

INDIA SPEAKS

(Monthly Digest of Official Indian Statements on Middle East)

No. 29

December 2011

Bilateral Issues

a. Iran

1. India's Explanation of Vote (EOV) on Resolution relating to Iran's Nuclear Programme, Vienna, 18 November 2011

I seek the floor to explain the considerations behind India's decision to support Resolution (GOV/2011/67). We have taken careful note of the Report of the DG of 8 November 2011 (GOV/2011/65) on the subject "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of the Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran".

India has consistently supported the right of all states to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, consistent with their respective obligations. Iran, as a non-nuclear weapon state signatory to the NPT, has all the rights and obligations that go with its membership pertaining to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We underline the importance of the full and effective implementation of all safeguards obligations undertaken by member states of the IAEA. The DG's Report highlights once again the need for international focus on the role of the so-called Clandestine Proliferation Network.

India has consistently underlined the critical importance of continued cooperation and dialogue between the Agency and Iran. We, therefore, support the intensification of dialogue between Iran and the Agency aimed at the urgent resolution of all outstanding substantive issues, including providing clarifications regarding those issues that have been highlighted in the Director General's report.

Middle East Institute @ New Delhi, www.mei.org.in

India would like to reiterate its support for a diplomatic solution. We believe that it is necessary to expand the diplomatic space to address all outstanding issues in restoring international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. It is, therefore essential to keep the door open for dialogue and avoidance of confrontation.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118561>

2. Payment for Iranian crude import, New Delhi, 22 November 2011

Question:

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

- (a) whether it is a fact that Germany has refused to accept payments resulting in raising India's oil payment outstanding against Iran;
- (b) if so, the details thereof with magnitude of outstanding amount by the end of March 2011;
- (c) whether this has serious impact on flow of crude oil from Iran to India; and
- (d) if so, the steps taken to solve the problem?

Answer

The Minister of state in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (Mr. R.P.N. Singh)

- (a) Yes Sir.
- (b) to (d) The outstanding amount due to National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) as on March, 2011 was USD\$ 2,241.34 Million. The Government has operationalised a new payment mechanism in August, 2011 under which all the outstanding payments due to National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has been settled successfully, and payment for crude oil import from Iran is made through this mechanism as and when due. There was no interruption in crude oil import from Iran.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No.124 asked by Mr. Parimal Nathwani

b. Libya

3. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council briefing on Libya (ICC), New York, 2 November 2011

Thank you, Mr President.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the Security Council for the month of November. I wish to assure you and through you your delegation of my delegation's full cooperation in smooth transaction of the work of the Council during this month. I would also like to thank the Permanent

Representative of Nigeria, Ambassador Joy Ogwu, and her delegation for her successful stewardship of the work of the Council during the month of October.

I would like to thank the Prosecutor, Mr Luis Moreno-Ocampo, for his briefing today. We have also taken note of his second report to the Security Council submitted pursuant to paragraph 7 of Resolution 1970.

Mr President, even at the risk of sounding repetitive, it is necessary to reiterate that India is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, and not a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for reasons that are well known. It is also important to note that of the 193 members of the United Nations; only 119 are States Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC. 5 of the 15 members of the Council, including 3 Permanent Members, are not parties to the Rome Statute. We, however, support the rights and obligations of the States who are members of the ICC.

The situation in Libya, Mr President, has significantly changed since the Prosecutor's last report and his briefing to the Security Council. During the eight months that the conflict continued in Libya, there have been a large number of deaths and destruction on a massive scale. Proliferation of weapons has emerged as a major problem posing threat to stability in Libya as well as in the larger region. The time has come for the new authorities in Libya to exert their sovereignty and independence and undertake an inclusive political process aimed at achieving national reconciliation, peace, security and stability in the country. The international community, including the Security Council and the ICC, should fully assist the Libyan authorities in this process. This inclusive approach to national reconciliation, anchored in state sovereignty, is the only way to overcome the multitude of problems that Libya is facing in the present, the ostensible post-conflict scenario.

