

INDIA SPEAKS

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Bilateral Issues

a. Israel

1. Statement at Media Interaction with Foreign Minister of Israel, Jerusalem, 10 January 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying that I am delighted to be here and have had an excellent and productive visit. I met President Peres yesterday and Prime Minister Netanyahu earlier today. We had the opportunity to review our bilateral relationship as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest.

I have just concluded very useful and productive discussions with Foreign Minister Lieberman. During our meeting we reviewed all areas of cooperation in our bilateral relations - political, economic, scientific and cultural. We also discussed regional developments both in West Asia and in South Asia. We have just signed the Extradition Treaty between the two countries. I will later today also meet the Finance minister who has recently visited India. I sincerely hope that my visit will provide continuity to the active political and economic engagement between our two countries.

India-Israel complete 20 years of diplomatic relations this month. To mark this important milestone we intend to organize several events during the year which would enhance economic, commercial and technological cooperation. We also hope to further strengthen people-to-people ties by showcasing the best of India's rich and diverse culture. I would like to invite the Government and people of Israel to participate in these celebrations.

In these 20 years, the bilateral relationship has developed in several critical areas to the benefit of the people of both the countries. Bilateral trade has increased from a modest

level of US \$ 200 million in 1992 to nearly US\$ 5 billion in 2011. We have built a strong partnership in agriculture, a sector which is critical to the Indian economy and have been able to use Israeli expertise to enhance productivity particularly in food and vegetables. The two countries are now set to adopt the next Agricultural Plan which will significantly enhance both the geographical as well as the substantive scope of this cooperation.

India is also keen to have Israel as a partner in several other sectors in which innovation and cutting edge technologies are essential for our continued growth. These sectors include water management, bio-technology, telecom, hi-tech industries, homeland security and several others.

The Indian economy provides immense potential and opportunity for the application of Israeli research as well as for Israeli investment. A Free Trade Agreement is presently under negotiations and we hope to finalise it soon. Several other innovative ideas of promoting financial and technologic cooperation are also being explored. We are also keen to further enhance tourism from Israel to India and to intensify cultural exchanges and thus increases mutual understanding and goodwill.

Let me end my remarks by expressing my gratitude to Foreign Minister Lieberman and the Government of the State of Israel for the warm hospitality that they have extended to me and my delegation.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118884>

2. Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the reception to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between India and Israel, Tel Aviv, 10 January 2012

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years may appear to be a short period but the impressive and multi-faceted development of our bilateral relationship shows how much can be achieved even in a few years given the necessary commitment and goodwill.

Impressive strides have been made in areas of critical importance to both our countries from agriculture and water management to latest the hi-tech applications in communications, health and energy. The reasons for this remarkable cooperation are not far to seek: both our countries share common democratic values which are

demonstrated by an active and representative Parliament, a strong judiciary based on Common law principles and an independent media.

Both countries successfully focussed efforts on human resource development, particularly in scientific and technological fields. And India, like Israel, sets great store by innovation as a game changer to bring about radical and rapid change. If Israel is known as the Start-up Nation, then India too has declared the present decade as the Decade of Innovation.

Economic complementarities, which allow the remarkable R&D achievements of Israel to find full play in an open, democratic and growing economy like India, will further enhance the potential of this relationship.

Mr. Foreign Minister, you would agree that this cooperation would not have been possible if there did not exist a wealth of goodwill and cultural empathy between the people of our two countries, demonstrated most obviously by the large number of Israelis tourists visiting India today.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indians and Israelis have shared the pain arising from loss of innocent lives in the dastardly act of terror in Mumbai in 2008 and are determined to fight the forces of terror together.

It is pertinent to note that Jewish people have been a part of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic mosaic of India for centuries. 70,000 of them who have migrated to Israel have not done so from any sense of persecution. They are, in fact, today a strong bridge between the two countries, participating in nation-building in Israel while holding fast to the cultural roots and traditions of the mother country.

In India we are fully engaged in meeting the challenges of poverty eradication and putting the country on the path of high, self-supporting, sustainable and inclusive long-term growth. We note with some sense of satisfaction that we have averaged over 6% growth over the last twenty years and have accelerated this to between 8-9% in the last five years. Despite the global economic downturn, the fundamentals of the Indian economy remain intact, and the growth story is poised to continue.

Yet, huge challenges need to be overcome if we have to sustain this high rate of growth. For instance, India needs world class infrastructure and that needs an

investment estimated at 1 trillion US Dollars over the next five years. Not all of this investment can be funded domestically; despite the very high saving rate of 35%, and increasingly we have to look abroad for these resources.

