

INDIA SPEAKS

(Monthly Digest of Official Indian Statements on Middle East)

No. 34

May 2012

Bilateral Issues

a. Bahrain

1. Press Briefing of Incident in Bahrain, New Delhi, 13 April 2012

In response to a media question regarding an incident in Bahrain the Official Spokesperson said:

“We have seen reports in the media of a bomb attack on April 09 at Al Eker in Bahrain resulting in serious injuries. We condemn such acts of violence. Our Embassy in Manama, Bahrain is closely monitoring the situation and has conveyed that all Indians in Bahrain are safe.”

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530319218>

b. Iran

2. Impact of Relations with Iran, New Delhi, 26 April 2012

Question:

- (a) Whether the Obama Administration is threatening to impose sanctions on India over its continued economic ties with Iran;
- (b) If so, the reaction of Government on such threats posed by Obama Administration;
- (c) Whether Government has taken up the matter with the U.S. officials to defuse any tension; and
- (d) If so, the details thereof?

Answer

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

(a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

The United States has not threatened to impose sanctions on India for its economic relations with Iran. However, as part of its sanctions regime related to Iran, the United States has recently enacted a law, which, inter alia, has provisions for imposition of sanctions on individual foreign entities like foreign financial institutions that engage in a significant financial transaction with

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

Iranian Central Bank or a designated financial institution in Iran for petroleum related trade after 28 June 2012. The institution could be exempted from sanctions if the U.S. makes the determination that the country with primary jurisdiction over that foreign financial institution has significantly reduced its volume of crude oil purchases from Iran.

The Government of India implements its obligations under the UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran. We continue to maintain that we are bound by UN sanctions and unilateral sanctions imposed by countries or group of countries should not impact legitimate trade relations with Iran. India's crude imports from Iran are guided by its energy security and take into account its oil requirements, multilateral sanctions, conditions in financial and energy markets, and security and stability in different oil-producing regions of the world.

India and the United States have regular dialogue on bilateral cooperation and all global and regional issues of mutual interest. In these meetings, the two sides have had candid and constructive discussions on issues related to Iran and broader West Asia region. India and the United States remain committed to strengthening their strategic partnership.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Starred Question No. 308 asked by Dr. Janardhan Waghmare, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

c. Israel

3. Press Release on the Strengthening of India – Israel Academic Relations – Agreed Outcomes, 9 April 2012

In the context of the twentieth anniversary of full diplomatic relations between Israel and India during which economic relations have flourished and innovation has become a shared value and goal and taking into account the strong desire of both countries to continue cultivating their long term economic, academic and technological ties, both governments have decided to substantially further enhance their academic cooperation by launching a joint program that will facilitate mutually beneficial research and academic activities.

The Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Mr.. Kapil Sibal, Israel's Minister of Finance, Dr. Yuval Steinitz, Israel's Minister of Education and Chairman of the Council for Higher Education, Mr. Gideon Sa'ar and Israel's Chairman of the Planning and Budgeting Committee, Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg, have agreed in principle to establish a long-term program that will bring together Indian and Israeli researchers to carry forward research in areas of mutual interests. This in principle agreement was arrived at during Mr. Kapil Sibal's visit to Israel from which he returned this morning.

The total scope of the program will reach US\$ Five Million from each side annually in steady state, over a three year period.

Both sides have agreed that the program will be coordinated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) on the Indian side and the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) on the Israeli side.

The particulars of the program will be finalized in accordance with the decision taken by the joint working group on April 3rd 2012 and subject to the required approvals in each country. The first call for proposals is expected to be published in December 2012.

The joint working group has identified broad areas for cooperation, such as Renewable & sustainable energies, Bio-medical sciences, Cyber-security, Humanities and Social sciences, etc.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=82123>

d. Kuwait

4. News on Indians Participate in 10th International Jewellery Exhibition, Kuwait, 23 April 2012

His Excellency Shaikh Dr. Ebraheem Duaij Al-Ebraheem Al-Sabah the Governor of Al-Ahmadi inaugurated the 10th International Jewellery Exhibition at Hall no.8 International Fairgrounds – Mishref on the 23rd April, and visited some of the Indian stalls. A large number of Indian companies are participating in the exhibition displaying exquisite traditional and contemporary jewellery in enchanting designs from various parts of India.

