



MEI INDIA SPEAKS

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No. 17

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Bilateral Issues

a. Iran

1. Joint Statement of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Barack H. Obama, New Delhi, 8 November 2010

The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to diplomacy to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, and discussed the need for Iran to take constructive and immediate steps to meet its obligations to the IAEA and the UN Security Council...

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530516632>

2. Indo-Iran Gas Pipeline Project, New Delhi, 11 November 2010

Question:

Will the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas be pleased to state:-

- (a) the present status of the Indo-Iran gas pipeline project;
- (b) whether India continues to have serious differences over the pricing of the gas and security of the proposed \$7.5 billion Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline that will pass through the unstable regions of Baluchistan; and
- (c) if so, the details thereof and the steps being taken by the Government to resolve such issues amicably with each concerned country within a timeframe?

Answer: Minister of the state in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (Mr. Murali Deora)

(a) to (c): A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) to (c) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO.59 ASKED BY SHRI PONNAM PRABHAKAR AND SHRI SURESH KUMAR SHETKAR, MPs TO BE ANSWERED ON NOVEMBER 11, 2010

(a) to (c): India is pursuing the import of natural gas from Iran through Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Gas Pipeline Project. Various important issues, viz., pricing of gas, delivery point of gas, project structure, payment of transportation tariff, transit fees and security of the pipeline for passage of natural gas through Pakistan, etc., are under discussion amongst the participating countries.

Such multilateral projects involve protracted discussions, as all the aspects have to be carefully examined and deliberated upon to the satisfaction of the participating countries to protect each country's interests and to avoid any problems in the future in the successful operation of the Project.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Starred Question no. 59 asked by Mr. Prabhakar Ponnam and Mr. Suresh Kumar Shetkar

3. Joint Communiqué at 10th RIC Ministerial Meeting at Wuhan, 15 November 2010

The Ministers recognized that Iran is entitled to the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and should at the same time restore international confidence to the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear activities. The Ministers emphasized that there is no alternative to the intensification of efforts to address the Iranian nuclear issue by peaceful means through dialogue and negotiation.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116682>

4. Address by Foreign Secretary at NDC on Challenges in India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 19 November 2010

... Iran is part of what has been defined as India's "proximate neighbourhood". We share a historical and civilizational relationship. People-to-people and cultural relations remain vibrant and alive today. It is a major source of our energy and hydrocarbon supplies, and is thus important for our energy security. Among areas of discussion with Iran have been regional issues such as the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan, trade and transit to Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond, and the common threats we face from cross-border terrorism and extremism.

The Iran nuclear issue however poses a challenge, because of the impact of UNSC and more particularly unilateral sanctions imposed by US, EU, Japan, and other countries, which have challenged even normal trade transactions with Iran. India's stand on the Iran nuclear issue has

been consistent. We support the right of all States to peaceful use of nuclear energy, consistent with their international obligations. We believe that the IAEA should have a central role in resolution of the issue, and favour dialogue and peaceful negotiations for settlement of the dispute...

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116703>

b. Iraq

5. Air Service Agreement between India and Iraq, New Delhi, 18 November 2010

Question:

Will the Minister of Civil Aviation be pleased to state:

(a): whether the Civil Aviation agreement between India and Iraq has undergone some structural changes recently;

(b): if so, the details thereof;

(c): the time by which the said agreement would be implemented; and

(d): the mutual benefits expected to be achieved through the new agreement?

Answer: Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Civil Aviation (Mr. Praful Patel)

(a) to (c): Yes Sir. During the bilateral talks had between India and Iraq in October, 2010 at New Delhi, the Air Services Agreement was modified. While the Article on designation of airlines was amended, new Articles on safety, security and cooperative marketing arrangements were incorporated. These amendments shall be provisionally applied with immediate effect.

(d) The Agreement is expected to increase connectivity between the two sides and has the potential to spur greater tourism and cultural exchanges.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question no. 1453 asked by Mr. Suresh Kodikunnil

c. Israel

6. Corruption in Defence Deals with Israel, New Delhi, 24 November 2010

Question:

(a) whether Government is aware that the multi-billion dollar defence deals with Israel have become a major source of corruption and kickbacks, corroding the integrity of Indian defence establishment;

(b) if so, whether there is a move on the part of Government to give a clean chit to the Israeli defence firms, which were blacklisted earlier by Government for being involved in kickback; and

(c) if so, the reasons therefor?

Answer: Minister of Defence (Mr. A.K. Antony)

(a) to (c): Procurement of defence equipment/weapon systems is done from various indigenous as well as foreign sources, including Israel, in accordance with the provisions of Defence Procurement Procedure. The said Procedure contains stringent provisions aimed at ensuring the highest degree of probity, public accountability, transparency and safeguarding the integrity of the Indian defence procurement process.

Irregularities in respect of some Israeli defence companies have come to notice and appropriate restrictions have been placed on dealing with these companies.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question no.1582 asked by Mrs. Brinda Karat

7. Action Against Black Listed Israeli Company, New Delhi, 24 November 2010

Question:

(a) whether action has been taken by Government on black listing of M/s. Israel Military Industries Limited as recommended by CBI; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor?

Answer: Minister of Defence (Mr. A.K. Antony)

(a) & (b): CBI had registered a case against Shri Sudipta Gosh, former DGOF and some others in May, 2009 regarding receipt of illegal gratification from some suppliers of Ordnance Factories. After examining the FIR lodged by CBI, the Ministry of Defence had decided to put on hold all contracts with the companies involved in the CBI case, in its order dated 28.5.2009. The above

order was challenged by some of the companies before the Delhi High Court. The High Court after hearing both sides set aside the order in its judgement dated 11.2.2010 directing that penal action against the companies can be taken only after following the principles of natural justice. Accordingly, show cause notices were issued to all the companies based on the contents of the FIR lodged by CBI. Replies were submitted by the companies denying the allegations and seeking specific evidence based on which penal action was proposed against them. When the information was sought from CBI, they informed that the charge sheet in the case will soon be filed.

After the charge sheet was filed, the advice of the CVC was sought on the action to be taken. After considering CVC`s advice, it has been decided to issue fresh show cause notices to the companies based on the contents of the charge sheet. A decision regarding penal action will be taken after examining the replies of the companies and in consultation with the Ministry of Law.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question no. 1575 asked by Mrs. Brinda Karat

d. Kuwait

8. Stake of Kuwait in Indian Oil Corporation, New Delhi, 11 November 2010

Will the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas be pleased to state:-

- (a): whether Kuwait has shown interest in strategic stake in the Indian Oil Corporation;
- (b): if so, the details thereof;
- (c): whether the Government proposes to divest Indian Oil Corporation;
- (d): if so, the details thereof;
- (e): whether Kuwait has also shown interest in Paradip oil refinery in Orissa and other oil fields in the country; and
- (f): if so, the details thereof?

Answer: Minister of the State in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (Mr. Jitin Prasada)

(a) & (b): During the visit of the Minister of Oil & Information of Kuwait during 25th to 28th September 2010 to India, the Minister expressed the desire of Kuwait to buy a Strategic stake in Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC). However, there has been no further development in the matter

(c) & (d): The Government of India has given “in-principle” approval for 10 % issue of fresh capital along with simultaneous 10% disinvestment by the Government.

(e) & (f): The funds for Paradip Refinery have already been tied up. Hence, participation of Kuwait in the Paradip Refinery project has not been sought by IOC. However, IOC has requested Kuwait to consider investment in the proposed Petrochemical project at Paradip in future. IOC has also proposed to Kuwait to consider the possibility of joint participation in the forthcoming NELP-IX Round.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question no. 520 asked by Mr. Nityananda Pradhan, Mr. Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy and Mr. Baijayant Panda

e. Syria

9. India Signs Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Govt. of Syria for Long Term Cooperation in Phosphate Sector, 1 November 2010

India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Syria for long term cooperation and setting up of joint venture plants in Syria in phosphate sector. The MOU signed by the Secretary (Fertilizers) Shri Sutanu Behuria and the Syrian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Resources envisages a broad framework of long term cooperation between the two countries through their respective fertilizer and mining entities for setting up of phosphatic plants and projects in Syria.

Syria is one of the countries, which has proven reserves of rock phosphate; estimated to 1700 million MT. Syrian mining and fertilizer company, General Company for Phosphates and Mines (GECOPHAM), which is responsible for mining operations in Syria, is presently able to exploit only about 4 million MT of rock phosphate annually. GECOPHAM is planning to up scale its productions to 10 million MT.

Earlier, based on a bi-lateral offer and the MoU signed between the GECOPHAM and the Department of Fertilizers in May 2009, Indian entities, MECON, RITES and PDIL have carried out a Consultancy Study for assessing feasibility of up gradation in infrastructure (port/rail/road) and mining sectors in Syria. Draft Feasibility Report (DFR) is under finalization between the Indian consortium and GECOPHAM. Government of India is funding the consultancy study at a cost of US\$ 1.5 million. The study is expected to provide basis for the Syrian entity to up scale its production of rock phosphate and strengthen related infrastructure for its export and downstream processing. Syria will gain immensely by exploiting its natural resources by way of employment and foreign exchange. India will also gain since it will enable Indian mining and fertilizer companies to set up phosphatic projects in Syria. This would provide certainty of supply of phosphatic fertilizers to the country.

The Indian delegation led by Secretary, Department of Fertilisers Shri Sutanu Behuria had representatives from the Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers (RCF), Zuari Industries and Jubilant Organosys. The delegation visited Syria recently.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=66705>

10.Statement by the President Pratibha Devisingh Patil to the Press, Damascus, 27 November 2010

First of all I would like to say that I am very happy to be in Syria, a beautiful country and which like India is an inheritor of an ancient civilization.

I am visiting Syria to carry forward the dialogue that I had with President Assad when he visited India in June 2008. I have just concluded very constructive talks with President Assad and I am glad to share with the media the outcome of these discussions. The meeting today was held in a cordial atmosphere and covered bilateral matters, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.

We are happy with the progress in India-Syria bilateral relations over the last few years, and are committed to further strengthening our ties.

The global economic downturn posed serious challenges since early 2008. Both India and Syria were affected, but have recovered and are confident of achieving higher rates of growth in the coming years. In Syria, this is the result of the pragmatic economic reforms being implemented under President Assad's leadership. Economic progress in the two countries would open up several new avenues for engagement between the industrialists and business communities of the two countries. In our discussions we recalled the decision taken at the bilateral Joint Commission that met in Damascus in June this year, to double bilateral trade levels in the next 2 to 3 years and reaffirmed that this target should be achieved. The business delegation that is accompanying me would be discussing these new opportunities with their Syrian counterparts. The India-Syria Business Council to be launched tomorrow will focus on strengthening economic and commercial links. Areas that offer enormous potential for mutually advantageous co-operation are the phosphate sector and tourism.

One of the main reasons for economic engagement not having reached the potential is the lack of awareness of each others' requirements and capabilities. In the talks today, India has offered \$100 million Line of Credit to be used by Syria in sectors to be mutually agreed upon, keeping in view Syria's priorities. While this will be the third Line of Credit, the purpose behind this offer is to encourage Indian companies to involve themselves in developmental projects in Syria, which will give them good exposure to the Syrian market, and would also showcase to Syria the

potential of Indian companies. This, I am confident, will lead to increased economic engagement.

The IT Centre for Excellence, a project of India-Syria co-operation agreed upon during President Assad's visit to India, will start functioning very soon. India looks forward to closer co-operation with Syria in fields such as IT and training in highly specialized fields. To facilitate this, as also for capacity building in other areas, the number of scholarships for Syria under the ITEC programme will be increased from the present 45 to 90. I call upon Syria to make full use of this offer.

A Cultural Exchange Programme and two agreements on co-operation between media organizations are being signed later today. These would facilitate greater flow of information and bring the people of the two countries closer.

India has consistently supported all just Arab causes. I would like to reiterate India's unwavering support for a lasting and comprehensive peace to the Middle East problem, based on relevant UN resolutions. I would also like to reiterate our strong support for Syria's legitimate right to the Golan Heights, and for its very early and full return to Syria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the commitment of both sides, I am confident that in the coming years, relations between our two countries will continue to flourish.

I would like to thank President Assad, the Government and the people of Syria for the great warmth and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation. I wish the people of Syria a very prosperous and peaceful future.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/pr271110.html>

11. Statement by Secretary (East) on President's engagements at Damascus, Damascus, 27 November 2010

As you are aware our President arrived in Damascus yesterday on a State Visit. As a special gesture, HE Syrian President Bashar Al Assad and First Lady Asma Al-Assad made a courtesy call on the President in the same evening. Earlier, President visited Ummayyad Mosque which is considered to be one of the oldest and largest mosques in the world. Significantly, the mosque also holds the relics of John the Baptist.

President commenced her official programme in Syria today with a ceremonial welcome accorded to her by President Bashar Al Assad at the picturesque Presidential Palace. There was a

brief meeting between the two Presidents along with spouses. This was followed by delegation level talks led by both Presidents. From our side, Shri Bharatsinh Solanki, Hon'ble Minister of State for Power; Shri K.E. Ismail and Shri Vijay Bahadur Singh, Hon'ble Members of Parliament; and Senior Officials participated in the talks. The Syrian side included Vice President Farouk Al-Shara; Foreign Minister Walid Al Moualem; Minister of Trade and Economy Lamia Marie Aasi; Minister for Presidential Affairs Monsour Azzam; Adviser to the President for Political and Media Affairs Bouthaina Shaaban and Senior Officials.

At the outset, President Assad extended a very warm welcome to President and the accompanying delegation. He said that this "first visit of the President is symbolic for every Syrian citizen and is a momentous occasion in India-Syria bilateral ties" which both countries have been enjoying since the last six decades. He stated that India and Syria share common vision and have similar values and expressed hope that the visit would be fruitful in every way in strengthening the friendship and the historic ties between the two countries. This is indicative of the warm and cordial atmosphere in which the talks were held.

President Assad fondly recalled his visit to India in June 2008 which laid the foundation for further enhancement and strengthening of historical ties with India. Both leaders dwelt upon the strong civilizational linkages between the two countries dating back several millennia. Our President referred to her visit to the Ummayad Mosque which is a symbol of Syria's strong secular tradition which India shares as well. They underscored the need for further enhancing of the ties and strengthening the cooperation in all fields to take this relationship to a higher level.

The two leaders held wide ranging discussions on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. On the bilateral economic side, both leaders expressed deep satisfaction on the engagement between the two countries in the last two years which led to, inter alia, setting up of an IT Centre of excellence in Damascus, a power plant being upgraded by BHEL, feasibility study on utilization of phosphates and up gradation of a steel plant. They also dwelt upon cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector, particularly with reference to OVL's investments in oil exploration. President Assad also invited Indian expertise and companies in making Syria a pipeline hub by linking Central Asia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Iran. Both sides discussed the possibility of long term arrangements for utilization of phosphate deposits in Syria for mutual benefit. Both sides also agreed to boost tourism in each other's country.

Responding to Syria's need for training and up gradation of its human resources in information technology, as also for capacity building in other areas, we offered to increase the number of scholarships under the ITEC Programme from the present 45 to 90.

Both sides also reviewed the level of trade which currently stands at US\$ 540 million and agreed to work towards increasing trade and commerce. In this regard, both sides welcomed the

proposed launching of India-Syria Business Council tomorrow, which would focus on strengthening of business and commercial relations. We offered a US\$ 100 million Line of Credit to be used by Syria in sectors mutually agreed upon. This was welcomed with great appreciation by the Syrian President. It would be pertinent to mention here that this would be the third line of credit extended by India; the earlier two being US\$ 240 million which is being utilized for up gradation of the Tishreen Power Plant and US\$ 25 million for up gradation of a steel plant in Hama by Apollo International of India. Both sides also discussed cooperation in frontier areas of science and technology such as bio-technology, information technology, pharmaceutical and food technology.

With regard to Palestine and the Middle East Peace Process, the Syrian side appreciated India's principled and unwavering support to the cause of Palestine and the Middle East. President reaffirmed "India's unwavering support for the Palestinian struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel. India's solidarity with Palestine struggle for the realization of its fundamental rights is an article of faith for us and enjoys national consensus in India. India has and will always support the Palestinian people in their pursuit of their legitimate goals based on dignity."

President also reiterated India's support for the legitimate right of Syria to the Golan Heights and noted with appreciation the sober and peaceful approach Syria has adopted in addressing this issue.

Condemning incidents of terrorism as global phenomena, Syria reiterated its condemnation of the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 26.11.2008, of which the second anniversary was marked yesterday. Stating that extremism and terrorism must be contained, Syria renewed its support to India in this effort and offered to help in combating terrorism.

India appreciated Syria's support in our election to the Security Council for the term 2011-12 and welcomed Syria's support for India's membership as a permanent member to the expanded UN Security Council which was reiterated by President Assad.

The following three agreements were signed later this afternoon at the State Planning Commission, which would further enhance our bilateral ties:

i) Executive Programme of Cultural Cooperation for the period 2010-2013, which envisages, inter alia, cooperation in the fields of cinema, archaeology, performing arts, libraries, exhibitions;

- ii) MOU of Cooperation between the Syrian Arab News Agency and the Press Trust of India for exchange of news, photographs and bilateral visits; and
- iii) MOU of Cooperation between Syrian General Directorate for Television and Radio and Prasar Bharati for exchange of TV and radio programmes, joint production of programmes and exchange of visits.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116727>

12. Speech by President Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Banquet Hosted in her Honour by the President of Syria Bashar Al-Assad, Damascus, 27 November 2010

On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to express gratitude for the warmth with which we have been received and for the gracious hospitality extended to us. May I say that to be in your beautiful country is a wonderful experience. I bring to you and the friendly people of Syria, the very best wishes of the people of India.