Similarly, more than half of our population still depends on agriculture for its livelihood and up gradation of agricultural productivity, agricultural infrastructure and food processing facilities remain major requirements. To sustain our growth pattern, we need very significant energy inputs from abroad both from conventional energy resources and through new and renewable sources of energy.

Innovative solutions are needed to solve problems related to people's health, rural communications, agriculture and animal husbandry, green energy, health delivery systems and so on.

India's integration with the global economy - about 40% of our GDP is today related to external economy - allows us to create opportunities for trade and investment with countries like Israel to meet the challenges that I have outlined.

Excellency, There is ample potential to multiply the bilateral trade figure of 5 billion dollars that we have achieved last year as well as to increase the level of investment between the two countries. The Free Trade Agreement now under negotiation is clearly a step in the right direction. It will give a boost to our economic and commercial ties.

Mr. Foreign Minister, I would urge that both our countries, even as we celebrate 20 years of diplomatic relations in 2012, should already be planning ahead for a long and fruitful partnership. I am aware that our Embassy has planned out several events, just as your Embassy has in India, for the coming year. These events aim to intensify our political engagement in several spheres, give further impetus to economic cooperation, infrastructure building and a partnership in innovation.

Particular focus will continue to be on strengthening people-to-people links through a colourful cultural festival and tourism promotion. In all these efforts, we look forward to receiving the full cooperation of our Israeli partners as in the past.

I, once again, take this opportunity to reiterate India's commitment to usher in a comprehensive and long-term partnership with Israel in diverse areas for the mutual benefit of our people.

Thank you.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118883>

3. Visit of Minister of External Affairs to the State of Israel, 10 January 2012

H.E. Mr. S.M. Krishna the Minister of External Affairs of India paid an official visit to Israel from January 9-10, 2012.

The Minister began his official program on 9th January by visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Jerusalem which perpetuates and documents the Holocaust. He laid a wreath at the memorial in memory of the Holocaust victims.

On January 9, the Minister called on H.E. Shimon Peres, President of Israel and discussed bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. The two leaders discussed issues such as cooperation in science and technology, water management, agriculture and combating terrorism. They also discussed recent developments in South Asia and the Middle East.

That evening, the Minister of External Affairs and Mr. Avigdor Lieberman, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel were Chief Guests at a reception hosted by the Ambassador of India. At the reception, the Minister launched celebrations of the 20th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Among the invitees were representatives from the Parliament, Government, corporate sector, media, academia and Indian community.

On January 10, the Minister met H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, at a 90-minute breakfast meeting in the Prime Minister's office. In this meeting, EAM and PM Netanyahu reviewed the bilateral relationship and charted out areas of cooperation for the future including energy, trade, agriculture and human resource development. They also had the opportunity to review regional and international developments of mutual interest.

External Affairs Minister thereafter met Foreign Minister Lieberman at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the latter hosted a lunch in his honour. The two Ministers reviewed ongoing bilateral cooperation and identified areas of cooperation for the future. The delegation level discussions provide an opportunity for the two Ministers to discuss recent developments in the Middle-East and South Asia. The two Ministers signed an Agreement for Reciprocal Extradition of each other's nationals; and an

Agreement for Transfer of Sentenced Persons respectively. They also addressed the media at a joint media interaction.

Dr. Yuval Steinitz, Minister of Finance called on External Affairs Minister. In this meeting, the two Ministers reviewed the economic and commercial cooperation between the two countries, including status of the Free Trade Agreement, the proposal for a Joint R&D Fund, and other initiatives.

The Minister visited the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem which dates back to the days of the revered Sufi saint Baba Farid. He announced a special grant of US\$ 25,000 by the Government of India for setting up a Baba Farid Heritage Centre at the Indian Hospice.

The Minister visited the Cemetery for Indian Soldiers in Jerusalem which was used from July 1918 to June 1920 and contains graves of 79 Indian servicemen of the First World War. The Minister laid wreaths at the memorials for Indian Soldiers and signed the Visitors Book.

Source: MEA, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530218885>

b. Libya

4. India's humanitarian assistance to Libya, New Delhi, 31 January 2012

The Government of India's humanitarian assistance consisting of life saving medicines and medical equipment worth US\$ 1 million (approximate) was handed over to the National Transitional Council of Libya, in Tripoli, on January 30, 2012 by Mr. Rajeev Shahare, Joint Secretary (West Asia and North Africa) in the Ministry of External Affairs.