The Ambassador of India to Kuwait and Honourable Srimati Prabha Thakur, Member of Parliament from India were present at the inauguration of the exhibition and visited Indian and other stalls. The exhibition is open until 28th April.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=27&SECTION=1>

5. News on Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Medical Cooperation Signed between India and the State of Kuwait, Kuwait, 23 April 2012

Recognizing the age-old and historically friendly relations and a common desire to strengthen cooperation between the two friendly countries and desiring to lay down institutional framework for developing medical cooperation between the two countries, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Medical Cooperation was signed between India and the State of Kuwait in New Delhi, India, on April 23, 2012. The MoU was signed by H.E. Mr. P.K. Pradhan, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Alabdelhadi, Under Secretary, Ministry of Health, Government of the State of Kuwait, on behalf of their respective governments. The salient features of the MoU are:

1. Degrees & other qualifications issued by institutions in respect of medicine (Including traditional medicine), nursing, medical technicians & paramedical recognized by Government Bodies will be treated at par by the Ministry of Health of Kuwait for appropriate job placements & benefits;
2. To provide appropriate training to Kuwaiti Doctors in Centres of Excellence in the field of Traditional and Modern medicine and Allied Health Specialties in the Republic of India;
3. To provide treatment to Kuwaiti patients in the approved specialized Indian hospitals and to encourage Medical Tourism; and
4. To set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) to further elaborate the details of cooperation and to oversee the implementation of this MOU. The JWG will meet not more than once a year or as agreed upon.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=28&SECTION=1>

6. Health Ministry Signs Memorandum of Understanding with Government of Kuwait on Medical Cooperation, New Delhi, 23 April 2012

The Union Health Secretary Mr. P.K. Pradhan on behalf of Government of India signed an MoU today with the State of Kuwait on Medical Cooperation. Dr. Ibrahim Alabdelhadi signed the MoU on behalf of the Ministry of Health, Government of Kuwait.

Indian doctors and nurses are employed in large numbers in Kuwaiti hospitals. Recognizing the long standing and friendly cooperation and common desire to strengthen cooperation between the two countries and desiring to lay down institutional framework for developing medical cooperation between the two countries, the MoU signed today inter alia provides for : degree & other qualifications issued by Institutions in respect of medicine (including traditional medicine), nursing, medical technicians & paramedical recognized by Government Bodies will be treated at par by the Ministry of Health of Kuwait for appropriate job placements & benefits; appropriate training to Kuwait doctors in centres of excellence in the field of traditional and modern medicine and allied health specialties in India; provisions for treatment of Kuwaiti patients in the approved specialized Indian hospitals and to encourage medical tourism; and set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) to further elaborate the details of cooperation and to oversee the implementation of this MoU. The JWG will meet not more than once a year or as agreed upon.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=%2082436>

e. Libya

7. Mr. Anil Trigunayat appointed as the Ambassador of India to Libya, New Delhi, 9 April 2012

Mr. Anil Trigunayat, presently Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow, has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Libya. He is expected to take up his assignment shortly.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530219195>

f. Qatar

8. India to import more crude oil from Qatar: Jaipal Reddy, New Delhi, 2 April 2012

Iran India is looking at importing more liquefied natural gas from (LNG) from Qatar and planning to step up crude oil imports from the country to meet growing energy needs, oil minister S Jaipal Reddy said.

"I would like to acknowledge Qatar's growing importance in India's energy security matrix not only in respect of LNG but also crude oil and LPG (liquefied petroleum gas)," Reddy said on Monday after a meeting with visiting Qatari energy minister Mohammad Bin Saleh Al Sada.

Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi,

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-04-02/news/31275255_1_domestic-oil-companies-qatari-energy-minister-jaipal-reddy

9. Press Release on State Visit of Emir of Qatar to India, New Delhi, 4 April 2012

His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar will pay a State Visit to India from April 8-10, 2012 at the invitation of Hon'ble President Mrs. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil. The Emir of Qatar would be accompanied by his wife Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned, a high level Ministerial delegation, senior officials and businessmen. This is the third visit of the Emir to India, the last two being in 1999 and 2005.

