

INDIA SPEAKS

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. KUWAIT

1. World Hindi Day Celebrated In Kuwait, Kuwait, 14 January 2013.

Hindi is the third most widely spoken language in the world and the “World Hindi Day”, is celebrated annually across the world on 10 January. In order to promote Hindi, “World Hindi Day” was celebrated with great enthusiasm in the Embassy of India, Kuwait on 10 January 2013.

Anju Dheman, Convener of the Kuwait Chapter of CBSE Schools in coordination with H.K Mohan, First Secretary (Education) organized the event in which nine schools participated with 15 children from each school. After lighting the traditional lamp, each school recited a poem/song emphasizing the importance of Hindi.

The chief guest Vidhu P. Nair, charge d’affaires during his addresses, spoke about the importance of Hindi and read out the message of the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India. He distributed prizes to the winners of the competition as well as to all the participating schools and the judges.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=179&SECTION=1>

2. India participates in the 3rd Economic Exhibition organized by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait, 15 January 2013.

An Economic Exhibition, organized by the Economic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait, was held on 13 January 2013 at Diamond Ballroom, Sheraton Hotel, Kuwait from 1000 hrs to 2000 hrs. The event was inaugurated by the Under Secretary H.E. Mr. Khaled Al-Jarallah. This is the Third year in succession that such an Exhibition has been organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

H.E. Mr. Al-Jarallah visited the India pavilion which was decorated exquisitely with 'Incredible India' posters. A variety of brochures on Investment opportunities in India, tourism, including Medical tourism, etc. were displayed and distributed during the event. DVDs and CDs were played on various topics, including India's vibrant economy, gem and jewellery and tourism.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=181&SECTION=1>

3. Message of HE Satish C Mehta, Ambassador of India to Kuwait, on the 64th Republic Day of India, Kuwait, 25 January 2013.

On the occasion of the 64th Republic Day of India, I convey my warm greetings and good wishes to all Indian nationals in Kuwait as well as to our Kuwaiti and other friends.

On this important day in 1950, the Constitution of India came into effect and India became a sovereign, secular and democratic Republic. Our Constitution encapsulated our values and beliefs of equality, justice, freedom of thought, speech and choice, rule of law and secularism. It has stood the test of time and India has blossomed into a participatory and caring democracy. As envisioned by our founding fathers, India has also stood for peace and harmony around the world. Besides being the world's largest democracy, India is also one of the most diverse countries where many different faiths, languages, ethnicities and cultures coexist peacefully. In fact, unity in diversity has been our leit motif.

Political consolidation in India was accompanied by efforts to transform our agrarian economy into a modern economy. India today is the third largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. Despite economic downturns in various parts of the world, as a result of prudent economic policies and management and attractive investment policies, in the last two decades, India has averaged a seven per cent growth, second highest among major economies. It is one of the most preferred destinations for foreign investments. India is endowed with a large middle class that is creating a huge domestic market. It is also one of the youngest nations in the world, with more than half of its population in the working age group. This demographic dividend is expected to significantly contribute to India's growth in the coming years.

Our emphasis on promoting science and technology is paying handsome dividends. We now have the third largest pool of qualified scientific and technical manpower in the world. India is amongst the few countries which can develop and launch its own remote sensing satellites or has full spectrum of nuclear technology. Our IT and IT Enabled Services sector, with a revenue of US\$ 100 billion last year has elevated the country as a software giant and a global outsourcing hub for business and knowledge processes. India is fast emerging as a key centre for research and development. The day is not far when India would become the knowledge capital of the world.

A large domestic market, availability of skilled and talented manpower, attractive policies, and a dynamic private sector hungry to grow is contributing to India's emergence as a major

manufacturing hub. To give an example, there is hardly a major international automobile company that does not or is not planning to have a manufacturing plant in India. We manufactured 20 million vehicles of all variety and exported about 3 million units last year.

Creation of infrastructure, essential for economic development, is receiving the highest priority. In the last five years almost US\$ 500 billion was invested in infrastructure and in the coming 5 years we plan to invest almost a trillion dollars of which half would be by domestic private sector or foreign investment. Besides physical connectivity we are also creating electronic connectivity. We are one of the fastest growing telecom markets in the world with a mobile phone user base of over 929 million (second largest in the world) and over 137 million Internet users(third largest in the world).