The National Transitional Council had earlier in Benghazi provided a list of life savings drugs to the Government of India and these medicines were selected as per the requirements of Libya.

It may be mentioned that Government of India had provided assistance worth US\$ 1 million in cash earlier to the National Transitional Council through the United Nation's Office of Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid in New York. The Government of India has been supportive of the people of Libya and has interacted with the National Transitional Council in London, Istanbul and Paris meeting including in the United Nations.

The interim Government of National Transitional Council has been considering

sending injured Libyan nationals for their medical treatment to India. Indian authorities welcome this and are looking forward to receive injured Libyan patients in India. In this regard a Libyan delegation has already visited India in December 2011 to tie up treatment of injured Libyan patients in reputed hospitals.

The Government of India is also arranging to send a team of 'Jaipur Foot' to Tripoli. The team would be providing prostheses (artificial limbs) to the injured Libyans and would set up a centre in Libya and provide readymade artificial limbs to injured Libyan patients.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530218967>

c. Oman

5. Key Note Address of Minister of State for External Affairs at the Conference on "Education, Empowerment and Excellence" organized by Indian School, Al Ghubra, 22 January 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for having invited me to address this august gathering. This is the fourth educational conference that I am attending in last two days. I had two international conferences in Chennai day before yesterday – one in Loyola College, another at Dr. B.S. Abdur Rahman University and yesterday one in Doha where I addressed the Principals of 120 Schools, affiliated to CBSE, at their 24th Annual Conference of Gulf Council. Today I am here with you. I am happy that I have, after assuming the additional charge of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the company of the academia besides the diplomats.

The theme of the Conference - "Education, Empowerment and Excellence" is quite appropriate in today's world when there is a significant disconnect between education systems and the needs of 21st century employers, both public and private. There is a mismatch between what employers, individuals and governments seek and what respective education and training systems provide.

Excellence in education should not be just a matter for national debate and dialogue; it should be the cause for urgent social action and demand. Education should be truly creative and should be in touch with the complete life of people – economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual.

Education today needs to create leaders, thinkers, philosophers and creators. Leaders, who are credible, committed to serve, belief in life long and continuous learning and are imbued with values and virtues.

Government of India is committed to make drastic changes in the education system in the country so as to bring about quality and excellence in the education. With this in mind, the Government has taken initiatives to bring revolutionary reforms in the field of education and the major initiatives which include the Right to Education Bill, 2009 ensuring the right of children to free and compulsory education.

As our primary education programs achieve a degree of success, there is growing demand for secondary schools and colleges. We are committed to universalizing secondary education. We should seek not just functional literacy, but good quality education – education that is affordable, accessible, equitable and available to everybody who seeks to study.

Government of India has adopted a neo-liberal approach to expansion of education in recent years. In higher education, we have been following a multi-pronged strategy – strengthening existing institutions of higher learning along with a massive expansion plan by way of setting up a large number of public funded institutions keeping in view the aim of doubling the access ratio to higher education. Besides setting up of new institutions of higher learning both in basic and applied areas of study, we have also decided to create some national level resource institutions. In this context, I may mention here that we have decided to have around 800 universities of all types i.e. an increase of 300 more, with nearly 50,000 colleges, and ten of our institutions/universities will feature among the top 100 of the world.

The Government has accorded blanket permission to all institutions of higher learning to collaborate with foreign institutions in all areas of mutual interests. We are encouraging our institutions to undertake both faculty exchange and joint research programmes with institutions from abroad.

Friends, India has a demographic advantage of youth. Young people only know rapid change; you have probably noticed the changing demands of young people. I am certain that the quality education that has been the endeavour of our government would not only empower communities but provide opportunities to them for excelling in their respective fields.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy that Indian School, Al Ghubra, on the occasion

of its celebrations of over 20 years of excellence, is organizing this Seminar in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman.

India and Oman are linked by geography, history and culture. The Sultanate of Oman is one of our most important partners in the Gulf region. Our relations have matured over the years and both countries attach high priority to the relations with the other. The decision of the Indian Government to confer the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said for the year 2004 shows the strong relationship between the two countries. During the successful visit of Honb'le Prime Minister of India to Muscat in November 2008, it was agreed that the historical ties should be transformed into a strategic relationship by upgrading the cooperation in various areas.