India-Syria relations are marked by warmth, friendship and mutual respect. Our two countries are inheritors of ancient civilizations that have cherished and preserved their age old value systems, including respect for diversity and equal treatment for all religions. Our contacts go back at least 4000 years, when India used to send raw silk and spices to Syria, and receive in return gold and silk fabric. Our trading interaction through the ancient Silk route was accompanied with the awareness about each other's culture and knowledge. These interactions have continued to the present day.

In the first half of the last century, both India and Syria were engaged resolutely in shaking off the yoke of colonialism. As independent nations from around the same time, we have been engaged actively in addressing the problems of our people. It is a matter of satisfaction that both our countries have achieved significant successes. India is hopeful of achieving 8.5 percent growth this year. As a national objective, India is committed to inclusive growth and is taking pro-active steps to ensure that no section of society is left behind.

I am glad to learn that the economic reforms launched in Syria under your guidance and leadership, have started yielding dividends. Your objective of working for a social market economy, is not much different from our approach of inclusive growth. The aim is to address poverty, even as we focus on rapid development.

There is scope for further strengthening of the multi-faceted relations between our two countries. The agreements that were signed today, US \$100 million Line of Credit extended by India, and the enhancement of scholarships for Syria under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, from the present level of 45 slots to 90 slots, would greatly facilitate this. I am also confident that the India-Syria Business Council to be launched tomorrow will identify new areas for mutually beneficial economic engagement. Indian companies are already involved in the

energy, petroleum and IT sectors, and are keenly looking forward to contributing and participating in Syria's development programme.

Excellency,

West Asia is of vital importance to us. We enjoy cultural and commercial links with countries in this region. 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. We have supported the Arab Peace Plan, which calls for withdrawal of Israel to pre-1967 borders, along with the recognition of Israel, and the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. We remain hopeful that the talks and negotiations would lead to a comprehensive peace process for the final resolution of the Middle East conflict.

I would like to convey our sincere appreciation for Syria's support for India's election to the UN Security Council for 2011-2012. Membership of the Security Council confers a special responsibility on us. During our forthcoming term in the Security Council, we will seek to discharge our duties and obligations constructively and objectively as a responsible member of the international community. We hope to work closely with other Member States for a balanced approach on peace and security issues. We highly appreciate the consistent support expressed by Syria for India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

Excellency,

Ever since our arrival in your historic and beautiful country, we have been experiencing the feeling of friendship that the people of Syria have for India. I would like to wish you, Excellency and Madame Asma Al-Assad continued success in the coming years. I also wish the friendly people of Syria peace and prosperity. With our commitment to further strengthen bilateral contacts, India-Syria relations will continue to blossom in the coming years.

Thank you.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/bqsp271110.html>

13.Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Syrian-Indian Business Summit, Damascus , 28 November 2010

I am glad to participate in this important event which brings together the business communities of India and Syria. Bilateral trade links date back at least 4000 years. Apart from direct trade, Syria, in the centuries past, was the meeting point of traders from the East and the West and

continues to be a hub in contemporary times. We should renew our focus on bilateral economic and commercial ties, which at current levels is far below potential. The Bilateral Joint Commission that met in Damascus in June this year, identified ways of strengthening these ties, including doubling bilateral trade levels in the next 2 to 3 years. We should now take it forward.

Both India and Syria are expanding economies that have successfully weathered the global economic crisis. This was possible due to an effective regulatory framework and a prudent monetary policy. Also, exposure to toxic assets and dependence on exports for growth was low. India is likely to register 8.5 percent growth in the current year, which should offer plenty of opportunities for the Syrian business community. I am confident that this growth rate will be sustained in the coming years also. I am glad to be informed that the Syrian economy has also been doing well, and that the outlook for the future is good. Syria is committed to economic reforms and has ambitious development plans, particularly in the infrastructure sector. I am sure that the India business delegation will identify several avenues to involve itself and contribute to Syria's developmental plans. Indian companies are already involved in the development programme of Syria. OVL is engaged in exploring for and production of oil; BHEL is putting up a power plant; and Apollo International is extending assistance in the modernization of the Steel Rolling Mill in Hama. MECON is close to completing a feasibility report on utilization of phosphatic resources of Syria. This, I am hopeful, would lead to greater Indian interest in this sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over 13 centuries back, in 662 A.D. a Syrian scholar monk Severus Sebokht recognised with appreciation the skill of Indians in computing and said 'their computing surpasses description'. By way of expressing gratitude to Sebokht for his prescient remarks, we are setting up an IT Centre of Excellence in Damascus. The Centre would become operational very soon. This would, no doubt, contribute to the growth of the IT sector in Syria.

An important item on the agenda for my talks with His Excellency President Assad was strengthening of bilateral, commercial and economic links. I was struck by the keen interest that President Assad evinced in this subject. I am thankful to him for the personal attention that he pays to relations with India. India and Syria are committed to inclusive growth or growth with social equity. The business community can and should contribute in this effort and the Governments would be happy to assist in this process, by creating a conducive environment.

FICCI and CII have signed MOUs with the Federation of Syrian Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Syrian Chamber of Industry respectively. These have facilitated frequent and closer contacts between the business communities of our two countries. Today we are launching the Syria-India Business Council. The formation of this Council would add to efforts to further

strengthen trade and economic ties. I am confident that the Council will function effectively, will disseminate information on opportunities in the two countries, work closely with the Governments in addressing the specific problems that hinder the smooth flow of commerce and bring the business communities of the two countries closer, so that they become partners in development efforts. I extend felicitations to the two co-chairpersons Mr. V.R.S. Natarajan of India and Mr. Ali Khwanda of Syria and members of the Council, and wish them every success in what they are setting out to do.

I am sure that all of you would find the interaction that would follow this session fruitful. Let me wish the business persons every success in their efforts to see that the economic and commercial engagement between India and Syria further expands.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp281110.html>

14. Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Indian Community Reception, Damascus, 28 November 2010

I am delighted to visit Syria, the cradle of civilization, and its capital Damascus, which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru described as a city where every stone tells a story of past history. I am happy to be amidst you this evening. I bring to you greetings and good wishes from India.

India and Syria share many things in common. Both countries are endowed with a rich heritage; we are pluralistic societies with secular credentials; we inherit a vibrant culture. Our time-tested links are civilizational, clocking almost four thousand years treaded via the Silk Route. We take pride in our traditional linkages. Moreover, India and Syria underwent similar experiences in the first half of the 20th Century, and through the sacrifice of their citizens, achieved independence from colonial rule around the same time. Since independence we have had close, friendly and cordial relations with Syria. That Syria highly regards our contribution to freedom movements all over the world is borne out in their decision, to name an important street here after Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and one of the foremost freedom fighters of India, who supported such movements in Asia and Africa.

Since our arrival in Damascus, my delegation and I have been overwhelmed by Syrian warmth and friendliness. All of us fondly recall President Assad's visit to India in June 2008. We attach strong importance to our friendly relations with Syria. I had very cordial and fruitful talks with President Bashar al-Assad. To further enhance our traditional relations, a number of agreements were signed yesterday. I also had useful discussions with Prime Minister Mr. Mohammad Naji Otri and Speaker Mr. Mahmoud al-Abrash.

India and Syria have weathered the global economic crisis. India is expecting to achieve a growth rate of 8.5 percent this year. I was glad to learn that the Syrian economy also has been

doing quite well. In the two years between President Assad's visit to India and my visit here, we have made a conscious effort to enhance our economic cooperation. To cite a few cases, BHEL is carrying out a project in the power sector. Apollo International is helping in the modernization of a steel rolling mill; an MOU has been concluded in October 2010 for cooperation in the phosphates sector; an IT Centre for Excellence is being set up in Damascus and will be functional very soon; and ONGC Videsh Limited has investments in the oil sector. Some Indian companies have forged joint ventures and long term contracts with their Syrian counterparts. I am happy to learn that Indian experts were involved in setting up of Syria's first cement plant some decades ago. The India-Syria Business Council launched today should prove to be useful in forging many more business ties. With both countries focusing on development, the future augurs well, and I am convinced that our relations will surely and steadily scale greater heights in the coming years, and that Indian companies will continue to contribute to the growth of the Syrian economy.

I am glad to learn that Indians are participating in many spheres and activities in Syria. Indian scientists in the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, have made valuable contributions to research. I will be visiting this facility tomorrow in Aleppo. Also Sisters from Missionaries of Charity from Kolkata are running 4 centres in Syria to take care of elderly persons. This evening I was happy to make a contribution to one of the Centres to enable it to enhance its facilities. I was very happy to meet them a few moments ago.

Fellow citizens, wherever my travels have taken me, I have always found Indian nationals commanding respect and assimilating with ease the milieu of the land and culture they live in. Syrian people are warm, friendly and hospitable. This should make it easy for you to adjust to the new environs, and contribute in whatever way you can to enrich Syrian society, and enhance friendly relations between India and Syria.

I convey to you my greetings and wish you all success in your future endeavours.

Thank you. Jai Hind!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp281110-1.html>

f. Turkey

15.EEPC India to Organise “India Show” in Turkey – to Provide Platform to Showcase Capabilities of Indian Exporters, New Delhi 10 November 2010

EEPC INDIA (formerly Engineering Export Promotion Council), under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, is scheduled to organize “India Show” from 3 – 6 February, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. India is the Partner Country in the fair and will take full pavilion where more

than 150 Indian companies will be showcasing engineering products. The main objective of the “India Show” is to promote India’s Image and provide a platform to Indian exporters to showcase their strengths and capabilities in an emerging market and developing country like Turkey.

Mr. R Maitra, Executive Director, EEPC INDIA, said that “the Show will also enable India to get closer to fast-growing markets in Eurasia and the Middle East and it will be our endeavour to highlight India as “Technology Hub” for Manufacturing Industry with equal participation from Small, Medium & Large industries.” “India Show” will coincide with the largest and most famous industrial exhibition WIN 2011 (World Industry Fair) organized by Hannover Messe and India has been dedicated as “Partner Country” in the exhibition. Around 150 Indian companies will be participating at the “India Show” and there is a huge opportunity for partnership development, networking and exploring business linkages for wide range of engineering products from India, said Mr. Maitra.

Mr. R. Maitra also stated that during the INDIA SHOW, EEPC India will be signing an MOU with Istanbul Chamber of Commerce which is the largest non-government organization, aiming to promote foreign and domestic economic development within Istanbul and in Turkey as a whole. With over 3 lakh (300,000) active members, it is perhaps one of the largest chambers of commerce in the world and this association will set the path for the future trade between the two countries.

Indian companies participating in the show will get the benefit of gaining an easy access to 1.5 billion potential customers from not only Turkey but also the neighbouring regions, which constitutes a significant 87% share of the total visitors in the show. The chambers of commerce in the neighbouring countries are also being sensitized about the large Indian presence in the show. The Show will provide a unique opportunity to Indian exhibitors for gaining business and develop networks and partnerships but also act as a platform to promote India as an Economic Superpower and accelerate bilateral trade.

Turkey is at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, Northern Africa and Middle East, thus making it a country of significant geo-strategic importance. Various economic forecast reports have predicted that Turkey will become one of the fastest-growing countries in 2011 with a target import of 168 billion USD. It is the 15th largest economy in the world in terms of GDP (PPP) and engineering is the most important sector in the Turkish economy.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=66865>

g. UAE

16. Briefing by Secretary (East) on President's engagements at Abu Dhabi, 22 November 2010

Shri Sailas Thangal, Director (XP): Good evening friends. Thank you for coming to this briefing today. We have with us Secretary (East) Ms. Latha Reddy who would be briefing you on today's events. Let me also introduce officers on the dais. On the right of Secretary (East) is Ambassador of India to UAE Mr. M.K. Lokesh whom all of you I am sure, would know him. To the left of Secretary (East) is Mr. Rajeev Chander, Joint Secretary in-charge of Gulf Division, in the Ministry of External Affairs. Secretary (East) will be making opening remarks after which she will take few questions on the visit of Hon'ble President to UAE.

May I now request Secretary (East) to make the opening remarks please.

Secretary (East) (Ms. Vijaya Latha Reddy): Dear friends, thank you for making it convenient to come to this briefing.

Today, the President commenced her official programme in the UAE with a ceremonial welcome accorded to her by H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE. This was immediately followed by talks and an official banquet hosted by H.H. the President in her honour. Several Ministers were present from the UAE side – Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Presidential Affairs, Foreign Minister, Education Minister and others.

The talks between the two leaders were warm and friendly reflecting the close ties between India and the UAE. Both leaders dwelt on the long tradition of friendship between the two peoples which are based on historical ties between the two countries. They emphasized the need to further develop and enhance this relationship to a new level of cooperation given the potential that exists.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction that the trade relationship had grown substantially resulting in both countries becoming the largest trading partners for each other in 2009-2010 with bilateral trade crossing the US\$ 43 billion mark.

Both leaders agreed to enhance the strategic relationship by focusing on areas such as education, science and technology, regional security and many other areas where there is potential for cooperation. They agreed that specific proposals in this regard should be taken up in detail at the forthcoming meeting in Abu Dhabi of the Joint Commission which is headed by the Foreign Ministers.

Another important area of cooperation discussed was that of food security where our President invited UAE investments in projects for enhancing agricultural production in India and especially in the area of food processing. This received a positive response from His Highness the UAE President who stated that this idea should be pursued.

Our President spoke of India's keenness to further strengthen our energy security ties with the UAE and invited their participation in both upstream and downstream activities in the petroleum sector in India which would further our energy security. The UAE side was also invited to invest in the infrastructure sector including in our railways.

The UAE Minister of Higher Education mentioned that there was an agreement between UAE and India on the plantation of palm trees in India. It was agreed that this could be useful in areas such as Rajasthan.

Another important proposal discussed related to the reduction of the present high costs of setting up of water desalination plants which would provide valuable water resources needed by UAE and by India. Our President's proposal that this could be the subject of a joint research project was welcomed by His Highness.

Discussions were also held on the need for enhanced security cooperation particularly to address issues relating to counter-terrorism and maritime security. Our President emphasized that the agreement on security cooperation should be signed as early as possible by the concerned Ministries on both sides.

The President thanked His Highness for UAE's support for India's recent election to the non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council and sought continued support for a permanent seat for India in an expanded Security Council. His Highness stated that UAE would certainly support India, which had the right to be a permanent member of a reformed UN Security Council.

Our President mentioned the contribution of the Indian community and the positive support extended to them by the UAE authorities. Our President expressed appreciation and thanked His Highness for his Government for extending many facilities to the large Indian community numbering around 1.75 million, which is the largest expatriate community in the UAE. The two leaders agreed that any issues with regard to the welfare of the Indian community, particularly the workers, should continue to be discussed by the UAE Ministry of Labour and the Indian Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and expressed confidence that these would be resolved and the processes to address these would be further strengthened and streamlined.

Thank you. That brings me to the end of this briefing. I will be happy to take some questions.

Question: Madam, you mentioned that the leaders agreed to develop the relations in various areas. Among the areas you mentioned was regional security. Could you be a little more specific as to what ideas were discussed where the two countries could cooperate with each other? Could you please put it in context?

Secretary (East): I think it was expressed as a desire to enlarge our cooperation in this area. It was mentioned as an area with potential cooperation. I have gone into detail that there is an agreement on security cooperation which is to be signed between our Home Ministry and the Interior Ministry here in UAE, and that will really spell out the details. In other words, cooperation exists. Our desire is that the cooperation should be enhanced and strengthened further.

Question: When is the agreement going to be signed?

Secretary (East): It is due to be signed. Our Home Minister has invited the Minister from the UAE to visit India for the signing of this agreement.

Question: Will it be done within this month?

Secretary (East): I cannot give you a timeframe, I am afraid.

Question: Is there any method of exchange of prisoners between India and UAE?

Secretary (East): No, but again there is an agreement under discussion on exchange of sentenced prisoners. That I believe is also at an advance stage.

Question: Regarding the palm trees, Kerala is one of the areas but Rajasthan is mentioned.

Secretary (East): I think the idea is that because palm trees grow very well in Arab countries, particularly in UAE and other areas, where there are dry desert conditions. And it may not necessarily be palm oil it could be date palms also. It is different varieties of palms that could do well in a desert climate.

Question: Regarding the invitation to invest in food security and agricultural sector, have you any concrete commitment from the UAE?

Secretary (East): I think the real issue which our President mentioned is that of course India has a great need for food security. The second issue is, less than two per cent of our food production goes into processed foods. So, the specific area mentioned was that we would welcome investment and cooperation in the area food processing. So, this would be an important area, and

of course whatever technical collaboration is possible on the overall issue of agricultural production.

Question: Madam, I have two questions. First, can you confirm that the UAE has backed India's bid to UN Security Council? And did the President of the UAE release a statement?

Secretary (East): Yes, I can confirm that there was support extended for India to occupy a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. What I have stated I will say it again. It was that His Highness stated that the UAE would certainly support India which had the right to be a permanent member of a reformed UN Security Council. There was no statement that issued at the end of the meeting but this is what was stated at the meeting.

Question: Just a follow-up question about the food security issue. Is the Indian Government looking for investments into the research and development sector as well?

Secretary (East): We are looking for investment into all sectors, I can say that quite confidently.

Question: Related to food processing.

Secretary (East): That is right, but also to agricultural production. We already have some programmes going on with various countries in the area of agricultural production, how to increase yields, how to adopt more progressive methods, and how to increase productivity. We would certainly be interested in all of that given the fact that we have a very large population.

Question: What was said about furthering energy security?

Secretary (East): I think on energy security what we had said was that we recognize that the UAE is a very valuable partner in ensuring India's energy security. We had given out the figure, which I believe amounts to US\$ five billion last year, of import of crude from UAE. And the idea of inviting investment in the upstream and downstream sectors in the petrochemical industry would be to see how else we can collaborate besides the simple purchase of crude oil.

Question: Madam, you mentioned that there has been a 43 billion dollar trade between India and UAE. Does it include petroleum?