To encourage foreign investment in the country, the Government last year announced a slew of policies like permission for foreign investment in multi-brand retail sector, investment up to 49 per cent by foreign airlines in the Indian carriers, raising the foreign investment cap in insurance sector to 49 per cent, allowing Qualified Foreign Investors to directly invest in Indian equity etc.

Even as India is attracting foreign investment, Indian companies have been reaching out to the world with the purpose of investing in various sectors. Our companies have appreciably invested overseas in the last few years through mergers and acquisitions or via direct investments, which has helped them access high-growth markets, acquire knowledge and technology, attain economies of size and scale, and leverage international brand names.

While our successes have been many, we are fully mindful of the enormous challenges and expectations that remain to be addressed, especially in eradicating poverty, malnutrition, diseases, and illiteracy as well as eliminating rural-urban divide, social inequalities, and regional disparities. The government has initiated a number of social development programmes aimed at inclusive growth like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna etc. Our strength in IT is being leveraged in transforming governance and implementing schemes.

In the area of foreign policy, India seeks mutually beneficial relations with all countries in the world and towards this end, is working with them on issues of common concern like terrorism, climate change, global economic crisis, and energy and food security. Our experience of tackling developmental challenges within a democratic framework, and our emphasis on building convergences and consensus have helped us play a key role in addressing international challenges as well as promoting peace, progress and prosperity globally.

India's relations with Kuwait are longstanding, close and growing. We have been an integral part of each other's life and consciousness for generations. Our engagement has been multifaceted and continues to grow. Our relationship extends beyond historical and cultural linkages to encompass political, trade and economic interests. India-Kuwait trade increased by 43 per cent in

2011-12 and reached a record US \$ 17.5 billion. India has consistently been among Kuwait's top trading partners and recent years have witnessed new opportunities opening up in sectors like human resource, medical tourism, hospitality and IT.

High-level visits and other exchanges between our two countries have provided the platform to further strengthen bilateral relations and explore new avenues of cooperation. Prominent among these in the last year included those by Minister of Overseas India Affairs Vayalar Ravi, Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed, Advisor to Prime Minister T.K.A. Nair and Rahul Gandhi, MP. Besides, institutional mechanisms like Joint Working Groups on Labour, Employment and Manpower as well as Hydrocarbons were convened last year. A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Health was signed in April 2012 and the first Foreign Office Consultations between the two countries took place in May 2012. Both sides have been working closely to further intensify engagements at all levels.

The over 650,000 strong Indian community in Kuwait plays an important role in bilateral ties. It is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait and is present in practically every segment of society. It has a reputation for being industrious, talented, disciplined and law abiding. Our community's contribution to the development and prosperity of Kuwait is appreciated. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the benevolence bestowed on the Indian community by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, and for the goodwill of the friendly people of Kuwait.

India deeply values the contribution of its nationals in Kuwait. I am delighted that the Indian Doctors Forum, Kuwait was honoured with the coveted Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award on 9 January 2013 by our Rashtrapati in recognition of its services.

The Embassy has been consistently trying to improve the quality of its services to the Indian community in Kuwait. The outsourced service centres for passport and visa services have been functioning satisfactorily. Besides, from May 2012, an optional paid courier service facility for home-delivery of processed passports to the applicants has been initiated and this has been well-received. In addition to the daily "Consular Open House" at the Embassy during which a senior consular official could be met without appointment, I have started an 'Open House' every Wednesday where any Indian citizen can meet me without an appointment for any unresolved matter. In addition, the Embassy's "Indian Workers Welfare Centre" set up in September 2009 has been providing the much needed support system to our workers with its help desk, labour complaints desk, toll-free 24x7 telephonic helpline, free accommodation, free legal advice clinic and employment contract attestation system. It will be our endeavour to upgrade our services to the Indian community and respond to their expectations.

On this joyous occasion, as we commit ourselves anew to serving our people, our motherland, and the larger cause of humanity, I wish every Indian in Kuwait good health and prosperity. I also take this opportunity to convey best wishes for the continued good health and well-being of

HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, HH the Prime Minister, and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait.

Jai Hind!