A Memorandum of Understanding between India and Oman in the field of Higher Education was signed in 2007 and a Joint Working Group was set up to implement various programmes. Educational Consultants India Limited under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which deals with placement of foreign students in Indian Institutions, besides Direct Admission of Students Abroad Scheme, has placed self-financing students, including Omani nationals, in various Indian Institutions for higher education. Ed.CIL has placed about 54 NRI students from Oman for B.Tech courses under DASA Scheme.

I once again take this opportunity to congratulate the organizers of this event and wish them a great success in all their future endeavours.

Thank you.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118948>

d. Qatar

6. Address by Minister of State for External Affairs at the Valedictory Session of the 24th Principals' Conference of CBSE Affiliated Schools in the Gulf, Doha, 21 January 2012

Ladies and gentlemen,

...India has close relations with Qatar marked by historical commercial ties and people to people contacts. There is a large Indian community in this country. There have been regular high level visits between the two countries, prominent among them were by

His Highness the Emir of Qatar in 1999 and 2005, His Excellency the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2006, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah in 2006 and from India by the Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 and Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2008.

I would also like to inform you that with regard to India-Qatar relations in the education sector, there is provision for a Joint Working Group to promote cooperation which we hope will be convened soon. The Indian side has made some important offers for collaboration with Qatar which includes the setting up of a campus of an Indian Institute of Technology in Qatar which is under their consideration...

Source: MEA, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118947>

e. Saudi Arabia

7. India- Saudi Arabia Trade Touches US \$ 25,612.46 Million in 2010-11 Focus on Investment and Joint Ventures for Enhancing Trade and Services, New Delhi, 4 January 2012

Mr. Anand Sharma, the Union Minister for Commerce, Industry and Textile met with Dr. Tawfiq Bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Saudi Arabia, here today. During the meeting Mr. Sharma stated that, "The Economic ties between India and Saudi Arabia would constitute a very solid foundation for the development of Strategic Partnership. While the trade ties at present are already quite substantial, there exists immense potential for taking the bilateral trade relations to the higher level."

The Indian Minister in the bilateral talks informed that, "The total trade between India and Saudi Arabia has increased from US \$ 15,946.10 million in 2006-07 to US \$ 25,612.46 million in 2010-11. The exports to Saudi Arabia have increased from US \$ 2590.77 million in 2006-07 to US\$ 5,227.19 million in 2010-11. The principle items of export to Saudi Arabia are Petroleum (Crude and Products); Rice Basmati; Dyes/Intmdtes and Coal Tar Chemical. Machinery and Instruments; Primary and Semi-Finished Iron and Steel. Similarly, the imports from Saudi Arabia has increased substantially from US\$ 13,355.33 million in 2006-07 to US\$ 20,385.28 million in 2010-11 and the principle items of imports are Petroleum (Crude and Products), Organic Chemicals, Artificial Resin, plastic, Material etc; Metal ferrous ores and Metal Scrap and Inorganic Chemicals. India imports almost 23% of its crude oil requirements from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Sharma during the meeting observed that the focus is now to be shifted to investment and joint ventures for enhancing our trade as well as services. Minister also emphasised strategies to be developed for increasing volume of trade in traditional items and diversify the trade basket.

Mr. Sharma expressed satisfaction on the fact that both countries have pledged to elevate the current buyer-seller relationship into strategic energy cooperation. India would like to participate in the Petroleum and Gas sectors in Saudi Arabia both upstream and downstream and invites Saudi Arabia to invest in Indian petroleum and gas based mega industrial estates, fertilizers and petrochemical plants, refineries, etc.

Source: Press Information Bureau of India, New Delhi

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=79345>

8. Union Finance Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee's Opening Remarks at the 9th India-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission Meeting, New Delhi, 5 January 2012

“It is my privilege to welcome you and your delegation to the 9th India – Saudi Arabia Joint Commission Meeting. I hope your stay so far has been enjoyable and the deliberations of the three Sub-Committees under the aegis of the Joint Commission constructive and fruitful.

This is an important meeting and an excellent opportunity for both of us to take stock of the progress made since the “Riyadh Declaration” and undertakes measures for successful and expeditious realization of the objectives which our leaders have set forth in the “Delhi Declaration-2006” as well as the “Riyadh Declaration 2010”.

Yesterday, the three sub-committees had an opportunity to review the progress on various issues. I am given to understand that they have set ambitious targets for themselves on our future cooperation initiatives.

Our economic ties are an important component of our Strategic Partnership. Our bilateral trade exceeded US\$ 25 billion last year. However, it comprises mainly petroleum and its by-products. There is a great scope to expand our bilateral trade basket to include non-oil products and we need to mount a concerted effort to enlarge and widen our trade basket. Equally important, we need to move into areas of investment and joint ventures. There is immense potential for increasing our trade in services as well.

