

INDIA SPEAKS

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. ALGERIA

1. Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed to Algeria, 18 April 2013.

E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs paid an official visit to Algeria from 17-18 April 2013 at the invitation of Foreign Minister of Algeria: The prime objective of the visit was to revive and renew our already strong bilateral relations on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Algeria's Independence and 50 Years of Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between India and Algeria. Algeria is the largest country in Africa and second largest economy with considerable trade existing between India and Algeria to the extent of US\$2.2 billion. The exports to Algeria have increased manifold to reach US\$1. 1 billion in 2012.

The Minister called on H.E. Abdelmalek Sellal, Prime Minister of Algeria and H.E. Mourad Medelci, Foreign Minister. During his interaction with both the leaders, the Minister of State discussed the possibility of signing term contracts for supply of oil and natural gas to India, Algeria being the 4th largest producer of oil in Africa. Possibility of joint venture in manufacture of gas-based nitrogenous fertilizers for captive export to India was also discussed. A road map for further strengthening of areas of bilateral cooperation including political, commercial & economic, human resource development, science & technology etc. were discussed while presenting to the Algerian side.

The Algerian side requested India for furthering cooperation in the field of ICT and pharmaceuticals whereas E. Ahamed expressed interest in participating in the Presidential programme for development of infrastructure including social housing, roads & highways, railways and airports. Possibility of more cultural cooperation and people to people contact including hosting Indian Food Festival and Films Festival in Algeria were also discussed.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the excellent level of bilateral relations in various sectors. However, both agreed that a large potential exists for further development of these relations for which the two sides would work together under the road map drawn for it.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/21569/Visit+of+Minister+of+State+for+External+Affairs+Shri+E+Ahamed+to+Algeria>

b. EGYPT

2. Ten Egyptians selected for India's prestigious C.V. Raman International Fellowship 2013, Cairo, 7 April 2013.

Ten Egyptian professors and senior scientists from various Egyptian universities, Ministries, Research Institutes have been selected for the CV Raman International Fellowship Programme offered by the Department of Science and Technology and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India for the year 2013. Out of the 10 selected candidates six candidates are selected for post-doctoral research in agricultural, veterinary and space sciences and three candidates have been selected for Senior-Fellowship position in chemical and physical sciences. One candidate will be on a Visiting Fellowship in the field of Biotechnology. The selected candidates will travel to India between April to September 2013 to join various prestigious Indian educational and research institutions located in different parts of India.

The CV Raman Fellowship programme was started for African Researchers in the year 2010 to provide them the opportunity to conduct collaborative research with leading research groups in Indian universities and R&D Institutions in areas of Science and Technology. The CV Raman Fellowship has been provided in three different categories namely post doctoral, senior fellowship and visiting fellowship covering all areas of science, technology including biomedical and health sciences with durations ranging from one to six months. So far, more than 30 Egyptian scientists have benefited from the programme.

Ambassador of India Navdeep Suri while welcoming the selection of Egyptian professors and scholars said “the exchange of scholars and scientist between the two countries reflects the depth and diversity of our relationship. I am confident that the scholars and scientific community in the two countries will benefit immensely from these collaborations and break new grounds to bring the benefits of science to the lives of our people.”

C.V. Raman (1888-1970) is regarded as one of India's most distinguished scientists. He received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1930 for the discovery that when light traverses a transparent material, some of the light that is deflected changes in wavelength. This phenomenon is popularly known as Raman Effect.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=497

3. A visual treat of Indian handicrafts and calligraphy at the Hanagir Hall, Cairo Opera House Complex, Cairo, 16 April 2013.

The Embassy of India, Cairo, in collaboration with Teamwork productions is organizing a unique exhibition of visual arts 'Akshara' at the Hanager Arts Centre from 15-21 April 2013 (open between 1200 hours – 2100 hours) showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Indian scripts. The festival is presented by TCI Sanmar chemicals SAE the largest Indian investor in Egypt. The main sponsors of the event are the Kirloskars, the Aditya Birla Group and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

The inaugural of the function, held on 15 April, witnessed a combined calligraphy by two calligraphers, Dr. Salah Abdel Khalid and Rajeev Kumar who produced a stunning piece of art to the singing of an Indian hymn by Mukesh Tomar. Mohamed El Bergini, an icon of Egyptian calligraphy was also present among other dignitaries.

'Akshara' - Crafting Indian Scripts, is an exhibition of over 100 museum-quality exhibits created by a not for profit national association of crafts people called Dastkari Haat Samiti. Its team has worked with 60 producer-groups or individuals in 14 official Indian languages and scripts using 21 different craft, textile and art forms, covering 16 states of India in what is a really unique and innovative attempt unseen till then.

The exhibition showcases India's great written heritage by focusing on of calligraphy through craft forms in multi-faceted ways by linking the art of calligraphy and design creating a new repertoire of designs that incorporates the ancient with the contemporary. Handcrafted applications of scripts on metal, carved and inlaid wood, clay, stone, pottery and stoneware, papier-mâché, a range of embroidered and woven textiles, and different areas of traditional art like paper cut, shibori, hand block printing, and a variety of lesser-known forms of folk art were on display.

Rajeev Kumar, an Indian calligrapher, has a dazzling display of Indian calligraphy in many scripts and techniques. An art film named Aksharakaram combining classical movements in dance with calligraphy with well-known dancers Navtej Johar and Justin McCarthy and calligrapher Rajeev Kumar will be part of the exhibition.

The main person behind the whole event is Jaya Jaitly who founded Dastkari Haat Samiti, which enables traditional workers to gain confidence in the marketplace through many innovative strategies. She has an intimate knowledge of the craft traditions of the country having worked in the field for over 40 years. She regularly guides crafts people in design, organization and marketing all over India and organizes major exhibitions promoting India's arts, crafts and culture in India and abroad in which craftspeople are an intrinsic part. She now focuses her public work to the craft sector and writing, although she is still active on many political issues,

including women's empowerment, and human rights. A prolific writer, Jaya has published books on the Crafts of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, the Craft Traditions of India, Viswakarma's Children, a socio-economic study of crafts people, and Crafting Nature. She has created a vast documentation of the arts, crafts and textiles of India through 24 highly artistic and unique maps of all the states of India, which has been compiled into a major publication called Crafts Atlas of India.

Speaking after the inauguration of the exhibition, Ambassador of India Navdeep Suri said, 'The focus of the India by the Nile festival is on forging meaningful and sustainable collaborations between India and Egypt in the field of arts and crafts. The canvas produced jointly by an Indian and Egyptian calligrapher is an example of this. Jaya Jaitley will also be sharing her extensive experience with Dr. Heba Handoussa and the Egypt Network for Integral Development (ENID) and with different groups of Egyptian artisans.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=509

4. Bollywood fusion show rocks the Cairo Opera House, Cairo, 16 April 2013.

In a first of its kind in Egypt, the Embassy of India and Teamwork productions in collaboration with the soloists of the Cairo Opera Ballet Company presented "Bollywood Music and Dance Fusion" at the Opera House main hall on 14 and 15 April 2013. The shows ran to full houses on both days and received enthusiastic support from the audience. Bollywood Fusion is a whirlwind of colourful dancing, singing and performances by Bollywood singers Mukesh Tomar, Parul Mishra, and choreographed by Gilles Chuyen with dancers from the Cairo Opera Ballet Company. The spectacular show weaves together melodic music, vibrant costumes, amazing lighting and great dancing into a colourful spectacle. Renowned Egyptian actor Hisham Abbas who was the chief guest for the launch of the premiere show on 14 April sprang a surprise by singing his famous song 'Nare Nare' along with Parul and repeated the performance owing to its popularity on the first day. Renowned Egyptian actress Leila Elwi also graced the second day's performance with her presence along with several dignitaries from the government of Egypt and notable members of society.

The festival is presented by TCI Sanmar chemicals SAE, the largest Indian investor in Egypt. The main sponsors of the event are the Kirloskars, the Aditya Birla Group and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

A Bollywood workshop preceding the performance was also conducted by Gilles Chuyen at the Al Sawy Culture Wheel earlier on 13 April. Trained in France in folk, modern Jazz, ballet and contemporary dance styles, Gilles Chuyen, has been teaching Bollywood dance style extensively in India, UK and South Africa. He has choreographed plays directed by the most prestigious Indian directors, which have taken him all over India and to the UK, Singapore, Pakistan,

Mexico and Columbia. Bollywood workshops communicate the energy and fun that is the hallmark of Indian cinema.

Speaking at the end of the second show, Indian Ambassador to Egypt Navdeep Suri said 'I am deeply impressed by the skill, enthusiasm and energy of the young dancers of the Cairo Opera Ballet Company. They have learnt complex dance steps within a matter of days and have delivered a joyful performance that had the packed house cheering and clapping.'

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=508

c. IRAN

5. PM condoles the loss of lives in Iran earthquake, New Delhi, 17 April 2013.

The Prime Minister condoled the loss of lives and destruction in the earthquake in Iran.

Dr. Manmohan Singh in a message, to President Ahmadinejad of Iran, offered all possible assistance to Iran in the relief efforts.

Excerpt of the Prime Minister's message is as follows:

"It is with deep sorrow that I learnt about the earthquake that struck the eastern region of Iran today.

The people of India join me in conveying our deepest condolences for the loss of life, injury and destruction of property as a result of this natural disaster. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Iran. I am confident that with the support of your government, the people of Iran will respond to this tragedy with their characteristic resolve and resilience and will succeed in restoring normalcy quickly.

We are prepared to provide all assistance within our means to support your efforts to provide relief to the affected people."

Source: Prime Minister of India, New Delhi, <http://pmindia.nic.in/press-details.php?nodeid=1607>

d. KUWAIT

6. Photographic Exhibition of Islamic Monuments of India, Kuwait, 4 April 2013.

The Embassy of India, Kuwait in association with National Council of Arts, Culture & Letters is organizing an exhibition of Photographs of Islamic Monuments of India by Benoy K Behl, Art - Historian & Photographer at Al-Edwani Hall, Dahiyat Abdullah Al-Salem. The exhibition is being inaugurated at 1900 hours on 21 May 2013 and shall be kept open till 27 May 2013. All are cordially welcome to the exhibition.

A write-up of the exhibition is appended below:

India is an enchanted land, watered by streams of compassionate philosophies since ancient times. There are flourishing communities here of the Islamic, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish faiths, as well as of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh faiths that were born here. There is a great cosmopolitan heritage of India's culture and art.

India has a vast, rich and varied heritage of Islamic architecture. These monuments are a great treasure of our cultural heritage and are of particular value as they reflect India's artistic and cultural links with many other countries.

The Mughal monuments are very beautiful and are well known. Besides presenting these, this exhibition also shows the exquisite mosques and dargahs of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kashmir and other parts of India. Far more than in the North of India, it was in the Deccan that India received the cultural and artistic influences of Persia and of the Arab world. The many exquisite monuments of the Deccan display the confluence of cultures which took place here.