Secretary (East): It does. It includes the five billion dollars of petroleum as well. But if you look at the overall figure of 43 billion, five billion is only a small part. So, unlike what most people imagine, our trade with UAE is very multifaceted in many sectors. Actually, of that 43 billion, I believe we exported 24 billion dollars. So, it was a balanced trade. And in that fiscal year, 2009-10, we actually in fact had a positive trade balance with the UAE.

Thank you.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530316705>

17. Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Social and Cultural Centre, Abu Dhabi, 22 November 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to visit the India Social and Cultural Centre, and address members of the Indian community. The global Indian Diaspora, spread across several continents has made India proud both by their contribution to the country of residence, and to their mother land - India.

Our trade links with the Arab world have seen Indian pearl traders reaching the shores of Dubai, Sharjah and Fujairah centuries ago. From there it has been a long journey for the community. Today, the Indian community is estimated to be around 1.75 million strong, making it the largest expatriate community in the UAE. Besides, with its presence in almost all spheres of economic activity, the Indian community has emerged as an important expatriate community for the host country. Be they skilled workers involved in the construction of modern high tech buildings, or professionals in the knowledge based sectors, or those in health care, hospitality and tourism, they have played a vital role in forging the abiding links between India and the UAE.

Let me congratulate each one of you for this contribution. 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. I am equally happy to note that the UAE Government has been extending support to the Indian community for its socio-cultural needs.

Over time, the profile of the Indian community in the Gulf is undergoing transformation. Though large numbers of Indian skilled workers were employed in the UAE in the 1990s as a result of the construction boom, gradually more and more professionals in the fields of finance, banking, insurance and information technology have gained employment in this friendly country. This transition in the profile of the Indian community is reflective of the UAE economy, which is gaining momentum in the knowledge-based service sector. By providing highly skilled service at a competitive cost, your role has proved to be important for the UAE economy. Your sustained remittances over the years have contributed to the foreign exchange reserves of India. I would also like to mention that India is the biggest recipient of remittances by expatriates.

Despite the global economic downturn, the Indian economy has witnessed rapid and sustained growth rate. The macro-economic fundamentals are sound and we seek to further expand our growth. Our infrastructure financing needs are estimated to be 1 trillion US Dollars in the next five years. India offers a large and a growing market. The UAE is also going through a

significant transformation. The space for India to play an increasing role in this transformation is widening. More employment avenues will open up in knowledge-based industries like IT, finance and insurance, as the UAE economy is bracing for a larger role by the service sector. This will ensure that there will be a demand for senior executives and professionals for some more years to come. I urge the Indian community to retune itself and remain responsive to the changing needs of this country. The UAE will remain as one of the largest trading partners for India and a gateway for Indian exports to the region.

I am also aware of the challenges and aspirations of the expatriate Indian community. The Government of India and the UAE Government are engaged in continuous dialogue on various matters concerning Indian labour. There is already an existing Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in India and the Ministry of Labour in the UAE. New schemes have been proposed by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to ensure the welfare of Indian workers in the UAE. I am happy that during my visit, I will be launching, the Indian Workers' Resource Centre, to provide a 24 hour helpline and counselling services for Indian workers in the UAE. This will be an important step to take the grievance redressal mechanism to the doorsteps of the large number of Indians, who are in distress and in need of urgent assistance.

I am impressed by the Indian Social and Cultural Centre and its facilities. That the Indian community has accomplished this task of establishing an impressive institution, reflects a strong sense of responsibility you feel, as members of the Indian community. While financial status may provide materialistic comforts, it is a sense of belonging to a group, and being a part of a cultural and social identity that generates a sense of well-being and satisfaction.

Let me congratulate the founding members of this institution for having envisaged a viable and a vibrant cultural centre for the benefit of the Indian community. I urge the President and the members of the Board of Trustees of this institution, to continue their earnest efforts in catering to the diverse needs of the Indian community. I would like to emphasize that each one of you as members of the vibrant Indian community has done India proud. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to each one of you, for your contribution to strengthening our relations with the UAE. I wish you and members of your family all the very best.

Thank You. Jai Hind!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp221110.html>

18.Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Indian Community Reception, Abu Dhabi, 23 November 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to meet all of you here today. You are all leading members of the Indian Community in the UAE, and your contribution in promoting ties between India and the UAE is greatly appreciated by the Government of India. At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the Indian community to the growth and transformation of this country. In this regard, the role of Indian workers requires special mention, as do their problems and issues, which should receive our careful attention.

I thank the Ministry of Labour of the UAE Government for initiating many welfare measures to help our workers. The Government of India, under the leadership of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has initiated programmes for the welfare of Indian workers abroad, including the setting up of the Indian Community Welfare Fund. I am happy to launch today, the Indian Workers' Resource Center which, apart from assistance including counselling, will provide a 24-hour helpline for workers. I hope that the Indian community will extend all assistance to the Indian Mission in the UAE to enable this Center to fulfil its responsibilities.

India is a country with great vitality in political, economic, cultural, educational and other fields. This vitality emanates from our dynamic civilizational heritage. We can be proud that ours is one of the oldest continuous civilizations of the world. Its contribution to human advancement has been as phenomenal as its contribution to the evolution of thinking, and of philosophical approaches of the human race. Our culture has taught us to live with and respect diversity, and to be resilient in the face of adversity. Our adherence and commitment to 'unity in diversity' has strengthened our vitality. As Mahatma Gandhi said, 'a nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people'

The cultural exchange between India and West Asia has been going on for centuries, with each drawing from each other's strengths. In the pre-colonial days, the Western coast of India, especially the Malabar Coast had been a major centre of world trade. The extensive trade ties between India and the Arab world was reflected in Indian ships with Indian sailors sailing along the Arabian Sea and to the Red Sea, carrying Indian goods which were in great demand. Many of your families came to this part of the world long before oil was discovered here. Indians played an active role in the pearl trade which was a major economic activity in the pre-oil era. The discovery of oil and the resultant growth in economic activities, led to a quantum jump in the arrival of Indians. The Indian community has made vital contributions to strengthen political, economic and cultural contacts between the UAE and India.

You have proved to be valuable goodwill ambassadors for our country and your contributions have been appreciated by the rulers of this country whose benevolent policies have enabled you to make a living here. I appreciate the assistance and attitude of the Government of the UAE. You have been an integral part of the success story in which the UAE has made rapid strides transforming itself, in a single generation, into a global economic powerhouse. Through your

collective efforts and hard work, you have built enduring institutions, and this India Club is one such symbol of your laudable achievements.

The Indian community in the UAE is a microcosm of India with diverse cultural backgrounds, but retaining the unique Indian identity. As the popular saying goes, 'you can take Indians out of India, but you cannot take India out of Indians'. During the years since our independence in 1947, India has achieved much success. Our democracy is deep-rooted and our international profile has shown consistent linear progression. Our voice is heard with respect in major international fora including at the G-20. We have recently been elected to the Non-Permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and we are thankful to the Government of the UAE and the ruler of the UAE, that they have extended support to India's permanent membership in the reformed UN Security Council. India is currently the fourth largest economy in the world on the basis of Purchasing Power Parity. Having successfully weathered the global financial crisis, our economy is now one of the fastest growing in the world. Our annual growth rate is 8.5 percent, but we are confident of taking it to double digits, sooner rather than later.

With a predominantly young work force and a vibrant market, India has become an attractive destination for foreign investors. During the last three years, India has received cumulative Foreign Direct Investment worth over 100 billion US Dollars. As our economy expands, it offers opportunities for collaboration between India and overseas Indian communities. I invite you to make use of these opportunities in India.

The Indian community in the UAE has been a strong supporter of our economic growth and through its regular remittances has stood by India in its difficult times. I am aware that the Indian community, with its high emphasis on educational opportunities for its children, would like to have more educational facilities in India than what it offers now. The Government is considering ways to address these demands. Our Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs runs a Diaspora Scholarship Scheme that offers scholarships to PIO and NRI students studying in Indian universities. I note that some educational institutes from India have set up institutes of advanced learning in the UAE. I look forward to seeing your greater involvement in this endeavour.

I wish each of one of you and your families the very best in the years to come, and also hope that the India Club will continue to serve the community for many years to come. I do hope that the India Club will continue to serve the Indian community in the years ahead.

Thank you. JAI HIND!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp231110-4.html>

19.Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Indian Islamic Centre, Abu Dhabi, 23 November 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to inaugurate the Indian Islamic Centre Abu Dhabi. The Centre has an illustrious history. Its foundation stone was laid in 1982 by the then Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi, who strengthened the secular fabric of India, that we are privileged to witness today.

Historically, India has been the meeting place of diverse races and cultures. Indian civilization shared its richness with other cultures and was itself enriched by this interaction. The coming of Islam to India in the 8th century A.D., and its sustained interface with a vibrant civilization with deep cultural roots, had a profound impact in all spheres of life in India. The Islamic heritage of India is an integral part of Indian culture.

The immense contribution of the Arab world to our heritage is visible in our monuments, literature, language, administration, arts and culture. The translation of many Sanskrit works into the Arabic language during the second Abbasid period of the 8th century A.D., brought to the Arab world, the ancient wisdom of India. The Arabs evinced great interest in Hindu sciences, especially in medicine and astronomy. There was a process of cultural osmosis.

The founding fathers of modern India, recognizing the long-standing tradition of tolerance and respect for diversity so ingrained in our society, chose to enshrine these principles in the Constitution of free India. These have provided the underpinnings for our secular and democratic credentials and have served India well. Given the attempts that we see in the contemporary world to divide and discriminate against people on the basis of their religion, the foresight of our founding fathers more than 60 years ago is, indeed, remarkable. It is part of our core belief that religions are meant to bring peace and harmony amongst humanity, and should not be a source of strife and violence. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian Nation said “I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity..for me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden or they are branches of the same majestic tree”.

The Indian presence and influence has been a regular feature of the Arab landscape. Whether it was trade in pearls, which were the major produce of this region before the discovery of oil, or the export of Indian timber from which Arab dhows were constructed, the destinies of our two cultures have been closely intertwined. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is part of both the cultures in all of us, whether Arab or Indian. It is, indeed, very satisfying to see two old cultures forging new links while preserving old ones.

India and the UAE have much in common in their promotion of religious harmony and tolerance towards different shades of thoughts and beliefs. The rulers of this country have adopted benevolent policies, and provided generous support to Indian Community organizations belonging to all religions. I am happy that the Indian community has through its hard work and dedication over the decades contributed very positively to the development of the UAE. I

understand that the UAE is home to many nationalities that are living in perfect harmony with each other. This "unity in diversity" is also a hallmark of our society.

The Indian Islamic Centre is a tribute to the collective efforts of community leaders. It is, indeed, a reflection of the strength of character of the Indian Diaspora, in nurturing its links with the mother country, while successfully adapting to the local conditions in the host countries. The Centre will no doubt, prove to be a valuable cultural bridge between the UAE and India, and stand as a symbol of our celebrated links. While inculcating pride among the community members about their Indian heritage, I hope the Centre will also serve to highlight among the Emirati community, the close and friendly ties between our two countries. I would like to commend the leaders of the community, whose hard work and dedication has made the Centre a reality.

Finally, warm words of thanks to our gracious hosts - the Government of the UAE. Their generous assistance has contributed to the realization of this project. I bring with me the greetings of the Government of India to the Government of the UAE and the greetings of the people of India to the people of the UAE.

I wish you well. Thank you. Jai Hind!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp231110-2.html>

20. Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Abu Dhabi Indian School, Abu Dhabi, 23 November 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen, and Dear Students,

It is a great privilege to be here amongst the children of the Abu Dhabi Indian School and other schools who have assembled here.

I understand that the Abu Dhabi Indian School was started 35 years ago through the efforts of our present Vice President, Shri Hamid Ansari, with only three teachers and 53 elementary level pupils, has now grown into a leading community school, with more than 450 staff and 5000 students. The school has been preparing students for the CBSE examinations since 1983, and has been achieving commendable success in its academic performance. It is also heartening to know that the students of this School have been winning the Hamdan and Sharjah Awards, constituted by the rulers of the UAE, for excellence in education. My congratulations for these achievements.

The quest for knowledge has been a basic characteristic of Indian ethos from time immemorial. Our ancestors undertook in-depth studies of questions on metaphysics, philosophy, logic, religion, astronomy, grammar, mathematics, medicine and many other branches of human

knowledge. The results of their research are available in our rich literature starting from the Rig Veda. Throughout the subsequent centuries, India adopted an outward-looking approach. This enabled its people to absorb the influences that came from outside the country. At the same time, the ideas, concepts and contribution to knowledge of India, went to places beyond the frontiers of India.

The quest for knowledge, however, is unending. Research for new discoveries must continue, as we cope with change and challenges of the contemporary age. This becomes all the more important as the world is moving forward rapidly and decisively into an era where societies and economies are incrementally based on knowledge. Our education system has the responsibility to adjust to the rapid changes, so that the youth are well prepared to meet the future with great confidence.

Schools, the basic units of an educational system, are where children spend the formative years of their lives. It is here, that the process of imparting knowledge begins. What children learn in school, leaves a lasting impression on their minds. In today's context, education should teach about the different aspects of human history, in a manner that students can draw lessons from the past. It should make students aware of their social and cultural milieu, so that they can contribute meaningfully to society. It should acquaint them with the marvels of science and technology, with its immense capacity to transform human lives, with a view to encouraging them to develop a scientific temper. Moreover, education should enable them to work intelligently and in a systematic manner. Hence, it is very necessary for schools to impart good education.

Knowledge without values, however, is incomplete. Concepts of peace, harmony and tolerance must be learned in school. It is a value system that makes you strong. True education would be one that moulds one's character to perform one's duties without fear or favour, and to observe ethics in one's conduct and behaviour. Gandhiji said, "Learning without courage is like a waxen statue, beautiful to look at but bound to melt at the least touch of a hot substance." An unwavering moral standard would liberate the mind from fear. Character formation should have equal priority with the knowledge of alphabet. Indeed, education without character is like a flower without fragrance. In Sanskrit we say "*Vidya vinayen shobhate*", which means knowledge, when accompanied by humility adds lustre to that learning.

Education should also help appreciate the underlying commonality of the future of the Earth and human life, families and communities, countries and regions. Hence, an essential objective of education must be to create individuals sensitive to their environment, and to the needs of fellow human beings. This will make them responsible inhabitants of the planet, enlightened citizens of their country with compassion towards others, especially those who are less privileged.

I have just seen the performances of your school, and I am impressed with the immense talent that there is in the school. I think you are fortunate to receive education in this school. I must congratulate the Principal, the teachers and students of the school, for the cultural performances. The performances were full of talent, were thrilling and beautiful. You must use your time to learn as much as you can, build friendships and develop the ability to work constructively as a team. The purpose of giving you education is not merely to put you in a profession so that you live well, but it is an investment for the future. You are the future of India, and the leaders of tomorrow. My best wishes to you for a bright and successful future.

Thank You. Jai Hind!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp231110-1.html>

21. Briefing by Secretary (East) and Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs at Dubai, 23 November 2010

Consul General of India, Dubai (Shri Sanjay Verma): Welcome to the media travelling with the Hon. President, the Indian media based in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and the other Northern Emirates. The briefing today will be by Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Ms. Vijaya Latha Reddy; Dr. Didar Singh, Ambassador Lokesh, and Dr. Ellangovan.

The focus, if I may emphasise, of this briefing is the Indian Workers Resource Centre which was launched this evening by the Hon. President. Questions about the other elements of the visit will be taken up tomorrow by Secretary (East) in a separate briefing. We will take advantage of the presence of Dr. Didar Singh who has come in especially for the launch of the Workers Resource Centre. I begin by inviting Ambassador to say a few words and then Secretary (East).

Indian Ambassador to UAE (Mr. M.K. Lokesh): Dear friends, I have already spoken but I just want to tell you that this is a very important initiative given the fact that the Indian community is the largest expatriate community in UAE and a significant number of them belong to the workers category. Many of them have many problems. Redressal of these problems has been one of our major concerns especially in the light of the recent economic downturn with the incidence of workers being exploited, workers being distressed, radically increased. Therefore, it was felt that it is not possible for the Embassy or the Consulate to tackle these problems alone. We already have some initiatives like Indian Medical Welfare Centre. All of them virtually are NGOs. They are doing good work. But we needed to do this job in a professional manner. And this is one of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs which the Embassy is implementing.

I think already you have seen the film which told you about the outline of the Centre, what it will do and how it will function. It has already started functioning. Of course, a Centre of this nature will have some teething problems but we will address them as and when they arise.

I thank you very much for coming here in good numbers and for giving your support. But without speaking any more, I will pass this mike on to Latha Reddy, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs in charge of this area. She will tell you more about this.

Secretary (East) (Ms. Vijaya Latha Reddy): Dear friends, thank you for turning up in such large numbers to attend this press briefing. I would just like to begin by putting into context the whole question of interaction of the leaders of our country with the Indian community when they travel overseas. A visit of our leaders from India to any country would not be complete without the very important element of interaction with our Indian community in those countries.

During this visit, our Hon. President has in fact already undertaken several activities for interacting with the Indian community in the United Arab Emirates. On the 22nd she visited the Indian Social Centre in Abu Dhabi and met with the Indian community leaders there. Earlier today on the 23rd she has visited the Abu Dhabi Indian School and addressed a very large gathering. She also had a more informal interaction with some of the students in the school there who were in a position to ask a question and to hear her reply.

There was also the function to inaugurate the new building of the Indian Islamic Centre in Abu Dhabi. Of course, the grand finale has been today's function at the India Club of Dubai which all of you have attended.

Of course with a population of 1.5 million, which is the estimated figure of Indians in the United Arab Emirates, this remains a very important element of our bilateral relationship. We have a number of success stories which we are all familiar with.