The rapidly expanding Indian economy has a growing requirement of crude oil to sustain its development momentum. We hope that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be able to assist India in meeting its energy security needs in the years to come.

India has vast experience in the Hydrocarbons sector not only India but also in other oil rich countries. We have specialists both in the upstream and in the downstream areas including in training, capacity building and Research and Development. India would be happy to participate in the Exploration and Production activities with Saudi Arabia in our two countries and also in third countries.

India has national plans to build refineries and petrochemical projects. The Joint Working Group on Hydrocarbons could explore mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation initiatives in this area.

India has made significant progress in the areas of science and technology, IT and telecom, and in developing affordable technologies in a range of employment generating Small and Medium Enterprises. We would be happy to share our experience with Saudi Arabia in all these areas.

We have a large community of Indian expatriates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and we greatly appreciate the measures taken by Government of Saudi Arabia on the welfare and well being of the India community. It would be necessary and useful to have a Memorandum of Understanding on Labour and Employment keeping in view our large expatriate work force in Saudi Arabia.

India needs an investment of close to a trillion dollars in the next five to seven years to build and expand its existing infrastructure to be able to sustain a GDP growth rate of 8 to 9 per cent. The proposed India-Saudi Arabia Investment Fund of US\$ 750 million to be jointly set up by Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia and a counterpart Indian agency needs to be given high priority as it is mutually beneficial.

We must facilitate regular interaction between the various Joint Committees and working groups on Science and Technology, Higher Education, Information Technology, Health etc. to carry forward the ongoing cooperation as well as explore new opportunities. Chairpersons of the sub Committees must work in tandem with a view to bring the planned programmes of cooperation to fruition expeditiously.

It would be useful if the Co-Chairs of the three sub Committees could submit joint

reports once every six months to the Co-Chairs of the JCM on the progress achieved.”

Source: Press Information Bureau of India, New Delhi,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=79370>

9. 9th Meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission, New Delhi, 6 January 2012

The 9th Meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission on Technical and Economic Cooperation (JCM) was held in New Delhi on January 4-5, 2012. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Hon'ble Finance Minister and H. E. Dr. Tawfiq bin Fowzan Al-Rabiah, Minister of Commerce and Industry of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia co-chaired the JCM. H.E. Dr. Al-Rabiah was accompanied by H. E. Mr. Abdullah A. Al Hamoudi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade, a 36-member Official Delegation and 40 members Business Delegation.

The visiting dignitary called on Hon'ble Prime Minister and Mr. S.M. Krishna, Hon'ble Minister External Affairs. He also met Mr. Anand Sharma, Hon'ble Minister of Commerce and Industry and Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy, Hon'ble Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The 9th Meeting of the JCM took stock of the progress made since the “Riyadh Declaration 2010” signed during the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister to Riyadh. The discussions of the JCM were held in three bilateral Sub Committees dealing with (i) economic and commercial, (ii) Education and Science and technology and (iii) Consular and community affairs. Agreed Minutes of the 9th JCM which provide the contours of future action plans for mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation were signed by the Heads of delegations at the end of the JCM.

Both sides noted that while the trade between the two countries was growing rapidly, cooperation in investments needed to be raised to make it commensurate with that of bilateral trade. The two sides propose to work towards this objective.

Source: MEA, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530218822>

10. India Tourism Road Shows in Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 13 January 2012

The Ministry of Tourism with the objective to tap the high end tourists from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) organised Tourism Road Shows in the cities of Dammam, Riyadh and Jeddah. The shows were held from 7th to 11th of this month.

A strong Indian delegation comprising officials from the Tourism Departments of

Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra, members of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Air India, Jet Airways, Taj Group of Hotels, Medical and Wellness facilities etc., from India were present to showcase the multitude of tourist attractions of India to the Saudi Arabian Traveller. The Indian delegation was led by Mr. RH Khwaja, Union Tourism Secretary.

The State delegation of Jammu and Kashmir was led by the Minister of Tourism and Culture Mr. Nawang Rigzin Zora and the Minister of State for Tourism Mr. Nasir Aslam Wani. The Ambassador of India, Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, was also present during the event in Riyadh.