2. During his stay in India, the Emir will meet Hon'ble President Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil who will host a banquet in his honour. Hon'ble Vice President and External Affairs Minister will call on the Emir. Chairperson of UPA and the leader of opposition will also call on the Emir. His Highness the Emir will hold bilateral talks with Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

3. The Prime Minister visited Qatar in November 2008. India's relations with Qatar have been historically close and friendly. Qatar is the largest supplier of LNG to India. Qatar also hosts an Indian community of around 500,000 persons.

4. The visit of the Emir is expected to provide further impetus to our multifaceted engagement.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530219182>

10. Speech by the President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the Banquet in Honour of the Emir of the State of Qatar, H.H. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, New Delhi, 9 April 2012

Your Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani,
Your Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al Missnad,
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and the people of India, it gives me great pleasure to welcome your Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al Missnad, and the members of the Qatari delegation to India.

We recall the memorable visits of your Highness to India in 1999 and 2005. Those are important milestones in our relations. We also remember the visit of Her Highness Sheikha Moza to India in 2006, and the contribution of that visit towards deepening engagement between our two countries. The visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to your country in November 2008, marked a significant step towards further strengthening of our bilateral relations.

Our countries have deep and rich historical connections. Qatar is a part of our extended neighbourhood. Our civilizational links with the entire Gulf region have today developed into a multi-faceted relationship over the years. We believe that it is time to translate our surging contemporary synergy into a mutually beneficial and durable partnership.

Economic and commercial ties between India and Qatar rest on strong foundations. Energy co-operation is a key pillar of our bilateral engagement, Qatar being a prominent partner in India's quest for energy security. Both our economies are growing and offer many opportunities. Our bilateral trade and investment levels, however, remain below their potential. There is an urgent need to work towards enhancing our economic inter-linkages for the mutual benefit of our countries and peoples. There are many possibilities for Qatari business in India in sectors like infrastructure, energy and fertilizers. Indian companies are also making their presence felt in Qatar in diverse sectors such as engineering, contracting, IT and consumer durables. We do hope that they will be worthy partners in Qatar's economic progress, and contribute meaningfully towards your country's preparations for the 2022 Football World Cup.

I understand that there are half a million Indians in the State of Qatar. Please allow me to take this opportunity to thank Your Highness, for the friendship and hospitality extended to the Indian community in Qatar, which adds another dimension to our friendship.

Your Highness, you come from a region that is of vital importance to us. Some countries in West Asia and North Africa are currently witnessing momentous changes. The political, social and

economic agenda for the region is witnessing rapidly shifting currents, and new paradigms are evolving. India has vital stakes in the security and stability of our extended neighbourhood which has a bearing on the progress and prosperity for both of us. As a country committed to democracy, India stands for peaceful and inclusive political processes to address the aspirations of all sections of society. We also believe that it is important to ensure that solutions to conflicts are arrived at by consensus among all stake holders, through dialogue and without recourse to violence.

Your Highness, we are impressed by the wisdom and commitment with which you have led your country's political and economic reform agenda. In this endeavour, you can count on India as your partner. There is an old Arab saying that it is important to select the right companion before embarking on a journey. I am sure that our partnership will be for the good of the peoples of our two countries. It is with this belief that I would request you all to join me in raising a toast:-

- to the continued health and well being of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and Her Highness Sheikha Moza;
- to enhanced co-operation between India and Qatar; and
- to the continuing friendship between our peoples.

Source: Banquet Speeches, The President of India, New Delhi,
<http://presidentofindia.nic.in/bqsp090412.html>

11. Anand Sharma pushes for urgent supply of 3 million tons of LNG from Qatar, New Delhi, 23 April 2012

The Union Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles, Shri Anand Sharma has requested Qatar to supply immediate requirement of 3 million tons of LNG to India. The LNG is to be imported by Petronet LNG Ltd and GAIL. The amount will further increase to 15 million tons in the next three to four years. The Qatar Minister of Energy & Industry Mohammed Bin Saleh Al-Sada informed that RasGas, Qatar and Indian agencies are involved in negotiations and assured that needed urgency will be imbued in the proceedings. Both the leaders met in Doha today.