Mr President, we have noted that the ICC Prosecutor's immediate goal is to complete the investigation into the alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Prosecutor's Office is also progressing in the investigations on gender crimes and is examining information related to attacks on migrant workers.

We expect that the Prosecutor will carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into all alleged crimes by all parties to the conflict in Libya. The Prosecutor must not be influenced by non-judicial considerations and focus his attention solely on prosecution without diversion due to extraneous considerations. All those responsible for committing crimes, covered under the Rome Statute, should be held accountable, irrespective of which side to the conflict they may belong to. Political or other non-

judicial considerations should not exonerate anybody from prosecution for the crimes committed.

Last but not the least, Mr President, it is also important to ensure that all actions by the ICC Prosecutor should fall strictly within the ambit of Resolution 1970, particularly paragraph 6 of the resolution that concerns the States that are not parties to the Rome Statute.

Thank you, Mr President.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York,
<http://www.un.int/india/2011/ind1953.pdf>

4. Evacuation from Libya, New Delhi, 24 November 2011

Question:

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the evacuation of Indians from Libya and other countries took place;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) if not, the reasons therefor?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Mr. E. AHAMED)

(a) & (b) Due to the turmoil in Egypt during January-February 2011, Air India arranged three special flights, on 'no profit' basis from Cairo to Delhi for Indian citizens living in Egypt and stranded Indian tourists who wanted to leave Egypt but were unable to find booking in available commercial flights. Around 670 Indians availed of these special Air India flights to return to India.

As situation deteriorated in Libya, Government of India facilitated evacuation of more than 16,200 Indian nationals desirous of returning to India by all means, i.e. by air, sea, and land.

A total of 800 Indian nationals have been evacuated from Yemen by Government of India.

In the wake of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident in north-eastern Japan in March 2011, Air India was requested to increase its frequency and capacity of aircrafts on the Tokyo-Delhi sector. Special flights of Air India were arranged for Indian nationals in Japan who wished to temporarily and voluntarily leave Japan on payment

basis. Temporary repatriation on a voluntary basis was also arranged for non-essential officials and family members of officials of our

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No.364 asked by Mrs. T. Ratana Bai, <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=220118674>

5. Impact of Libya's internal situation on oil availability in India, New Delhi, 29 November 2011

Question:

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

- (a) whether Government has studied the effect of the Libyan situation on the availability of crude oil in the economy;
- (b) if so, the details of the outcome;
- (c) what precautionary measures Government has taken in this regard?

Answer

Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas (Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy)

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

Statement Referred to in Reply to Parts (a) to (c) of Rajya Sabha Starred Question No. 120 Regarding Impact of Libya's Internal Situation on Oil Availability in India.

(a) & (b): As India imports very little crude oil from Libya, there has been no direct impact of the situation in Libya on India's crude oil imports. During 2010-2011, India imported 1.094 MMT of crude from Libya which was only 0.667% of the total crude oil imports during the said year. During 2011-12, only Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) had a term contract with Libya's National Oil Company of 0.50 MMT. The said quantity could not be lifted due to the turmoil in Libya but the shortfall has been made up through alternate sources.

(c) In order to reduce its dependence on any particular region of the world, India has been consciously trying to diversify its sources of crude oil imports. During 2010-11, the country imported crude oil from more than 30 countries spread across different continents.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Starred Question No.120 asked by Mr. Rajeev Chandrasekhar

c. Qatar

6. Import of Crude Oil from Qatar, New Delhi, 24 November 2011

Question:

Will the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas be pleased to state
(a) whether India had sought more crude oil and natural gas from Qatar;
(b) if so, the details thereof; and
(c) the response of the Government of Qatar thereon?

