present day relations. If anything, it needs more hard work by all concerned so that we are not lulled into complacency.

12. The bedrock of goodwill between our two regions provides the foundation to build a strong edifice of substantial contemporary relations. We are keen to enhance our partnership with the Arab world, which has been playing an important role in shaping our political, economic, defence and security policies at both the regional and global level. Our traditional bonds have been revitalized in recent years. For India the Arab world is an important source of our energy security and is home to more than 5 million Indians. The Arab world's rich resources and the growing demands of India's rapidly expanding economy make us natural partners. It is not surprising to note, for instance, that the number of flights to the Gulf region from here far exceeds the total number of flights from India to the rest of the world.

13. As the Hon'ble Minister of Commerce will no doubt confirm, our trade with Arab countries is booming. We will take a closer look at the trade figures later during the Ministerial panel discussion, but it is clear that both in the foreign and in the trade ministries of our countries we need to identify and focus our work on multipliers and leverages. For instance, if we are able to conclude the India- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) at the earliest, it would give an enormous boost to the economic engagement between our regions. But even this is not enough. You are already a major trading partner and we hope you will also become a major investment partner.

14. Another area of focus could be to work on mechanisms to institutionalize the welfare of the Indian expatriate workforce in the Arab countries, particularly in the Gulf region. While I was in Oman over the last three days I met with a number of Indian workers, heard about their problems and sought a meeting with the Manpower Minister to resolve them. I was gratified by the warm and constructive spirit in which the Minister received me and accepted my suggestions. There was a clear appreciation that these Indian workers are an asset to their receiving countries and that if conditions governing their work and life are improved, it would be a "win-win" proposition for all concerned. This will bring enormous benefits to our relations.

15. In today's era of globalization we have to take into account the changing world economic scenario and to equip ourselves appropriately. Our endeavour should be to leverage our comparative advantage to build alliances, develop partnerships, create new avenues of growth and development and strengthen the existing ones. We need to enhance our mutual investments, joint ventures and project participation in the region and in India. It is a matter of satisfaction that our efforts are being matched by the countries of the Arab world.

16. We are keen to enhance our engagement. Our multi-faceted ties are steadily and rapidly developing. The last three years have seen a significant increase in our interactions with the countries of the Gulf region. Several high level visits and Joint Commission Meetings have facilitated many institutional arrangements in the areas of trade and investment, energy

cooperation, security cooperation, cultural, scientific and educational cooperation and bilateral arrangements.

17. The Secretary General of the League of Arab States and my good friend, H.E. Mr. Amr Moussa, visited India in November-December 2008. As you are aware, during this visit the Memorandum of Cooperation between India and the League of Arab States on the establishment of an Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum was signed in New Delhi. This is a very comprehensive document that looks at deepening our relations in many sectors including energy, education, human resources development and trade and investment. We are pleased that Deputy Secretary General Ahmed Ben Helli and we are looking forward to the spirited implementation of the Memorandum which we are sure will take our relations to new heights. I look forward to cooperation from you all to carry this ambitious agenda forward.

18. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Arab world has always figured very high in India's foreign policy priorities. India considers the Arab world a key part of its strategic neighbourhood. India desires to strengthen cooperation to explore opportunities across the entire spectrum of potentialities that exist. We wish to work together today with an eye on tomorrow: to consolidate our ties in emerging sectors of the economy so that we can develop a framework for future generations. Our economies are complementary. There is no reason why our efforts should not dovetail into each other's.

19. In conclusion, I would like to underline that we have in place a framework for cooperation, which is constantly deepening and widening. While the pace of progress could be faster, a critical mass has already developed to take us into a qualitatively upgraded relationship. There are many dimensions to Indo-Arab relations, some very old and some very new. I am sure this conclave, with its emphasis on our contemporary economic relations, will help chart the way forward and give more substance to our relations in the future.

Thank you.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2010/02/08ss01.htm>

Specific Issues

Islam and Oriental Religions

32. Address of the Hon'ble Vice President M. Hamid Ansari at the inauguration of the Conference titled "An International Dialogue between Islam and Oriental Religions" at Ansari Auditorium, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, 20 February, 2010

Religious discourse is a ponderous subject. I claim no competence in it. Inter-faith dialogue is seemingly simpler but is in reality equally obtuse. Here, too, I claim no expertise. Both frighten

away the novice and make the initiated cautious. Despite this, I succumbed to Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan Saheb's request to present myself in your midst today. Temptation, said George Bernard Shaw, should not be resisted:

*Rang-e-sharaab se meri neeyat badal ga-ie
Waaiz ki baat reh ga-ie, saaqi ki chal ga-ie¹*

The organizers of this conclave are to be congratulated for taking up a subject that is in dire need of open discussion in our country. My personal inclination would be to dispute the title. It imposes a geographic definition on a theme that transcends geography. It categorizes faiths or belief systems in terms of their region of origin. It severely limits a reading of the history of inter-faith dialogues.