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=188&SECTION=1>

4. Indians in Kuwait celebrate Republic Day, Kuwait, 26 January 2013.

Celebrations to commemorate the 64th Republic Day of India took place at the Embassy premises on the morning of 26 January 2013, with the unfurling of the Indian flag by the Ambassador of India, Mr. Satish C. Mehta. This was followed by the singing of the National Anthem and reading of the Address to the Nation of the Honourable President of India by the Ambassador. Thereafter, the all-girls brass band of the Indian Community School and the bugle band of the Bohra Community played a variety of tunes to the delight of the assembled gathering. This was followed by a colourful float and performance of folk dances by Indian Community School children. Thereafter, children from four Indian Schools as well as members of the Indian Community in Kuwait sang patriotic songs followed by an Open House reception. The festivities were attended by thousands of Indians from all walks of life, including project and domestic workers, engineers, doctors, and other professionals and representatives of Indian associations and businessmen, besides Embassy staff and their families.

In his interaction with the Community members, Ambassador Mehta stated that India-Kuwait relations are exemplary, longstanding, close and growing, characterized by mutual respect and understanding. The relationship extends beyond historical and cultural linkages to encompass political, trade and economic engagement. The large Indian community in Kuwait has a reputation for being industrious, talented, disciplined and law - abiding. He highlighted the efforts made by the Embassy to effectively address issues of concern of the Community. The Ambassador conveyed his warm greetings to all members of the Indian Community in Kuwait.

The Ambassador also extended his best wishes and warmest greetings for the continued good - health and well - being of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister and for progress and prosperity of the people of the friendly State of Kuwait.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=189&SECTION=1>

5. Reception held to celebrate Republic Day of India, Kuwait, 28 January 2013.

A reception was hosted by the Ambassador of India to Kuwait, HE Satish C. Mehta, and Mrs. Preeti Mehta at Hotel Crowne Plaza on 27 January 2013 to celebrate the 64th Republic Day of India. HE Mr. Khalid Sulaiman Al-Jarallah, Undersecretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Kuwait was the Chief Guest at the function. High dignitaries attending the event included HE Mubarak Bneih Al- Khurainej, Acting Speaker, Kuwait National Assembly, HE Sheikh Salman Sabah Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, HE Dr. Mohammad Barrak Al-Haifi, Minister of Health and HE Jassim Mohamad Al-

Kharafi, Former Speaker. A large number of other prominent Kuwaitis from various walks of life, senior officials, Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of Indian Community in Kuwait, doctors, engineers, professionals, businessmen, representatives of the media and other dignitaries attended the function.

During his address, the Ambassador spoke about the progress and development of India since its independence. He praised the centuries old close relations between India and Kuwait and said that these were further strengthened in 2012. The Ambassador conveyed his best wishes and greetings to HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, HH the Prime Minister, HE the Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister. He also conveyed his good wishes to the friendly State of Kuwait and its people.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=190&SECTION=1>

6. Reception held for visiting Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Kuwait, 30 January 2013.

Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs of India, H.E. E. Ahamed is on a visit to Kuwait from 29-31 January 2013 to represent India at the High - level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference on Syria scheduled on 30 January 2013.

The Ambassador of India Mr. Satish C. Mehta hosted a reception for the visiting Minister at India House on 29 January 2013. During his interaction with the members of the Indian community at the reception H.E Ahamed stated that all sides should work for peace in Syria and as a responsible member of International Community India considers it a duty to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria.

Speaking about India's bilateral relations with Kuwait, he stated that the bonds of friendship between the two countries have resulted in close political understanding and strong economic and cultural ties. India values its relationship with Kuwait and is committed to further strengthen and expand it.

During his interaction with the members of the Indian Community and members of the women association he discussed issues of interest to them. He appreciated the role of the Indian community in fostering closer links between India and Kuwait. He also congratulated the Indian Doctors Forum on being conferred with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman by the Hon'ble President of India at Kochi in January 2013.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=191&SECTION=1>

b. LEBANON

7. Remarks by Ambassador Ravi Thapar at the Reception hosted by him on the occasion of the 64th Republic Day of India 26th January 2013, Beirut, 29 January 2013.

Your Excellency, Mr. Walid Daouk, Minister of Information, Government of Lebanon and Representative of His Excellency, General Michel Sleiman, President of the Republic of Lebanon and of H.E. Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Lebanese National Assembly and of H.E. Najib Mikati, President of the Council of Ministers, Government of Lebanon.