A view of the rich Islamic heritage of India is presented in this exhibition through the eyes of renowned photographer Benoy K Behl. He is a filmmaker, art-historian and photographer who are known for his tireless and prolific output of work over the past 31 years. He has taken over 34,000 photographs of Asian monuments and art heritage, made a hundred documentaries on art history; his exhibitions have been warmly received in 24 countries around the world.

His films, including 26 documentaries on 'The Paintings of India' and 26 documentaries on 'The Sculpture of India' have been nationally telecast on prime time in India. Behl has been invited to lecture by most of the important universities and museums around the world, which have departments of Asian art. His book on 'The Ajanta Caves' is published by Thames & Hudson, London and Harry N. Abrams, New York.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait,

<http://www.indembkwt.org/ShowNews.aspx?ID=235&SECTION=1>

e. LIBYA

7. Courtesy call by H.E. Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India on H.E. Dr. Awad al-Bor'asi, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of the State of Libya, 3 April 2013.

On 2 April 2013, His Excellency Anil Trigunayat, Ambassador of India called on His Excellency Dr. Awad Al-Bor'asi, Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of the State of Libya to discuss cooperation in the area of capacity building and power sector.

They also discussed means and ways for enhancing trade & economic cooperation and business relations between the two countries. Deputy Prime Minister appreciated the Indian assistance in the area of training and capacity building as well as that of the Indian technical workforce. Ambassador also extended an invitation to the Deputy Prime Minister to visit India as per his convenience which was accepted.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly//index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=43&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

8. Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed to Libya from 14 to 16 April 2013), Tripoli, 14 April 2013.

Honourable Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed will be visiting Libya from 14-16 April 2013. During the visit, the Minister is scheduled to meet his Libyan counterpart and other high dignitaries.

E. Ahamed's visit will be the first high-level interaction with the political leadership of Libya in the post-Gaddafi era. The visit will underline India's continued political and economic engagement with Libya.

Bilateral trade between the two countries has seen a significant growth with Indian exports reaching US\$144 million and imports exceeding US\$1.2 billion in the latter half of 2012-13. Indian companies have expressed their intent to undertake projects in Libya. India has conveyed its readiness to Libya to extend assistance in Libya's political transition and also in rebuilding of the country. A consignment of life saving medicines was handed over by the Honourable Minister of State to the Libyan side in January 2012.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly//index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=45&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

9. Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed to Libya, New Delhi, 15 April 2013.

H. E. E. Ahamed, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs of India, paid an official visit to Libya from 14-16 April 2013, at the invitation of Foreign Minister of Libya. The visit has taken place in the backdrop of new democratic Libya and was the first high-level visit after the visit of External Affairs Minister to Libya in 2007. India, being the largest democracy, greatly appreciates the onset of democracy in Libya and looks forward to further enrich it through cooperation in vital sectors that are essential for New Libya's stability, reconstruction, development and institution and capacity building.

The Honourable Minister has made calls on H. E. Dr. Mohammad Yousef Al-Magarief, President of the General National Congress, and H. E. Dr. Ali Zeidan, Prime Minister, on 15 April 2013. Both the leaders have welcomed return of Indian companies and Indians to Libya to partake in the reconstruction and development of new Libya.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the excellent bilateral relations as well as cooperation in the field of health, education, IT, pharmaceuticals sectors. The President thanked India's offer for providing assistance and expertise in drafting of Libyan Constitution and expressed desire to be benefited from India's experience. They also assured of looking into the financial losses suffered by the Indian companies.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/21552/Visit+of+Minister+of+State+for+External+Affairs+Shri+E+Ahamed+to+Libya>

10. H. E. E. Ahamed, Honourable Minister of State for External Affairs of India, official visit to Tripoli-Libya, Tripoli, 18 April 2013.

H. E. E. Ahamed, Honourable Minister of State for External Affairs of India, paid an official visit to Tripoli from 14-16 April 2013, at the invitation of Foreign Minister of Libya. The visit has taken place in the backdrop of new democratic Libya and was the first high-level visit after the visit of External Affairs Minister to Libya in 2007.

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The visiting Minister held detailed discussions with H.E. Mohamed Emhemed Abdulaziz on the whole gamut of bilateral relations as well as cooperation in multilateral fora and reiterated the invitation to him from H.E the Minister of External Affairs to visit India on mutually convenient dates which was gratefully accepted. He also met the Libyan Minister of Oil& Gas; Minister of Economy; and Minister of Housing and Utilities and discussed the ways and means to enhance collaboration for mutual interest in Libya's quest for reconstruction and development. Minister Ahamed also met the leaders of major Libyan political parties. He assured of India's continued commitment to provide assistance especially in capacity building to Libyans which was highly appreciated. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the excellent bilateral relations as well as cooperation in the field of health, education, IT, and pharmaceuticals sectors.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=46&cntnt01pagelimit=5&cntnt01returnid=15>

f. OMAN**11. Omani Parliamentary Delegation in India, Muscat, 21 April 2013.**

A 11 member Omani Parliamentary Delegation under the Chairmanship of H.E. Abdullah Salem Nasser Al Makhaini, Member of Shura Council left for India on 21 April 2013. The Omani Parliamentary Delegation is visiting India for the first Meeting of the Oman-India Parliamentary Friendship Group. The delegation was seen off by H.E. J.S. Mukul, Ambassador of India.

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

12. Press Release, Muscat, 22 April 2013.

In line with the decision of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for adoption of Fridays and Saturdays as the new weekly off days, it has been decided that effective 1 May 2013, the Embassy of India in Muscat, Oman would also follow the same, i.e., Fridays and Saturdays as its weekly off days. Office hours, would, however, remain the same.

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

13. Visit of Parliamentary Friendship Group to India, Muscat, 26 April 2013.

A 11 member Omani Parliamentary Delegation, led by H.E. Abdullah Salim Nasser Al Makhaini visited India from 22 to 26 April 2013 and held the first-ever meeting of India- Oman Parliamentary Friendship Group, in New Delhi. The Group comprising members of the Shura Council called on External Affairs Minister & MOS (EA), visited Parliament Library & Museum, and witnessed the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. During its visit to Mumbai, the Group called on the Governor of Maharashtra.

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

g. SAUDI ARABIA**14. Press Release, Riyadh, 1 April 2013.**

Indian Embassy requires a Clerk in the pay scale of SR.3000-90-4350-130-5650-170-7350. Applicants should (a) hold a degree (b) be able to operate computers effectively (c) have a good command of spoken and written English. Interested candidates with requisite qualifications may send their CVs to (i) E-mail hoc.riyadh@mea.gov.in (ii) P.O. Box No.94387, Riyadh-11693. Last day for receiving applications is 7 April 2013.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh, <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

15. Press Release, Riyadh, 1 April 2013.

A number of people have been approaching the Indian Embassy in Diplomatic Quarters for Out Pass (Emergency Certificate). At present, the Embassy is accepting application forms for Out Pass. Out Pass will be issued after completion of formalities including Exit formalities with the Saudi authorities.

Please note that no amnesty has been declared by Saudi authorities. Indian Embassy is in touch with the Saudi authorities and will notify the Indian community if it receives any information in this regard. Out Pass will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants. Embassy will announce updates on these through media release. A 24-hour Embassy helpline would also provide information on these steps.

Embassy would like to re-iterate that Emergency Certificate is a one-way travel document valid for three months only. Those who already have a valid passport need not come to the Embassy.

The Embassy urges the Indian expatriate community not to panic based on inaccurate reports published by some sections of the Indian media. The Embassy is fully committed towards the wellbeing of Indian nationals and will continue to address issues of their concern within the framework of applicable Saudi laws, keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations with this country and the welfare of more than two million Indians resident in Saudi Arabia.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

16. Press Release, Riyadh, 2 April 2013.

The Embassy of India will remain closed on 4-5 April 2013 on account of closed holidays.

This is to inform the members of Indian community that NO applications for Emergency Certificate will be issued or received on the above-mentioned dates by the Embassy.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

17. Press Release, Riyadh, 2 April 2013.

The Embassy is getting several requests for opening counters at various cities of Saudi Arabia to collect applications for Out Pass (Emergency Certificates) for return to India. In order to help the Indian nationals in other cities who wish to apply for Emergency Certificates, it has been decided that their applications will be received in the Embassy by Post/Courier. Emergency Certificates will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants. Embassy would like to re-iterate that Emergency Certificate is a one-way travel document valid for three months only. Those who already have a valid passport should not apply for Emergency Certificate.

The duly filled application forms for Emergency Certificates along with copy of the passport, resident permit and any other document to establish the Indian nationality may be forwarded to EC Section, Embassy of India, B-1 Diplomatic Quarter, PO Box 94387, Riyadh - 11693, Saudi Arabia. There is no need for Indian nationals to visit the Embassy premises in the Diplomatic Quarter to submit the applications for Emergency Certificates. Please note that your mobile numbers and contact numbers are required to be clearly mentioned in the application forms.

Please note that the Emergency Certificate forms are available free of cost. It can be downloaded from the Embassy of India website <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/>. (Click <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/WebFiles/Scan0001.pdf> to download EC Form) Photocopies of these forms can be used freely for submitting the applications.

The Embassy would like to inform the Indian community in Saudi Arabia that the no agent, association or community social worker has been appointed by the Embassy to distribute/collect Emergency Certificate application forms.

Please note that No amnesty has been declared by Saudi authorities. This Embassy is in touch with the Saudi authorities and will notify the Indian community if it receives any information in this regard. It is reiterated that Emergency Certificates will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants. Embassy will continue to issue updates on these through regular media release. The 24-hour Embassy helpline would also provide information on these steps.

The Embassy urges the Indian expatriate community not to panic based on inaccurate reports published by some sections of the media. The Embassy is fully committed towards the wellbeing of Indian nationals and will continue to address issues of their concern within the framework of applicable Saudi laws, keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations with this country and the welfare of more than two million Indians resident in Saudi Arabia.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,
<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

18. Press Release, Riyadh, 7 April 2013.

The Embassy of India in Riyadh urges all Indian nationals affected by the Nitaqat programme to use the three-month grace period announced by Saudi Arabia to regularize their legal status for stay in Saudi Arabia and also to arrange their exit as per rules and regulations of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia immediately.

The Embassy proposes to set up a panel of legal firms to assist those Indian nationals who seek initial legal assistance in this regard.

The Embassy of India seeks 'Expression of Interest' from reputed legal firms in Saudi Arabia to assist the Indian nationals to regularize their Iqama status, as per the Saudi laws and regulations. Reputed law firms which have branches/offices in all major cities of Saudi Arabia intending to be on the panel of the Embassy of India may forward their company profile along with the following information:

- Profile of the firm;
- Services offered by the firm;
- Experience of the firm in handling labour related cases;

- Initial Legal Assistance that could be provided for regularizing Iqama, changing sponsors etc during the grace period and charges / fees in respect of each case.