The Road Show held in the city of Dammam on 7th January 2012 witnessed the presence of over 154 participants representing the members of the Travel Trade, Media and opinion makers of this sector. During the event held in Riyadh on the 9th January, as many as 172 members of the travel industry and media participated and got a glimpse of Indian tourism products and its rich cuisine. The final leg of the Road Show was held in Jeddah on the 11th January 2012.

According to travel statistics, 4.5 million Saudis representing nearly a quarter of the population, travelled abroad and spent about US \$33 billion last year. India is fast emerging as a preferred destination for the Saudi tourists.

Foreign tourist arrivals into India have witnessed a steady increase over the years, touching 6.29 million in 2011, an increase of 8.9% over 2009. During the year 2010 there has been an increase of nearly 38% in the inbound tourism from KSA to India with around twenty two thousand tourists. The Visa issuance figures of the Indian Mission indicate a similar high growth in the year 2011.

One of the highlights of the Road Show was the focus on the 'Medical and Wellness' Tourism potential of India. India's vast potential as a Health and Wellness tourism destination, backed by its medical facilities and world-class doctors, para-medical staff and hospitals, ancient healing systems such as 'Ayurveda' and other rejuvenating programs were show-cased.

The cost of medical services in India is almost 30% lower to that in Western countries and the most cost effective in the region. Indian hospitals excel in cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery, joint replacements, transplants, cosmetic treatments, dental care, orthopaedic surgery and much more. All medical treatments and investigations are done using the latest, technologically advanced diagnostic equipment. Moreover,

India is just about four hours away making it easier for patients to visit even for follow-up – offering unmatched proximity and value-for-money.

The Road Show also highlighted destinations which are becoming popular for holiday and the business traveller like the Luxury Trains viz. Palace on Wheels, Royal Rajasthan on Wheels, The Deccan Odyssey and the Golden Chariot etc. in addition to the Palace Hotels, Luxury Spas etc. The other niche tourism products being publicized were adventure, eco and wildlife tourism.

The presentations were followed by interactive sessions with the members of the Indian Tourism Industry which provided an opportunity of building awareness about the Incredible India tourism product. This will contribute significantly in sustaining the growth of high spending tourists from KSA.

Source: Press Information Bureau of India,
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=79562>

f. Syria

11. Travel Advisory on Syria, New Delhi, 7 January 2012

In view of the situation prevailing in parts of Syria, Indian nationals are advised to avoid all non-essential travel to Syria for the present.

Source: MEA, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530218871>

12. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri during Briefing on the Middle East (Syria) in UN Security Council, 31 January 2012

Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to thank you for organising this meeting at the request of the League of Arab States. I also take this opportunity to welcome in our midst today the Chair of the League's Ministerial Committee and Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, His Excellency Bin Jasim Bin Jaber Al Thani, and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Dr. Nabil El-Arabi. I would like to thank them for their comprehensive briefings on the League's efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Syria for his statement. Participation of the US Secretary of State, the Foreign Minister of France, the Foreign Secretary of the UK, the Foreign Ministers of Guatemala, Portugal and Morocco and

Minister of State of Federal Foreign Office of Germany in today's meeting testifies to the importance of the subject of our discussion and deserves our appreciation.

Mr. President, Chapter VIII of the UN Charter provides for this Council's cooperation with the regional organisations for maintenance of international peace and security. In this context, we welcome today's meeting and think that it provides us a good opportunity to understand the role the League of Arab States is playing in resolution of the problem in Syria.

Mr President, the Syrian Arab Republic has historically played an important role in the Middle East by virtue of its geographic and strategic location, its diversity, and the genius of its people. Developments in Syria have implications for peace and stability in the wider region. We have, therefore, called for a peaceful and inclusive political process to address the grievances of all sections of the Syrian society since the beginning of the protests in March 2011. The problem in Syria is not merely security-related; it is primarily political and economic and emanates from the Syrian people's desire to play a greater role in shaping their destiny. Resolution of this problem cannot be found in violence or armed struggle and its violent suppression. Nor can a solution be reached through prescriptions from outside. The Syrian people demand and deserve empowerment so that a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution can be found in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed.

Unfortunately, during the last ten months we have witnessed an increasing level of violence that has taken a heavy toll of civilians and security forces and caused destruction of civilian infrastructure. We unequivocally and strongly condemn all violence irrespective of whoever the perpetrators are and whatever justification is proffered. We also condemn all violations of human rights and rights of expression and peaceful assembly. India holds these rights among the fundamental values that should be respected while ensuring stability and security of the society. India, along with its IBSA partners, conveyed this message clearly to the Syrian leadership when an IBSA delegation visited Damascus in August 2011. This message was also contained in the Council's PRST issued in August 2011 under India's Presidency.