Answer

Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas (Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy)

(a) to (c): India has conveyed to Qatar, its requirement of additional quantity of crude oil and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supplies on long term contract. Qatar has offered to supply the additional quantities, starting with LNG, for which the concerned oil companies are holding discussion on finalizing the commercial terms & conditions.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No.481 asked by Mr. P. Venu Gopal

d. Saudi Arabia

7. Nurses Returning from Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 23 November 2011

Question:

Will the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs be pleased to state:-

- (a) whether a large number of Indian nurses are returning from Saudi Arabia;
- (b) if so, the details thereof including the number of nurses returned this year and the reasons for their return;
- (c) whether the Government has taken up the issue with the Saudi Arabia Government;
- (d) if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) the measures proposed to be taken by the Government at the diplomatic level to ensure job security for the new recruits to Saudi Arabia?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Mr. Vayalar Ravi)

(a) & (b): There are no such instances where exodus of large number of Indian nurses from Saudi Arabia has taken place. As per provision of the contract, Saudi authorities can employ a Saudi nurse as and when available in place of a foreign recruited one after payment of legal dues to such nurses. The Saudi side has not informed about the number of such nurses who might have returned to India.

(c) to (e): Indian Mission in Saudi Arabia has taken up cases of few nurses with the Saudi side on humanitarian grounds. The Saudi side takes such decisions in line with the nationalization policy of the Government to provide jobs to unemployed Saudi citizens and in accordance with the provisions contained in the contract..

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No.331 asked by Mr. P. T. Thomas

e. UAE

8. India and UAE Ministerial Level talks, New Delhi, 23 November 2011

Both Countries Signed Treaties on Security Cooperation and EXCHANGE of Sentenced Person

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Govt. of UAE H.H. Lt. Gen. Sheikh Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Union Home Minister, Government of India, Mr. P. Chidambaram have signed agreements, on Security Cooperation and on Transfer of Sentenced Persons. The two leaders met at a meeting held here today to discuss issues pertaining to bilateral security cooperation between two countries.

The Agreement on Security Cooperation seeks to strengthen and develop the existing bilateral framework/ mechanism to enhance security cooperation in the areas such as combating terrorism in all forms, addressing activities of organized criminal groups, drug trafficking, illicit trafficking in weapons, ammunition, explosives, etc.; and initiatives on training of personnel.

The Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons provides the framework to facilitate the social rehabilitation of sentenced persons in their respective countries by giving citizens of the Contracting States, who have been convicted and sentenced as a result of commission of a criminal offence, the opportunity to serve the sentence in their own society.

Issues relating to drug trafficking, security, capacity building so as to enhance cooperation to combat organized crimes and international terrorism were also discussed in the meeting. Both countries reiterated their commitment for enhanced cooperation in investigation of mutually relevant criminal cases and sharing of relevant information in this regard.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=77393>

Specific Issues

f. Hajj

9. Hajj Goodwill Delegation Calls on the Prime Minister, New Delhi, 1 November 2011

The Union Cabinet today approved the following for the Hajj 2011 Operations:

A Goodwill delegation for Hajj 2011, led by Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Mr. K. Rahman Khan, called on the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh in New Delhi today. The Prime Minister urged the delegation to convey good wishes to the people of Saudi Arabia on behalf of 120 crore people of India. The Prime Minister said India enjoys excellent relations with Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the Arab world, and would strive to take them further. Following is the composition of the Hajj goodwill delegation:

1. Mr. K. Rahman Khan, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha - Leader
2. Mr. Abdul Kashem Sabhapati, Khargram Panchayat Samity, Murshidabad, WB
3. Mr. Hakim Yaseen, Ex-Minister & M.L.A., J&K
4. Mr. M.J. Rehman, Senior Vice President, Amity Group
5. Mr. Abdul Rahim Rather, Finance Minister, J&K Govt.
6. Mr. Sheikh Alim, Advocate & Secretary, MPCC
7. Mr. Sayed Mohammed Moin, Delhi
8. Mr. Mohammed Hasan Fazal, Bangalore
9. Mr. Sultan Ahmed, MoS Tourism
10. Mr. Aquil Ahmad Rahi, General Secretary JD(U)
11. Mr. Syed Abbas Ali Shihab Thangal, AI Manhal, Pannakkad, Mallapuram
12. Mr. Khurshid Aziz, Jagdishpur, Amethi
13. Mr. Mohd. Usman, Raebareilly
14. Mr. Maqsood Alam, Sultanpur
15. Mr. Hafiz Sajid Hasan Khattat, Distt. Bijnor
16. Mr. Abrar Ahmed, JS, Ministry of Minority Affairs
17. Mr. Mufti Abdullah Mohamed, Hasnot, Distt. Bharuch, Gujarat
18. Mr. I. Shanavas, M.P., Lok Sabha, Wayanad, Kerala
19. Mr. Mohammad Adeeb, M.P., Rajya Sabha
20. Dr. M. Saleem Kidwai, Centre for Canadian, US & Latin American Studies
21. Mr. Sayyed Qasim Ashraf, Lucknow
22. Mr. Justice Bhanwaroo Khan, Judicial Member, Armed Forces Tribunal, Jaipur Bench
23. Mr. Hasan Shuja, Chief Editor, Sahafat & Awam-e-Hind Urdu News Paper
24. Mr. Gulam Nabi Moonaga, Advocate, Srinagar, J&K
25. Mr. Maulvi Iftikhar Hussain Ansari, J&K

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=76941>

10. Phase-1 of Hajj Air charter operation- 2011, New Delhi, 2 November 2011

The Phase-1 of Hajj Air charter operation- 2011, arranged by Ministry of Civil Aviation has successfully completed today. The operation commenced on 29th

September, 2011. A total of 1,25,000 pilgrims through Hajj Committee of India (HCOI) have been successfully airlifted to Medina / Jeddah by Saudi Arabian Airlines (SV) and NAS Air. Total of 435 flights operated to carry these pilgrims and 99.9% of the flights have maintained the time schedule.

The return phase will start from 10th November, 2011 and is expected to conclude on 10th December, 2011. The Ministry of Civil Aviation has decided to start round the clock control room at Jeddah and Medina airport from 8th November, 2011 to oversee the return phase.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=76966>

f. Palestinian issue

11. Statement by Mr. Prem Chand Gupta, Member of Parliament, on Agenda Item 52-“United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Unrwa)” at The Fourth Committee of The 66th Session of The United Nations General Assembly, New York, 1 November 2011

Madam Chair,

At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Flippo Grandi, Commissioner General of UNRWA for the detailed briefing to the committee on the activities of UNRWA. India commends UNRWA for its work, often carried out under difficult circumstances, over the past six decades in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA, including education, health care and social services is critical for nearly 5.0 million Palestinian refugees. I also take this opportunity to commend the cooperation of host countries to UNRWA's work.

We also thank the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the members of the working group on the Financing of UNRWA, for their valuable guidance to UNRWA in carrying out its mandate.

Madam Chair,

The services provided by UNRWA are of a critical importance in the context of the continuing uncertainty in the region. The Agency has played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance. 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, and other reports of the UN Secretary-General under consideration of this agenda item, clearly illustrate the severe challenges UNRWA is facing today particularly the increasing funding gap.

The immediate challenge before UNRWA that needs to be addressed is the crisis of financing. The growing budgetary shortfall of UNRWA at a time when there is an increasing demand on UNRWA for assistance and support is a cause for serious concern. Shortage of funds has direct implication on UNRWA work and makes it difficult to maintain the existing level of services. Thousands of Palestinian students who are otherwise eligible cannot make it to UNRWA schools due to lack of class rooms. The people suffering from life threatening diseases are unable to access tertiary care.

The quality services have also been affected by the resource crunch and increasing costs. Therefore, there is a greater need for augmenting international efforts to improve UNRWA's financial health. In this regard, we support the efforts of UNRWA to enhance the donor base. It is important that international community continues to show commitment to this cause, despite the current difficult global economic situation. While we note that there has been some improvement in security related restrictions on West Bank and movement of humanitarian supplies and other products into Gaza, restrictions on movement due to separation barrier, closures, and curfews in the Palestinian territories is causing severe hardships to the affected population. The restriction on freedom of movement of UNRWA staff members continues to hinder the work of UNRWA.