The firm will be required to advise the Embassy on the best course of action under the prevailing Saudi laws on the procedure to be followed for regularizing the legal status of affected Indians in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

For any further clarification, please contact First Secretary (Community Welfare), Telephone 4884032. The complete profile and other information of the interested legal firms shall reach the Indian Embassy, Riyadh, [B-1, Diplomatic Quarters, PB No. 94387, Riyadh – 11693], Saudi Arabia, on or before 15 April 2013 and a copy by mail to sscw@indianembassy.org.sa; hoc.riyadh@mea.gov.in; and pol.riyadh@mea.gov.in

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

19. Press Release, Riyadh, 8 April 2013.

With effect from 15 April 2013, Tatkal service on passports will also be available at the Umm Ul Hammam office of VFS Global. No application will be accepted in the Embassy premises. The application will be accepted between 0900-1130 hours and delivery will be from 1700 hours to 1800 hours on all working days.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

20. Expression of Interest, Riyadh, 10 April 2013.

Ambassador H.E. Hamid Ali Rao held a meeting with H.E. Dr. Moufarrej Haqbani, Vice Minister for Labour at the Ministry of Labour of Saudi Arabia on 8 April and discussed issues relating to the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia. Ambassador welcomed the announcement by Government of Saudi Arabia giving three months grace period for the expatriate community to legalize their stay in Saudi Arabia. He said that the Embassy has initiated various steps to help the Indian expatriate community to effectively use these three months grace period including by providing initial legal assistance in deserving cases.

The Embassy continues to receive applications for Emergency Certificates - ECs (travel documents) from Indian nationals for taking up their case of final exit with the Saudi authorities for favourable consideration, within the framework of applicable Saudi laws. ECs will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants. The Embassy will announce the updates through media release.

Every Indian national wanting to leave Saudi Arabia on final exit, but does not have valid Indian or Saudi documents is urged to register with the Embassy so that their cases can be taken up with the Saudi authorities effectively within the framework of applicable Saudi laws, keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations with this country and the welfare of more than two million Indians resident here.

They may also send duly filled application forms for Emergency Certificates along with copy of the passports, any other document to establish the Indian nationality by Post/Courier to EC Section, Embassy of India, B-1 Diplomatic Quarter, PO Box 94387, Riyadh - 11693, Saudi Arabia.

Embassy is currently making a panel of reputed legal firms in Saudi Arabia to assist the Indian nationals to regularize their Iqama status, as per the Saudi laws and regulations. The Embassy has also sought 'Expression of Interest' from law firms in Saudi Arabia to provide initial legal assistance in deserving cases to the Indians in Jails/detention centres/under trials and also to those Indian nationals in dire need of such assistance.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

21. Press Release, Riyadh, 17 April 2013.

During March 2013, Embassy of India realized for affected Indian community members as legal dues on account of death compensation an amount of three crore rupees. The Embassy of India would like to release a few additional figures in respect of the assistance rendered to fellow Indians by the Community Welfare Wing of the Embassy during the last two years:

The number of labour complaints received during the last two years are as follows:

Year	EOI, Riyadh
2011	2,330
2012	2,781

The number of death cases handled during the last two years are as follows:

Year	EOI, Riyadh
2011	1,249
2012	1,404

Details of Death Compensation and Legal Dues handled/ realized during the last two years are as follows:

Year	Death Compensation Amount realized (Rs.)	Legal Dues Amount realized (Rs.)
2011	7,575,680	76,551,510
2012	6,823,937	100,421,973

The number of Emergency Certificates (ECs) issued during the last two years are as follows:-

Year	EOI, Riyadh
2011	28,928
2012	4,073

The following table gives year-wise details for the number of workers for whom the Missions attested recruitment documents:-

Year	EOI, Riyadh
2011	19,926
2012	15,187

The above numbers do not reflect the actual numbers of workers arriving in the Kingdom as all documents are not presented for attestation.

Number of housemaids who were provided assistance and returned to India during the last two years is as follows:-

Year	EOI, Riyadh
2011	207
2012	177

The Embassy of India in Riyadh is committed to continue serving the community within the framework of Saudi laws and keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries and the welfare of the over two million Indian community resident in Saudi Arabia

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,
<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

22. Press Release, Riyadh, 17 April 2013.

The Embassy of India is receiving queries from green category companies in Saudi Arabia offering placement to those Indian workers affected by Nitaqat programme. The request received include that of Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. (TCIL) which is looking for Surveyors, Draughtsmen Supervisors (Electrical & Optical Fibre), Transformer Technicians, Masons, Painters, Overhead lines Construction Technicians, Carpenters, HDD with Saudi Driving License, Machine Operator with License, Electrical Cable Jointers, OFCs, Splicers, Data Entry Operators, Welders, Technician Substation, Electricians and Labours.

Those wish to change from red category to TCIL may apply to Mr. P. Suresh Babu, Joint General Manager (Administration), Telecommunications Consultants India Limited, Building

No. 6997, Abdul Latif Bin Abdul Rehman Road, Naseem Area, P.O. Box 88987, Postal Code 11672, Riyadh or email to tcilksa@tcil-india.com or contact Mr. V. Anand, Administrative Officer, Phone No. 2378671, Extn. 231.

Another major Saudi company in new industrial area has approached this Embassy offering placement for around 300 Indian workers (skilled and unskilled labour) currently in red category companies. Those interested may contact Mr. P.T. Chandramohan, Cell 0564423989 and email chandram@riyadh-cables.com.

The Embassy urges other companies in green category also to come forward with such placement offers to Indians in red category companies.

In case of any legal complications for transfer of jobs, Embassy could be contacted for initial legal assistance.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

23. Press Release, Riyadh, 18 April 2013.

The Indian Community Schools in major cities of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will set up collection centres to collect Emergency Certificate (EC) application forms from Indian nationals. The Indian Schools namely IIS Riyadh, IIPS Riyadh, IIS Dammam, IIS Jeddah, IIS Jubail, IIS Buraidah, IIS Al-Khafji, IIS Taif, IIS Majmah and IIS Tabuk will set up Collection Boxes during school working hours starting 22 April 2013. The Embassy is making arrangements to collect these forms from the Schools.

The VFS Centres in Dammam, Jubail, Wadi Al Dawasir, Hail and Buraidah, will also have Collection Boxes in which duly filled in EC application forms may be dropped during working hours. No fee is charged for dropping the EC applications at the Collection Centres.

Every Indian national wanting to leave Saudi Arabia on final exit, but does not have valid Indian or Saudi documents is urged to register with the Embassy by submitting EC application forms so that their cases can be taken up with the Saudi authorities effectively within the framework of applicable Saudi laws, keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations with this country and the welfare of more than two million Indians resident here. It is reiterated that Emergency Certificates will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants.

The duly filled application forms for Emergency Certificates along with copy of the passport, resident permit and any other document to establish the Indian nationality could also be forwarded by Post/Courier to EC Section, Embassy of India, B-1 Diplomatic Quarter, PO Box 94387, Riyadh - 11693, Saudi Arabia. Please note that mobile numbers and contact numbers are required to be clearly mentioned in the application forms.

The Emergency Certificate forms are available on the Embassy of India website <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/>. For any further queries, please e-mail at labour.riyadh@mea.gov.in or call at the 24-hour Embassy helpline numbers i.e. +966-1-4884697 & 4881982.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,
<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

24. Press Release, Riyadh, 22 April 2013.

Ambassador H.E Hamid Ali Rao today (22 April 2013) called on Minister of Labour H.E Adel bin Muhammad Fakeih at the Ministry of Labour in Riyadh. Ambassador discussed the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia in the context of the Nitaqat programme.

Ambassador recalled the excellent bilateral relations between India and Saudi Arabia. He thanked H.E Adel Fakeih for the decision by His Majesty the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques to give three months grace period for those affected by the Nitaqat programme to correct their legal status in Saudi Arabia.

The Embassy of India urges all Indian nationals affected by the Nitaqat programme to fully utilize the three months grace period announced by the Saudi authorities to correct their visa status. Those cases where people are not able to correct their legal status may approach the Embassy for assistance. Any specific cases where assistance is required may be forwarded to labour.riyadh@mea.gov.in

The Embassy of India also urges all Indian nationals wanting to leave Saudi Arabia but does not have valid documents to obtain final exit from Saudi authorities also to register with the Embassy by submitting their Emergency Certificate (EC) application forms. Please note that No amnesty has been declared by Saudi authorities. The Embassy is in touch with the Saudi authorities and will notify the Indian community if it receives any information in this regard. It is reiterated that Emergency Certificates will be issued only after the Saudi authorities agree to grant permission for the final exit of the applicants.

The Embassy is fully committed towards the wellbeing of Indian nationals and will continue to address issues of their concern within the framework of applicable Saudi laws, keeping in view the excellent bilateral relations with this country and the welfare of more than two million Indians resident in Saudi Arabia.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,
<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=790&PID=691>

25. Problems of Indian employees in Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 25 April 2013.

Question:

Will the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs be pleased to state?

- (a) Whether Government had any bilateral talk with Saudi Government regarding the state of affairs of Indian employees working in Saudi once the Nitaqat law is implemented;
- (b) If so, the details thereof;
- (c) Whether Government would arrange special flights for the workers who lost their jobs, to return to India; and
- (d) Whether any rehabilitation plan would be announced for such returnees, and if so, the details thereof?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Vayalar Ravi)

- (a) & (b): A delegation, led by Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, is scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia in the last week of April.
- (c): There is no such proposal under consideration at present.
- (d): The State Governments of major labour sending States have been advised to take appropriate action in this regard.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 3303 asked by K.N. Balagopal, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/OResult.aspx>

26. Problems of Keralites in Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 25 April 2013.

Question:

Will the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs be pleased to state?

- (a) Whether Government's attention has been drawn to the fact that thousands of Indians particularly Keralites working in Saudi Arabia have started coming back losing their jobs following the strict implementation of its labour policy known as Nitaqat which mandates that 5 to 25 per cent staff of a private company with minimum 49 employees must be Saudis;
- (b) If so, the details of the workers who have come back so far; State-wise; and
- (c) The measures that are being taken for their rehabilitation in the country?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Vayalar Ravi)

- (a) & (b): The Indian Mission in Riyadh has reported an increase in the number of Indians at deportation centres in Saudi Arabia in the last week of March 2013. This is largely on account of the drive against illegal workers in Saudi Arabia. A drive against illegal workers affects both the illegal workers working in companies affected by the 'Nitaqat' policy of the Saudi Government, or in companies not affected by this policy. As of 7 April 2013 as many as 15000 Indians has already requested for the issue of documents to travel to India (Emergency Certificates) from the Embassy of India, Riyadh. Of the EC applications received and processed by the EOI, Riyadh in the 1st week of April, which are on account of both drive against illegal workers, and on account of strict implementation of the 'Nitaqat' policy, the State-wise distribution of applicants was mainly from Uttar Pradesh [338], Andhra Pradesh [186], Tamil Nadu [184], Rajasthan [73], Bihar [60], Kerala [49], West Bengal [39], Karnataka [28] and Uttrakhand , [24].