But in our happiness over those success stories we must not forget those who are less fortunate. A large proportion of the Indian community who work in this country fall into the semiskilled and skilled category of workers and face some rather distressing problems. We are indeed grateful to the authorities of the UAE, particularly the Ministry of Labour and the political leaders who have reached out positively to try to resolve many of these issues in cooperation with our Government. But it was felt that we needed to do something more.

This is where the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs – and we are privileged to have with us Dr. Didar Singh, Secretary from the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs – decided to take the initiative under the leadership of the Hon. Shri Vayalar Ravi our Minister of Overseas Indian

Affairs, and to take this unique initiative to set up an Indian Workers Resource Centre which we have just inaugurated at the hands of our Hon. President here in Dubai today.

As this is an initiative of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, I think no one could be better suited to tell us some details about this which would in any case also be distributed to you. But I would like to request my colleague and friend Dr. Didar Singh to please give us some highlights of this programme and perhaps some background as to how this was set up.

Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (Dr. A. Didar Singh): As my colleague Madam Reddy has just said, it is very good to see this kind of interaction and this kind of interest from your side which emphasizes for us all over again that Dubai, UAE, the Gulf are very special places for us where interaction is so important and the interest is so high both at the local level and in India.

As some of you are aware, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is a special initiative of the Government of India. We are only the tenth such country in the world which actually has a Diaspora Ministry. This is being done because we all know we count over 25 million overseas Indians across the world in something like a 190 countries. Of these overseas Indians, as you know, we say about 15 million are Persons of Indian Origin. That means non-Indian Passport holders, persons who went through various waves of economic migration. And we count about 10 million as the Non Resident Indians (NRIs) that is Indian Passport holders in different parts of the world.

We are very proud that of those the majority is in the Gulf. 5.5 million is what is estimated to be in the Gulf itself. That is a very large figure. UAE itself, as you have just heard, has 1.7 million. It is a very large figure. Of that large figure, 65 per cent to 70 per cent is actually workers. So, they are by far the single most important component of the NRIs outside India in this region. It is the mandate of our Ministry and the responsibility of the Government of India to ensure that the workers are looked after in every manner.

We have from the Ministry established labour relations in the context of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with seven countries now through which we have bilateral interaction with the Governments to ensure the welfare of our workers here. We started another very major initiative four years ago in India called the Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) which is in fact the parent of what you have seen inaugurated today.

The OWRC is a Government of India helpline and a resource centre based out of Delhi available for the whole country. It also has walk-in centres in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. We have extended that context of interaction and assisting the Indian workers. We have extended it now by this first establishment of the Indian Workers Resource Centre in Dubai.

The idea is that we provide a seamless service to the Indian worker starting from when he first thinks about going outside for economic migration back home in India, to when he comes here, and the issues that come up here, and then also whenever he goes back to India and has issues that need to be addressed there. This is the seamless interaction that we try to do to ensure that welfare of workers is the top of the priorities.

We have of course chosen Dubai to be the first place to launch it because we believe the demand here is the highest. This is something which I must compliment the Consul General, the Ambassador, our Missions here, who have worked at this. We have our Counsellor who is specially posted for Community Affairs in Abu Dhabi, Dr. Ellangovan, here. We have worked to start this year with the objective, but we will now extend it to other countries where the majority of NRIs are actually workers. This experiment for us is just a beginning. It is a beginning through which we will be able to extend these services to other places also.

Details of this Centre are available to you in this Press Release which has been given out. It has been established in one of the most prominent parts of Dubai. We have outsourced this to a private company that has a lot of experience in dealing with counsellor type of issues, visas, passports, and now Workers Resource Centre. We will be seamlessly offering services in terms of addressing grievances, addressing problems, addressing issues that need to be taken up whether back home in India or with the Government here, or with individual employers through which these issues may arise.

Let me only finish by saying that this is not something new. Our Embassies are already doing this. Our Missions all over the Gulf are already interacting with the Indian community and particularly with the Indian workers. They have been doing it over the years. We are just trying to consolidate this very same initiative to make it more professional and to make it better to work in a manner which people can know about. And for that, your role is very important because this message has to go out. We can have all these nice meetings and meet all the prominent people of the Gulf in these kinds of occasions. But, as my colleague was just mentioning, the unsung heroes are those who are working in the labour camps. They need to get the message and that can only come through you.

We hope, therefore, that you will carry the news of this initiative now and in the future also to assist us in carrying this message so that people know they can come to this Centre, that there is a 24x7 helpline available to them which is manned by people who speak in seven different languages, so that any issue that comes up can be addressed right there.

Thank you very much.

Question: ...(Inaudible)...

Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs: It is written here in your note also. Once a week it is already there. We already have at the Indian Mission, with the Ambassador, we have Dr. Ellangovan who is Counsellor (Community Affairs) who is already addressing these issues. This initiative of the Workers Centre here incidentally is for the entire UAE. It is not just for Dubai, it is for the whole of UAE. It is a free helpline available that can be rung up from any part of UAE.

Question: ...(Inaudible)...

Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs: All recruiting agents are established in India through the Emigration Act which is an Act of Parliament and through which agents register in India. We have about 1400 agents who are registered in India. Of that, operational are about 600. It is not only through the Workers Resource Centre that the complaints come. Complaints come to us through the Indian Missions and directly also to us on an ongoing basis. We enquire into every single complaint. For your information, over a hundred agents have been put under suspension and in some cases removed. This is an ongoing activity. Whenever we get information that there is so-called unscrupulous agents operating, action is taken but as per law.

Question: ...(Inaudible)...

Secretary, Overseas Indian Affairs: Every Indian is free to travel anywhere and is also free to travel back to his country. We do not stop anybody from either going or coming back. There are arrangements available in Indian Missions all over the world, not just in the Gulf. Whenever somebody does not have the facility to pay for his own travel, there are facilities available through the Counsellor Services to make this available in an emergency situation. Same situation will apply here also.

Question: Sir, I am a journalist. I know so many cases ...(Inaudible)...

Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs: Just for your information, in the last year itself about 800 such workers have been sent back, paid for through the Indian Community Welfare Fund which has been set up. You also know that this Ministry with the Ministry of External Affairs set up something called the Indian Community Welfare Fund. This is also available and it is now available in 42 countries around the world including in the Gulf. People can use this facility when they have an emergency issue that needs to be addressed.

Question: Sir, eight hundred workers from UAE or around the world?

Secretary, Overseas Indian Affairs: UAE.

... ..

Question: ...(Inaudible)... website, all these complaints received should be updated. Will it be updated?

Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs: Yes, that is the idea.

Secretary (East): I would like to answer that question. I think firstly Governments are not in the business of forcing other Governments. We talk to each other. We can negotiate solutions. We talk about setting up agreements or arrangements. Our Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has talks with the Ministry of Labour of those countries. The Memorandum of Understanding is there. We set up mechanisms to address certain problems. There are Joint Working Groups who would get together. Secondly, when it comes to legal cases there is a legal system that applies in each country and I think we as foreign guests in that country have to respect the legal system of each country. However, we do provide whatever assistance we can under our Consular laws. We provide legal assistance where required. We try to facilitate visits by the family. Where all legal resources have been exhausted, we then can also consider requesting for a special clemency on compassionate grounds in certain specific cases. There are different methods that can be followed. In the particular case you have mentioned in Sharjah, the legal process is still continuing. The legal resources have not been exhausted. That is the point.

...

Question: What is the strength of staff?

Secretary, Overseas Indian Affairs: It is not a question of strength of the staff but the question is of the services being offered. The services are 24x7, and the services range from the Call In Centre which is a call centre like a BPO centre, there is counselling facilities where there are already ... We, as I mentioned to you, plan to extend this to all countries where majority of workers go. At the moment we refer to them in India as Emigration Clearance Required. As per the Emigration Act, we have seventeen countries which are designated as Emigration Clearance Required and this is essentially required for those workers who are of educational qualification less than class 10.. So, basically it is taking care of only the semiskilled and low-skilled category of workers of whom ...

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530316716>

22.Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Dubai International Academic City, Dubai , 24 November 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be able to meet scholars and faculty from not one, but four Indian Institutes, brought together under the umbrella of the Dubai International Academic City. I am happy to note the presence of Principals and faculty members from the over fifty Indian schools in the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE is part of our extended neighbourhood. There has been regular exchange of ideas and knowledge between our communities on either side of the Arabian Sea over centuries. When the contribution of Indian community to the growth of UAE is appreciated, we should remember that India has made rapid strides in the field of human resource development, because of the importance we attach to the acquisition of knowledge.

I am aware of the primacy accorded to the education sector by the UAE in the Vision Document 2020. The clustering mode followed initially by the Knowledge Village, and now by the Dubai International Academic City has ensured that the best talent from all over the world is attracted. I am also aware of the focus on quality in education, the emphasis on students and parents making informed choices, and the efforts to ensure affordability of education. We in India empathize with these missions and goals. I wish to felicitate the visionary leadership of the UAE for the successes in their endeavours, and assure them of India's continued support and interest in their initiatives.

Historically, Arabia and India have been recognized as the sources, receptors and repositories of knowledge from the early days of our contacts. We have shared the conviction, since as early as the days of Nalanda, that knowledge is the one treasure that increases manifold by sharing. According to different etymological constructions, Nalanda means "giver of knowledge". Nalanda was a residential university which attracted students and travellers from all over the world, including from the Arabian Peninsula. Subjects ranging from science, astronomy, medicine and logic to meta-physics, philosophy and scriptures were pursued. The Nalanda University Bill of 2010, and the efforts being made in cooperation with our friends in Asia, is a reaffirmation of our commitment to "borderless knowledge".

We recognize that education is the fastest vehicle for enabling socio-economic mobility and change. India seeks to realize its demographic dividend in a scenario where young persons will outnumber the old for many years to come. To optimize this human resources advantage, India's systems of teaching and learning have also been undergoing rapid changes. The Right to Education Bill seeks to ensure that every child between the age of 6 and 14 has access to free education. We are also expanding our higher education infrastructure. We are confident that the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology, which has recently entered project mode, will bridge the gaps between urban, mofussil and rural India ensuring that every scholar, irrespective of location will be able to access the best academic resources available in India.

We are also aligning our syllabi to globally accepted standards. Teaching methodologies that promote active learning are being encouraged. The accent of our education system has two deliverables - preparing students to become productive forces in the economy, whilst pursuing the quest for pure knowledge. This trend will ensure that the growth of social capital will keep pace with growth of human capital.

Not long ago, it was the brilliance of only some individual Indians which attracted global interest. Thereafter, premier institutes of higher learning like the IITs and the IIMs emerged, and soon became regular by-words for excellence across boardrooms and R&D labs in all continents. I am heartened that such globally recognized Indian brands of education are increasingly venturing outside and setting up bases abroad in clusters like the Dubai International Academic City. Brand India has been served well by our world recognized educational institutes.

The Indian student community in the UAE has the unique privilege of being recipients of knowledge transferred in the Indian way, even as they are exposed to a global milieu. Your campuses undoubtedly pulsate with the intellectual ferment characteristic of multi-cultural and multi-linguistic settings, which makes learning enjoyable. In the coming millennia, the world will see a lot more of India and through your work and conduct, you can contribute to its visibility and growth. Hence, you should aim to be not merely symbols of the success of individuals and institutions, but represent the strengths, potential and future of a resurgent India on the world stage.

Wishing you all well and lots of good wishes! JAI HIND!

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp241110.html>

23. Briefing by Secretary (East) and Consul General of India, Dubai on President's discussions with UAE Dignitaries, Dubai, 24 November 2010

Archana Datta: Friends, we have Secretary (East) with us. Along with her are JS (Gulf). You have already met both of them. Consul General based in Dubai also is present here. Secretary (East) will brief you about this morning's activities.

Secretary (East) (Ms. Vijaya Latha Reddy): Good afternoon. I hope you are all comfortable and well in Dubai. If you are not, you know who to blame. I thought I will ask Consul General to join us because being the local person, some of your questions perhaps he could answer in more detail.

I think at yesterday evening's press briefing I had briefed you in detail about President's interactions with the Indian community. I thought today would be a good opportunity to meet with you and bring you up to date on the discussions held with H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and the Ruler of Dubai - this meeting was held earlier today; and with H.H. Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the

Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE; and also with the Minister of Presidential Affairs which was held in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

I will begin with the meeting that was held yesterday with H.H. Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. For your information, His Highness heads the International Petroleum Investment Company, an entity of the Abu Dhabi Government responsible for all foreign investments in the oil and petrochemical sector. He is also Chairman of the Emirates Investment Authority, one of the leading sovereign wealth funds of the UAE, and also a Board Member of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority that is considered to be the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world.

In the areas of mutual interests discussed, investment opportunities in India and the UAE were focused in the context of the discussions which had earlier been held between our President and His Highness the President of the UAE on 22nd November, the first day of her visit. These included UAE investments in the energy sector in India including in power generation projects, agriculture, food processing, and infrastructure projects. Our President pointed out that India was looking at one trillion US dollars in investments in the infrastructure sector over the next five years, and that our Government was planning to disinvest up to US\$ 8.7 billion in our PSUs, and that these would both present very good opportunities for UAE businesses and for the UAE Government. It was also agreed that H.H. Sheikh Mansour would visit India in the coming months to further discuss investment opportunities in India.

It can also be recalled that the two Presidents had agreed earlier that the next meeting of the Joint Commission, to be headed by the two Foreign Ministers, will be held shortly in Abu Dhabi to take up issues discussed between the two leaders. So, there would be two follow-ups - one at the Joint Commission meeting and perhaps very soon thereafter or around the same time a visit by H.H. Sheikh Mansour.

Hon. President met earlier today here in Dubai with the Ruler of Dubai, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Other Dignitaries from the UAE who were present on the occasion were: His Highness Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Deputy Ruler of Dubai;

H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the Chairman of Dubai Airports, and President of the Dubai Department of Civil Aviation, and Chairman and CEO of the Emirates Airlines, a very eminent figure in aviation.

Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qasimi - whom you would have all seen, the Minister in Waiting - who is the very eminent UAE Minister of Foreign Trade; and H.E. Reem Al Hashemi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum warmly welcomed the President on her first visit to the UAE and to Dubai. And our President recalled his own state visit to India in 2007 and more recent visit in March 2010. She complimented His Highness on his leadership which had led to the impressive development of this country and particularly Dubai.

Our President recalled the traditional ties between the West Coast of India and Dubai and Sharjah. Based on this foundation, our multifaceted relationship has grown immensely particularly after 1971. Our President informed His Highness that she had brought with her a large Business Delegation of 56 persons from India, and that there were also a large number of local Indian companies who had joined with the Delegation here. She mentioned that she had already had a successful business interaction in Abu Dhabi, and was looking forward to her interaction here with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce.

There were enormous areas and opportunities for cooperation between the countries in education and in infrastructure, particularly roads and the energy sector. She pointed out the scope for Indian PSUs to participate in projects as well as public-private partnership opportunities. One important area discussed was bilateral security cooperation. H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum mentioned that India and UAE already had very good cooperation in this area. Our President also reiterated that the agreement on security cooperation should be signed early as this would help us concentrate further on counter-terrorism and maritime security issues. She pointed out that we already had agreements on extradition and on mutual legal assistance. H.H. Sheikh Mohamed agreed that we should continue with our cooperation to assist each other with security concerns.

The President once again thanked the UAE Government for their support for India's election to the non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council. His Highness reiterated that the UAE also supports India's candidature for a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council.

Moving on to the question of agriculture, the President reiterated that the area of agriculture, food security would be a good one to further develop joint projects. She also stressed the proposal already discussed with the President for having a joint research and collaboration in creating economical desalination procedures.

The two leaders agreed that there was vast scope to increase our trade which had already reached US\$ 43 billion. They also recognized that the UAE acts as a gateway for Central Asia, Africa and West Asia for Indian exports, and offers excellent re-export facilities. His Highness mentioned that there was also excellent scope for India and the Gulf countries to think of having joint ventures in third countries.

The two leaders discussed the question of empowerment of women and took note that both countries had women Ministers in their Cabinet and had been working on the empowerment of women including in the area of higher education.

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum said that the UAE was very happy with our bilateral relationship which was already very good but has progressed to an even better level and that the President's visit will give a further impetus to our relations.

Thank you. I will be happy to take some questions.

Question: I believe there was an informal consultation between the local NRI businessmen and the Business Delegation. Could we have something on that?

Secretary (East): The formal business interaction with the Chamber of Commerce will take place tomorrow. As is normal in the President's visit, she normally has an informal internal meeting with our Business Delegation to get an idea from them as to what have been successful projects, where do we need to concentrate more, where do they see untapped opportunities. There is a very good exchange of views. In this case, since we had both our own Indian Business Delegation which came from India - the combined delegation from CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM - as well as, as I mentioned, a number of local Indian businesses who are already active here, they were able to have a very good exchange, and some of the questions brought up by our Indian Delegation were almost answered directly by them. But certainly they made certain suggestions to the President and through her to the authorities in India of further things that could be considered either for taking up with the UAE Government or in our own procedures. These were different things like for instance that there are some issues with getting long-term business visas or for getting residence visas for some of the Executives. What we have decided is that a list of all the suggestions made would be incorporated by the Embassy and forwarded to us in India, and we would take these up suitably at different levels both in India and with the UAE.

Question: Madam, you said that India and UAE are looking forward to have joint ventures in the third countries. What are the spheres?

Secretary (East): We did not have specific discussions in detail on this. This was a suggestion from the Vice-President and Prime Minister the Ruler of Dubai that this could be an area to explore that India and Gulf countries could look at joint ventures in other countries.

Question: Madam, was there any discussion on the nuclear agreement? The UK Foreign Minister is in Dubai and the Queen is also here. They are going for the same thing again. Did something like that happen?

Secretary (East): No, this was not a subject that was discussed.

Question: Can you give us a little detail of the state of cooperation between India and UAE in various areas?

Secretary (East): What has your experience been, Sanjay? Maybe you would like to say something.