Your Excellency, Mr. Ali Osseiran, Hon'ble Member of the Lebanese National Assembly, Representatives of various Lebanese political and religious parties, Excellencies and senior officials from the Government of Lebanon, Your Excellency, Mr. Gabriele Caccia, Ambassador of the Vatican and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Your Excellency, Ambassador Derek Plumbly, Under Secretary General and UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Excellencies - my colleague Ambassadors from all countries and other diplomats, Other Distinguished Representatives of the UN and various international organizations, Ali Ghandour and. Khaled Najjar, President and Vice President of ADLIR – the Association for Development of Lebanese Indian Relations and other ADLIR members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking all present here, for their gracious presence and participation in this celebration of India's 64th Republic Day. My wife and I feel very privileged at your having joined us for these festivities.

The year 2012 saw momentous changes all over the world. International scientists discovered the 'God Particle'. Technology and innovation gained new heights and the world became better connected through smart-phones. The digital revolution has given new speed and accuracy to all our scientific endeavours. However, as we gain more mastery over the elements, we also seem to be becoming more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and other natural calamities. Despite better education and appreciation for human values, mankind's quest for greater political, economic or military power seems to have made its vision more stunted, intolerant and parochial. Unfortunately, as things stand today, it seems a foregone conclusion that unless we take remedial steps, we will bequeath to our children and our grandchildren, a world filled with uncertainty, conflict, hatred and terrorism.

On the other hand, it is also true that with the dawn of an era of globalization, Internet and social media, a heady excitement and global consciousness is emerging in the international community. New energies of entrepreneurship and creativity are inspiring youth all over the world. Excellence on all fronts and compliance with international norms and standards, including in personal life and business, are increasingly becoming the USP of the day. In a country such as India, with a massive population of 1.2 billion, these trends unleash tremendous forces of change, upheaval and social transformation. In the short-term, these developments could be deemed as challenging and disturbing. In the long term however, they promise to become India's

strength. Indeed as the old blends with the new and modernity merges with tradition, the final product is unique. It is this openness of thought and vision, which India upholds and extols.

Sixty-three years ago on 26 January 1950, these were the ideals which guided the framers of the Indian Constitution and inspired them to consciously adopt a model of democracy which seeks nourishment from India's cultural and spiritual heritage but is nevertheless, open to ideas and dialogue with other countries and communities. According to our freedom fighters, democracy should not merely be limited to granting of political freedoms and the right of universal franchise but should also enable freeing of the spirit, liberating the soul and human consciousness from the shackles of poverty, bigotry, religious and social discrimination. Six decades after embarking on its journey as a democratic republic, India diligently pursues the dream of Mahatma Gandhi "to wipe every tear from every eye". However, the responsibility for empowering India's teeming millions is not merely confined to the country's political echelons. The Indian judiciary, media, civil society and other public institutions are integral and important contributors to all governance initiatives.

The tangible strides made by India in diverse fields during the last few decades, clearly establish that the choices made by our leadership many years ago, when India became independent, were wise. For despite being a heterogeneous country with 22 languages, 28 states spread over 3.3 million square kilometres and where all religions and sects of the world peacefully co-exist, India has steadily been progressing along its journey of achieving inclusive growth for its teeming millions. Currently, a sizeable economy of US\$1.9 trillion in classical GDP terms growing steadily every year at 6.5 per cent, in 2012, India attracted foreign direct investment to the tune of US\$23.4 billion from multinationals wishing to benefit from India's huge market and its middle class of some 350 million people. Its talented scientists and engineers have equipped India with the capacity to produce everything from cars, supercomputers, light combat aircraft, advanced light helicopters, missiles and if required, even products with nuclear capabilities. Despite this potential, the Indian ethos is pacifist and strictly based on 'ahimsa' and non-violence. This is because we firmly believe that rather than defence armaments and weapons of mass destruction, what India needs is new economic and trading partners and mutually beneficial, business alliances which will bring development, technology, prosperity and succour to its masses.