In this regard, we support the call of the UNRWA Chairperson regarding removal of restrictions on the movement of agency staff and goods throughout UNRWA's areas of work. In addition, further simplification of the approval process for transportation of humanitarian materials by UNRWA would greatly help the population in need. An early and significant easing of restrictions on movement of goods and people into the Gaza Strip would also greatly help in addressing the dire humanitarian situation there. We also hope that expeditious implementation of amended Labor Law in Lebanon would be carried out to ensure better employment opportunities for Palestinian refugees.

India on its part has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to UNRWA to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010. During the last two years, India has also contributed US\$ 10

million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. We are offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme. We have also undertaken joint projects with our IBSA partners in Palestine with a sports complex having just been completed. India will continue to do all within its capacities to assist Palestine in its endeavors in capacity and institution-building.

Madam Chair,

It may not be out of place to reiterate India's continued solidarity with the Palestinian people. Speaking a day after President Abbas filed an application for Palestine's membership of the UN, my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in the General Assembly on 24 September 2011 that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations. We expect the Security Council to endorse Palestine's application so that the UNGA can take further action.

It is critical for the international community to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to resume direct negotiations. In this context, we have noted the Quartet Statement of 23 September and hope that the timelines indicated in the Statement would be realized leading to enduring resolution of all final status issues, including refugees. Till such time, Madam Chairman, it is incumbent upon all of us to fully support UNRWA, as the primary source of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees.

Thank You.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York,

<http://www.un.int/india/2011/ind1950.pdf>

12. Speech by Minister of State for External Affairs at the inauguration of IBSA Sports Complex in Ramallah, Ramallah, 19 November 2011

Your Excellency Dr. Houssein Al-Araj
Chief of Staff of the office of President and Representative of President Abbas
H.E. Janet Michael, Mayor of Ramallah Municipality
H.E. Ambassador Paulo Cordeiro de Andrade Pinto
Undersecretary-General for Africa and the Middle East
Ministry of External Relations of Brazil
H.E. Marius Fransman
Deputy Minister

Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa
H.E. Yasmine Sharif
Deputy Special Representative of the Administrator of UNDP
Dear Colleagues and Friends,
Assalamu Alaikum Rehmatullahi wa Barakatuhu

It is a matter of great pleasure and privilege to be here in Ramallah today for the inauguration of the IBSA Multipurpose Sports Centre. Significantly, this Sports Centre is the first project completed through IBSA funding for the Palestinian Authority as a gift from the people of India, Brazil and South Africa to the people of Palestine. While this happens to be the first IBSA project in the entire Middle East, two more IBSA-funded projects are being proactively pursued: the rehabilitation of the 'Al-Quds Hospital' in Gaza; and construction of a 'Centre for People with Special Needs' in Nablus.

The Government and the People of India remain committed to assist the Palestinian people in their exercise of nation building in all sectors, including areas of niche expertise. Our support to the Palestinian people is not limited only to economic and humanitarian support but we have a long history of supporting the 'Palestinian cause'. India supported Palestine even before she herself attained independence in 1947. In 1975, India was the first non-Arab State to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In 1980, we accorded full diplomatic recognition to the PLO Office in New Delhi. In 1988, within no time of its declaration, we recognised the State of Palestine.

Your Excellency, clearly the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history of Middle East conflict after President Abbas filed an application with the Secretary General of the United Nations for Palestine's full membership to the United Nation. You may recall my Prime Minister's speech in the General Assembly that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this organisation, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet roadmap.

The Prime Minister added that India looks forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations. I think that the time is not far when Palestinians will realize their dream to have a State of their own and an honourable member of the international community

We have also expressed our views in different fora direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine is the key to resolve all final status issues. We have also been calling for easing the siege on Gaza Strip. To alleviate the suffering of the children of Gaza, Government of India this year has contributed US\$ 1 million to UNRWA for providing daily supplementary food assistance to more than 76,000 students attending UNRWA schools in Gaza Strip for 50 school days under the UNRWA's Emergency Programme in Gaza.