(c): The State Governments of the major labour-sending States have been advised to take appropriate steps in this regard.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 3301 asked by M.P. Achuthan and D. Raja, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

27. Employees losing jobs in Saudi Arabia, New Delhi, 25 April 2013.

Question:

- (a) Whether Government is concerned that due to new law in Saudi Arabia, nearly one-lakh employees belonging to the State of Tamil Nadu are in danger of losing their job in that country;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and whether Government has taken any steps to talk to Government of Saudi Arabia regarding this new law which is endangering the livelihood of Indian employees; and
- (c) If so, the details thereof and the follow up actions taken by Government in this regard?

Answer

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

- (a) The Saudi Authorities have recently made increased efforts to identify and deport expatriate workers including Indians who are working in Saudi Arabia illegally – (i) expatriates without a valid visa, (ii) expatriates working with sponsors and jobs different from those mentioned in their visas. In addition, the Saudi authorities have also started implementing the Saudization program (Nitaqat) introduced in 2011 as a direct governmental intervention aimed at providing jobs to Saudi nationals in the private sector. On 6 April 2013, the Saudi authorities announced a grace period of three months for correcting legal status of those affected by Nitaqat programme. While the number of Indians likely to be affected can be assessed only after the processes of deportation of illegal Indians and the application of the “Nitaqat” program, currently ongoing, are concluded, the Government is keeping a careful watch of the evolving situation.
- (b) & (c) The Government of India is in regular discussion with Saudi authorities in Riyadh on the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 3293 asked by B.S.Gnanadesikan, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

28. Indian delegation in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, 27 April 2013.

A high-level delegation led by Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Vayalar Ravi is visiting Saudi Arabia on 27-30 April 2013. He is accompanied by H.E E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs and T.K.A. Nair, Advisor to the Prime Minister of India. The delegation is scheduled to meet the Saudi Minister of Labour, H.E Adel Fakieh, on 28 April at Jeddah. This is a ‘Goodwill Visit’ within the framework of the close relationship between India and Saudi Arabia. The delegation will also visit Riyadh.

The delegation will meet the Indian community at two community receptions at the Indian Consulate in Jeddah on 28 April and Indian Embassy in Riyadh on 29 April. The visit aims at exchanging views with the authorities concerned at high level in Saudi Arabia on the welfare of

the Indian community in the context of the Nitaqat programme and also to clarify to the Indian community that the ongoing developments in Saudi Arabia would not adversely affect those who are currently working legally in Saudi Arabia. The visit also focuses on briefing the Indian community in Saudi Arabia on the specific steps that the Indian government has taken for the rehabilitation of the returning Indians and addressing their concerns in this regard. The delegation would urge the Indian community in Saudi Arabia to fully utilize the three months grace period announced by the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdullah for correcting the legal status of those affected by Nitaqat programme.

In response to the press release by the Embassy on the job offerings by various companies in the green category for those affected by Nitaqat program, the Embassy has been receiving encouraging enquiries from some companies in Saudi Arabia. The Western Auto Company Ltd (Ashok Leyland), P.O. Box 41003, Dammam 31521 has informed the Embassy that they would like to recruit qualified executives and technicians under transferable Iqama. Those interested may send their CVs to mnaim@etawestern.com or at viswa@etawestern.com

Another major company Al Faraá Group, P.O. Box 3891, Riyadh 12211, currently working on five major projects in Saudi Arabia is offering jobs to carpenters, masons, helpers, electricians, plumbers, aluminium fitters, heavy duty drivers, light duty drivers and painters. Those interested may contact at telephone number +966 1 4661891 or fax + 966 1 4661682 or send email to banna@alfaraa.com

The collection of applications for Emergency Certificates (ECs) for those Indians wanting to leave Saudi Arabia but have not been able to get exit is continuing. The collection centres set up at the Indian Schools namely IIS Riyadh, IIPS Riyadh, IIS Dammam, IIS Jeddah, IIS Jubail, IIS Buraidah, IIS Al-Khafji, IIS Taif, IIS Majmah and IIS Tabuk are fully functional. The Embassy has already been approached by over 50,000 Indian nationals for ECs. The Embassy urges every Indian national wanting to leave Saudi Arabia on final exit, but does not have valid Indian and/or Saudi documents, to register with the Embassy by submitting EC application forms so that their cases can be taken up expeditiously with the concerned Saudi authorities within the framework of applicable Saudi laws.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

29. Opening Remarks by Honourable Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs at Media Interaction, Jeddah, 28 April 2013.

My colleague E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs, T.K.A. Nair, Advisor to the Prime Minister, Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao and dear Media representatives.

Let me begin by thanking you for coming in such large numbers today. The interest in the media here on the visit of this delegation shows the importance of the issues involved.

Let me thank each one of you for being responsive and responsible journalists who contributed in a big way in highlighting the issues affecting the Indian community in the right perspective and in joining hands with our Embassy and our Consulate in addressing these issues. I have learnt the constructive role that your media played in addressing the panic created by inaccurate reporting by some of our media friends back home.

I am leading a high-level 'Goodwill delegation' to Saudi Arabia. The visit is aimed at exchanging views with the Saudi leadership on the welfare of the Indian community in the context of the Nitaqat programme. The visit also aimed at briefing the Indian community in Saudi Arabia on the specific steps that the Indian government has taken for the rehabilitation of the returning Indians and addressing their concern in this regard.

We had met the Indian community workers before my meeting with the Saudi authorities. We will be meeting the community again here today and in Riyadh tomorrow. The delegation understood the issues and took it up with the Saudi leadership appropriately. The issues include implementation of Nitaqat programme and also regularizing the status of overstaying workers and their return to India.

We had a good meeting with Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel bin Mohammad Fakeih. We were received warmly and we had very fruitful discussions on all issues related to welfare of the community here. We continued our discussions over lunch. He was very positive and constructive in his approach. The delegation also met Foreign Minister His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal. He was appreciative of the dialogue between the delegation and Ministry of Labour and shared the belief that the dialogue would yield positive results. Both the leaders were full of praise for the peace-loving, law-abiding and disciplined Indian community in Saudi Arabia.

We thanked His Majesty the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques for giving a 3-month grace period to all expatriates for correcting their legal status. We also thanked the Saudi leadership for taking a humanitarian approach to the issue by giving this grace period. I invited Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel Fakeih to visit India. He graciously accepted the invitation.

During our meeting with the Minister of Labour today we agreed on the following:

A Joint Group led by Deputy Minister for Labour Affairs Ahamed Al Humaidan and Deputy Chief of Mission of Embassy of India Sibi George has been constituted to discuss and evolve mechanism for addressing all immediate problems facing the community including issues related to overstaying Indian workers. The first meeting of the JG will be held in Riyadh on 1 May 2013.

Expedite discussions on the MoU for Labour Cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia. The India – Saudi Arabia Joint Working Group on Labour has been constituted to discuss the MoU

and other related issues. The first meeting of this JWG on Labour will be held in New Delhi at an early date in May 2013.

Both India and Saudi Arabia would work closely to make the process of recruitment of workers more transparent which is in the interest of both the workers and the employers. This would be made a model for similar mechanism for other countries.

We go back to India with the satisfaction that we have been able to discuss with the Saudi authorities and sensitize them on all aspects of the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia. The mechanisms set up will follow up on the discussions and address the issues.

At the same time, we need to keep in mind that we live in a foreign land. We need to obey the rules and regulations of the land where we live. We need to utilize this three-month grace period effectively to regularize our stay here. You would have seen a statement by the Minister of Labour here. It said “We have 7.5 million legal foreign workers and we need them. We will continue to issue visas but those who want to come to this country have to respect the law.” We are convinced that the Saudi authorities would continue to follow a humanitarian approach while implementing the Nitaqat programme.

As you are aware, our Embassy and the Consulate have taken a series of steps to address the concern of the community here. Ambassador met the Saudi authorities at high levels. He regularly meets community workers in various cities and listens to their concerns. The Embassy has been able to understand the issue and brought it to the attention of the highest authorities here in Saudi Arabia and in India.

The collection of EC applications now being undertaken is a major step aimed at helping our brethren who do not have any documents to return to their homeland. We urge all concerned to register with the Embassy and the Consulate. We have offered full support of Government of India to the Ambassador in his efforts to assist the community during this challenging time. We would urge the media also to support us in our efforts.

Thank you.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

30. Remarks by Ambassador at the community Reception in Riyadh, Riyadh, 29 April 2013.

We are in the middle of a major exercise aimed at helping our fellow citizens all over Saudi Arabia in their efforts to regularize their stay or to return to our homeland with dignity. My Embassy in Riyadh and our Consulate in Jeddah have been working 24x7 to achieve this target. For this endeavour to succeed, we need three major things: the support of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia; the support of our government and leadership in India; and above all the goodwill and blessing of the Saudi government and people.

Let me thank His Majesty the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques and the leadership of this country for adopting a humanitarian approach to the implementation of Nitaqat programme. The announcement of three-month grace period came as a great relief to many of our countrymen. In the last few weeks, I had several round of meetings with senior officials of this country. Each one of them thanked me for urging our community to utilize these three months effectively to correct their legal status. We live in this country and we obey the rules of this country. The Embassy has come up with a series of measures to help those affected.

We launched a campaign all across Saudi Arabia urging the people not to get panic by exaggerated media reports. We urged those affected to correct their status or leave the country. We offered legal assistance to those who faced complex problems in changing their sponsors. We strengthened our 24x7 helpline. We conducted regular meetings with the community workers in Riyadh and also met them in Dammam and Jeddah. We were approached by many Indian and Saudi companies offering jobs for those wanting to change from red category companies. This facility was used by many of my brethren. I thank the Saudi and Indian companies who came forward with this offer of assistance.

We also launched a drive to collect Emergency Certificate applications from those Indians who do not have valid documents to return to India. In Riyadh, we have been approached by over 50,000 Indians who wish to return to India. We are preparing a database which we will share with the Saudi authorities to request final exit for them to return to India with dignity. We will also share this database with our Central and State governments to take concrete steps for rehabilitation. We have energized our community. We are working together. Our social workers are involved, our schools are involved, and our media in Saudi Arabia is involved. We are working together with one goal, to help our brethren in need. To help them either to regularize their legal status or to return to India with dignity.

I am happy that my team and I received tremendous support during the last few weeks. I had several rounds of interaction with the Indian community in Saudi Arabia. I wanted to get inputs from them on what the Embassy and Government of India can do to help our brothers and sisters in this country. I would like to thank the community workers for their wholehearted support in mobilizing the entire community to achieve our target. I have seen social workers working hand in hand with my embassy officials in utilizing the three months grace period that His Majesty announced.

I thank the media in Saudi Arabia both English and vernacular for their support. I want to mention that at least two newspapers published the EC forms get the message to the remotest corners of Saudi Arabia. My friends and colleagues know the constraints under which the Embassy and Consulate work. We need to cater to all across Saudi Arabia. Indians are in all corners of Saudi Arabia. Within our limited resources, we need to cater to all these places. This is when the support of our government back home matters. Honourable Minister Vayalar Ravi,

Honourable Minister of State E. Ahamed and Honourable Adviser to the Prime Minister T.K.A. Nair have assured all support to help our brethren. I thank them for their support for the efforts of the Embassy.