Consul General of India (Shri Sanjay Verma): The ideal type of relationship would be the surplus which UAE generates by selling us oil and the investment opportunities in India, essentially establishing cross investments whether they invest in our midstream or downstream oil sector, that chunk in itself. They are I think in the top five of our oil suppliers worldwide. In that aspect the relationship probably can be tuned further.

Question: What is the magnitude of surplus?

Consul General of India: The trade figures you have are of non-oil trade. All oil they are selling us is surplus for them. The current account surplus is essentially because of the oil. That is one part of the relationship which can be worked out further to mutual advantage, not just to UAE but to the entire Gulf region, the redistribution of wealth, thanks to oil resources and the opportunities available in India in the infrastructure sector or many other sectors for that matter. Yes, we have 43 billion dollars worth of trade. But if you look at the composition of the trade, there is a lot of scope of adding variety because as of now 80 per cent of that trade is essentially jewellery, gold and diamonds. In a sense it is a counter-trade with the jewellery, diamonds, etc., going to India for processing and coming back comes back and sold worldwide. In that sense, when you say US\$ 43 billion, the trade can be much more and we all have to work much harder.

Question: Just value addition there and that is all.

Consul General of India: Yes.

Question: We have been talking about cooperation in the agriculture and food processing sectors. Does the UAE have sizeable agriculture, and do they have sizeable companies in order to participate or cooperate with the Indian companies?

Consul General of India: In a very limited way. In food processing, probably fruit juices is one area where they have some strength. They have state of the art facilities in fruit processing, not food processing as such. But they have companies with a lot of surplus which can be used in the agro-processing sector in India. In terms of the agricultural strength of the UAE, it is minimal in that sense. Most of their potable water is through desalination plants, etc. But dates is an area.

Secretary (East): I mentioned also in my briefing in Abu Dhabi, if you recall, that what we would like is for them to invest and to help us to develop our food processing sector. I think that is the way they are looking at it. Incidentally, in answer to your previous question, one area which had been mentioned was that we could look at third country projects in Africa in agriculture, joint ventures between either the UAE Government or private companies and our companies or public sector for that matter. I think there is a fair amount of interest because we must not forget that there are several Arab countries in Africa as well. So, there is a certain organic link between Arab countries and Africa. About eight countries in the 22 countries in the Arab League actually also belong to the African Union.

Question: This is regarding the helpline started yesterday. When you call that number, the answering machine starts. In the case of those persons who do not understand English or any other language, if he does not understand how to operate it, he cannot make use of it. Is it not possible for the consultants to pick up the phone and directly answer the questions?

Consul General of India: That is how it should be. I think there are some teething problems. It was launched yesterday. It is the first initiative. It will also be implemented in phases. Right now they are focusing on a 24x7 helpline and with multiple languages facility. The counselling bit is right now on appointment. Gradually, over the next six weeks, I think you would have counselling services five times or six times a week from 8 to 4. So, it is a build up. These are services which were being done in the Consulate. For instance, we ran free legal counselling every Thursday afternoon for the community, and psychological counselling every Saturday the entire day. We were doing it for the last two-three years. The essence of the IWRC is to ramp up those services, move them up from what was essentially social work, social service, voluntary nature of services provided by the Committee, to a professional basis round the clock, five to six days a week. So, this will take time to come to speed. But we expect in the next three-four weeks things will change. I am surprised actually to hear that people are not getting the response on the phone that you are expecting.

Question: In fact they have got response. They have got fifty calls since yesterday evening till today 7 am. But that problem was still there. If the answering machine answers your call, some people may find it difficult.

Consul General of India: I think these are little creases which will smoothen out over the next couple of days. Before you leave, tomorrow try calling up and I think the act would be in place.

Secretary (East): If there are no more questions, I understand we are standing between you and the Burj Khalifa. May I wish you a very pleasant visit!

Consul General of India: Madam, with your permission I just have one suggestion to make. We have tried to arrange a visit to Shyam Bhatia's place. I have been to his house. He has converted

his outhouse, about 3000 square feet, into a shrine to cricket. He has got an amazing collection of cricket memorabilia. I think outside the Lord's Stadium this is probably the best. Visual Media especially will get good visuals. He is very passionate about the game. It is a delight. So, you should spend 30 minutes there. It is a good soft side story.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530316712>

24. Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dubai , 25 November 2010

It gives me immense pleasure to address this distinguished gathering representing leaders of business, trade and investment. Your presence here is testimony to the fact that there is deep interest in expanding India-UAE economic and trade ties.

India has been a dynamic partner of the UAE in the trade and economic fields. For thousands of years, our ancestors sailed across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean to exchange goods, ideas and experiences. This interaction over several millennia has left an indelible mark on our history, providing us a fertile ground for accentuating our traditional links in the modern context. Trade and investment will be the cornerstone of our partnership in the evolving global scenario.

The India-UAE bilateral trade, which was dominated by traditional items such as dates and fish, underwent a sharp change after the discovery of oil in the UAE, with India starting to import a sizeable quantity of oil from the UAE. At the same time, with the emergence of the UAE as a unified entity in 1971, our exports also started growing gradually over the years. The real impetus, however, started after Dubai positioned itself as a regional trading hub by the early 1990s and about the same time, the economic liberalization process started in India. The UAE, a long standing commercial and business hub in the region, has also emerged as the third major re-export centre in the world after Singapore and Hong Kong, which is clearly reflected in our growing trade. India-UAE trade, valued at US\$ 180 million per annum in the 1970s, is today in excess of US\$ 43 billion making the UAE one of India's leading trading partners.

Both India and the UAE, through their prudent policies before, as well as the stimulus measures after the global economic crisis, have successfully weathered the financial crisis, and are now contributing to the stability of the global economy. It is a matter of some satisfaction that, despite the world economic crisis, although it did affect us to some extent, India has come out as one of the fastest growing economies in the world and is poised to register a GDP growth rate of over 9 percent in the coming years. Our exports are recording impressive growth since November - December 2009, and we have seen a substantial rise in corporate earnings and profit margins. Capital flows and business sentiments have improved tremendously.

As I have already mentioned, India and the UAE are leading trade partners, for which a large part of the credit must go to the persistent efforts of the trading community in both the countries. The visionary policies of the rulers of Dubai in building excellent infrastructure, have transformed this city into a throbbing metropolis and a great hub for international commerce and trade. There is potential for the current level of Indo-UAE trade to be boosted considerably in the coming years. For this we would need to take several measures. The institutional arrangements like the India-UAE Joint Business Council and the India-UAE Joint Commission for Economic, Technical and Scientific Co-operation (JCM) should be reactivated. Both countries should increase their participation in specialized trade fairs and exhibitions. Immense potential also lies for a mutually beneficial partnership in the energy sector and also in the agriculture and food processing sectors. India is one of the leading producers of fruits, despite this only 2 percent our trade is in this area. Both countries must consider more co-operation between their respective oil-industry sectors for establishing a long term relationship in the field of petro-chemical industries, not only in India and the UAE, but in third countries also.

India is a large and growing market with healthy micro-economic fundamentals and robust banking and financial institutions. This makes India one of the most attractive FDI locations in the world. Our plans for expansion of our infrastructure, energy and industrial sectors, presents opportunities for investment. I call upon the investor community from the UAE to participate in the growth story of India. India extends to all of you a hand of partnership, and invites you to participate with us in the new phase of rapid development and prosperity on which we have embarked. Indian companies, on their part, will be able to bring in their technology, manpower as well as capital to partner in the development programme of the UAE.

The large presence of Indian business companies in the UAE can act as a springboard to elevate our economic partnership to new levels. While trade has been the bedrock of our economic partnership, strengthening of the flow of Foreign Direct Investment between the two countries, can be another significant pillar of our relationship. I thank the members of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry for their immense contribution to promote and strengthen trade and economic links between India and the UAE. I would also like to thank the Chamber for giving me this opportunity to interact with the Dubai business community.

Thank you.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp251110-2.html>

25. Speech by President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the India Trade and Exhibition Centre, Sharjah , 25 November 2010

I would like to thank His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi the Ruler of Sharjah, for the warm welcome accorded to me in the Emirate of Sharjah. Let me tell you that I

was impressed by your foresight and the interest you are taking to develop this region. It is remarkable. It is a privilege for me to be the first President of India to make an official visit to the Emirate of Sharjah. I am happy to be here to inaugurate the India Trade and Exhibition Centre, which I hope will act as a catalyst for promotion of trade and economic links between India and the UAE.

This centre reflects the visionary policies of the Ruler of Sharjah, to expand trade and economic links with other countries, including India. The Emirate of Sharjah is known for its historical links with India. It has a rich history, heritage and culture. Very aptly, it was named as the cultural capital of the Arab world in 1998 by UNESCO, due to its eclectic mix of museums, heritage preservation and traditional souks and it became a gateway of this region, long before oil was discovered.

The civilizational and cultural links between India and the Gulf date back to many centuries. Many Arab Islamic scholars from the 8th Century A.D. documented Indo-Arab cultural links, including Indian contributions to Arab thought and culture. Translations of Indian works were undertaken, leading to synthesis of ideas between the two civilizations.

Trade links constituted the bedrock of Indo-Arab links in the ancient world, and cultural interaction was a consequence of the vibrant trade links. Even in the contemporary world, trade is the cornerstone of our links with this region. The Emirate of Sharjah, due to its geographical advantage, stands in the forefront of promoting economic and trade links between India and the region.

Today, India and the UAE with an annual trade turnover of 43 billion US Dollars for the year 2009-2010 are among the leading trade partners for each other. There are complementarities in our trade relations and hence, there is opportunity to expand the volume of trade considerably in the coming years. Equally important is the potential for mutual investments by the two countries. We need to explore every avenue to realize this potential, by strengthening promotional efforts.

By holding industry and state specific exhibitions for an extended period of time, and providing office space to aspiring exporters from India, this Centre will be able to meet the needs of SME's and other trade bodies. I also urge the Centre to work in close cooperation with the ASSOCHAM, FICCI, CII and other renowned export promotion organizations in India, to achieve its objectives. Sharjah, and the other Emirates in the UAE, with their excellent infrastructure and trade and investment friendly policies, provide ample opportunities for taking India - UAE economic relations to new heights. Agriculture is also a very important field in which you can have co-operation. Food processing is also very important. Think of these new areas. In India agriculture is the biggest private business. In India 40 percent of farming activity

is dry land farming. We want to green our arid areas. The UAE also wants to go green, so let us work together.

I congratulate the Emirate of Sharjah and the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce for providing this elegant building to house the India Trade and Economic Centre. I declare this Centre open.

Thank you.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp251110-1.html>

26. Agreement with UAE, New Delhi, 25 November 2010

Question:

- (a) whether India and United Arab Emirates have stressed the need of expediting work on three agreements including security and swap of convicts;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether India and UAE stay in constant touch over having dialogue on various issues and hold regular meetings on common issues; and
- (d) if so, the type of relations India and UAE have had during the past five years?

Answer: The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Mrs. Preneet Kaur)

(a) & (b) Yes. The three agreements currently being discussed between the two countries are:

1. Agreement on Security Cooperation
2. Agreement on the transfer of sentenced persons
3. Agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance in custom matters

(c) & (d) Yes. India's relations with UAE continue to be warm, friendly and irritant free. They are based on continuity, trust and confidence. Our ties are multi-faceted, encompassing and cover many areas of bilateral cooperation. Both sides have made sincere efforts to improve relations in all fields.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question no. 1743 asked by Mr. Ishwarilal Shankarlal Jain

Specific Issues

a. Hajj

27. Arrangements for the Hajj Pilgrims, New Delhi, 10 November 2010

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

- (a) the number of persons expected to perform Hajj Pilgrimage during the current year, State -wise;
- (b) whether the arrangements made including accommodation in Jeddah for the Hajj pilgrims are satisfactory;
- (c) if not, the reasons therefor;
- (d) whether his Ministry has received complaints from certain quarters in this regard;
- (e) if so, the details thereof; and
- (f) the follow-up action taken/proposed to be taken for improving the arrangements along with the details of fresh instructions issued to Hajj Mission in this regard?

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

- (a) The number of pilgrims expected to perform Hajj during current year through Hajj Committee of India is 125,850. In addition, 45,637 seats have been allocated to Private Tour Operators (PTO). State-wise statement of pilgrims proceeding through the Hajj Committee of India is attached at Annexure – I. Since the flights are operating from 21 Embarkation points, the actual figures could be made available after departure of the last flight.
- (b) Adequate arrangements have been made for pilgrims including their stay at Mecca & Medina.
- (c) Does not arise.
- (d) No, Sir.
- (e) Does not arise.
- (f) Does not arise. It is the constant endeavour of the Government to keep making improvements in the arrangements for the Hajj pilgrims and provide them with better facilities after taking into account the feedback received from all concerned.

Annexure A

Sr. No	Name of States /UTs	Total Pilgrims [Hajj 2010]
1	Andaman & Nicobar [UT]	119

2	Andhra Pradesh	6,792
3	Assam	4,220
4	Bihar	6,268
5	Chandigarh [UT]	43
6	Chhattisgarh	398
7	Dadra Nagar Haveli [UT]	15
8	Daman & Diu [UT]	55
9	Delhi [NCT]	1,579
10	Goa	341
11	Gujarat	4,466
12	Haryana	1,189
13	Himachal Pradesh	187
14	Jammu & Kashmir	6,605
15	Jharkhand	2,896
16	Karnataka	6,284
17	Kerala	7,645
18	Lakshadweep [UT]	56
19	Madhya Pradesh	3,735
20	Maharashtra	9,986
21	Manipur	354
22	Orissa	740
23	Pondicherry [UT]	321
24	Punjab	372
25	Rajasthan	4,656
26	Tamil Nadu	3,374
27	Tripura	108
28	Uttar Pradesh	29,887
29	Uttrakhand	984
30	West Bengal	10,325
31	Government Quota [includes Khadimul-Hujjaj, Mehram, Members Hajj Committees of India]	11,000
32	Additional Quota	850
	Total	125,850

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the Peoples), Starred Question no. 37 asked by Mr. Neeraj Shekhar, <http://meaindia.nic.in/meaxpsite/parliament/ls/2010/11/10ls02.pdf>

28. Funds spent on Hajj, New Delhi, 10 November 2010

Question:

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) the amount spent on Hajj Pilgrims by the Union Government during 2009-10 and 2010-11 so far;
- (b) whether the Government proposes to increase this amount;
- (c) if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA)

(a) Information is tabulated below :-

Financial Year	Expenditure on Hajj (excluding subsidy)	Expenditure on Hajj Subsidy (administered by Ministry of Civil Aviation)
2009-10	Rs. 30.49 crore	Rs. 611* crore
2010 -11 (so far)	5.24 Crore *	Figures will be available after completion of Hajj.

* - provisional figures

- (b) No.
- (c) Does not arise.
- (d) Budget allocation is made according to anticipated expenditure.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question no. 446 asked by Mr. Jai Prakash Agarwal <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=220216675>

29. Hajj Facilities, New Delhi, 24 November 2010

Question:

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the facilities/assistance provided by the Union Government to the Hajj pilgrims along with the contribution of the State Governments therein; and

(b) the details of such funding provided to Hajj pilgrims of Madhya Pradesh along with the number of persons from the State benefited as a result thereof?

Answer: The Minister of State in the Ministry of external Affairs (Mrs. Preneet Kaur)

(a) Government of India makes necessary arrangements of airlifting of the pilgrims from India to Saudi Arabia, accommodation and local transportation in Saudi Arabia through Hajj Committee of India, Mumbai and Consulate General of India, Jeddah. Subsidy in airfare is given to the pilgrims going for Hajj under the arrangements of Hajj Committee of India. Government supplies medicines and deposes administrative staff, Doctors, nurses and paramedics to render medical assistance to the pilgrims in Saudi Arabia. State Governments, through the State Hajj Committees, make arrangements of training camps, mandatory inoculation of polio and meningitis and transit accommodation at all embarkation points in India prior to departure of the pilgrims.

(b) 3,314 pilgrims from Madhya Pradesh who benefited from subsidized airfare travelled under the arrangements of Hajj Committee of India for Hajj - 2010.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question no. 2370 asked by Kumari Minakshi Natrajan, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=220216744>

b. Palestine

30. Statement by Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Member of Parliament, on Agenda Item 51 - UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - at the Fourth Committee of the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 2 November 2010

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Flippo Grandi, Commissioner General of UNRWA for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East for the annual report on the extremely important work over the past year in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to commend the work of Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, the outgoing Commissioner General who led the Agency for five years.

We also thank the UNRWA Advisory Committee and the members of the working group on the Financing of UNRWA, for their efforts in support of the work of UNRWA. India also places on record its admiration for the difficult and often risky work that UNRWA has carried out over the past six decades, placing service to the Palestinian refugees as its highest priority.

Mr. Chairman,

The services provided by UNRWA are of a critical importance in the context of the continuing violence in the Middle East. The Agency has played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance, including education, health care and social services to over 4.6 million Palestinian refugees. Today UNRWA is a symbol of the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees until a just and durable settlement of the issue is achieved.

The report of Commissioner General, clearly illustrates the severe challenges UNRWA continues to face. As the report notes, several of the challenges directly impinge upon the well-being of Palestine refugees and the Agency's ability to efficiently and effectively discharge its humanitarian and development responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman,

The first of the challenges before UNRWA that needs to be addressed is the crisis of financing.

The budgetary shortfall of UNRWA is growing, and this takes place at the same time as demands upon UNRWA for assistance and support have increased. Shortage of funds has direct implication on UNRWA work in general and projects like rebuilding of Nahr El Bared camp in particular. It also affects up gradation of services at several refugee camps. Therefore, there is a greater need for augmenting international efforts to improve UNRWA's financial health.