During my long political career, I have had the honour to work closely with the Palestinian leaders. I had met the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people late President Yasser Arafat on 17 September 2004 at Ramallah, just a few months before he left his earthly abode.

At that meeting, I had the opportunity to reiterate India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. He had warmly recalled his close relations with Indian leaders, particularly Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mr Rajiv Gandhi, and appreciated India's unwavering support for the cause of the Palestinian people. We have continued our interactions with the Palestinian leadership under President Abbas. He has paid state visits to India in 2008 and 2010.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate the people of Ramallah and the Ramallah Municipality for having such a wonderful facility as the Sports Centre and I am confident that the facility would be utilised to its optimum. I am sure that the facility would contribute to the physical and social well being of the younger generation of Ramallah.

Thank You.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118555>

13. Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. E Ahamed to Palestine and Jordan, Ramallah, 21 November 2011

MOS Mr. E. Ahamed visited State of Palestine from November 18 – 19, 2011 for participating in the handing over ceremony of IBSA Multipurpose Sports Centre at Ramallah. The Sports Centre is the first project completed with IBSA funding for the Palestinian National Authority. It is a gift of people of IBSA countries to the people of Palestine.

Along with IBSA delegations, MOS called President Mr. Mahmoud Abbas and Foreign Minister Dr. Riyad Malki. The Palestinian leadership expressed appreciation for the

developmental and humanitarian assistance provided by the IBSA countries, as well as, for their support for Palestinian membership of UN and UNESCO.

MOS reiterated Government of India's continued support to Palestine in their efforts to achieve a just solution to the Middle East conflict. He also assured the Palestinian leadership of India's support in their efforts in state building.

During the visit, the Commissioner General of UNRWA, Mr. Filippo Grandi called on the MOS (18 November). MOS handed over a cheque of US\$ 1 million as India's annual contribution to the UNRWA for 2011-12 to be utilized for 'providing daily supplement of food assistance to more than 76,000 students attending UNRWA schools in Gaza for 50 school days under the UNRWA's Emergency Programme in Gaza strip'. MOS assured UNRWA of the Government of India's continued support in its operations and in its efforts to alleviate the sufferings of Palestinian refugees.

MOS also met with Sheikh Abdul Azeem Salhab, President of Islamic Endowment Council and Head Imam of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. During his transit visit to Amman, Jordan on 20 November 2011, MOS called on the newly appointed Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan H.E. Mr. Awn Shawkat Al-Khasawneh. Issues of bilateral importance and regional developments that included Syria and Palestine were also discussed.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530218556>

Multilateral Issues/ Regional Issues

g. India and the Middle East

14. External Affairs Minister Mr. S.M. Krishna's Statement to the Press after the Bilateral Meeting with Russian Foreign Minister, Moscow, 17 November 2011

...Foreign Minister Lavrov and I also discussed the international situation, particularly the situation in Afghanistan, developments in the Middle East and North Africa, the Iran nuclear issue, developments in the Asia Pacific region, including the recently concluded APEC and EAS Summits. India and Russia share similar perceptions on such issues. We will continue to consult on them in the future, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora, such as the SCO, EAS, BRICS and at the United Nations General Assembly and UN Security Council...

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118539>

15. Forging Stability in Asia - Keynote address by Foreign Secretary at MEA-IISS-IDSa Dialogue, New Delhi, 21 November 2011

...The upsurge that began in Tunisia in early 2011 has transformed West Asia. The changes set in motion in early 2011 still echo in the region: more regions are affected, more regimes have fallen, and among those which have survived, many have been forced to adopt new policies. Taken together, these changes herald an epochal shift primarily in the Arab world, possibly one of the most significant geo-political developments of the 21st century.