India has a strategic partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and this partnership has been further reinforced and carried forward following the visits of King Abdullah to India in January 2006 and the return visit of Prime Minister to Saudi Arabia in February 2010. Both our countries have been able to make significant breakthroughs in our bilateral political, economic, defence and security relations. We have excellent bilateral relations which we value and want to strengthen. We have a large community, over two million, living in this country peacefully and happily. We are thankful to the leadership of this country for hosting them in this country. We would do nothing to violate any rules or regulations of this country. We would do everything to help our brethren in distress to correct their status or return to India with dignity.

With those words, I welcome our Minister and leaders to Saudi Arabia. I seek their support and guidance in realizing our objective. I thank all of you for having come today and, through you, I would like to reach out to all my fellow Indians to work with the Embassy and Consulate to help our brothers and sisters in need.

Thank you.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

31. Remarks by Honourable Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs at the community Reception, Riyadh, 29 April 2013.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be in this great country where more than two million of my compatriots and their families are residing, and some, for many decades. We meet in the context of difficult times for some of our brothers and sisters here and their families in India.

I am leading a high-level goodwill delegation. The visit was aimed at exchanging views with the Saudi leadership on the welfare of the Indian community in the context of the Nitaqat programme. The visit also aimed at briefing the Indian community in Saudi Arabia on the specific steps that the Indian government has taken for the rehabilitation of the returning Indians and addressing their concern in this regard.

In Jeddah yesterday, we had a very good meeting with Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel bin Mohammad Fakeih. We were received warmly and we had very fruitful discussions on all issues related to welfare of the community here. We continued our discussions over lunch. He was very positive and constructive in his approach. The delegation also met Foreign Minister His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal. He was appreciative of the dialogue between the delegation and Ministry of Labour and shared the belief that the dialogue would yield positive results. Both the leaders were full of praise for the peace-loving, law-abiding and disciplined Indian community in Saudi Arabia.

We thanked His Majesty the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques for giving a 3-month grace period to all expatriates for correcting their legal status. We also thanked the Saudi leadership for taking a humanitarian approach to the issue by giving this grace period. I invited Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel Fakeih to visit India. He graciously accepted the invitation.

We have set up Joint Group (JG) of senior officials to discuss and evolve mechanism for addressing all immediate problems facing the community including issues related to overstaying Indian workers. The first meeting of the JG will be held in Riyadh on 1 May 2013. The Joint Group will follow up on our discussions and will brief you on the way forward. The Embassy will come up with regular updates on the outcome of their discussions with the Saudi side.

All the leaders of this country that I met here, without exception, were full of praise for the peace-loving, law-abiding and extremely disciplined Indian community. The Indian community is the most-preferred community in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The contributions which Indian workers have made to the development of this country were also gratefully acknowledged by the Saudi leadership.

We discussed the urgency to have a MoU on labour cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia. The Joint Working Group on Labour was constituted and it will meet in New Delhi in May 2013. The JWG will discuss the MoU and other labour issues.

I find that many of the problems which Indians find themselves in, in Saudi Arabia, are because of middlemen and agents at both ends who exploit the sense of desperation amongst poor and illiterate workers. In our meeting with the Saudi Labour Minister, we have decided to work closely to make the process of recruitment of workers more transparent which is in the interest of both the workers and the employers. This would be made a model for similar mechanism for other countries. The Government of India is taking several measures to ensure that middlemen and agents do not continue with their exploitation. We have launched an awareness campaign to alert the communities against middlemen and on the Saudi laws. We have launched various orientation programmes to educate Indian workers, before they travel abroad for employment.

The Government of India attaches great importance to the welfare of all Indians living abroad, and several rehabilitation programmes are being initiated in this regard. I would request the Indian community here not to panic and to work with the Indian Embassy to address the issues we face today. I would also request all affected Indians to correct their status within the 3-month grace period announced by His Majesty.

The Embassy has been in regular touch with my Ministry – the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. I am pleased and gratified to note the good work being undertaken by the Embassy, in spite of many constraints. Ambassador has been relentlessly taking up all issues affecting various sections of the Indian community with the highest authorities in the land. He had several meetings with various authorities, including with the Minister of Labour, the Governors of

Riyadh, Eastern Province and Medina. The Embassy officials have been regularly visiting Deportation Centres in Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah for the purpose of issuing Indians lodged in these Centres, with Emergency Certificates, to enable them to travel back to India on final exit. I am aware both of the expectations and the constraints. The country is quite huge and the resources are a little stretched considering the large number of Indians residing in this country. I am happy to note that it is almost an 'open house' every day in the Embassy and Consulate.

For almost a month, our Embassy has been undertaking a massive exercise of registering all Indians in Saudi Arabia who want to leave, but do not possess valid documents, by submitting their Emergency Certificate (EC) Application Forms. So far, more than 50,000 Indians have approached the Embassy for EC Applications. Because of the vastness of the country, the Embassy has recently enlisted the services of the 10 Indian community schools for collecting the EC Application Forms. I thank the school authorities for extending their cooperation in this regard. I urge all Indians concerned to register with the Embassy.

The Indian Community Welfare Scheme, launched by my Ministry in September 2012, provides for giving initial legal assistance to overseas Indians in deserving cases. Today, I am happy to announce the decision to empanel at least three legal firms by the Indian Embassy to provide initial legal assistance' to the Indians in need. This is a work in progress and we will continue to enlarge this panel including more firms and lawyers.

We need to keep in mind that we live in a foreign land. We need to obey the rules and regulations of the land where we live.

I wish all of you all the very best and would be leaving Saudi Arabia with the full faith and knowledge that the Saudi authorities would follow a humanitarian approach in resolving all issues and my countrymen would not be found wanting in reaffirming the image of India and Indians as peaceful and law-abiding people.

Thank you.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

32. Opening Remarks by Honourable Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs at Media Interaction, Riyadh, 29 April 2013.

Let me begin by thanking you for coming in such large numbers today. The interest in the media here on the visit of this delegation shows the importance of the issues involved. I have seen similar interest in Jeddah yesterday.

Let me thank each one of you for being responsive and responsible journalists who contributed in a big way in highlighting the issues affecting the Indian community in the right perspective and in joining hands with our Embassy and our Consulate in addressing these issues. I have

learnt the constructive role that your media played in addressing the panic created by inaccurate reporting by some of our media friends back home.

I am leading a high-level 'Goodwill delegation' to Saudi Arabia. The visit is aimed at exchanging views with the Saudi leadership on the welfare of the Indian community in the context of the Nitaqat programme. The visit also aimed at briefing the Indian community in Saudi Arabia on the specific steps that the Indian government has taken for the rehabilitation of the returning Indians and addressing their concern in this regard.

We had a good meeting with Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel bin Mohammad Fakeih. We were received warmly and we had very fruitful discussions on all issues related to welfare of the community here. We continued our discussions over lunch. He was very positive and constructive in his approach. The delegation also met Foreign Minister His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal. He was appreciative of the dialogue between the delegation and Ministry of Labour and shared the belief that the dialogue would yield positive results. Both the leaders were full of praise for the peace-loving, law-abiding and disciplined Indian community in Saudi Arabia.

We thanked His Majesty the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques for giving a 3-month grace period to all expatriates for correcting their legal status. We also thanked the Saudi leadership for taking a humanitarian approach to the issue by giving this grace period. I invited Minister of Labour His Excellency Adel Fakeih to visit India. He graciously accepted the invitation.

During our meeting with the Minister of Labour yesterday we agreed on the following:

A Joint Group led by Deputy Minister for Labour Affairs Ahamed Al Humaidan and Deputy Chief of Mission of Embassy of India Sibi George has been constituted to discuss and evolve mechanism for addressing all immediate problems facing the community including issues related to overstaying Indian workers. The first meeting of the JG will be held in Riyadh on 1 May 2013.

Expedite discussions on the MoU for Labour Cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia. The India – Saudi Arabia Joint Working Group on Labour has been constituted to discuss the MoU and other related issues. The first meeting of this JWG on Labour will be held in New Delhi at an early date in May 2013.

Both India and Saudi Arabia would work closely to make the process of recruitment of workers more transparent which is in the interest of both the workers and the employers. This would be made a model for similar mechanism for other countries.

We go back to India with the satisfaction that we have been able to discuss with the Saudi authorities and sensitize them on all aspects of the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia. The mechanisms set up will follow up on the discussions and address the issues.

We need to keep in mind that we live in a foreign land. We need to obey the rules and regulations of the land where we live. We need to utilize this three-month grace period effectively to regularize our stay here. You would have seen a statement by the Minister of Labour here. It said “We have 7.5 million legal foreign workers and we need them. We will continue to issue visas but those who want to come to this country have to respect the law.” We are convinced that the Saudi authorities would continue to follow a humanitarian approach while implementing the Nitaqat programme.

As you are aware, our Embassy has taken a series of steps to address the concern of the community here. Ambassador met the Saudi authorities at high levels. He regularly meets community workers in various cities and listens to their concerns. The Embassy has been able to understand the issue and brought it to the attention of the highest authorities here in Saudi Arabia and in India. We will continue to focus on this issue.

The collection of EC applications now being undertaken is a major step aimed at helping our brethren who do not have any documents to return to their homeland. We urge all concerned to register with the Embassy and the Consulate. We have offered full support of Government of India to the Ambassador in his efforts to assist the community during this challenging time. We would urge the media also to support us in our efforts.

Thank you.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

h. SYRIA

33. President of India’s Message on the occasion of National Day of Syria, New Delhi, 16 April 2013.

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the occasion of the National Day of Syria (i.e. 17 April 2013).

In a message to the President of Syrian Arab Republic, Dr. Bashar Al-Assad, the President has said, “On behalf of the Government and the people of India, it gives me great pleasure to extend warm greetings and felicitations to you and to the friendly people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the occasion of your National Day.

I avail of this occasion to reiterate India’s commitment to further strengthen and diversify our bilateral cooperation to the mutual benefit of our people.

India and the Syrian Arab Republic have traditionally enjoyed warm and friendly relations. We are, therefore, concerned at the violence and loss of lives in Syria. We hope that all sides will cease violence at the earliest – and resolve all issues peacefully through discussions – in

accordance with the Geneva Communiqué, taking into account the aspirations of the people of Syria”.

Source: *Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,*

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=94726>

i. TUNISIA

34. Holi, the festival of colours, celebrated with joy in Tunis, Tunis. 23 April 2013.

Ambassador Nagma M. Mallick hosted a Holi celebration at Bharat Bhavan in Carthage, a suburb of Tunis, on Saturday, 20 April 2013 which was attended by Tunisian public figures, officials, media personalities, business persons and members of the diplomatic community. Short films were shown on the celebration of Holi, while Ambassador explained in a speech in French the traditional significance of Holi in Hindu mythology and the current widespread celebration of the festival of colours in India and abroad. This was followed by a presentation of popular Indian dances by young Tunisian dancers in Indian costumes. An Indian lunch was served thereafter.