India is currently importing 7.5 MMTPA of LNG from RasGas, Qatar. A 25 year contract in this regard was signed by Petronet LNG limited (PLL) in July 1999. The supply of 5 MMTPA LNG from Qatar commenced in 2004, with the balance 2.5 MMTPA starting in January 2010. India needs additional long-term tie up to 15 MMTPA of LNG. An immediate requirement of 3 million tons of LNG was indicated by the Indian side to be imported by Petronet LNG Ltd and GAIL, which will further increase to 15 million tons in the next three to four years.

Furthermore, Qatar expressed keen interest in ONGC offer to jointly participate in upstream projects in 3rd countries. ONGC offered its upstream expertise in EOR/IOR, Qatari side welcomed the same and also informed that they are now looking for appropriate EOR/IOR projects.

Minister Sharma asked his Qatari counterpart to use its good offices for pushing India-GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiations. Being GCC Member Qatar may play an important role in this regard. Qatar also expressed its desire for early completion of negotiations.

The total bilateral trade during the last 5 years has increased more than three times from US\$ 2.39 billion in 2006-07 to US\$ 7.20 billion in 2010-11. The exports from India to Qatar have registered an increased from US\$ 331.53 Million to US\$ 381.77 Million. Similarly, the imports from Qatar have increased from US\$ 2.06 billion in 2006-07 to US\$ 6.81 billion in 2010-11. The major Indian exports to Qatar are petroleum (Crude & Products), Manufactures of Metals, Electronic Goods, Machinery and Instruments and Transport Equipment. India's major imports from Qatar are Petroleum(Crude & Products), Organic Chemicals, Artificial Resins, Plastic Materials, etc., Inorganic Chemicals and Sulphr & Unrostd Iron Pyrts.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=82444>

g. Saudi Arabia

12. Press Release for Open House for the community members at the Embassy of India, Riyadh on Thursday 19th April, 2012 from 0900 hrs 1200 hrs, Riyadh, 10 April

The Embassy of India Riyadh will hold Third Open House for the members of the Indian community residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on April 19, 2012 in the Embassy premises from 0900 hrs to 1200 hrs.

During the Open House, members of the community can meet His Excellency Mr. Hamid Ali Rao Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other officers of the Embassy to discuss their consular, labour-welfare and any other issues.

All interested members of the community are invited to attend the Open House.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

13. Memorandum of Understanding with Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 26 April 2012

Question:

- (a) Whether Government has signed many MoUs with the Saudi Arabia Government during the Hon'ble Defence Minister's visit in February;
- (b) If so, the details thereof;
- (c) Whether the Saudi Government has extended support towards India's energy security; and
- (d) If so, the details thereof?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Shri. E. Ahamed)

(a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) & (d) Yes. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently the largest supplier of crude oil to India.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 2356 asked by Mr. Piyush Goyal, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

h. Syria

14. Press Briefings on Developments in Syria, New Delhi, 13 April 2012

In response to a query on the developments in Syria, the Official Spokesperson said:

“We welcome the developments in Syria in response to the Mission of UN Special Envoy Kofi Annan. We hope this Mission will have further success in resolution of all issues leading to lasting peace in Syria.”

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530319210>

15. Explanation of Vote on the Resolution concerning Syria by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council, New York, 14 April 2012

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, India has consistently supported all efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis through an inclusive Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society. To this end, we have given our full support for the mission of Joint Special Envoy Mr. Kofi Annan. Earlier this morning, our Minister of External Affairs spoke to Mr. Annan and underscored India's support for his mission.

Madam President, it is a matter of satisfaction that Mr. Annan's efforts over the last six weeks have resulted in cessation of violence. We welcome this development and also the commitment of the Government of Syria to the six-point plan proposed by Mr. Annan. We expect that the Syrian opposition too will adhere to the relevant parts of this plan, renounce violence and cooperate fully with Mr. Annan.