The rise of a new democratic West Asia will bring its own set of challenges and opportunities. The biggest challenge to stability will be the creation of employment opportunities and satisfying aspirations of the growing young generation who believe that dictators have stifled their prospects. This will require governments and businesses in each of these countries coming together to foster entrepreneurship in a sustained manner, with international support. The EU, GCC, US and to a lesser extent Japan, Russia, China and India may have a role to play. But so far, there is no sign of a coordinated move to work to support democratic and economic aspirations of the people. We are doing our bit by being helpful with election management, training programmes, etc...

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118554>

16. Indians Working in Gulf Countries, New Delhi, 23 November 2011

Question:

Will the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs be pleased to state:-

- (a) whether the Government has data regarding Indians working in Gulf countries;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the Government proposes to set up a Contributory Pension and Life Insurance Fund (CPLIF) for the welfare of emigrant workers on their return to India; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Mr. Vayalar Ravi)

(a) & (b): Such data are not maintained, since there is no compulsory registration with the Indian Missions at the time of arrival or departure.

(c) & (d): Yes Sir. The Government is seized with the matter.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No.334 asked by Mr. Nishikant Dubey

17. Exploitation of Indian women in Gulf Countries, New Delhi, 24 November 2011

Question:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the sexual and other forms of exploitation faced by Indian women workers in the Gulf countries;
- (b) the steps being taken by Government to prevent this exploitation and to address the complaints by the workers; and
- (c) whether Government would provide any financial assistance for rehabilitation of these women workers who return to India?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indians Affairs(Mr. VAYALAR RAVI)

- (a) Indian Missions receive complaints from women workers particularly housemaids on account of non-payment of salaries, long working hours, inadequate living conditions, physical harassment, refusal of leave or 'exit/re-entry permits' 'final exit visa' etc.
- (b) The Government has taken various measures for protecting the safety and welfare of women migrant workers of the ECR (Emigration Check Required) category who emigrate to 17 notified (ECR) countries. These include:-
 - (i) Age restriction of 30 years has been made mandatory in respect of all such women emigrants.
 - (ii) The employment contract must be duly attested by the Indian Missions in respect of all such women.
 - (iii) Women household workers are allowed to emigrate after the Indian mission has attested the identity of the foreign employer and terms and conditions of contract.
 - (iv) A pre-paid mobile facility must be provided by the employer to every woman Household Worker. If the Foreign Employer recruits the worker directly, he is required to deposit a security of \$2500 with the Indian Mission.
 - (v) The Ministry has set up the Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) with a 24x7 Helpline to enable emigrant workers / prospective emigrants including women to obtain information on all emigration related matters and to seek redressal of their complaints.
 - (vi) The Ministry undertakes Awareness Campaign through the print and electronic media to sensitize potential emigrant workers including women emigrants about the legal emigration process and hazards of illegal emigration.
 - (vii) Indian Community Welfare Fund has been established in all the Indian Embassies/ Missions including all ECR countries. Financial assistance is provided by the Indian Missions out of this fund to all Indian emigrants who are stranded and are in need of assistance.
- (c): There is no such proposal with the Ministry.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No.372 asked by Dr. T.N. Seema

18. Heads of Missions Conference of GCC Countries, New Delhi, 25 November 2011

The Union Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Mr. Vayalar Ravi inaugurated two-day 6th Annual Conference of Heads of Indian Missions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as well as Jordan, Yemen, Malaysia, Maldives, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and Iraq, here today. Mrs. Preneet Kaur, Minister of State for External Affairs delivered the Key Note Address. The two day Conference is an important institutional initiative to discuss various issues and problems relating to the Overseas Indian Community, especially the expatriate workers and to further develop an institutional framework and operational mechanism to effectively address the concerns of Overseas Indians.