The Tunisian guests as well as the Ambassadors of other countries who participated at this event, most of whom had seen Holi celebrated only in Indian films, expressed their happiness at participating in the colourful event.

Source: *Embassy of India, Tunis,* <http://www.indianembassytunis.com/holi-festival.html>

j. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

35. Task force on investment from UAE, New Delhi, 22 April 2013.

Question:

Will the Minister of Commerce and Industry be pleased to state:-

- (a) Whether India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Task force on investment have held a meeting recently in Abu Dhabi;
- (b) If so, the details of the discussion held in the meeting;
- (c) Whether UAE proposed to invest US\$2 billion in the infrastructure projects in India;
- (d) If so, the details thereof;
- (e) Whether some UAE companies are facing difficulties about their investment in India; and
- (f) If so, the steps taken/being taken by the Government and assurance given to UAE to sort out the problems faced by these companies?

Answer

The Minister of Commerce and Industry (Anand Sharma)

(a) & (b): Yes. The inaugural meeting of the UAE – India Joint Investment Taskforce was held on 18 February 2013 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. It was co-chaired by HH Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Court, and Anand Sharma, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles. The issues relating to promotion and facilitation of investments between the two countries and the modalities to address issues associated with existing investments between the two countries were discussed.

(c) & (d): Yes. UAE offered to allocate US\$2 billion for investments in infrastructure projects in India.

(e) & (f): Yes. It was decided that Governments of both countries would provided assistance and support for expediting the resolution of issues associated with existing investments and opportunities for new cross-border investment across a range of sectors.

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Unstarred Question No. 4587 asked by Asaduddin Owaisi, <http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/psearch/QResult15.aspx?qref=139881>

36. Task Force on Investment from UAE, New Delhi, 22 April 2013.

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This information was given by the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Anand Sharma in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=94836>

37. India and UAE Sign MoU on Air Services, New Delhi, 24 April 2013.

India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a MoU on Air Services, following the two-day bilateral negotiation at Abu Dhabi. UAE had urged India to allocate additional 40,000 seats per week, grant Goa, Pune, Amritsar and Lucknow as additional points of calls, remove the maximum cap prescribed from each point of call in-term of seats/ frequency per week and allow third country /domestic code share facility. India was looking at the negotiations in overall economic interest of India and Government's policy of liberalization for attracting foreign investment in India, including civil aviation sector. The Indian side had requested the UAE side to grant change of gauge facility at Abu Dhabi to Indian carriers in addition to ensuring full fifth freedom rights from UAE.

As per the present Air Service Agreement, the designated carriers of both sides have existing entitlement of 13,330 + 2per cent flexibility (total 13,600) Seats per week with eleven points of call available to UAE. After present negotiations both sides have agreed to allocate an additional entitlement of 36,670 seats per week spread over a period of 3years; 11,000 seats per week in year 2013, 12,800 seats per week up to winter schedule 2014 and 12,870 seats per week up to

winter schedule 2015. Both sides have also agreed to extend third country and domestic code share facility. However, Indian side has not agreed to the request of UAE for any additional point of call and removal of cap in terms seats/frequency from each point of call. The additional 2 per cent flexibility on total entitlement has been done away with. Both sides have agreed to extend third country code share and domestic code share of designated airlines of either side. The UAE have agreed to Indian request of change of gauge facility and both sides have agreed to allow designated airlines of each side to have the option to change the aircraft in the territory of the other party.

The enhancement in the present capacity spread over 3 years would allow the carriers of both the countries to plan their future operations. The change of gauge facility will provide operational/commercial flexibility to Indian carriers to enable deploy equipment corresponding to market demand. This will help in enhancing international connectivity for Indian passengers and also facilitate local and international route networking.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi,

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=95006>

SPECIFIC ISSUES

K. HAJJ AND GULF

38. Transcript of the media briefing by Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj) and Official Spokesperson (April 3, 2013), New Delhi, 5 April 2013.

Official Spokesperson (Syed Akbaruddin): Good afternoon friends and thank you very much, and sorry for the slight delay.

I have here with me A.R. Ghanashyam who is Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj) who handles all matters relating to India's relations with the States of the Gulf as also Hajj. I would request him to answer any questions that you may like to ask him on those issues. Given the time that we have and since and it is slightly late, we will answer questions right away.

So without much ado I will give the floor to Ghanashyam. Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj) (A.R. Ghanashyam): Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Assalam Vaalekum, Khawateenon va Hazaraat.

Official Spokesperson: I hope you are all suitably impressed!

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): Bonsoir, Madame et Monsieur! I am available to you, please shoot your questions. I am not going to give any introductory remarks because these are subjects which are being discussed by you, and I think most of you perhaps know more than I do. So, I am not going to give you any introduction. I am ready for the questions.

Official Spokesperson: Let us abide by the norm of one question per person. So choose your question correctly. No second questions.

If everybody asks questions on different subjects, and there are 75 of you here and about seven subjects that I have here with me, it would be pandemonium. The request is that I am certain others can ask on what you would like to query us on. We will start with Venkat Narayan, the senior most among all of us. He is welcome to shoot his question.

Question: Ghanashyam, can you give us an overview of the Indian community living in the Gulf? The last number I remember is five million, and they send something like 40 to 50 billion dollars every year. How has the business of localizing, each country wants to give jobs to its own people, affected Indians overall in the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia in particular, because there is a lot of excitement going on in the recent past?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): Sir, this is only one question but it has at least 25 questions in it.

At the outset let me say that the Gulf is important to us for a number of reasons. One is they are our largest trading partners. Second, they also happen to be the largest hosts of our expatriate community. Third is they are actually very closely related to us in terms of geography. We are just across one and a half hours. It takes longer for me to fly to Kochi rather than to Dubai or Kuwait. And one particular reason which we had somehow not given importance to in the past is that this is now one of the most powerful and beautiful sources for investments. If you add up all the sovereign funds of the world, three-fourths of them – about four trillion dollars – will end up the Gulf. So, it is for us an extremely important relationship.

As for the Indian community, some countries have hosted Indian communities for a very long time. They go back centuries. For instance if you walk around on the streets of Muscat, you will find that people look very similar to us. Some of the biggest business tycoons of that country are actually originally Indians. You could say the same thing in Kuwait. In UAE, you cannot differentiate whether you are in India or in some other foreign country when you walk around in Dubai. So, the relationship is quite close.

The number of Indians working in this area has been slowly and gradually increasing in the last few years. Today we estimate about 6.5 million people living in the Gulf. The largest numbers of them are in Saudi Arabia – 2.45 million. The second largest is 1.8 million in the United Arab Emirates. There are countries like Qatar where the number of Qataris is 300,000 but the number of Indians is 500,000 in a total population of 1.7 million. It is just slightly bigger than Karol Bagh but it is one the richest countries in the world with the largest per capita income.

The importance of these people comes from several aspects. First, when they go abroad from India they give you a job in India. They leave a job behind for us. And then they go back to the Gulf. They are very different from expatriates elsewhere in the world. If you go to the United States or if you go to the UK, you have the possibility of getting what is called a Green Card first and then become a citizen. That facility is not given to expatriates in the Gulf. They go there for tenure. He goes there to work for three years or five years, then gets an extension and stays for

another five years or just comes back and settles down in Kerala or Tamil Nadu or Karnataka with a little bit of his own investment and settles down here. That is the big difference.

The second difference is, although the number of computer software engineers, structural mechanical engineers, chartered accountants, management experts, consultants is increasing now, they may be about 10 to 20 per cent depending on which country you are talking about, but a large number of them are blue-collar workers. And these people are one-man families there. Whatever little they earn, they send it back home.

I always say that with this every individual who is working in the Gulf, uske zariye Hindustan ke kisi kone mein ek makaan ka diya jalta hai, chulha jalta hai, us ghar ke bachhon ki parvarish hoti hai. Us ghar ki begam ko biradari mein izzat milta hai. That is the reason why we should respect this man. He has not only given you a job, he is sustaining a family which is in the back of beyond in some village in India.

The other reason why it is important is he is sending the money back which is in convertible currency. It is very difficult to exactly assess how much is this money that is coming in. If you ask the Reserve Bank of India they will give you one figure; if you ask the State bank of India they will give you another figure; and if you ask the Governments concerned they will give you a third figure. I go by, for lack of a better figure, the World Bank estimates.

The World Bank estimated in the year 2012, US\$70 billion as the remittances that are coming to India from all Indians abroad. I would say a sizeable or significant part of this money is coming from the Gulf because these are boys and girls and men and women who send about 90 per cent of their income home. So, out of these 70 billion dollars, maybe 50 or 55 or 60 billion dollars actually is coming from these people.

Now there is a sudden talk that all these people are going to come back home because Saudis want all the jobs back, Kuwaitis want all the jobs back, and the Omanis want all the jobs back. What actually has happened? When an Indian or any national goes into a Gulf country, how will he go and what visas will he carry? First, he takes an employment visa. Forget about the tourist visas, visitor visas, Hajj visas, Umrah visas and all that. He goes on an employment visa.

The employment visas in the Gulf identify a sponsor. If he is working as a driver, or a cook, or a shop assistant, there is a sponsor for him. The visa indicates the name of the sponsor, the period of his visa, and the place of work is specified in that piece of paper. So, he goes there for two years, three years, or as many years as he has got. That is a man who is working legally there.

After he finishes his term of three years or five years, he must renew that visa. And it is not easy to renew a visa. He may be able to do it and he may not be able to do it. If he is not able to do it, what does he do? He should come back home. Some of them do not come back. They disappear. Saudi Arabia is a huge country. If you look at the map, it is about 70 per cent of India's

geography. It is a large country of about 30 million people, and it is full of deserts, and there are townships and small hamlets in different parts. On the west, you have industry, on the east, you have oil and you also have Mecca and Medina. And it is very difficult to identify these people. Now the Saudis have decided to identify these people. They want all of them back and sent home.

There is another category. In Saudi Arabia if you get a visa and you change the sponsor or if you change the work that you are doing, that is also illegal unlike in other countries. You go on a driver's visa but the owner finds out that you are much better than what is needed for a driver; you could become a foreman in his brother's factory. He says you go and work there. You will get a little more money also. So, you go out there. That is illegal according to the Saudi law. There may be an understanding between the sponsors. They have no problem. But the Saudi law has a problem. They say it is illegal. So right now, they are trying to identify these people and then send them home.

We are the largest expatriates. Out of the eight million in Saudi Arabia, 2.45 million are Indians. And about 300,000 of these are dependent members. Everybody cannot carry their family. I told you about 10 to 20 per cent which are professionals. They carry their wives and children. So, this is the 300,000 people that I am talking about. Now having come this far, they say that we must now identify all illegal people, and that includes Indians, Pakistanis, Somalians, Yemenis, Nigerians, and a number of people.

We are actually a preferred community there. For whatever reason, we have built that reputation that we work, and particularly when we are abroad we seem to work better, I do not know about the Indian diplomatic missions! But the fact is these people work very hard and they are politically not involved in anything. They may participate in their local politics of the State or the country here. They may be representatives of political parties from within this country but they do not go anywhere near the politics of the local country. That is why they are respected. There are a large number of them. They are respected. The number that is now being attacked is only the illegal Indians.