This "Oriental" distinction is significant in view of the results of the survey of the world's Muslim population done by the Pew Research Centre. It revealed that two-thirds of the world's 1.57 billion Muslims live in Asia. Islam, indeed, is as much an Oriental religion.

Be that as it may, and taking the subject on face value, I presume the intention is to examine the interaction of Islam with religions that originally emanated from the Indic and Sinic societies. These would principally be Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism in India, Zoroastrianism in Iran and Confucianism and Taoism in China. One reason for this could be that while there has been an on-going dialogue between Islam, Christianity and Judaism in recent times, the same is not the case with other faiths mentioned above. Another reason, equally valid, is the religious diversity of the Indian society and the consequent need for a dialogue with the religious Other.

It is to be noted that all these faiths emerged in the Eurasian landmass and the vast majority of their adherents are to be found in geographically contiguous regions. Together they constitute over two-thirds of the world's population. The normal business of living brought them together from time to time in the past and does so today. Such social intercourse may include religious dialogue but is not necessarily synonymous with it. The frequency and intensity of this interaction varied with time and place. Despite the abridgement of distances due to modernization, urbanization and globalization, the disappearance of traditional channels and modes of communication have impacted adversely on this interaction.

Inter-faith dialogue has emerged as a prominent civil society initiative between nations and groups in the post-Cold War world, amidst the "Clash of Civilizations" debate and the raging ethnic and religious conflicts in various parts of the globe. The "The Alliance of Civilizations" initiative under United Nations auspices connects people and organizations devoted to promoting dialogue among political, religious, media and civil society leaders, particularly between Muslim and Western societies. Other such dialogue frameworks include the Cordoba Initiative on improving Muslim-West relations, the Madrid Dialogue Conference that was a Saudi-Spanish effort, the Assisi interfaith work of the late Pope John Paul II and the Common Word initiative of Muslim scholars.

¹ *The colour of wine induced a change of mind
The preacher failed, the Saqi triumphed.*

Despite the significant progress achieved, the record shows that inter-faith dialogue has remained confined to the select few and has not percolated to the public at large.

Religion, in a generic sense, covers both the articles of faith or creed and a set of rituals emanating from them. The two are connected but not synonymous. Furthermore, all systems of faith also promulgate certain universal values and principles of human conduct that are similar to each other. On a metaphysical plain thinking about Creator, the Purpose of Creation, and the relationship between the Creator and the Created often tends to run along parallel lines and reaches proximate conclusions. Once that level is reached, commonalities prevail:

*Hum muwahhid hain hamara kaish hai tark-e-rusoom
Millatain jab mit ga-een ajzaa-e-eeman ho ga-een²*

Dialogues and discussions between adherents of different faiths have always taken place and are not a modern day novelty. Occasionally, they have been state-induced; more often, they emanated from individual or group initiatives.

This backdrop helps us address a set of questions. To what extent did this contact help the process of mutual understanding, particularly an understanding of each other's religions and systems of belief? What were the points of convergence and divergence? To what extent were these influenced by politics and state craft? What conclusions can be drawn from it? Above all, what needs to be done today?

II

The first, and unquestionably the most important in the Indian context, is the contact between Islam and Hinduism. This was not a single point happening in space and time and response patterns were not uniform. In southern India Islam as a faith came through traders and had little difficulty in being accommodated. The story was different elsewhere in the sub-continent where Islam was often identified with rulers; here too, however, response patterns varied and their homogenization does no service either to history or to proper understanding.

It is a truism that all social orders are impacted upon by belief systems as well as by politics. In order therefore to comprehend the interaction between the two, it is essential to distinguish between (a) a religious action that is politically relevant or conditioned and (b) a political action that is religiously relevant or conditioned. A good many examples in both categories can be found in history as well as in current practices.

An early example of Muslim perception of Hinduism is to be found in the Central Asian scholar Abu Rehan Alberuni's account written in the early years of the 11th century. He candidly admitted the dissimilarities between the adherents of the two faiths, highlighted "the deeply rooted hatred" resulting from the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni, and then went on to dwell on the essence of Hinduism:

² *We believe in one God, ritual we renounce
Creeds when dissolved, reform as one faith.*

"The Hindus believe with regard to God that he is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving: one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him."

In a similar vein Amir Khusro in the 14th century said the Hindus are among those good people who believe in God who is omnipotent and omniscient and is "pure Truth and inimitable Reality."

Another example of this approach was Dara Shikoh's *Majma-ul Bahrain* wherein he concluded, with regard to Indian monotheism, that "he did not find any difference, except verbal, in the way they sought and comprehended Truth." (*Juz ikhtilaaf-e-lafzi dar daryaaft o shenaakht-e-Haq, tafaawati na deed*).