Based on this world view of peace, mutual respect and non-interference, India has also been strengthening its linkages and interaction with its Arab friends. A staunch supporter of the Palestine cause from the very beginning, India joined many other nations in enabling Palestine's inclusion as a non-member observer state in the UN General Assembly of 2012. Such sentiments of warmth and camaraderie also guide India's relations with our beautiful host country – Lebanon with which we historically have very close and friendly ties. Indian armed forces' personnel have been diligently guarding Lebanon's southern frontiers since 1998. India has also extended relief assistance to Lebanon during its hours of crisis and war with neighbouring

countries. In 2012, the bilateral trade between both countries touched US\$ 370 million. Possibilities of deepening economic & commercial ties by formalizing bilateral agreements such as the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, MoU for Cooperation in Agriculture and Allied Sectors and an Educational Exchange Programme are currently under consideration. Indian public sector oil companies have expressed keen interest in participating in Lebanon's initiatives to explore offshore gas and hydrocarbon deposits. India is also offering scholarships to Lebanese civilian and defence personnel for training in various disciplines under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme. Under the patronage of the Embassy, the Association for Development of Lebanese Indian Relations [ADLIR] has also been taking active steps for building new bridges between both countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the year 2012 has witnessed many changes and upheavals in the Middle East. However, as recent events have established in the Arab Spring countries, there is no single, preferred model of democracy or governance which can be imposed on them. Ultimately, it is the people of any particular country who will have to decide which method of governance best suits their needs and requirements. As external players, it may not be prudent for us to pressure others to adopt political systems in a few months or few years which many of our nations took decades or centuries to adopt and prepare ourselves for. India therefore endorses Lebanon's policy of disassociating itself from ongoing events in other countries. We also commend Lebanon's team of political leaders, officials and intellectuals for actively working to prevent Lebanon from being drawn into sectarian or other conflicts due to ongoing disturbances in its neighbourhood. We also welcome initiatives by the Government of Lebanon to focus on key economic and infrastructure issues.

On this auspicious occasion, on behalf of the government and people of India, I would like to propose a toast -

To the continued good health, well-being and prosperity of all citizens of Lebanon,

To ever-lasting peace and stability in Lebanon and

To the further deepening of friendship and ties between India and Lebanon

Long Live this beautiful country of ancient heritage and tradition!

Long live India!

Long live all our brothers and sisters in all countries and all over the world!

Thank You and

NAMASKAR

Source: Embassy of India, Beirut, <http://www.indianembassybeirut.org/news/view/15>

c. LIBYA

8. Courtesy call by H.E. Mr. Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India on H.E. Mr. Mohammed Mahmoud Al-Bargati, Minister of Defence of Libya, Tripoli, 9 January 2013.

On January 1, His Excellency Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India called on His Excellency Mohammed Mahmoud Al-Bargati, Minister of Defence to discuss the opportunities for enhancing and enriching our bilateral cooperation including in the area of defence and capacity building.

During the meeting Ambassador also invited the Minister to attend the Ninth International Aerospace Exposition “AERO INDIA – 2013” at Air Force Station, Yelahanka, Bengaluru (Karnataka), India from 6-10 February 2013.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=35&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

9. Courtesy call by H.E. Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India on H.E. Mohammed Fitouri Sualim, Hon'ble Minister of Labour and Retaining of State of Libya, Tripoli, 14 January 2013.

Highness, On 8 January , His Excellency Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India called on His Excellency Mohammed Fitouri Sualim, Minister of Labour and Retraining to discuss mutual cooperation in labour and capacity building.

The Minister appreciated the role played by the Indian workforce in Libya’s development especially those Indian medical staff who had opted to stay behind in Libya during the Revolution to help the injured. The Minister also appreciated the Indian offer to set up Vocational Training Centre and hoped for greater cooperation in training and capacity building of young Libyans in Indian institutes under the ITEC programme as well as on the self-financed basis. The Ambassador also discussed issues relating to welfare of Indian nationals and the need for institutionalized cooperation in this regard.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=36&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

10. Celebration of Republic Day of India, Tripoli, 31 January 2013.

On 26 January , H.E. Ambassador of India, Anil Trigunayat hoisted the national flag at India House in the presence of Indian community and read out the message of Hon’ble President of India.

In the evening, Ambassador hosted a reception at Hotel Radisson that included senior members of the government including Deputy Ministers, Director Generals as well as a cross-section of important Libyan businessmen, Parliamentarians, and heads of political parties. The delegation that visited India from High National Election Commission of Libya also attended the reception. Immediate past Prime Minister His Excellency Dr. Abdelrahim Al-Kieb was the Chief Guest who appreciated the strengthening of Indo-Libyan bilateral cooperation. This was the first reception and interaction held in the presence of wide spectrum of new Libyan leadership.

An Exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi' in the same Hotel was arranged which was witnessed by all guests and residents of the hotel and was highly appreciated. Almost every Libyan spoke very highly of the ideals that Mahatma Gandhi had imbibed and preached by example.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=38&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

d. OMAN

11. The Embassy of India, Muscat celebrates 64th Republic Day of India, Muscat, 26 January 2013.

On the occasion of the 64th Republic Day of India, the anniversary celebrations to mark the adoption of the Constitution of India on 26 January 1950, H.E. J.S. Mukul, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, unfurled the Indian National Flag and read out the Address of Hon'ble President of India Mr. Pranab Mukherjee at a ceremony organized at the Embassy of India premises. The Embassy function was attended by around 400 members of the Indian Community from all walks of life. Children of Indian School Wadi Kabir sang the National Anthem and patriotic songs.

Earlier in the morning, Ambassador unfurled the Indian National Flag, and witnessed a march-past at Indian School Muscat and read out the Hon'ble President of India's Address to the Nation. Around 500 members of the Indian Community including parents, teachers and students were present at Indian School Muscat. A bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was unveiled and a new school website launched. Children of the School sang the National Anthem and patriotic songs and presented a colourful cultural program showcasing the Glimpses of India on the occasion.

Source: Embassy of India, Muscat, <http://www.indemb-oman.org/What's-new-Republic%20day2013.asp>

e. QATAR

12. Republic Day Flag Hoisting, Doha, 26 January 2013.

To celebrate the 64th Republic Day of India, Flag Hoisting will be held at Embassy of India [No. 19, Street No. 828, Wadi Al Neel, Al Hilal Area, Doha] at 0900 hours on Saturday, 26 January, 2013.

Mr. Sanjiv Arora, Ambassador of India will hoist the National Flag and read the Address of Hon'ble President to the Nation. Students of Indian schools will participate in the programme. Refreshments will be served.

All Indian nationals are cordially invited to attend the Flag Hoisting function.

Source: Embassy of India, Doha, http://www.indianembassyqatar.org/press_release.php

f. Saudi Arabia

13. Open House for the Indian community members at the Embassy of India, Riyadh on Thursday 17 January, 2013 from 1000 hrs to 1200 hrs, Riyadh, 12 January 2013.

The Embassy of India Riyadh would be holding next Open House for Indian citizens to address their problems/grievances on Thursday, 17 January, 2013 in the Embassy premises from 1000 hrs to 1200 hrs.

During the Open House, members of the community can meet His Excellency Mr. Hamid Ali Rao Ambassador of India 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>

14. Republic Day Flag Hoisting, Riyadh, 12 January 2013.

On the occasion of 64th Republic Day, Shri. Hamid Ali Rao, Ambassador of India, will hoist the National Flag on Saturday, 26 January 2013, at 0900 hours, at the Embassy of India, B-1, Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh. All Indian nationals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are cordially invited to attend the flag hoisting ceremony, and be present in the Chancery premises at 0845 hours.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

g. SYRIA

15. High-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria January 29, 2013, New Delhi, 29 January 2013.

Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, will be participating in the 'High-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria' to be held in Kuwait on 30 January 2013. The conference, which is an important initiative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to express support to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, is being hosted by the Emir of Kuwait.

India has been closely following the developments in Syria and is deeply concerned about the hardships and sufferings of the people of Syria as a result of unabated violence in Syria.

India has already responded positively to the humanitarian needs of the people of Syria and had decided to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria in the form of life saving drugs and fortified biscuits.

In keeping with India's commitment to extend support to the Syrian people, India will be pledging an amount of around Rs. 14 crores towards humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria in the conference. This assistance will be in the form of life saving drugs, food and other essential items required by the people of Syria.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/21137/Highlevel+International+Humanitarian+Pledging+Conference+for+Syria>

16. Address by Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. E. Ahamed at High-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, Kuwait, 30 January 2013.

His Highness the Emir of the State of Kuwait;

His Excellency UN Secretary-General;

Distinguished Heads of State/Government;

Distinguished Foreign Ministers;

Distinguished invitees;

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to be here today to represent India at the ‘High-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria’. Let me thank the Kuwaiti leadership for hosting this conference and the United Nations Secretary-General for this need of the hour initiative.

All of us present here, representing a wide cross-section of countries, in our own ways are here to express support to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people arising out of continued escalation of violence and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria.

Syria has, historically and in contemporary times, been an important country in the Middle East. Its role in the Middle East peace process and in the stability of the wider region is pivotal. Thus, prolonged instability or unrest in Syria will have serious ramifications for the region and beyond.