Then there is the programme called Nitaqat where the Saudi Arabians want to replace the foreigners in Saudi companies and Saudi institutions. How do we do that? So, they have identified the companies as up to ten people working in the company, 10 to 49, 50 to 500, and 501 to 3000, and more than 3000. They have asked for a minimum of five per cent Saudi employees and a maximum of 30 per cent depending on where you go, and the balance of course can be foreigners. Anybody can work there. So, they are not asking for the moon. They are only looking after themselves and their own interests. It is their local law and we cannot question it.

For all we know, the number of Indians may grow further after this programme because more Pakistanis may go away, more Somalians may go away, more Yemenis may go away. We do not know. It is very difficult to say. But it is nothing that we should be paranoid about. Certainly we

should be concerned about it, but we should not be paranoid about it. And this will keep on growing. For instance you say with all this problem with the Arab Spring, we had a population of about five million, as you rightly said, a few years ago and it has become 6.5 million. And more Indians are going in than coming out even today from the Gulf. So the number is only going to go up. I think I have taken more time than I was supposed to for this question.

Question: I have heard that there are many people in Saudi Arabia who charge money to give the visa which is somewhere known as independent visa like a person takes visa in somebody's name and gives him money, say 10,000 Rial a year, and goes there and does independent work and he is not having any problem there. Now when the Saudi Arabia Government is sending them all back, somewhere it is giving profit or benefit to their Government. A large number of people are doing such kind of work giving visas for money. You know the people from India who are going there are selling many things and they are not so rich and when they are going and they are getting a huge loss, they are not getting time to work there and paying even.

Official Spokesperson: What is your question?

Question: Do you know about this? Do you think that after sometime Saudi Government can again welcome the Indians, Somalians and other people?

Official Spokesperson: Let me answer that before I request Ghanashyam to respond. For those of you who do not know, Out of the last 25 years, I spent eight years in Saudi Arabia and so I am well aware of all aspects of life there. Having said that, I think I need to share with you some information and this is a personal sort of a thing.

1988 was the first year when I went to Saudi Arabia. The total number of Indians then in Saudi Arabia was 400,000. I left Saudi Arabia after four years in 1992. The total number of Indians then was 700,000. I went back to Saudi Arabia in 2000. The number of Indians then was 1.2 million. I left Saudi Arabia sometime in 2004 and the number of Indians then was 1.5 million. Today, Ghanashyam just told you, it is 2.45 million. So, as you can see, consistently over the last two decades the number of Indians who have found work in Saudi Arabia has only increased. That is point number one.

Point number two is what Ghanashyam said that for a variety of reasons Indians are seen as a preferred community there, and he has listed out those reasons. In any society there are going to be ups and downs in terms of what you have said. What he said was that there are two types of irregular workers there. First of all there is no such thing as free visa or independent visa that you said. Therefore, this is a colloquial term that does not exist in law. Having said that, what does this mean? It only means, like Ghanashyam said, that you go on a certain specific job and you move to another job without changing your visa. Alternatively you go and work with one sponsor and then you move to another sponsor. Both these are irregular. Therefore, when you go you have to make that choice. There have to be regulatory mechanisms that check that etc.

Obviously the Saudi Government clamps down on both when they clamp down on those who are not fulfilling those requirements. They also ensure that those who have brought them are not fulfilling that requirement. So, there is a loss to both. It is not that the person who is impacted is the expatriate; the person who brought this expatriate in is also impacted. So, please understand that this is not about Indians; this is not about South Asians; this is not about expatriates; but this is about not being able to abide by Saudi local laws. Every country, every society has the right to enforce their laws which are well-known and well understood. If anybody says that he or she is going on an independent visa, ab initio this is wrong. And it is only a matter of time whether it is a year or two or three years, five years, or seven years down the line, you would have to come back to a system where you abide by the law. I will leave the rest to Ghanashyam if he wants to add anything.

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): I think it is very intimidating to sit next to a walking encyclopaedia on Saudi Arabia and answer questions on Saudi Arabia.

I just want to clarify to you my friend that yes there is something what people call as free visa. It is not a term which is used by the Saudi Government or any other consular manual. It is considered free because it is taken by someone and given to somebody else and that somebody else goes and works there. This is all unscrupulous agents on both sides. You have people who are unscrupulous in this country and you have people unscrupulous in the other country.

I will tell you a little story. In one country, 250 Punjabi workers went and they were promised that they will work in an American camp and they will sleep in air-condition comfort and they will get pizzas and McDonalds to eat for lunch and dinner and they will get a thousand dollars. That is it. When they reached there, they were not working in any American camp. They were working on a construction site. The outside temperature was 55 degrees Celsius. Then they were told that their salary was 400 dollars per month. They said, 'No, we were told it is going to be 1000 dollars'. The Indian agent had swallowed 300 dollars, and the local agent had swallowed 300 dollars. The company paid a full 1000 dollars under the agreement. It was not the fault of the company. But these two agents had swallowed the money and given this poor fellow only 400 dollars.

Then they said they want to go back home. They said - Okay you can go back home. We have spent 2000 dollars for your airfare. At the rate of 400 dollars a month, you work for five months. Then we have had to spend 2000 dollars to get you the visa. That is another five months. After ten months, you can go back home with nothing in the hands. So, there are unscrupulous elements on both sides. The Saudis have also realized it. They are now trying to merge a corporation; ultimately it might become a single corporation, to recruit people from wherever they were taking labour from. It will be a government company and nobody else can do it.

And we will insist on what is called the electronic attestation of every document of labour agreement. Every individual who is going must sign an agreement and it should be electronically

registered with us in India as well as in the Mission concerned. So, this free visa concept someday hopefully, Inshallah, will disappear.

Question: You talked about a four trillion dollar sovereign fund that exists. There has been a lot of talk that as there is no BIPPA, funds are not flowing in. Can you give us some kind of an indication as to what are the concerns they have about BIPPA and which sectors they did not invest in?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): You are right that the funds run into several trillions of dollars and there are two ways of investing this money in India. One is you put it in our stock market and it grows. All these countries which have lot of money have done that and they keep investing money. It is a short-term investment and they have professional who do what you call satabaazi and then they make their money and then take it home. The other one is the foreign direct investment where you have billions of dollars being poured in into industrial infrastructure, into physical infrastructure, into major factories and companies.

When any company, any country wants to invest in another country what does he need? First he needs what is called a bilateral Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement. When a company starts producing goods and selling the goods and makes money, it gets a sales revenue and it makes profits and the tax is paid on that profit to the local country. And if tax is paid also in the host country from where the investment came, he will be paying taxes twice. So, there is an agreement between the two countries that the man will pay tax in only one country. That is the first agreement which you must have.

The second one is what is called the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA). In case there is a problem of an investment that has been brought into this country, then the investor or the investing country wants to get an undertaking or wants to get an assurance from the Government of India saying that their principal will not be lost. If he invests his money and is unable to make profits and he is making losses that is his headache. At that time if he decides to take his money back home, he should be able to do it. That is the BIPPA.

We have had BIPPAs with many countries. But things are changing now. We have WTO which has come into the picture; we have international arbitrations which are coming on; we have large investments. Earlier it used to be a few US\$100 million every year. Now it is several tens of billions of dollars which are coming in and things have become far more complex and far more complicated. So, there is a model agreement which needs to be worked out which at the moment the Ministry of Finance and Government of India are working on. Once the model text is done, then we will start. We already have some agreements with many countries. With some countries we do not have. With some countries we need to change them or we need to amend some clauses. Hopefully we are planning to do it and it depends on the Ministry of Finance which is working really hard at it. Once that thing gets done, then money can flow in.

Ultimately it is your own ability. There is a Urdu saying: Khud hi ko kar buland itna ke har taqdeer se pehle khuda bande se khud puche bata teri raza kya hai. If you have enough, if you have the power to stand up straight with nose up in the air and be counted, then people will come to you. If your economy grows at ten per cent per annum, if your education level keeps doubling every five years, if your agricultural exports keep doubling every five years, obviously people will come to you.

Question: As you said, Saudi Arabia is implementing its own law. What can India do in this matter? There was talk of a delegation going to Saudi Arabia on this matter. What can the delegation ask there and whether you have decided on the dates of the delegation?

Official Spokesperson: Before we answer that, let me tell you what we are doing. There is an ongoing dialogue with the Saudi Government on this. As you know, Saudi Arabia is divided into various Provinces. Our Ambassador during the course of last month has met the Governor of Riyadh, the Governor of the Eastern Province where the largest numbers of Indians are there, and he has also met the Governor of Medina. The idea was to try and tackle the humanitarian impact of this at a local level.

As you know, we have an Embassy in Riyadh and a Consulate General in Jeddah. In addition what the Ambassador has done is that he has placed people in Dammam which covers the Eastern Province, Dammam, Dhahran, Al Khobar, you call it what you want, there are these three cities so that in the cases of those who want to go back and do not have travel documents, they are being facilitated through this sort of temporary measure where we put in a person there to collect those documents, get in touch with the concerned States, get the clearances, and try and ensure that they leave as quickly as possible to ameliorate their condition there.

As you know, yesterday there was a meeting between the External Affairs Minister and the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs as well as the Chief Minister of Kerala. One of the things that they agreed to was that Kerala will within 24 hours provide responses to cases of checking of identity. Before you give a travel document you have to check the identity. And that identity check requires confirmation from the District Headquarters or from the Superintendent of Police. That has been now put in place so that there will be swift responses.

Despite all this, as Ghanashyam said, we have not seen any increase of a significant number in terms of people coming out because of Nitaqat. That is not there. Yes, we have seen a slight increase in numbers of those who are coming back because of irregular appointments or irregularly working in various places. That is what we are trying to do in terms of ameliorating the conditions of the people there.

As regards a visit, these matters are dealt by the Saudi Minister of Labour. We understand that currently the Saudi Minister of Labour is not in the country. He is likely to return in the latter half of this month. Should there be a necessity, certainly there would be a possibility of senior

Ministers from the Government visiting there. But we will take it as it comes there. We still have some time before the Saudi Minister of Labour, who would be the right interlocutor for senior Ministers from Government of India to interact with, comes back to Saudi Arabia.

If there is anything else, Ghanashyam would like to add.

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): I think Akbar has already given you full details. I just want to add that labour being an important component of our relationship, there is an ongoing dialogue between the two countries which goes on. We are right now discussing an agreement on labour with Saudi Arabia. We are also discussing with them the possibility of getting their support on our electronic attestation of labour contracts in the Embassy. So, there are a number of issues which we are talking about.

We also want to understand what is the reality in the picture and why this unnecessary or necessary noises that are coming from all over. If the press is talking about something, we should understand exactly what the issue is so that the readers of tomorrow get the real correct picture. And they will get the correct picture only when we understand ourselves what the picture is. That is the reason why Ministerial visits become necessary and they take place periodically. And this is going to be one more in the chain of meetings.