In the 20th century, Muhammad Iqbal went even further in a popular poem, *Hindustani bachon ka qaumi geet*:

*Wahdat ki lai suni thi dunya ne jis makaan se
Mir-e-Arab ko aai thandi hawa jahaan se
Mera watan wahi hai, mera watan wahi hai³*

These should have signalled a mutual appreciation of two systems of belief. The Mughal Emperor Akbar and his Prime Minister Abul-Fadl came close to such an appreciation. However, compulsions of statecraft directed the majority of rulers in an opposite direction. As a result, identities were principally sustained through the cultivation of prejudices rather than through spiritual and social values. Politics contributed to it in great measure. Rulers were motivated by political and economic considerations; principles of their faith rarely guided their actions. The result of this approach was twofold: on one plane, the coming together of people in daily life impacted on habits and customs and induced acceptance of each other; on another, they lived together separately.

The chasm was sought to be bridged by the Sufis who, as one scholar put it, took religion from the classes to the masses; another described it as "a walking incarnation of inter religious dialogue". This achieved degree of success, had its imprint on the Bhakti movement, left some mark on perceptions but did not alter the wider picture. Over time, the negative perceptions congealed.

It is evident, therefore, that despite adequate knowledge and good intentions, misperceptions were allowed to prevail. Their impact on Indian society is in no need of commentary.

The need of the hour is to seek a more effective approach to further mutual understanding.

III

³ *Whence did the world hear the song of unitarianism
Whence the cool felt by the leader of Arabs
That is my land, my country is that.*

A beginning has to be made with the first principles of social order. This is a set of values that regulate social intercourse and dispense justice. These values, in a religiously homogenous society, are generally taken from religion or conditioned by religious precepts; in a non-homogenous one, however, the only available and acceptable course is to seek values common to all faiths, is subscribed to by the votaries of all faiths, and is not overtly offensive to any segment. Every society in its political manifestation accepts these common values; it also subscribes to a set of secular values. The historian Edward Gibbon dwelt on this in the context of ancient Rome in its republican period; his words remain relevant:

"The various modes of worship were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful. And thus tolerance produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord."

Our requirement today is no different. We need to go beyond tolerance; the imperative for religious concord in a framework of equality is evident and compelling. This would be achieved only through a sustained, candid and uninterrupted dialogue without a syndrome of superiority or inferiority and with the objective of locating common values conducive to the maintenance of ethical standards essential for social harmony and furtherance of common objectives. The process of locating these values would bring forth other commonalities. Experience over time of shared public space and common national resources in everyday interaction, and mechanisms that blur boundaries through management of differences, would assist the process.

The quest for common values would not be a substitute for religions. All it would do is to locate a minimum of basic values on which consensus exists or can be developed; these would include faith in the unity of humankind and equality among human beings, contemplation, penance, ascetic living, justice, charity, truthfulness, help to poor and needy, contentment, self respect, tolerance and promotion of social peace and stability.

These values unite, they do not divide; they foster love, not hatred. Because they are embodied in all faiths, they transcend formal boundaries. Together, they would involve a commitment to a culture of peace, respect for life and non-violence, justice and social solidarity, truthfulness and human equality.

Commitment is one aspect of the matter, practice is another. The latter has to go beyond the circle of the select few and percolate to the masses. In the final analysis, we will be judged not by what we say, but by what we do. To do this meaningfully, institutional arrangements would be helpful; these would be means to an end, not the end itself.

IV

Today's conference is the beginning of a process debating how to foster dialogue between various faiths in East and South Asian societal contexts. It is an affirmation that the process starts through cooperation among religious, cultural, political, educational, and media establishments with a view to consolidate ethical values and encourage progressive social practices.

Prof. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in his epic study of Indian Philosophy has concluded: "The twin strands which in one shape or another run through all the efforts of the Indian thinkers are loyalty to tradition and devotion to truth...The different views are not looked upon as unrelated adventures of the human mind into the realm of the unknown or a collection of philosophical

curiosities. They are regarded as the expression of a single mind, which has built up the great temple, though it is divided into numerous walls and vestibules, passages and pillars."

Inter-faith dialogue should proceed on this Indian heritage that we have inherited. This heritage has no specific religious, linguistic or cultural label and no attempt should be made to keep it exclusive or make it exclusionary. The inclusiveness of our constitutional ideals derives its inspiration from this heritage and any process that further strengthens it is good for the nation and needs to be encouraged.

The message from this Conference should be loud and clear:

*Aa ghairiyat ke parde ek baar phir utha dain
Bichroan ko phir milaa dain, naqsh-e-duie mitaa dain⁴*

I thank Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan for inviting me to inaugurate this Conference and wish its deliberations all success.

Source: Office of the Vice-president of India, New Delhi

<http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/content.asp?id=270>

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Editor, MEI India Speaks: P R Kumaraswamy

⁴ *Come let us lift the veil of otherness
Unite the separated, erase signs of being two.*