We have voted in favour of the resolution today so that an advance team of the UN supervision mission may be deployed expeditiously to monitor the cessation of violence. We hope that all parties, including the opposition, will implement their commitment and cooperate with the mission. It is also necessary that the mission carries out its work impartially, fairly and independently with due respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

Madam President, for the success of the Annan plan and observer mission, it is necessary that it is accompanied by an inclusive Syrian-led political process. The cessation of violence should create a conducive environment for such a process to start as early as possible. We have noted the commitment of the Government of Syria to such a process. We expect that the opposition will also engage seriously in this process so that the crisis is resolved without any further bloodshed, and that peace, stability and security is re-established and the people of Syria are able to focus their energies on socio-economic development.

Madam President, for the success of the Annan mission, it is also necessary that all countries in Syria's neighbourhood and beyond facilitate, and extend their support for, a political resolution of the Syrian crisis under the auspices of the Joint Special Envoy. India, for its part, will continue to extend full support for the impartial implementation of Mr. Annan's six-point plan.

Thank you.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, <http://www.un.int/india/2012/ind2011.pdf>

16. Explanation of Vote by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council Resolution on Syria, New York, 21 April 2012

Thank you, Madam President.

Let me begin by thanking the Russian delegation for introducing the resolution that the Security Council has adopted unanimously today as resolution 2043. This is a significant step in the Council's collective support for the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan.

Madam President, it is a matter of satisfaction that Mr. Annan's efforts over the last seven weeks have resulted in an improvement in the situation in Syria. Even though there have been reports of violations, the ceasefire that came into force on 12 April has been observed by all parties in a large part of Syria. Obviously, there is a need to sustain the gains made so far. This should be facilitated by the expeditious deployment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), authorized by resolution 2043. This resolution is also an appeal to all parties to walk back from violence so that an impartial supervision and monitoring of the ceasefire can contribute to observing and upholding the commitment of the parties.

We have voted in favour of resolution 2043 with the expectation that UNSMIS will implement its mandate impartially, objectively and fairly and help the Syrian parties to build on the ceasefire and commence an inclusive Syrian-led political process that will meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

For the success of the Annan plan, it is necessary that all parties implement their respective commitments under the six-point plan. We have noted that the Preliminary Understanding signed

by the Syrian Government and the United Nations on 19 April sets out clear conditions that have to be met by the Syrian government and the armed opposition groups. We hope that all parties, including the opposition, will abide by those conditions.

Madam President, while the Syrian parties cooperate with UNSMIS and the Joint Special Envoy, it is also necessary that all countries interested in securing peace and stability in Syria extend their full support for Mr. Annan and UNSMIS, and also refrain from any action that may cause further bloodshed. This will help in the expeditious resolution of the Syrian crisis as well as in ensuring that the crisis does not spill over Syria's borders.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,
<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530119239>

i. Tunisia

17. Strengthening Indo-Tunisia Scientific Technological Collaboration Tunisian Minister Calls on Dr. Ashwani Kumar, New Delhi, 24 April 2012

Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes, Minister of State, Foreign Affairs, Government of Tunisia today called on Dr. Ashwani Kumar, Minister of State for Planning, Science & Technology and Earth Sciences in New Delhi to discuss further steps for strengthening the Indo-Tunisia scientific technological collaboration.

A Fresh Program of Cooperation for the period of 2012-14 was signed on 19th December 2011 during the 2nd Indo-Tunisian Joint Committee on S&T. Dr. Ashwani Kumar and H.E. Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes discussed the current Program of Cooperation which provides opportunities for bilateral S&T cooperation through exchange of researchers, training of researcher in Indian laboratories, organization of workshops and joint R&D projects.

The two countries agreed on certain specific areas of cooperation, identified for cooperation under the current Program of Cooperation. This included biotechnology, material sciences, information science (including software development), renewable energy sources, medical sciences, water technology, geospatial technologies and science popularization.

During the meeting, Dr. Kumar called for further consolidation of unique partnership between the two countries. He informed Minister Abbes, that India is committed to faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth by harnessing its knowledge and potential in science and technology and that innovation is a key focus area for the government. The government proposes to enhance its total R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP to 2% by the end of 2012. Dr. Kumar informed Minister Abbes that India had expended S&T cooperation with technologically advanced countries like Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, USA, UK and Korea and also with the EU. Government has taken steps to build national capability and capacities in the area of supercomputing, open drug discovery, national geographical information systems (GIS) etc. As a

result of indigenous efforts India has emerged as a country with advanced defence and strategic capabilities.