India has been closely following the developments in Syria. Syria continues to face acute crisis as the impasse has become explosive and could engulf the region. India has strongly expressed its concern on the steep escalation of violence and has called upon all sides in Syria particularly the Syrian leadership to abjure violence and resolve all issues peacefully through discussions taking into account the aspirations of the people of Syria. We have also clearly articulated our position that there should be no outside military intervention and the peace process should be Syria-led. In this regard we supported the Geneva Communiqué which includes the 6-Point Plan of Kofi Annan, and have welcomed the appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi as the new Joint Special Envoy.

India is deeply concerned about the hardships and sufferings of the people of Syria as a result of unabated violence in Syria. Thousands of people are being displaced internally and have also fled to neighbouring countries like Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. India welcomes and fully supports the initiative of UN to address the need of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people.

India has always responded positively to the call for rendering humanitarian assistance and shall certainly do so in case of Syria as well. We have already processed humanitarian assistance to Syria in the form of life saving drugs and fortified biscuits.

In keeping with India's commitment to extend sympathy and support to the Syrian people, I am glad to announce at the conference that my government pledges US\$ 2.5 million towards humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria. This assistance will be in the form of life saving drugs, food and other essential items required by the people of Syria.

I take this opportunity to reiterate that India is extremely concerned about the security situation in Syria and the spiralling violence. India considers that the only acceptable way to resolve the internal crisis in Syria is through urgent peaceful negotiations with participation of all parties taking into account the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians.

I once again thank the State of Kuwait for hosting this conference and the UN for this timely initiative.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/21138/Address+by+Minister+of+State+for+External+Affairs+Shri+E+Ah+amed+at+Highlevel+International+Humanitarian+Pledging+Conference+for+Syria>

h. TURKEY

17. Important Announcement, Ankara, 14 January 2013.

Turkish Ministry of Economy has announced the lifting of anti-dumping safeguard measures imposed on cotton yarns from India, w.e.f. 31 December 2012.

Source: Embassy of India, Ankara, <http://www.indembassy.org.tr/Eklenti/46,important-announcement.pdf?0>

18. Commemoration of 64th Republic Day Flag-hoisting, Ankara, 24 January 2013.

Flag hoisting ceremony to commemorate the 64th Republic Day of India will be held at the Chancery premises at 77 Cinnah Caddesi, Cankaya, Ankara, from 09.30 hours to 1030 hours on Saturday, 26 January 2013. All members of Indian community and Friends of India are cordially invited to attend the function along with their family members. Kindly reach the Embassy by 0915 hours.

Source: Embassy of India, Ankara, <http://www.indembassy.org.tr/EN,309/republic-day.html>

i. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

19. Voting Rights, Abu Dhabi, 2 January 2013.

Every overseas Indian citizen, who is away from his place of ordinary residence in India owing to employment, education or otherwise and has not acquired citizenship of any other country has been given voting rights for electing their representatives to either Lok Sabha or concerned State Legislative Assembly. As a consequence, he/she is entitled to have his/her name registered in the electoral roll of the Assembly Constituency of his place of residence in India as mentioned in

his passport. After this enrolment, an overseas elector will be able to cast his vote in an election in the constituency, in person, at the concerned polling station provided for the part where he is registered as an overseas elector. The identification of overseas electors at the time of casting their votes at the polling stations shall be done on the basis of their original passports.

The overseas electors have to fill the form 6-A for registering themselves in the electoral rolls. Form 6-A is available on the website of the Election Commission of India i.e. www.eci.nic.in. The filled in form 6-A, along with the required self-attested documents need to be sent to the concerned Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) of the concerned constituency in which they are to be registered as voters, or deposited with EROs in person. The documents required are the relevant pages of the passport containing name, date of birth, place of birth, father's name, place of residence in India, passport details and details of the visa. The ERO will be the one which corresponds to Indian address, as mentioned in the passport of the overseas elector. The details of particulars of the EROs are available on the website of the Election Commission of India i.e. www.eci.nic.in. All NRIs in UAE are requested to get their names registered as voters to participate in this registration campaign.