We note the concern of the Chairperson of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA that "the separation of barrier, closures, curfews and other restrictions on movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have led to further hardship for the affected population". As we have stated in the past, the walls/encroachment on Palestinian land and interests creates great hardships for the people affected by its construction and exacerbates the already grim situation.

An area of continuing concern is the restriction in freedom of movement of UNRWA staff members. Regrettably, the environment in which the Agency carries out its operations continues to hamper its ability to deliver services. Of equal concern is that these restrictions have had a serious impact on the ability of UNRWA to move staff and provide humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need. Closures and blockades need to be lifted and unhindered access allowed to humanitarian supplies. The events of 31 May 2010 that led tragic loss of life and the reports of killings and injuries to people on the boats carrying supplies for Gaza is deplorable.

The continued levy of fees and charges for the transit of humanitarian goods is not called for as it seriously affects the working of Agency which is already short of funds. The detention of UNRWA staff and lack of Agency access to and information on its staff is matter of serious concern. We support the Commission calls on all parties to respect United Nations resolutions and international law, including international humanitarian law.

We support the call of the UNRWA Chairperson regarding removal of restrictions on the movement of agency staff and goods in throughout UNRWA's areas of work. We also take note of UNRWA welcoming new measures towards easing of movement of goods to Gaza. However, more relaxation on movement of reconstruction material is required to effectively address the situation in Gaza.

We have, as in the past, manifested our support to the Palestinian people through continuing developmental support to Palestine. Last year, we enhanced our annual contribution to UNRWA to \$ 1 million, besides, making a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to UNWRA's flash appeal. Last year and this year, India contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budget support to the Palestinian National Authority. This year's budget support followed from discussions between His Excellency, President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in New Delhi in February this year. These exemplify India's continuing commitment to Palestine.

The support for the Palestinian cause has been a central feature of India's foreign policy since even before it achieved independence in 1947. India will continue to do all within its capacities to assist Palestine in its endeavours in capacity and institution-building. We salute the struggling people of Palestine. We express our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Mr. Chairman,

It is critical for the international community to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to resume direct negotiations that began in September. We are hopeful that the talks and negotiations would continue, leading to a comprehensive peace process for final resolution of the conflict. Till such time, Mr. Chairman, it is incumbent upon all of us to fully support UNRWA, as the primary source of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees. For this reason, we endorse all efforts to support UNRWA by expanding its capacity to render assistance.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, <http://www.un.int/india/2010/ind1781.pdf>

**31. Address by Foreign Secretary at NDC on 'Challenges in India's Foreign Policy',
New Delhi, 19 November 2010**

...Turning to West Asia, India's consistent and unwavering record of support for the Palestinian cause since the days of our freedom struggle continues to guide our policy in the region. The Palestinian problem needs a solution which has been delayed for far too long. India supports a united, independent, viable, sovereign state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders side by side at peace with Israel. We are hopeful that direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians will resume and the talks and negotiations would lead to a comprehensive peace process for the final resolution of the conflict.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116703>

Multilateral Issues/ Regional Issues

c. India and the Middle East

32. Joint Statement of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Barack Obama, New Delhi, 8 November 2010

.... The two leaders agreed to deepen existing regular strategic consultations on developments in East Asia, and decided to expand and intensify their strategic consultations to cover regional and global issues of mutual interest, including Central and West Asia....

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530516632>

33. Prime Minister's statement to the media at the Joint Press Conference with the President of the United States Mr. Barack H. Obama, New Delhi, 8 November 2010

... We had a detailed exchange on the situation in our extended region, including East Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and West Asia..

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116631>

34. Hon'ble Vice President's inaugural address at the International Seminar on Indian Culture in a Globalised World, New Delhi, 11 November 2010

... It has been rightly said that Maulana Azad's thought process transcended national boundaries and imbibed the best of different worlds - Indian, West Asian and Western...The richness of values secreted in the interstices of Indian culture was known and appreciated long before the era of present day globalisation. It left its imprint on the culture and civilisation of East Asian, South-east Asian, Central Asian and West Asian lands...

*Source: Vice President's Secretariat, New Delhi,
<http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/content.asp?id=312>*

35. External Affairs Minister's Suo Motu Statement in Lok Sabha on the visit to India by the President of the United States of America Hon'ble Barack H. Obama, New Delhi, 19 November 2010

... India has an interest in peace, stability and prosperity in Asia, based on an open, balanced and inclusive regional architecture. We have decided to deepen our existing consultations with the United States on developments in East Asia and expand our consultations to cover regional and global issues of mutual interest, including Central and West Asia....

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116699>

36. Speech by Foreign Secretary at National Maritime Foundation on "India as a Consensual Stakeholder in the Indian Ocean: Policy Contours", New Delhi, 19 November 2010

To the west, the world's busiest shipping lanes pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which connects the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. The Malacca Straits handle 40 % of world trade; the Straits of Hormuz handle 40 % of all traded crude oil.

We are actively engaged with almost all regional bodies that are either based in or border the Indian Ocean region- ranging from SAARC, BIMSTEC, ARF, ASEAN, GCC, SADC to the AU. We are interested in building a web of cooperative relations that brings together all the stakeholders based on mutual interest and benefit. Our 'soft power' gives us advantages that few other countries can match in this region. There is almost universal acceptance of India's credentials and recognition of the vital contribution that we can make for stability and prosperity of the entire region.

The Navy did a commendable job in helping in the evacuation of over 2280 people from strife torn Lebanon under Operation Sukoon. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) initiative, launched by Indian Navy has provided a forward looking framework for constructive engagement among the navies of the region.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116701>

37. Address of the Vice President of India M. Hamid Ansari at the inauguration of the ICWA Conference titled *India and GCC Countries, Iraq and Iran: Emerging Security Perspectives*, New Delhi, 20 November 2010

I thank the Indian Council of World Affairs for inviting me today to inaugurate this seminar on a subject of considerable relevance. The presence of a good number of scholars from many lands testifies to it.

I note that the organisers have riveted attention on the terra firma rather than on a body of water about whose nomenclature dictionaries are sought to be re-written. This is perhaps a good example of the art of evading choices and managing contradictions!

Our focus today is on eight countries that constitute a sub-set of the West Asian region. Their location and contiguities are relevant. Six of them (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) are members of a regional grouping the Gulf Cooperation Council while the other two Iran and Iraq are physically in the sub-region and share commonalities with all others as also with some countries beyond the region.

Given the geography, security perceptions are unavoidably interlinked and turbulence within or around the area usually has a wider impact.

Some in this audience would recall the title of Ibn Khaldun's great work on history. It is *Kitab al-Ibar* (Book of Lessons). It would be no exaggeration to say that in relation to our subject of discussion, lessons of history are of relevance. One of these, pertaining to the concept of dominance and exclusivity, is particularly note worthy. It can be dated to the arrival in the region of the Portuguese in 1498. They were followed by the Dutch who in turn were replaced by the British. The British dominance lasted till 1970. In the past four decades, various bilateral and multilateral, regional and extra-regional, combinations for security have been explored. Like the earlier versions, selectivity and exclusion rather than inclusion have been their dominant trait.

These perceptions have focused on military security aimed at ensuring the safety of the trade routes by sea; they remain a principal impulse for the littoral states as also for their trading partners the world over. An un-stated major premise is maintenance of political stability and, by implication, regime security. In a wider context, however, this view of security is limited and inadequate. A more holistic approach was articulated by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2001. We must, he said, broaden our view of what is meant by peace and security. Peace means much more than the absence of war. Human security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In such a comprehensive framework, deficit on any of these counts would signal an element of insecurity. A holistic approach of this nature, essential for a fuller understanding of security and

insecurity, is perhaps beyond the scope of this conference focused as it seems to be on a more traditional paradigm.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is evident that given the geo-political imperatives of these eight littoral states of the Persian Gulf, security perspectives and threat perceptions do not converge. Nevertheless, and in relation to this international waterway, some common elements can be discerned. In the first place, the concerned states want to prosper and avail of the benefits of development. Secondly, the Gulf lands are essential for the economic health of the world since they are a principal source of hydrocarbon energy as well as a major market for industrial goods, technology and services. For these reasons, to use Curzon's phrase used in another context in 1903, "the peace of these waters must be maintained". Interestingly enough Gulf security, in the words of a Saudi scholar, "was an external issue long before it was one among the Gulf states themselves".

The essential ingredients of such a requirement would be (a) prevalence of conditions of peace and stability in the individual littoral states (b) freedom of access to, and outlet from, Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz (c) freedom of commercial shipping in international waters in the waterway (d) freedom to all states of the Gulf littoral to exploit their hydrocarbon and other natural resources and export them (e) avoidance of conflict that may impinge on the production of oil and gas and on the freedom of trade and shipping and (f) assurance that regional or extra-regional conditions do not impinge on any of these considerations.

In December last year a senior dignitary in the region described the objectives of Gulf diplomacy as "mutual understanding, coexistence, good relations with our neighbours and the establishment of strong relations based on the principles of reciprocal advantage and the realisation of the good of all." These principles by themselves are unexceptionable and widely subscribed to. The devil is in the un-stated major premise, and in threat perceptions that do not converge sufficiently.

The challenge, then, lies in seeking this convergence in areas of security, politics and economics and in developing procedures that would help bring it about. Experience shows that convergence is achieved only through a painstaking process of developing a (minimum) common threat perception, in maintaining it over time and in developing the mechanism for minimising risks to common security and maximising the benefits of cooperation. Such a process requires agreement on dialogue procedures.

Record shows that the resources of the region were initially controlled by extra-regional private commercial entities that had played a pioneering role in the discovery and development of these resources. They were strongly supported by their governments. The process of establishing national control over these resources was at times torturous and painful. Eventually, however, the mindset of an earlier era gave way to the common sense approach of inter-dependence of the

producer and the consumer. Access to resources thus became more relevant than physical control.

I mention this because some residual perceptions of the earlier period do at times cloud the market vision even now and need to be dispelled.

Friends

In this backdrop, I propose to explore answers to three questions: How does the prevailing situation affect India and Indian interests? What should India do to sustain and secure its interests? What could, and should, be the Indian contribution to the promotion of peace and security in the sub-region?

The strategic relevance of the sub-region to India has to be located geographically, historically and in economic terms. The distance from Mumbai to Basra is 1526 nautical miles while Bander Abbas and Dubai are in a radius of 1000 nautical miles. Contact through trade and movement of people has roots deep in history, testified to by archaeological finds and written record. Fascination with India is reflected in *Kitab Ajaib al-Hind* by Buzurg ibn Shahriyar of Ramhormuz, a tenth century collection of sailor's tales. Many proverbs pertaining to India are to be found in the colloquial language of the lower Gulf. Familiarity with India and Indians at individual and family levels, Mumbai-Hindustani, Mumbai-Biryani and Bollywood films contribute to it in good measure particularly in the GCC countries.

Given this proximity, it is hardly surprising that in the period after 1975 there has been a significant spurt in economic linkages between the region and India. Changed and changing requirements and capabilities have contributed to it and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. It is significant that given the affinities of the past and the experience of recent decades, the public and political establishments in the littoral states are India-friendly and Indian friendly. The quantitative parameters of this relationship can be specified:

- We import over 63 per cent percent of our crude oil requirement from these eight countries of the Persian Gulf. Its worth in money terms, in 2009-10, stood at over \$ 49 billion. Given the rate of growth of the Indian economy, these figures can only go up in the future.
- These eight countries account for over 22 per cent of our total trade as of 2009-10 amounting to around \$ 105 billion. They account for a quarter of our imports totalling \$ 72 billion and 18 per cent of exports totalling around \$ 33 billion. Six of these eight countries, barring Oman and Bahrain, figure among the top 25 countries in terms of total trade.

- UAE is our top trading partner with a total trade of \$ 43.5 billion, ahead of China at \$ 42.4 billion and the US at 36.5 billion. It is our largest export destination accounting for 13 per cent of our exports amounting to \$ 24 billion and the second largest source of our imports after China, totalling \$ 19.5 billion.
- Saudi Arabia is our fourth largest trading partner with a trade of \$ 21 billion, and Iran our ninth largest trading partner at \$ 13.4 billion.
- An Indian non-immigrant workforce of around 6 million works in these countries, principally in the GCC states. Of these, 1.6 million are in Saudi Arabia and 1.2 million in the UAE. The composition of this workforce has changed over the years and many more professionals and specialised technical skills are to be found amongst them today. The remittances of this workforce, through banking channels, stands at around \$ 30 billion per annum. They help support six million families and contribute in some measure to economic activity in some of the states of the Indian Union.
- The two-way investment profile, modest at present, is expected to grow with the growth of the Indian economy. The GCC countries have become an important destination for Indian projects and IT services.

The sub-region is also within the security parameter of India and within the operational radius of the Indian Navy. The latter's participation in the anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea is a case in point. If needed, it can escort shipping and interdict forces hostile to it.

The focus of Indian interest therefore is, and would remain, on the desirability of having (a) friendly governments (b) regional peace and stability (c) access to oil and gas resources of the region (d) freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and through the Straits of Hormuz (e) continued market access for Indian trade, technology, investments and workforce and (f) security and welfare of the Indian workforce, particularly in times of distress emanating from disturbed local or regional conditions.

A state of preparedness for responding to other contingencies should also be catered for, in consonance with the developing dimensions of maritime security.

It would therefore be fair to opine that India is reasonably comfortable with the status quo. However, the apprehension of an unstable status quo also looms over the horizon. Misgivings about intentions motivate it; divergence of perceptions and policy about extra-regional politico-military presence adds to it; so does what had been called "an undeclared arms race".

One may add to this disruptive challenges emanating from non-state actors and new technologies. The requirement clearly is to seek understandings and arrangements that would

cater to the threat perceptions and essential interests of all regional and extra-regional stake holders and thus stabilise the regional situation on a longer term basis.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Despite the successes of the GCC, attempts to foster a comprehensive Gulf regional cooperation have a history of over three decades and are replete with failed strategies of local or global hegemony. There is therefore an imperative need for developing a security order that is seen as equitable by all the states concerned.

There are ideas and precedents elsewhere that can be drawn upon beneficially. Asian regionalism and community-building has remained, albeit unevenly, an important framework for cooperation and framework within the continent. We thus have strong regional organisations focused on constituent sub-regions such as ASEAN, GCC, SAARC, SCO, BIMSTEC and the MGC. The Asian Development Bank, in the context of East Asia, has characterised the challenges of regional cooperation as including “providing regional public goods, managing spill overs among economies, exercising Asia’s influence in global economic forums, liberalising trade and investment, and helping to improve national policies in which the region has a vital stake”.

It is evident, that these challenges exist in the Gulf region too, and that a Gulf regionalism that is outward looking, flexible and dynamic, consistent with regional diversity would contribute to regional and global welfare, peace and security. This would also enable these nations to take advantage of the opportunities emerging from enhanced economic integration, as also to face the common threats of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, securing energy exports, security of sea lanes, tackling pandemics, natural disasters and others.

What could or should be the guiding principles of a Gulf regionalism that is in the interest of all regional and extra-regional stakeholders? A few of its essential ingredients can be mentioned: It should not, in the first place, be exclusive or exclusionary. It should instead articulate an inclusive, open and transparent process of community building.

Secondly, it should not be a reflection of the emerging redistribution of global or regional power nor should it be a platform for projection of narrow economic and political interests of a nation, an alliance or a group of nations.

Thirdly, soft regionalism based on informal dialogue and consultation mechanisms, consensus building and open structures would help in establishing cooperative and beneficial norms of state behaviour. And

Finally, it must not be seen as means to limit state sovereignty but as instrumentalities to address complex regional problems through cooperation and partnership.

Like in East Asia, Gulf regional cooperation and community building should include important stake-holders like India, China and Japan as also all other principal beneficiaries of energy supplies and open sea lanes. A Persian Gulf littoral that is integrated through a web of regional cooperative structures will offer more opportunities for socio-economic advancement of its peoples and lay the foundation for eroding political rivalries and harsh nationalist impulses and for bringing about regional stability and peace.

For us in India, a “Look West” policy towards this part of West Asia, aimed at engaging in this dynamic, would thus be as relevant for safeguarding and promoting India’s interests as its Look-East policy that has been in place for some years.

I am confident that this conference would shed useful light on these perceptions and contribute to the effort. I wish it all success.

I thank Ambassador Devare for inviting me to inaugurate this Conference.

Source: Vice President's Secretariat, New Delhi,
<http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/content.asp?id=315>

38. Valedictory Address by Foreign Secretary at the ICWA Seminar on India and the GCC, Iran and Iraq: Security Perspectives, New Delhi, 21 November 2010

Ambassador Sudhir T. Devare, Director General, Indian Council for World Affairs, Dr. Reena Marwah, Secretary General, Association of Asian Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be joining you today for the ICWA-AAS Asian Relations Conference 2010. It is an honour to be addressing such a distinguished gathering of eminent scholars, diplomats and experts on the issue of India and GCC Countries, Iran and Iraq: Emerging Security Perspectives.

I wish to congratulate ICWA and AAS for the very important initiative in organizing the Asian Relations Conferences in 2009 and this year. With the economic, political, strategic and cultural focus in world affairs increasingly shifting towards the Asian Continent, it is entirely appropriate and timely that ICWA has sought to revive the buoyant and exhilarating spirit of the Asian Relations Conference held in March 1947 by ICWA itself, on the eve of India's independence, when India and the Asian Continent as a whole expressed a shared sense of the possibility and the potential of mutual cooperation for benefit of our peoples.

My address today is based on the following premises:

One, that India shares with the countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq the closest of civilizational, cultural and historical links;

Two, that these links have not been passive but active and alive throughout history and this dynamism energises the relationship even today;

Three, that we share an ocean that has been the pulsating heart of the world, economically and strategically, for over two millennia;

Four, that the dramatic economic growth in India and China and other countries of Asia promise to make this an Asian century;

Five, that the countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq will be fully a part of the Asian renaissance, given the growing demand from the rest of Asia for energy resources and investible finances, and in light of the increasing diversification and sophistication of West Asian economies as they seek to become financial and knowledge hubs not just of Asia but of the whole world;

Six, that as with Europe in the last century, intra-Asian interdependence will dramatically increase, and the costs of any forced disruption of these linkages will become higher.