The Tunisian Minister conveyed that his country was committed to strengthening S&T ties with India and assured of increased collaboration between S&T establishments of the two countries.

Tunisia and India have a long standing relationship in the field of Science & Technology. Bilateral collaboration in the area has been strengthened over time through the projects undertaken by the Indo-Tunisia cooperation conducted mainly under India's Technology Diplomacy Policy.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=82467>

j. United Arab Emirates (UAE)

18. UAE and India to Activate an Electronic Contract Registration and Validation System to Streamline the Employment of Indian Contract Workers, New Delhi, 4 April 2012

The UAE Ministry of Labour and India's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs today signed a protocol at Abu Dhabi to streamline the admission of Indian contract workers by way of an electronic contract registration and validation system. A milestone in the efforts to upgrade rules and procedures governing contract employment of Indian nationals in the UAE, the new system heralds a joint endeavour by the UAE and India.

Mr. Saqr Ghobash, UAE Minister of Labour underlined the commitment of the UAE to exemplary co-operation with India in a range of areas, including the employment of Indian contract workers in the UAE, whose number has grown to approximately 1.7 million. In particular, the new system ensures the full transparency of the contracting process by mandating that the prospective worker be duly informed by Indian government-accredited recruitment agencies of the terms of the contract offer, including the scope of remuneration and employment conditions and benefits, prior to deploying to the UAE. Mr. Ghobash further elaborated that the system requires that the worker signs off on the terms of the contract and that the competent Indian government authorities approve these terms before the admission process is completed and a work permit is issued. These same terms are then electronically captured into the formal employment contract that is signed by worker and employer in the UAE. He stressed the importance of safeguarding and protecting the interests of both workers and employers under the provisions of the UAE Labour Law.

Mr. Vayalar Ravi, Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs hailed the protocol, which would protect the interest of workers as well as the employers, as a leap in India-UAE relations in the field of

labour employment. He stated that the protocol underlines the commitment of the Indian Government to the protection and welfare of the Indian workers in the UAE, in accordance with UAE legislation. Thanking the Ministry of Labour of UAE Shri Ravi said the new system safeguards the interests of workers and employers alike by validating the contract conditions of the Indian worker in the UAE. The Minister said that India is implementing a comprehensive e-governance system towards making the process of overseas deployment of Indian workers transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. The Contract Registration and Validation System is fully aligned with India's e-governance system, allowing for a seamless application of the respective rules and procedures of both countries. He cited many projects undertaken by the Indian government to ensure welfare and protection of the Indian workers. Shri Ravi stated that the interests of workers and the employers are complementary and that the new protocol is a commitment of both the governments to jointly work towards the same.

The new system is activated by an online application by a UAE employer for the granting of work permits that requires disclosure of the key terms of the employment offer. The UAE Ministry of Labour processes the application and provides access to the electronic record to Indian government-accredited recruitment agencies in India that are then required to obtain the worker's attested consent; a duly designated Indian government agency also accesses the record for the purpose of reviewing the terms of the employment and granting an emigration clearance accordingly. This is followed by the registration of the electronic contract and the issuance of the work permit by the Ministry of Labour of UAE.

This protocol emanates from a comprehensive UAE-India Memorandum of Understanding on Manpower, which was signed by Mr. Vayalar Ravi, Minister of overseas Indian Affairs and Mr. Saqr Ghobash, UAE Minister of Labour in New Delhi on September 13 last year.

The protocol mandates the informed consent and approval by the worker, the employer and the Indian competent authorities of the full terms of the work contract prior to the worker's deployment to the UAE. The contract terms are, in turn, captured in the contract document that is eventually signed by worker and employer in the UAE and duly registered with the Ministry of Labour of UAE.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=82092>

19. Press Release on the visit of External Affairs Minister to United Arab Emirates, New Delhi, 14 April 2012

External Affairs Minister Mr. S.M. Krishna is to visit the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 14th to 16th April 2012. Relations between India and the UAE are deeply rooted in history and age-old economic, socio-cultural interactions and extensive people to people contacts.