We see the efforts of the League of Arab States in Syria in light of our support for a political resolution of the crisis. We had noted that the deployment of the League's Observer Mission across several areas in the country had had a calming effect and are disappointed that the Mission was suspended on 28 January on account of a serious deterioration in the form of continuing violence. The report of the Observer Mission that the League made available to the Security Council clearly states that there is an

armed element to the opposition which is also responsible for a number of violent acts. The continued presence and deployment of the Observers could have helped reduce the violence and present a more accurate picture of developments especially since the monitors had also confirmed that a lot of information in the media is exaggerated and misleading. The report of the Observer Mission also made an important point that the mission needs to be accompanied by a political process to address the grievances of the Syrian people, something that we strongly support.

Mr President, we are firmly of the view that all sides need to cooperate with the League of Arab States. A political process must begin without any further delay. The process should be led by the Syrians and should respect Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The League of Arab States, as an important regional organisation, should play its required and historic role in promoting political dialogue among the Syrian parties. This dialogue can build upon the package of political reforms already announced by the Syrian leadership and also bring about necessary changes to the package of political reforms so that it finds acceptance among all sections of the Syrian society. The outcome of this dialogue cannot be prejudged. The outcome should also be acceptable to the widest segment of Syrian society for it to resolve the present crisis and be enduring.

Mr President, the international community, including this Council, should play a constructive role in the process of political dialogue among the Syrians. In this context, we welcome submission of a draft resolution to the Security Council. We will engage with fellow Council members so that the Council can speak with a unanimous voice in support of the initiative of the League of Arab States to expeditiously resolve the Syrian crisis.

Thank you.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to United Nations, New York,
<http://www.un.int/india/2012/ind1983.pdf>

Specific Issues

g. Palestinian issue

13. Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of India, New York, 5 January 2012

The Security Council was briefed in consultations on 19 August by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, on the situation

following a series of terrorist attacks in southern Israel. Council members considered a draft statement to the press on the incident but failed to adopt it. On 25 August, the Security Council was briefed on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. After the briefing, Council members considered the issue in consultations. During his briefing, the Under-Secretary-General talked about recent terror attacks and escalating violence in the Middle East, the status of the Israel-Palestine peace process and the situations in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. He said that the differences between Israelis and Palestinians remained profound and expressed the hope that the international community would be able to shape a legitimate and balanced way forward to help the parties resume meaningful negotiations that would realize the two-State solution. Meanwhile, he said, the achievements of the Palestinian Authority in terms of State-building, security and economic improvement must be consolidated and bolstered, both through political progress and economic assistance. The Authority was experiencing a serious fiscal crisis and needed \$250 million in additional commitments to meet its obligations. The Under-Secretary-General called on donors to provide timely and generous support.

At the same time, he said, Israel had announced a series of new settlement expansions in the West Bank, with some 5,200 units planned in East Jerusalem and 277 units approved for the Ariel settlement — the largest number approved outside East Jerusalem in a single settlement by the current Government. Turning to Gaza, he said that the living conditions of the population there remained a priority for the United Nations. While imports into Gaza had increased by 12 per cent since his last briefing, a comprehensive easing of the closure of the Gaza Strip was needed, along with a substantial improvement in the security situation.

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

<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/679f662f61acc4688525798b0051cda5?OpenDocument>

14. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, at the United Nations Security Council open debate on situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, New York, 24 January 2012

Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Mr President, to the Security Council and thank you for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Mr President, today's Open Debate is taking place at a crucial time when the international community is engaged with Israel and Palestine to re-start direct peace talks. On 23rd September, the day when President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary General for Palestine's membership to the United Nations, the Quartet issued a statement proposing a series of steps to re-start the peace process. It included a preparatory meeting between the parties within a month, commitment of the parties to submit their preliminary proposals on territory and security within three months, to make substantive progress within six months, to hold a donors' conference and to reach an agreement on the final status issues by the end of 2012.

During the last four months, the Quartet has been engaged with the parties separately and met them several times and sought proposals on security and border. These were followed by a series of meetings in Amman this month under the auspices of King Abdullah II. While the possibility of direct talks has remained elusive, it is encouraging that the parties have remained engaged in these processes. We believe that such engagements need to become more serious and purposeful with a view to resolving the issues in a time-bound manner.