Seven, as pressure on our resources increase, and even as science and technology progresses to overcome the challenges posed, India and the countries in its extended neighbourhood will increasingly have to forge common solutions to problems such as those of energy and food security, water scarcity, climate change and instances of drought and flood, and rapid reactions to natural disasters.

Based on these premises, the following conclusions can be drawn: that our countries have a shared interest in the security of the sea lanes that link West Asia to the rest of the Continent; that stability in the countries of the region as well as of those abutting them – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia have a direct impact on GCC countries, Iran, Iraq and India, and must be an area of cooperation and consultation; that India is a natural partner for the GCC, Iran and Iraq given our rapid economic growth, and limitless opportunities as an investment destination, especially in the infrastructure sector; that our people-to-people exchanges are a largely untapped source of dynamism and strength for our partnership; that India's growing political, military, economic and cultural influence is welcomed in the West Asian region given that India plays a stabilizing role; and lastly, that our partnership would be of mutual benefit, both economically, and in the related realm of cooperation in security-related issues.

India's ties with the countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq have their origins in history and mythology. There were rich commercial links between the two sides as far back as the Harappan

Civilization, and an unending stream of traders and philosophers, scholars and warriors, religious figures and pilgrims have strengthened the ties over the millennia, with scientific, cultural, religious and commercial exchanges that have influenced the lives of ordinary people on both sides. In our art and culture, our language and literature and cuisine, the impact of this interaction can be clearly seen even today. India was known as a source of products of daily life as well as luxuries; in fact the skilled Persian and Arab navigators and boat makers who travelled to the Indian coast are said to have sourced wood for their boats from the Indian subcontinent. Indian ships carried pilgrims to Jeddah for the Hajj pilgrimage. And as I said before, this is a living and dynamic interaction, underlined most starkly by the presence of over 5.5 million Indians in the region. Indians form the largest group of expatriates in each of the GCC countries and have contributed to the remarkable economic transformation of these countries in the last half century. Their remittances to India are also significant. Given our mutual cultural comfort levels and history of interaction, I am confident that the linkages forged at the people-to-people level will further invigorate the vision we have for further enhancing our relationship.

Our economic ties provide a firm foundation for the future. In 2009-10, two way trade with just one GCC country - the UAE - was greater than our trade with China. Our trade with GCC as a whole was almost US\$100 billion last year. Add our trade with Iran and Iraq, which was over US\$13 billion and US\$ 7.5 billion respectively in 2009-10, and the strength of the economic relationship is clear. What is even more exciting is what the future promises. The GCC countries, Iran and Iraq already dominate India's imports of crude oil. As India's economy continues its growth of 8-10%, energy imports will inevitably increase, and geography, economics and history dictate that West Asia will remain a preferred partner. India and other Asian countries such as China will also remain major markets for energy exports from West Asia, which is planning to expand its oil production capacity substantially, from an already high base, by 2020. It has been estimated that the oil income of countries of the West Asia region would increase substantially over the next couple of decades; this accumulation of investible surplus provides a perfect match to India's investment needs, particularly in infrastructure (such as electricity generation, roads, telecom, ports, irrigation). The countries of the region have themselves been looking to diversify their investments for which they increasingly look at Asian countries. The countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq have emerged as hubs along what has been called a 'new silk route' linking the economies of West Asia to the fast-growing economies of East Asia, South Asia and Central Asia. In the new millennia, the mutual ties and interdependence between India and the countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq will only increase further.

The restoration of stability in Afghanistan and assistance to the people and Government of Afghanistan as they build a peaceful, democratic, pluralistic and prosperous society is in the common interest of all our countries. Recent history has taught us that no country is immune from the acts of terrorist and extremist groups, not even the countries that supported and financed them and continue to provide them safe havens and sanctuaries. India's vision is for Afghanistan

to reclaim its traditional role as an economic hub linking West and South Asia with Central Asia, through freer trade, transit, pipelines and movement of people. This is however only possible if the independence and sovereignty of Afghanistan are respected, if the international community shows sustained commitment to defeating the terrorists and extremist groups, and if such groups are denied sanctuary and support beyond Afghanistan's borders.

Other issues where India's cooperation with GCC, Iran and Iraq is essential is countering terrorism, its linkages with narco- trafficking and organized crime, countering money laundering, and dealing with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of their falling into the hands of terrorists. In our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, where technology can be used for both good and ill, proactive and dynamic cooperation between the law-enforcement and security related organs is increasingly essential, because the threats posed by terrorist and criminal groups have the potential to undermine all our societies.

Maritime security and free and safe passage of trade, including oil and gas, is of vital concern not just to India and the countries of West Asia, but also to the rest of the world. The problem of piracy in the Indian Ocean has dramatically illustrated potential threats that we all face. India has expressed its readiness to play its part in combating this menace with the international community under the leadership of the UN. In this, and related issues, India, with its enhanced capacity and ability, can help to play a stabilizing and reassuring role. India's role has been welcomed in the region: apart from India being seen as a neighbouring country, with historical and cultural commonalities, we are also viewed as non-hegemonistic, non-prescriptive and non-intrusive. This will stand us in good stead as we brace ourselves for the security challenges that are emerging this century, both traditional and non-traditional, both direct and those that indirectly flow from issues such as climate change, food insecurity and dealing with natural disasters. India has attempted to promote greater cooperation among Indian Ocean Rim States, which is necessary to take advantage of the opportunities that have opened up for mutually beneficial cooperation. We have sought to encourage economic cooperation in the area through Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). India has also sought to give greater salience to initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.

There is perhaps a need for creation of a permanent regional mechanism for dialogue and discussion in which countries of the region and others interested could participate. There are a number of regional initiatives such as the Manama dialogue, or those taken by different think-tanks, including the ICWA. It may however be necessary to consider a more expanded and structured mechanism which could discuss regional issues such as those of peace and stability, weapons proliferation, terrorism, counter-narcotics, etc.

Our most meaningful contribution to regional stability and security may come from enhancing mutually beneficial and high-level interaction. In the realm of economic linkages, creation of

regional inter-bank clearance mechanisms, preferential and free trade agreements, regional energy markets and cooperation projects would be mutually beneficial and would enhance confidence. Politically, a greater commitment to dealing together with common problems such as the threat of terrorism and regional stability would send a powerful signal. In addition, countries of the region could give greater importance to enhancing the frequency and level of bilateral interactions, especially in the context of securing sea lanes and to counter piracy.

The issue of Palestine is of abiding concern to all of us. The rights of the Palestinian people remain to be achieved. This situation requires to be resolved at the earliest. Not only does it cause deep harm to the people there, it also has a negative resonance across the region and beyond. India remains convinced that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question is achievable. We continue to extend our full support to the Palestinian people in realizing their aspirations for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State living side-by-side, and at peace with the State of Israel.

India's stand on the Iran nuclear issue has been consistent. We support the right of all States, including Iran, to peaceful uses of nuclear energy consistent with their international obligations. We also believe that the IAEA provides the best framework to address technical issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme. We continue to support the path of peaceful dialogue and diplomacy to resolve all issues among relevant countries.

While recognizing the growth of India and China, there are some who posit that this will inevitably lead to conflict and competition between the two, including in West Asia, given the increasing demand for energy and other resources. I believe that there is a fundamental flaw in this argument. It is precisely the fact that China and India share similar views on a number of issues of common concern – energy security, food security, climate change and trade liberalization, that avenues open up for cooperation and consultation for the common benefit of all our people.

India looks forward to an enhanced partnership with the countries of the GCC, Iran and Iraq. This is not only a strategic and economic imperative, but would also represent a natural progression from our historical and civilizational ties which have few, if any, parallels in the world.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530116713>

39. Workers returning from Middle East, 25 November 2010

Question:

- (a) whether many workers who were working in Dubai and other middle east countries are coming back to India;
- (b) if so, the number of workers that have come back to India; and
- (c) the steps taken by Government of India to protect the job of Indian workers?

Answer: The Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Vayalar Ravi)

(a) to (c): Indian workers go for employment to the Gulf countries for a specific period in accordance with their employment contract and return on the expiry of their employment contract or of the work visa period unless renewed. Indian workers also leave for other reasons such as personal circumstances or because of disputes with employers.

Since no official statistics on the number of expatriate Indian workers are maintained by the Indian Missions, accurate figures regarding the return of Indian workers are not available.

However, according to reports received from Indian missions and a study conducted on the impact of global recession in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Malaysia, it is estimated that the return / retrenchment of workers was significant only in UAE, during 2008-09. The estimated number of workers who returned to India as a result of the delay in execution of projects due to economic slowdown in UAE is minimal.

The steps taken by Government to protect jobs of overseas Indian workers include the following:

- (i) When complaints are received from overseas Indian workers the Recruiting Agent is directed to settle/resolve the complaint in the first instance and to ensure that the Foreign Employer meets the terms of the contract.
- (ii) The Indian Mission when it receives complaints against foreign employers takes immediate action for redressal of the grievances of Indian workers.
- (iii) Indian Missions also recommend inclusion of defaulting foreign employers in the Prior Approval Category (Black list). This Ministry places such foreign employers on the PAC list, and allows such employers to recruit Indian workers only after prior approval.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question no. 1768 asked by Mr. Ramachandra Khuntia

40. Indian Community Welfare Fund to be Extended to all Missions: Shri Vayalar Ravi, New Delhi, 29 November 2010

The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) will be extended to all the Missions around the world. Addressing the two-day Conference of Head of Missions of Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC) Countries as well as Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Malaysia & Maldives here today, Shri Vayalar Ravi, the Union Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs said that the ICWF scheme is found very useful by the Indian Missions in mitigating the suffering of Indians, therefore, it has been decided that this scheme will extend to all the Missions. He said the fund which was originally made for all the Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries has been extended to 48 countries.

Shri Ravi said that the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has several measures for the protection and welfare of Overseas Indian workers. The Ministry has established an Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) which is a 24x7 hour telephone helpline which provides information to intending emigrants as well as emigrants on all aspects of emigration. Complaints can also be lodged through this helpline. He further said that the Ministry has also signed MoU on labour with five GCC countries and Malaysia. Negotiations are in progress with Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Yemen and Libya for signing of MOU. He said a Nationwide Awareness-cum-Publicity Campaign through media has been launched to educate the intending emigrants about legal emigration procedures, risks of illegal migration and precautions to be taken during emigration.

The Minister said that that Conference of Heads of Missions of the GCC countries is an important initiative to discuss various issues and problems relating to the Overseas Indian Community, especially the expatriate workers numbering nearly five million in the Gulf Countries.

Addressing the conference, Smt. Preneet Kaur, Minister of State for External Affairs said that around 5.3 million Indians live in the GCC Countries out of which about 65 to 70% of them are workers. In this context, the role of Indian Mission becomes very important. She said the Indian Mission have a proactive role to play towards welfare and safety of Overseas Indian Workers and to understand the issues faced by the Indian community. Dr. A Didar Singh, Secretary, M/o Overseas Indian Affairs was also present on the occasion.

The Conference is attended by Heads of Missions of 11 countries, senior Officials from other Ministries including the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs and representatives from the major labour sending States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The Conference would deliberate on various issues and problems relating to overseas Indian workers both at the source and destination points and how the institutional engagement between our Missions and other stakeholders in India can be strengthened for better regulation of Labour Mobility.

The Agenda of the Conference will include the new initiatives in the Emigration Policy being framed by the Ministry, review of various welfare measures at the Mission level, strengthening Grievance Redressal Mechanism at the Mission level, follow up on the Joint Working Group

meetings decisions, pursuant to labour MoUs with five GCC countries etc. Several important decisions taken by the Ministry for the protection and welfare of migrant workers will also be discussed for effective implementation and follow-up.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=67762>

Miscellaneous

41. Death of Indian Woman on Muscat Airport, New Delhi, 18 November 2010

Question:

- (a) whether an Indian woman was stranded for four days at Muscat airport as she lost her passport and then died at the airport itself;
- (b) whether the nearest Indian Mission made any effort to rescue her;
- (c) whether it is a fact that the Indian Mission could not help her or give her some documents or give relief in any way;
- (d) whether Government has held an enquiry into the whole affair; and
- (e) the steps proposed to ensure that such incidents do not occur again?

Answer: Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Mr. Vayalar Ravi)

(a) : Yes, Sir. An Indian housemaid Ms. Beebi Lumada died in Oman, while being taken from Muscat Airport to Ibn Sina Psychiatric Hospital on 8th October, 2010. Ms. Beebi Lumada was flying to Chennai on 3rd October, 2010 by Qatar Airways (QA) after her sponsor decided to send her back and cancelled her Omani visa. QA claimed that her passport was found missing at Doha by the Immigration Authorities. As a result she was sent back to Muscat.

(b) to (e): As per existing procedure the Airlines should have contacted the Indian Mission in Doha to issue her an emergency certificate and her stay at Doha Airport extended by 24 hours as per standard operating procedures of the Airlines. Further the Airlines used her Doha-Chennai voucher to send her back to Muscat even though she did not have a valid visa for Oman or valid travel document. QA at Muscat Airport later got in touch with EOI officials to provide her an emergency certificate in the absence of a passport. As per Government regulations, an emergency certificate, which is a document issued in such cases, requires a missing passport report. QA and Airport Police were both asked to send the passport details and name of the Indian national in writing and the missing passport report from airport immigration. This is also a

standard operating procedure of airlines, which was not followed. Despite repeated reminders from the Indian Embassy staff to the airlines as well as the airport police, no report or communication was sent to the Embassy either orally or in writing. Ms. Lumada was kept under the watch of the immigration officials in a separate cordoned off area at the airport. The airlines promised that she will be brought to the Embassy to prove her Indian identity, but failed to do so. Thursday, the 7th October, and Friday, the 8th October, were holidays in Oman. Despite the holiday period, the Embassy of India, tried its best to reach the authorities asking them to provide either a missing passport report or a written communication on this issue or to bring Ms. Lumada to the Embassy.

At no point of time either the QA or the police authorities at the airport informed the Embassy that Ms. Beebi Lumada was unwell or suffering from hysteria, as the report of the Ibn sina Hospital, where she was brought dead on the evening of 8th October, 2010, states. Her condition deteriorated rapidly on 8th October, 2010 and the Embassy was informed that the police were taking her to the Ibn Sina Hospital in the evening of 8th October, 2010.

The airlines then passed on the task of getting a post mortem done and sending the body back home on to the Embassy. QA refused to fly the dead body to India on a no cost basis. The Embassy, however, made arrangements for the body to be flown to India and all expenditure on this account was borne by the Embassy. The Embassy also got in touch with her next of kin in this regard.

This issue was taken up with the Qatar Airways at Doha and Muscat and the Immigration officials at both airports in order to avoid recurrence of such incidents. Ministry of External Affairs had deputed a senior officer to enquire and gather further facts regarding the case and steps have been taken and instructions issued to our missions abroad to ensure that such incidents do not recur in the future.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question no. 975 asked by Mr. Syed Azeez Pasha

42.Statement by Minister of State for External Affairs Mrs. Preneet Kaur at the Afghanistan International Investment Conference, Dubai, 30 November 2010

H.E. Dr Zalmi Rassoul, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, H.E. Dr. Anwar Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, Excellencies, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and people of India, I would like to thank the Governments of the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for inviting India to this

important conference.... Afghanistan has always been a land bridge between the Indian sub-continent, the Central Asian countries and Iran.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530116745>

Special

UAE and Syria visit of President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil

43. Briefing by Secretary (East) on President's Visit to UAE and Syria, New Delhi, 19 November 2010

Official Spokesperson (Shri Vishnu Prakash): A very good evening to all of you. You are aware that Rashtrapatiji, Hon. President of India, would be leaving very shortly on a state visit to United Arab Emirates and Syria. Secretary (East) Ms. Latha Reddy is here to brief you on this very important visit of Rashtrapatiji. I would like to introduce two of my colleagues who have joined Secretary East. To her right is Mr. Rajiv Chander, Joint Secretary (Gulf) and to my left is Mr. Rajiv Sahare, Joint Secretary (WANA).

May I now invite Secretary (East) to please make her opening remarks?

Secretary (East) (Ms. Vijaya Latha Reddy): Thank you Vishnu and thank you friends for being here.

President of India Smt Pratibha Devisingh Patil will be on a State visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) from November 21-29, 2010. While the UAE visit will be from November 21-25, the visit to Syria would be from November 26-29.

Rashtrapatiji's forthcoming State visit to UAE would be at the invitation of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of UAE. It would be our Hon'ble President's first State visit to the Gulf region.

During the visit, apart from the President of UAE, she will be meeting the Vice President & PM of UAE & Ruler of Dubai; the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi & the Deputy Supreme Commander of UAE Armed Forces, and the Ruler of Sharjah. Apart from Abu Dhabi, President will travel to Dubai and Sharjah. She is being accompanied by senior officials and a business delegation drawn from the leading industry associations.

India-UAE relations have been traditionally warm and friendly and based on continuity, trust and confidence without any irritants. India has had social and mercantile contacts with the Gulf and West Asian region since times immemorial. People-to-people contacts and barter trade have

existed for centuries. India-UAE relations have flourished after the creation of the UAE Federation in 1971.

UAE is a significant trading and energy security partner. Indo-UAE trade, valued at US\$ 180 million per annum in the 1970s, was valued at US\$ 43.4 billion in 2009-2010. UAE emerged as the top destination for India's export with 13.41% share of our total export in year 2009-10. UAE also ranks among the top five suppliers of crude oil to India.