During the visit the External Affairs Minister is to preside, along with his counterpart His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan Minister of Foreign Affairs of UAE, over the 10th Session of India-United Arab Emirates Joint Commission for Technical & Economic cooperation (JCM). The JCM is alternatively held in New Delhi and Abu Dhabi. Some key agreements on double taxation and consular issues are to be signed during the visit.

India's bilateral trade with the UAE in 2010-2011 was estimated at US \$ 67 billion and is likely to increase further. India and UAE were each other's largest trade partners in 2010-2011. UAE is a significant investor in India in terms of FDI. These investments are largely concentrated in Energy; Services; Programming; Construction; and, Tourism and Hotels. Several prominent private and public sector Indian companies and banks are operating in the UAE.

Both countries have regular exchange of dialogue in the field of defence. There have been goodwill visits of Indian Navy ships to the UAE from time-to-time. In recent years, bilateral defence cooperation has been strengthened.

UAE is home to an Indian expatriate community of more than 1.75 million – the largest expatriate community in the UAE.

During his visit to the UAE the External Affairs Minister will also interact with Heads of Indian Missions in the region at a conference convened in Abu Dhabi.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530219220>

20. Protocol with UAE, New Delhi, 25 April 2012

Question:

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

- (a) Whether the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been preferred destination for skilled and unskilled Indian workers;
- (b) If so, the details of the workers presently working in UAE;
- (c) Whether the Government of India has recently concluded a protocol with the Government of UAE to streamline the employment process of Indian workers through an electronic contract registration and validation system;
- (d) If so, the salient features of the said protocol; and
- (e) The modalities/requirements to be fulfilled by Indian workers before the Labour Department of UAE to get the above facilities?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Mr. Vayalar Ravi)

(a) United Arab Emirates is one of the preferred destinations for Indian workers going overseas for employment. However, many Indian workers also go for employment to other Gulf countries as well.

(b) Approximately 1.5 million Indian workers are estimated to be working in UAE.

(c) Yes, Madam.

(d) The UAE Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs have agreed to jointly deploy an electronic contract registration and validation system that ensures:

Full transparency of the contract terms; Disclosure of such terms to the prospective worker and securing the worker's informed consent to the same terms prior to being deployed to the UAE; Approval by the concerned Indian government agencies of the terms of the contract for the purpose of granting emigration clearance to the prospective worker, and non-substitution of any of the agreed-to terms of employment in the final and official contract document to be signed by the worker and the employer after the former's arrival in the UAE.

(e) The protocol mandates the informed consent and approval of the worker, the employer and the competent Indian authorities, of the full terms of the work contract prior to the worker's deployment to the UAE. The contract terms are, in turn, captured in the contract document that is eventually signed by the worker and employer in the UAE and duly registered with the Ministry of Labour. The new system is activated by an online application by a UAE employer for the granting of work permits that requires disclosure of the key terms of the employment offer. The UAE (Ministry of Labour) processes the application and provides access to the electronic record to Indian government- accredited recruitment agencies in India that are then required to obtain the worker's attested consent. A duly designated Indian government agency also accesses the record for the purpose of reviewing the terms of the employment and granting an emigration clearance accordingly. This is followed by the registration of the electronic contract and the issuance of the work permit by the UAE Ministry of Labour.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No, 3381 asked by Mr. Khagen Das, K. Sugumar and K. Sudhakaran,

<http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/psearch/QResult15.aspx?qref=120175>

Specific Issues

21. Issue of passport on priority basis to Hajj pilgrims, New Delhi, 14 April 2012

In a response to a media question on issue of passports to Hajj pilgrims the Official Spokesperson said:

“Ministry of External Affairs has issued instructions to all Regional Passport Officers in the country to issue a short validity passport to Hajj pilgrims pending receipt of police verification report.

In order to enable prospective Hajj pilgrims to obtain passport, the Hajj Committee has decided to extend the last date for submission of Hajj application forms from April 16 April 2012 to 25 April 2012.”

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

<http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530319219>

22. Subsidy to Hajj Pilgrims, New Delhi, 25 April 2012

Hajj Committee of India had received 357338, 300680 and 302616 applications during the years 2009, 2010, 2011 respectively. 120131, 126191 and 125051 pilgrims were provided subsidized airfare by the Government during the year 2009, 2010 and 2011. During the years 2009, 2010 and 2011, the Government has spent an amount of approximately Rs. 690, Rs. 600 and Rs. 605 crores (excluding service tax) as subsidy on air travel of Hajj pilgrims.