Source: Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, <http://www.indembassyuae.org/drupal/node/825>

20. Indian Workers Resource Centre (IWRC), Abu Dhabi, 2 January 2013.

Indian Workers Resource Centre (IWRC) set up by the Embassy of India in Dubai is one-stop centre for providing all information related to various processes and procedures related to seeking benefits under Amnesty declared by the UAE Government. IWRC can be accessed by 24x7 helpline on toll free number 800 46342 (INDIA), e-mail help@iwrc-uae.com, fax 04-3559309, SMS: 055-7694747 or directly by walking into the IWRC counter located at 202, Al Jawaharlal Building, Bank Street (Khalid Bin Waleed Road), Bur Dubai P.O. Box-114100, UAE.

In addition to providing information, the 24x7 helpline of IWRC serves for dissemination of information on employment or other related issues. It also provides legal, financial and psychological counselling in its centre in Dubai and on Fridays in India Social & Cultural Centre, Abu Dhabi.

Any Indian can walk into the Centre, call its helpline number or seek counselling by getting an appointment fixed a priori.

Source: Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, <http://www.indembassyuae.org/drupal/node/824>

SPECIFIC ISSUES

j. SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

21. Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative in the Security Council Open Debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question", New York, 23 January 2013.

Mr. President,

At the outset, please allow me to express our appreciation to you Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. I would like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question. I would like to join others to welcome the participation of Foreign Minister of the Observer State of Palestine, H. E. Dr. Riad Al Malki in today's debate and thank him for his statement. I also would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel for his statement.

Mr. President, amidst unprecedented transformation of the Arab World, the continuing stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process, is clearly not in the interest of the region. There have been no direct talks between Israel and Palestine, for more than two years. Efforts of the international community including those of the Quartet towards resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine have yielded no results.

Against this backdrop, the overwhelming vote in the General Assembly on November 29 last year, upgrading the status of Palestine to a non-member state is a positive development. It is a decisive achievement for Palestine in the history of its long and arduous struggle to reach its final goal of an independent and viable Palestinian State. India, which has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora, co-sponsored this resolution. India will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

Mr. President, developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since the historic vote in the General Assembly have been most unhelpful for the Palestinian cause. The intensification of settlement activities by Israel, despite widespread international condemnation, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are creating new realities on the ground, thereby threatening the very premise of a two-state solution. We join others in urging Israel to end the settlement activity in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

Mr. President, settlements, roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation continue to cause severe hardships to the Palestinian population. These are also adversely affecting the normal functioning of Palestinian state institutions. The Palestinian Authority is facing a severe financial crisis. The financial crisis could erode the significant progress made in building Palestinian state institutions, if immediate attention is not given to the issue. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority to meet its budgetary shortfalls.

The blockade of Gaza is in its sixth year. It is affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. While Israel has taken several measures to allow flow of essential goods into Gaza, these cannot be a substitute for lifting the blockade. Recent hostilities in Gaza are again a stark reminder to the international community of the dangers, that continuing

stalemate in the Peace Process can bring about. We hope both parties will continue to uphold the ceasefire agreement and implement its provisions in good faith.

The recent rapprochement between various Palestinian factions is indeed welcome. We hope that efforts towards promotion of reconciliation will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation a Unity Government, holding of elections, reunification of Palestinian state institutions, and measures for reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

Mr. President, India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. India was the first non-Arab State to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1975 and in 1988 became one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine.

India has also extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority since its establishment and has been a partner in the socio-economic development of Palestine in its quest for a life of dignity and self-reliance. Our assistance has been for humanitarian relief, development projects, establishment of educational and training facilities, budgetary support etc. This year, India has pledged an amount of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes US\$ 1 million annually to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Following the three MoUs signed during the visit of President Abbas to India in September 2012, India is in the process of implementing projects in the fields of Information & Communication Technology, Vocational Training and Construction of Schools. In addition, India is implementing development projects in Palestine with Brazil and South Africa as partners in IBSA.

India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its Capital, side by side and at peace with Israel as endorsed in various United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the Quartet Road Map. Let me also state here that progress on Lebanese and Syrian track remains critical for lasting peace in the region. We remain hopeful that environment conducive for direct talks can be achieved in the near future. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Lastly, Mr. President, we remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating security situation and continuing violence in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We urge all the parties to stop violence and engage in an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the conflict through peaceful means based on the internationally approved political and legal basis including the UN Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043 and the Joint Communiqué of the Geneva Action Group.

I thank you.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York,
<http://www.un.int/india/2013/pmi04.pdf>

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