Mr. President, for the Quartet's timeframe for reaching an agreement by the end of the year to be realized, it is necessary for Israel to completely stop settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, other than being illegal under the international law, are undermining the efforts of the international community to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-state solution. Several reports, including those of OCHA, clearly indicate that the increasing trend of settlement activities in the Palestinian lands is not compatible with the two-state solution.

Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. More than 43% of the West Bank being outside the control of the Palestinian Authority has deprived the Palestinian people of access to their natural resources and prevented them from undertaking rightful economic, social and cultural activities. It has resulted in a large number of Palestinian people losing their homes, access to their farms and their

livelihoods. Settlement activities have also led to violence and aggravated social tension between settlers and the Palestinian population. We, therefore, reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

In Gaza, the blockade and restrictions on exports continue to have far reaching consequences. Poverty and aid dependency have increased and demands for emergency services like health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter have overstretched UNRWA's resources. There is an urgent need to further ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip. Established channels for such supplies should be used even while the capacity of these channels is improved.

Mr President, intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important issue that needs no emphasis. We support the efforts of the Palestinian leadership to expedite implementation of the reconciliation agreement reached last year between the Palestinian factions.

It is also necessary that all violence come to an end. We condemn all attacks that cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure.

Mr. President, for a comprehensive and durable peace in the region, other issues relating to the Arab lands that remain under occupation are also important. For the Middle East Peace Process to succeed, progress has to be made on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks as well. These critical issues must not be lost sight of amidst unprecedented social and political upheaval that the region is witnessing.

In fact, developments in the region call for consolidation of the collective efforts of the international community to assist the countries in undertaking inclusive political processes and implementing reforms to meet legitimate aspirations of their people. In such collective efforts, we must respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resort to arms. No action should be taken from outside that may exacerbate the problems and give rise to extremism.

Mr. President, 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. This support was reiterated to the Palestinian leadership last week when the Minister of External Affairs of India visited Ramallah.

India also remains committed to continue its development cooperation with Palestine through direct budgetary support, training of personnel in various areas, annual contributions to UNRWA and projects under IBSA fund.

Mr President, Palestine is recognized by more than two-thirds of the membership of the United Nations. This was clearly demonstrated by the overwhelming vote in Paris on 31 October 2011 in favour of Palestine's membership to UNESCO. Being the first non-Arab country to have recognized Palestine in 1988, India remains 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 support Palestine's application for membership of the UN sooner than later.

In conclusion, Mr President, let me reiterate India's support for Quartet's efforts for a lasting resolution of the Israel-Palestinian issues based on the two-state solution. India stands ready to play its role in the Council's collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

I thank you.

*Source: Permanent Mission of India to UN, New York,
<http://www.un.int/india/2012/ind1981.pdf>*

Multilateral Issues/ Regional Issues

h. India and the Middle East/ West Asia

15. Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of India, New York, 5 January 2012

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Middle East

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On the situation in Lebanon, the Under-Secretary-General highlighted several security incidents of concern, including the targeting, on 26 July, of a convoy of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) outside the city of Saida, which had injured five peacekeepers. He said that Israeli violations of the Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, and in high numbers. In addition, two explosions had taken place in Beirut, on 29 July and 11 August. On 13 August, a shooting had been directed at the property of a Member of Parliament. Serious clashes had also erupted between armed factions in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain el-Hilweh, and a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had been hit, causing material damage.

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

<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/679f662f61acc4688525798b0051cda5?OpenDocument>

16. Address by Minister of State for External Affairs at the Valedictory Session of the 24th Principals' Conference of CBSE Affiliated Schools in the Gulf, Doha, 21 January 2012

...The GCC is home to over 5 million Indian expatriates. While in the past, a predominantly large proportion of the Indian population was made up of blue collar workers, this ratio has been changing with a larger influx of Indian professionals, entrepreneurs and other white collar workers. This trend has resulted in more families meeting the eligibility criteria for residence in the Gulf countries and, therefore, an ever-growing need for schools based on the Indian curriculum. Governments of the GCC countries have been receptive to the needs of the Indian expatriates in the Gulf from a very early time and generous in providing land and approvals for setting up Indian schools. It is indeed commendable that these schools which were primarily for Indian expatriates, have over the years earned themselves a reputation for high scholastic achievements, and thus now sought after by other expatriates communities, including from our neighbourhood South Asia. While this is a most welcome trend which provides an international environment for Indian children, it is important to bear in mind that the permissions for Indian Schools have been granted by the local governments principally for the Indian community and as a school seat is a precious and scarce commodity, it should be treated as such...

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118947>

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