This information was given by the Minister of Civil Aviation Mr. Ajit Singh in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha today.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=82555>

Multilateral Issues/ Regional Issues

k. India and the Middle East

23. Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Dubai (12 -13 October 2012), Riyadh, 7 April 2012

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has been organizing Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas(PBD) conventions in different regions of the world since 2007. In 2012, the MOIA plans to organize the Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention in Dubai which is tentatively scheduled to be held on 12th and 13th October 2012. The Convention provides an opportunity to the Indian Diaspora in host country and the neighbouring regions to meet and discuss issues of mutual interest.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

24. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council open debate on the Middle East, New York, 23 April 2012

Thank you, Madame President.

I would like to begin by thanking Under Secretary General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question, during the last one month. I also would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their useful statements.

Madame President, the Middle East peace process is undoubtedly passing through one of the most difficult times since the signing of the Oslo accord. The continuing stalemate in the peace process is undermining the gains made so far. In fact, dramatic developments in West Asia and North Africa since the beginning of 2011 appear to have pushed the Palestinian issue on the backburner. Ironically, this is happening at a time when the international community is supporting the democratic aspirations of other people in the region.

If the present stalemate is allowed to continue and Palestinian aspirations denied, we run the risk of a sharp deterioration in the situation. The lack of trust between parties, primarily due to intensification of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, needs to be seriously and urgently addressed. In this regard, we call for a renewed commitment of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to the accepted principles for settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Oslo Accords, the Arab Peace Plan and the Quartet Principles. The parties should take urgent steps to recommence negotiation for realizing the aspiration of the Palestinian people to have a state of their own, living side by side and at peace with Israel. In this regard, the complete cessation of settlement activities is of utmost importance. At the same time, all violence against civilians, irrespective of their source and cause, must stop. The international community, particularly the Quartet, must redouble its efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. We hope that the meeting that took place between the Palestinian and the Israeli negotiators on 17 April will facilitate their efforts towards commencement of direct talks.

Madame President, as I have said, if there is one issue that has become the major hindrance to the peace process, it is Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several reports, including those of OCHA, have clearly shown that the intensification of these activities is not compatible with the two-state solution. In fact, it is destroying the very possibility of the two-state solution. Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They have led to violence and aggravation of tension between the Israeli settlers and the Palestinian population. We, therefore, reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

Indiscriminate violence not only puts the lives of civilians in real danger, but also leads to a vicious cycle of violence. We condemn all these attacks that cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure, and call for their full cessation.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza due to the continuing blockade and restrictions on exports is constantly aggravating the living conditions of the civilian population. As has been brought out in several reports of the UN agencies, poverty and aid dependency have increased. Demands for emergency services like health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter have

overstretched UNRWA's resources. While we welcome some steps in easing restrictions and blockade, much more is required to be done urgently.

There is also a need to enhance the level of humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza and West Bank. This should be done through the established channels. At the same time, the capacity of these channels should be increased. On its part, India is continuing its development cooperation with Palestine through untied direct budgetary support of US\$ 10 million for last two years, training of personnel in various areas, annual contributions of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA and projects under the IBSA fund.

Madam President, formation of a unity government and implementation of the reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian factions signed last May are important for strengthening the administrative and security achievements made by the Palestinian Authority, despite severe financial crisis. It will not only bring all Palestinian factions together but also ensure establishment of one authority for the whole of the Palestinian territories. An early action on this front will help reaching a political common ground essential for future democratic processes in Palestine.

Madame President, the Palestinian question remains at the core of Arab-Israeli conflict. Resolution of this issue should be a priority for the international community. 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 the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap. For achievement of this dream, India will continue to support all efforts, including the Quartet's.

At the same time, it is also important not to lose sight of other Arab lands under the Israeli occupation for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli problems.

I thank you.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, <http://www.un.int/india/2012/ind2015.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).

Note: One Crore: ten millions.

Compiled by Alvite N

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