There are more than 450 flights per week between various destinations in India and the UAE. Indians have emerged as important investors within the UAE, and the UAE has around US \$ 5 billion investment in India and is one of the biggest investors in terms of FDI.

The President will be addressing the captains of business and industry in UAE during her visit, both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. In Sharjah, the President would be inaugurating the Indian Trade Exhibition Centre the objective of which is to promote two-way trade, tourism and investment between India and the UAE.

There is considerable goodwill for India in the UAE at all levels and our ties are multi-faceted and have benefited with the regular exchanges of high-level visits from both sides. Since the ninth Session of the India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) headed by EAM and the Foreign Minister of UAE, which took place in June 2007 at New Delhi, we have had more than 15 exchanges at Ministerial level between our two countries as well as the visit of Prime Minister and Vice President of UAE to India in March 2010.

The President will also be interacting with a wide cross section of the Indian community in UAE, which numbers nearly 1.75 million and is the largest expatriate community in the UAE whose role and contribution for the development of UAE is widely appreciated. The President will launch an Indian Workers' Resource Centre during her visit, which is designed to provide 24-hour helpline and counselling services to distressed workers. In addition, the President will inaugurate the premises of the Indian Islamic Centre in Abu Dhabi. In Dubai, she will be addressing the students and faculty of the Dubai International Academic City where several Indian educational institutions have their branches. In Abu Dhabi, the President will also interact with the students of the Abu Dhabi Indian School.

In the second leg of her tour, President will visit Syria from November 26-29 at the invitation of President Bashar Al Assad. Significantly, this will be the first Presidential visit to Syria from India.

India and Syria have ancient historical linkages dating back several millennia. Archaeological findings provide evidence of 4000 year old trade links between India and Syria and there are

linkages between the Mauryan Empire and the contemporary rulers in Syria. It is said that Christianity and Islam reached the shores of India from this region.

President Assad paid a State visit to India in June 2008. The visit strengthened our bilateral political and economic ties. President's visit to Syria will provide the opportunity to carry forward our dialogue and engagement with the Syrian President and the leadership of Syria in all areas. Discussions will take place on bilateral issues – political, economic and cultural. Both sides will also explore investment opportunities in each other's country. On the regional and international front, Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and Syria's relations with its neighbours will be important segment of President's discussions.

India's engagement in the economic sphere has increased substantially in the aftermath of President Assad's visit: An IT Centre is coming up with Indian assistance and would be functional soon; MECON is giving final shape to its feasibility study on utilization of phosphatic resources of Syria; the power project awarded to BHEL is partially funded by us through a US\$240 million Line of Credit; and Apollo International of India is up-grading a steel plant in Hama, for which we have extended a Line of Credit of US\$25 million

Our engagement in the hydrocarbon sector with Syria has been rewarding. OVL has investments in Al-Furat Petroleum Company and in Block-24 it has struck oil. OVL is now looking for other opportunities for oil exploration, making Syria important to our energy security. As Syria throws its market open and embarks on a massive development programme, there will be opportunities for India expanding economic links.

The two-way trade level stands at a modest \$530 million. The Indo-Syrian joint Commission that met in June this year has decided to work towards doubling the trade shortly. The visit will provide us an opportunity to strengthen economic relations, identify areas of mutually beneficial cooperation and to register our interest in sourcing phosphates, which would help us in our aim to achieve food security. The launching of India-Syria Business Council during President's visit should also give further impetus to our economic relations.

President's engagements in Syria include a meeting with the President of Syria followed by delegation-level talks which are expected to cover bilateral relations, regional issues such as the MEPP and international issues as well. The President will, inter-alia, meet the Prime Minister of Syria, Eng. Mohammad Naji Otri and the Speaker of the Syrian Parliament - Mahmoud Al Abrash. President will address the Indian and local businessmen and launch the Syria-India Business Council. President would also be visiting the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo.

I think I have given you a broad outline of what the programme and what the meetings would be in both the countries. I will be happy to take your questions.

Question: Madam, Syria is one of the oldest ancient cultures in the world. Will any officials from the Culture Ministry also be accompanying the President?

Secretary (East): We are hoping to sign a cultural exchange programme with Syria on this visit. I am sure this will enhance our relations. This has already been negotiated between officials on the Indian side and the Syrian side. While we do not have specifically a delegation from the Culture Ministry, we will carry forward our discussions also on cultural cooperation.

Question: Madam, who all are accompanying the President?

Secretary (East): It is Mr. Bharat Singh Solanki, the Minister of State for Power; and Mr. K.A. Ismael from the Rajya Sabha; Mr. Vijay Bahadur Singh from the Lok Sabha, and Mrs. Masoom Noor from the Lok Sabha.

Question: Madam, you mentioned that the President is going to inaugurate the helpline. What would it cater to?

Secretary (East): This is a project which has been taken on through the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. And the idea is, given the very large number of workers, as you know in the Gulf overall we have over five million NRIs there and a very large majority of them I would say, on an average about 70 per cent in each of the Gulf countries, are people who are working as workers in projects - both skilled and unskilled labour. They very often do run into problems with their contracts and they need to contact the Embassy in a hurry. They may be in distress, they may have injuries, they may need to be repatriated urgently, they may have a problem with the employer. One of the problems is, of course the Embassy is available and open, the Consular Offices are available, but there was the need felt for a 24 hour helpline so that they could call at any time, and for giving wide publicity taking out advertisements, advising them that you can call this number at any time once in 24 hours, funds will be made available for those in distress. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has undertaken a very wide-ranging programme. In fact, they will be calling in the Gulf Heads of Mission to discuss with them further how we can facilitate the life of our Indians there. There will be a meeting at the end of this month with all our Ambassadors here in Delhi. MEA and MOIA are working together on these programmes.

Question: So, in that issue 18 or 20 Punjabis were on death row in Dubai or Sharjah. Will there be any talk on them also? Even in the last month's meeting you were saying something.

Secretary (East): The matter is still sub-judice in the sense that it is still being held in court. It is under appeal. We have provided legal counsel, we have facilitated visits by the family and others to these people. Taking it up with the Government or submitting a mercy petition would come at a later stage once we have exhausted all legal resources. But we are in touch with them and we are extending them all the necessary assistance.

Question: I just wanted to know the MEA and CAS stand over our claim to the United Nations Security Council membership. What has been their stand on Jammu and Kashmir?

Secretary (East): I will answer your second question first. Their stand has been that this is a bilateral issue to be settled by dialogue between India and Pakistan and they recognize our position. As far as the United Nations Security Council is concerned, both these countries supported our non-permanent membership and have expressed support for our permanent membership as well.

Source: MEA, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530316697>

44. Departure Statement on Board by President Pratibha Devisingh Patil on her State Visits to the United Arab Emirates and Syria, On Board Special Aircraft, 21 November 2010

Dear members of the media, Good Evening,

Today I commence my first official visit to the Gulf and the West Asia regions, with journeys to the United Arab Emirates and Syria. My visit will, I am confident, reaffirm India's interest to strengthen ties with countries in these regions, which are a part of our extended neighbourhood.

I am visiting the UAE at the invitation of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE. I will be meeting with a wide cross section of the UAE polity and society during my visit, which takes me to Dubai and Sharjah besides Abu Dhabi.

India has enjoyed historic, warm, friendly and multifaceted relations with the UAE. These relations stretch back over millennia and our civilizational links are well known. The Arabian Sea was the ancient highway across which our ancestors exchanged goods, ideas and much more. It is, therefore, no surprise that our ties which flourished through the ages have deepened and broadened in contemporary times. Since the creation of the UAE Federation in 1971, these links have been nurtured and sustained by exchange of high level visits.

Our relationship with the UAE is free of any irritants which enables us to focus on the many positives that define our relationship. I look forward to my discussions with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, as well as other dignitaries, so that we can look at ways and means to further strengthen

our bilateral ties in order to realize the full potential that exists between our two friendly countries.

I will also be interacting with the business community, both Indian and local, in the UAE. Our bilateral trade which stood at a modest figure of around U.S. Dollars 180 million in the early seventies, is today valued at U.S. Dollars 43 billion, which makes the UAE one of our leading trade partners. While emphasizing the possibilities of further expanding our trade, I will highlight the tremendous scope for investing in India's infrastructure. Our fast growing stable economy with its strong fundamentals, makes India an attractive investment destination.

The UAE is one of our leading suppliers of crude oil, playing an important role in the energy security of India. As a country whose energy requirements will increase significantly in the years to come, continued co-operation in this sector is important.

In particular, I look forward to meeting with our countrymen who, thanks to the welcome and encouragement received from the host Government and people, have through their hard work and dedication, contributed to the development and well-being of the host country. Their positive contribution is no doubt a major factor behind the fact that the Indian community is the largest expatriate community in the UAE. My programme includes several elements, which would give me a glimpse of the various facets of the Indian community in the UAE. I would be interacting with the children of the Abu Dhabi Indian School and meeting with the students at the Dubai Academic City. I would also have the opportunity to inaugurate the new premises of the Indian Islamic Centre in Abu Dhabi. The welfare of the overseas Indian community, particularly our workers, is always uppermost in my mind. I am, therefore, happy that I will be inaugurating the Indian Workers' Resource Centre in Dubai.

In the second segment of my tour, I will be visiting Syria which will be the first Presidential visit from India. India and Syria enjoy traditionally friendly ties and cooperate actively in the UN and NAM. Significantly, Syria has expressed support for India's Permanent Membership of the UNSC. India, too, on its part, has always supported all just Arab causes, and has consistently supported the return of the Golan Heights to Syria, which remains occupied by Israel since 1967.

President Bashar Al Assad visited India in June 2008 when I had the opportunity to have an extensive dialogue with him on bilateral, regional and international issues. During my visit, I look forward to continuing discussions with President Assad (), with a view to further strengthening our ties. I will also be exchanging views with the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Syrian Assembly.

On the economic and business aspects, apart from discussing these with the Syrian leadership, I will be addressing Indian and Syrian business persons and launching the India-Syria Business

Council. We seek to increase the level of our bilateral trade which stands at a modest U.S. Dollars 540 million. As Syria intends to open its markets and embark on massive development, there should be plenty of opportunities for India to expand its economic links. Syria is also important to us for our energy security. OVL already has investments there and is looking for more opportunities for oil exploration.

The Indian community in Syria though small compared to our presence in the Gulf countries, is participating in diverse activities in Syria. I will have an opportunity to meet and interact with them. I will be travelling to Aleppo - a historical city in Syria - to visit the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas, where many Indian scientists are doing commendable work. I will also meet representatives of the Missionaries of Charity who are doing excellent work in Syria with older persons. I will be visiting AAMAL, a Syrian organization for the disabled managed by Mrs. Asma Al Assad, the First Lady of Syria,

India seeks to further reinforce relations with the UAE and Syria and, it is in this context, that I look forward to my visit to both these countries. I also hope that you have a good trip.

Thank You.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/pr211110.html>

45. Statement of the President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, after completing Her State Visit to the UAE and Syria, Onboard Special Aircraft, 29 November 2010

I have just concluded a very successful visit to the United Arab Emirates and Syria, two friendly countries with whom we have enjoyed civilizational ties over the millennia. My visit reinforced these traditional bonds of friendship.

In my discussions with a broad section of the political leadership in the UAE and Syria, I had a useful exchange of views on a wide range of issues of common interest. There is deep appreciation of India's role in global affairs and acknowledgement of its growing importance.

The visit enabled me to put across to the leadership and business communities in both countries the possibilities and opportunities of increasing our economic engagement. The business delegation accompanying me had fruitful discussions with their counterparts. There is strong interest to explore the many complementarities that exist between our economies.

An important and, indeed, a very satisfying aspect of this visit was my interaction with a cross-section of the Indian community. It made me proud when I was told by the leadership of these countries as to how they valued the contributions of our countrymen. Their role adds another element of vitality to our relationship.

In the UAE, my meeting with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, was highly productive. We agreed that our bilateral multi-faceted relationship was progressing well, as also reflected by the fact that the UAE and India are each other's leading trading partners. We agreed on the need to further enhance our strategic partnership by focussing on areas such as education, science & technology, agriculture & food processing, energy security, desalination technology, regional security and many other potential areas for cooperation. Many of these would be addressed by the forthcoming meeting in Abu Dhabi of the Joint Commission headed by the two Foreign Ministers.

It was agreed that to discuss the specific issue of UAE investments in India's petroleum sector, power generation and infrastructure projects, His Highness Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Minister of Presidential Affairs would be visiting India at an early date.

In Dubai, I met the Vice President and the Prime Minister of UAE, the Ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who also reaffirmed the commitment of the UAE leadership to strengthen ties with India.

During my visit to Sharjah, the first ever by an Indian President, I was received by His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, the Ruler of Sharjah. He was present in the function where I inaugurated the India Trade and Exhibition Centre that will work to further facilitate Indian business activity in the UAE and the region.

There was strong endorsement of India's candidature for a permanent seat on an expanded UN Security Council by the UAE leadership at the highest levels. My discussions with them on enhanced security cooperation, particularly to address issues relating to counter-terrorism and maritime security, were productive. Both sides now look forward to the early signing of the Agreement on Security Cooperation during the visit of the UAE Interior Minister to India at the invitation of our Union Home Minister.

In my meetings with the UAE leadership I had the occasion to convey our appreciation for their positive attitude towards the more than 1.75 million strong Indian community that has made the UAE their home. Indians, as the largest expatriate community in the UAE, have on their part been active contributors to the growth and development of the UAE, a fact appreciated by the UAE leadership.

I had numerous occasions to see the vibrant life of the Indian community - whether it was the visit to the Abu Dhabi Indian School; my inauguration of the Indian Islamic Centre whose foundation stone had been laid, fortuitously by the first woman Prime Minister of India, Smt.

Indira Gandhi; the function at the Indian Social & Cultural Centre in Abu Dhabi; and the India Club in Dubai where I inaugurated the Indian Workers Resource Centre meant to provide assistance to the large number of Indians working in the UAE. My visit to the Dubai International Academic City showed the growing footprint of Indian academic institutions in the UAE.

The second part of my journey was to Syria, where the entire leadership deeply appreciated the first Presidential visit from India. In the words of President Assad - the first visit was "symbolic for every Syrian citizen and a momentous occasion in India-Syria bilateral ties".

I had a number of meetings with President Bashar Al-Assad. We reviewed our bilateral ties since our last meeting in June 2008 when President Assad visited New Delhi. He expressed satisfaction on India's engagement in sectors of Power, Hydrocarbons, phosphates and the IT sector. President Assad invited Indian companies in making Syria a pipeline hub, by linking Central Asia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Iran. We also discussed cooperation in bio-technology, pharmaceutical and food technology.

We reviewed the level of trade which currently stands at US\$ 540 million and agreed to work towards increasing it. India has offered a US\$ 100 million Line of Credit to be used by Syria in sectors to be mutually agreed upon. This was welcomed with great appreciation by the Syrian President.

I also had a fruitful meeting with the Syrian Prime Minister, Mohammad Naji Al-Otri, who invited India for enhanced engagement in the power, IT, oil and phosphate fertilizer sectors. We also agreed to explore areas of cooperation in agriculture, animal husbandry, railways and metro projects.

It was agreed that there should be more high-level ministerial contacts to follow up on all issues discussed during my visit. These could be in addition to regular meetings of the India-Syria Joint Commission.

President Assad reiterated Syria's support for a permanent seat for India in an expanded UN Security Council.

The Syrian leadership appreciated India's principled and continuous support to the cause of Palestine and the Middle East. I reaffirmed India's unwavering support for the Palestinian struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel.

I also reaffirmed India's support for the legitimate right of Syria on the Golan Heights and noted with appreciation the sober and peaceful approach Syria has adopted in addressing this issue.

Syria reiterated its condemnation of the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 26 November 2008. Stating that extremism and terrorism must be contained, Syria renewed its support to India in this effort and offered to help in combating terrorism.

Three agreements were signed on the sidelines of my visit - two pertaining to cooperation in the field of media and one in field of culture, which would further enhance our bilateral ties. In addition, an MOU was signed setting up the India-Syria Business Council, which would focus on strengthening of business and commercial relations.

I also exchanged views with the Speaker of Syrian People's Assembly, Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash on the functioning of our respective Parliaments. We emphasized the importance of interaction between Parliamentarians in strengthening the relationship. He informed that an India-Syria Friendship Group has been set up in the Syrian Parliament.

I visited AAMAL, an institution for the physically challenged, run by the First Lady of Syria, Mrs. Asma Al-Assad and was very impressed with its work. I made a contribution of Two Million Syrian Pounds equivalent to Rupees (2 million), to the institution.

I had an opportunity to meet the Indian community, which although small, is active and vibrant. I interacted with sisters from Missionaries of Charity, Kolkata, and donated One Million Syrian Pounds equivalent to Rupees one million, to one of their Centres, taking care of the elderly, to enhance its facilities.

Earlier today, I also paid a visit to the International Centre for Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo, another historic city in Syria. A number of Indian scientists are working in and are closely associated with ICARDA. Dry land farming is an area of great importance for global food security as well as for a second Green Revolution in India. As 40% of farming in our country is dry land farming, the work being done in ICARDA would provide valuable inputs for improving our agriculture productivity and food production. ICARDA has agreed to my suggestion to take up, India specific research and development for which project assistance could be provided.

Overall, I am satisfied with my visit to the UAE and Syria, important countries in our extended neighbourhood. The momentum generated should take forward our bilateral relations with both these countries.

Like me, you too would have seen and experienced the affection and goodwill that exists for India in both the countries at all levels. I hope you enjoyed the trip and it was productive.

I thank all of you.

Source: President's Secretariat, New Delhi, <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/pr291110.html>

*Compiled by
Anjani Kumar Singh*

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

Core= Ten millions

Anjani Kumar Singh is a Doctoral candidate in the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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Editor, MEI@ND: P R Kumaraswamy