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. The recommendations of the Conference would give guidance to the Ministry of Overseas Indian affairs for setting the Agenda for future course of action for addressing the concerns of the overseas Indian community.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is the nodal ministry for protection and welfare of Overseas Indian workers. An estimated five million semi-skilled and unskilled Indian nationals are working on temporary employment/contract visas, predominantly in the construction, healthcare and household services sectors, mostly in the GCC countries and Malaysia. The Ministry had entered into bilateral labour agreements with Jordan, Bahrain, Malaysia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and UAE to protect the welfare and security of Indian workers working in ECR countries. The Ministry would like to expand bilateral labour agreements with the remaining ECR countries. Indian Community Welfare Fund which was originally for ECR countries has been extended to Missions in all the countries. The Missions are making use of this fund to provide immediate relief to Indian workers in need and distress. The Heads of Missions would be requested to suggest modalities as to how the use of funds can be made broader.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=77602>

19. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, on Agenda Item 36 'The Situation in the Middle East' at the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 30 November 2011

Mr. President,

At the outset, please allow me to express our sincere appreciation for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that demands our collective attention -The situation in the Middle East. Today's discussions that follow the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people are timely and appropriate.

The West Asian region, a cradle of human civilization, is of importance and concern to the entire international community including India. The region is home to nearly 5 million Indians and is an important source for India's energy needs. As a nation with age-old historic and cultural ties with the Middle East, India has an abiding interest in the early resolution of all pending issues that have troubled the region since the inception of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The situation in the region is quite different from what it was when we discussed this topic last year in the General Assembly. While the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history after Palestine's application on 23 September 2011 full membership to the United Nations, the region is also witnessing unprecedented events. People of many countries in the region are demanding the right to shape their own future.

Speaking a day after President Abbas filed the application, my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in the General Assembly on 24 September 2011 that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

While the Council could not reach unanimity on the application of Palestine for full membership to the UN, the overwhelming vote in Paris on 31 October in favour of Palestine's membership to UNESCO demonstrated that the international community

supports recognition of Palestine as an equal member of the comity of nations. We remain convinced that Palestine meets all criteria for UN membership as set out in the UN Charter and deserves to become a full-fledged member of this organization. We hope that the Council will be able to support this soon. For peace and security on the ground, however, it is necessary that direct talks between Israel and Palestine resume without any further delay. In this regard, we are encouraged by the efforts of the Quartet. We hope that the Quartet would pursue with both parties the timeline set in its September 23 statement.

Mr. President,

The biggest stumbling block to direct negotiations is the continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Israel to stop settlement activities. This will facilitate resumption of negotiations in which all Final Status issues should be addressed. We also call on Israel to release the Palestinian tax revenue to the Palestinian Authority which is already facing severe shortage of funds. Equally important is the implementation of reconciliation agreement between Palestinian factions leading to formation of a unity government.

We also welcome the negotiated prisoners swap between Israel and Hamas and hope this will ease tension and build confidence. It is also necessary that the cycle of violence between the Gaza Strip and Southern Israel come to an end given the security concerns of Israel. The blockade of Gaza which has led to difficult humanitarian conditions for people needs to be lifted completely. India on its part has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010. This year we have requested UNRWA to utilize the funding to provide daily supplement of food assistance to more than 76,000 students attending UNRWA schools in Gaza for 50 school-days. During the last two years, India has also contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. President,

The progress on Lebanese and Syrian tracks constitutes the essential core to achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. Developments in the Middle East since February this year underline the need for reinvigorating the search for this comprehensive peace, while the countries in the region undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue

and negotiations rather than resorting to arms. It is the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enable their people to freely determine their pathways to development. This is the essence of democracy and fundamental human freedoms. No action should be taken from outside that exacerbates problems and gives space for the rise of extremism. The international community should stand ready to assist the countries in these efforts while respecting sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. Mr. President, As my Prime Minister said in the General Assembly on 24 September, societies cannot be reordered from outside through military force. Observance of the rule of law is as important in international affairs as it is within countries. In conclusion, Mr. President, India is ready to play a supportive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

*Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York,
<http://www.un.int/india/2011/ind1969.pdf>*

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).

Compiled By Anjani Kumar Singh

Anjani Kumar Singh is a Doctoral candidate in the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Email: aks1511@gmail.com

As part of the policy, the MEI@ND standardizes spellings and date format to make the text uniformly accessible and stylistically consistent. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views/positions of the MEI@ND. Editor, MEI@ND P R Kumaraswamy