Question: As of today how much investments are there from the Gulf into India?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): This is a very difficult question to answer because no one has the answer. I know for instance the amount of money that may be there in the stock markets will run into tens of thousands of crores. But this is what we call liquid cash which is boiling here and when things get hotter more comes here and when things get cold it goes back from here.

The major investments that have taken place are like for instance the Etisalat telecommunications company from UAE which is now wound up and gone back. Then you have Emaar which is doing a huge township in Andhra Pradesh. You have six ports being run by a Dubai Port World company.

In the case of Oman, we jointly own a fertilizer company in Oman, and we jointly own a refinery in Madhya Pradesh here. We also own a steel mill there. Oman has also got a revolving India-Oman Joint Investment Fund which is run by the Central Bank of Oman and the State Bank of India. They have a hundred million dollars which is sitting in the kitty which has a capacity of one and a half billion dollars. The Sultan of Oman has said that you can go up to US\$1.5 billion. They have just about finished this US\$100 million. Now they will get more money and they will start getting more projects.

Investment of some of the big countries like Saudi Arabia is less than US\$100 million. They have not invested big money. UAE is a big investor. Oman is a big investor. Kuwait is now

trying to come in. Bahrain is too small a country. Qatar is very keen to come but then they are waiting and they are buying their time.

Overall, right now the potential I would say is much bigger than the actual investments that we have in the country. In fact our investments in the Gulf may be more at this point in time than their investments in India.

Question: There are a lot of media reports about the kind of humanitarian crisis that you are talking about. People who are scared of police raids are going into hiding thinking that the law is going to change, etc. Are we making any attempt to reach out to the Indian community there who are living under such conditions? Also, is there any evidence to suggest that other countries in the region are also mulling such changes to their labour laws?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): I will give one simple example. I think in 2007 there was an amnesty which was declared by the United Arab Emirates, and we had about 50,000 Indian who came back. That is a sizeable number. And in the year 2013, they had another amnesty, which ended on the second or third of February. How many Indians returned? 3,500. Why did this happen? The number of Indians has shot up compared to 2007 and now, and the number of illegal Indians also must have shot up. But how is it that this number has suddenly become so small? This is where you should give some credit to the Indian diplomatic missions.

We have introduced new systems over a period of time. We have understood their problems and we have tried to be as accessible to them as possible. One of the constant problems was: 'Embassy ka phone hi nahin milta ji. Koi uthata nahin'. So, first you must get them to access the Embassy. We said, 'Okay, we will have an open day every month.' In some Missions where there are more Indians, they are doing it every week also. On one holiday they declare the Mission open. They are open and the Ambassador sits there personally and so does the consular officer. Anyone can come and ask about any complaint.

Then we have started what is called Indian Community Welfare Fund which is given to us by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. For example, we have a dead body which was lying there and it has to be transported to some family in India. We do not have a budget and it is supposed to be paid for by the next of kin according to our manual. So, we wait here. I have regular complaints saying that the body is lying there for three weeks or fifteen days. The fact is there are formalities to be attended to there in that country. It is not that the body is lying on the wayside and rotting. It is embalmed and it is put in the morgue. In all these Gulf countries the morgues are well looked after. The body is kept safe and sound till the formalities are completed. Once the formalities are completed, then he comes to the Embassy, gets the attestation of documents and the body is carried with his original passport into the State concerned where he goes back.

The fact is we have been able to access our people more easily. The Ambassadors are under the instructions to send teams across in Saudi Arabia for instance which is 70 per cent of the size of India. He has only a certain minimum number of officers. So, he shoots them off periodically telling them to go to that region, this region, and keep meeting people. We ourselves keep pressurizing our Ambassadors wherever there are concentrations of Indians, to make sure that our officers go there and it helps. Many times the ordinary Indians, particularly in the Gulf, who are not highly educated think that the Ambassador is a very big man and Embassy is much bigger than our temple, you cannot just go there. That feeling of fear has been removed now completely. Now the Ambassador is accessible, the officers are accessible. If they are not accessible on the phone and the fax, they have to be physically present on the specified day of the month and everybody can go at that time. The doors are kept open. So, that is the reason why the numbers have reduced. Earlier they all used to accumulate. Now regularly we are sending bodies back, regularly we are deporting people, regularly we are going to the court and getting waivers on penalties. The process is ongoing. That is why this number came down in UAE from 50,000 in 2007 to 3500 in 2013. I hope I have answered the question.

Question: In Saudi Arabia, are you making any efforts to reach out to the people who are scared due to the recent development?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): Yes, that is exactly what we are doing in Saudi Arabia also. In addition to what we are doing now, the Ambassador is doing an additional bit. He is going and meeting Indians where there are large concentrations of Indians. He has been to Jeddah. He has been to Dammam. He has been to the Eastern Province. He has been meeting the Governors of these Provinces. That is what Akbar was also mentioning. And then people are being told also wherever they are accessible. There are telephones; there is an Embassy website. Although everybody may not be able to read the website but opinion leaders are in regular touch.

Now in the Gulf the Ambassador has a set of telephone numbers on which he can tweet, on which he can send mails, on which he can send SMSs. He keeps in touch with the opinion leaders, the associations that we have all over the country. It is very easy now to disseminate information. It used to be very difficult once upon a time. Now it is much easier and we have a 24/7 helpline which is open every day of the week 24 hours in every Embassy.

Official Spokesperson: Just to add to the point, I think what you are thinking of is a system which was there several years ago. The system has now been revamped. We have community welfare wings in every Mission, certainly in Saudi Arabia. The Ambassadors and the Consul Generals give great importance to it. If your argument is that with 2.5 million people are we able to reach out to everybody, sure the answer is we try our best. Within the circumstances we try and ensure that there are systems and we try and respond in the cases of unique nature, etc. So, that is about the expanse of what we can do in these circumstances.

Question: This is regarding Saudi as well as the rest of the Gulf. There have been indications that a few countries have considered abolishing the Kafala sponsorship system. You said there is an ongoing dialogue. Is India doing anything on its part because on the other side the GCC has been working to make sure that this remains? There is a new plan for recruiting domestic workers that keeps Kafala in there. Is there anything that India is discussing in terms of getting rid of it because there are countries that have considered it?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): First and foremost, we do not interfere in the internal policy machines of other governments. We do not go and advice them how to run their government. If they want to do something on their own, it is their choice. If we like it, we will go and tell them, yes we like it. We have told them, one country has done it, maybe you can also try and do it. Bahrain did it once, and the other countries may also do it. But we cannot go and ask them that they should do it. But we keep discussing these aspects. There are political consultations which take place between the two governments. It is free for all. There is no restriction on the agenda. We can speak on any subject and we do raise our concerns and we do talk about that subject but we do not in any way formally try to influence their policy-making systems.

Question: At the risk of being naïve I just wanted to understand. The Saudi move comes soon after the first summit of the ACD which was held in October in Kuwait where, if you remember, there was a lot of discussion and there was this thing of more cooperation and all. Is not this Saudi move a bit of a sad reflection, not a very happy situation soon after the ACD?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): Actually, if you look at the history it goes back to December 2010 when a young man by the name Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia burnt himself because he was not allowed to run a thela shop and he was not even given a job. That is where the Arab Spring began and it spread around. One of the prime causes, which is now understood to be a major one, is the unemployment of educated youth in all these countries. So, with that began an understanding within the leaderships of the entire region that time has come for them to employ their people.

For a long time they had plenty of money but most of this money came from oil. If you go to a petroleum refinery, if any of you has actually gone, it is a maze of pipelines. It does not create employment. In a good two million ton refinery of Dhirubhai Ambani's son, you will possibly find 300 people. That is about the employment it creates. It may create more in terms of truck drivers who will carry that and ships which will bring in the crude oil and then other industries which use the output of these machines. But direct employment is very minimal. So, Saudi Arabia has 30 million people but how many jobs has the petroleum industry created? Not many.

So they had to start working to get their own boys and girls who are returning from America, who are returning from UK, who are returning from Australia after studying and acquiring degrees. They were worried that these will become more Mohamed Bouazizis. So they had to

start creating the employment. So the search for balance in the employment regime of the Gulf began at that time. We have been seeing it.

Even the so-called Nitaqat programme of Saudi Arabia started in September 2011. It is one and a half years ago. It is nothing new. But identifying the illegal people and deporting them is new. It has just started. It is only a few weeks old. All other countries are also doing it. Kuwait is also now trying to understand. The only reason is some people are better placed than the others. Like in Kuwait there are more white-collar and professional Indians. Same thing is true in UAE. But in Saudi Arabia a large number are in the blue-collar area. In Muscat, a large number are blue collar. Depending on where you are the problems vary, the intensity varies.

I would not say that there is any link between the Asian Cooperation Dialogue and the exodus that may come out of this. And this is not targeting Asia. There are Africans involved in it and there are other nationalities outside of Asia involved in it. We are not being targeted within Asia. In fact, we are still the largest number among the expatriates and we will possibly continue to be so for a long time to come.

Question: Mashallah, aapne badi khubsurti se sab jawab diye. Har saal jo Hajj hota hai, Hajj mein jo taqleefin hain, last moment par Saudi Arabia camp mein 200 kilometres, 300 kilometres divert kar deti hai. Aur unko pareshaniyan, taqleefin hai, aur koi bhi dekhne ke liye badi taqleefin jhelni padti hai. Is baar koi naya agenda bana hai ya aisa koi aage kuchh karravayi chaalu hai ispar ke naye agenda par kuchh ho?

Joint Secretary (Gulf & Hajj): Yeh Hajj ke liye to alag se poora savere se sham tak ki press conference ki zaroorat hai. Although I look after Gulf and Hajj, there are times in which I spend 120 per cent of my time on Hajj because bahut kaam karne ki humko zarurat padi. Aur humne kiya bhi apne taraf se koshish jitna hum kar sakte hain. Today, 170,000 Hajji Hindustan se Saudi Arabia jaate hain Hajj karne ke liye. Unmein se 125,000 log Hajj Committee ke zariye jaate hain. Hajj Committee was set up as a body under the Government of India under an Act of Parliament. Aur baaqi ke 45,000 ke kareeb log private tour operators ke zariye jaate hain. Now it is our responsibility to make sure that all the arrangements are made starting from the embarkation point in India. 21 shaharein hain Hindustan mein jahan se havai jahaz udte hain Hajj ke liye. And then we take them to Jeddah. From there we make them go through the Hajj ritual. Uske baad mein Hindustan unko vaapas laane ka zimma bhi hamaare upar aata hai.

Pehle to hum kehte the ki paanch saal mein ek baar aap Hajj kar sakte hain. Humne naya rule banaya ki ab zindagi mein aap ek hi baar Hajj kar sakte hain Hajj Committee ke dvara. Agar aap ke paas paise hain aur aap do baar Hajj karna chahte hainteen baar karna chahte hain, zaroor karein. Lekin private tour operator ke yahan jayiye. We will not allow. Kyon ki ek seat ke liye teen se chaar arziyan hamaare paas aate hain Hajj ke liye. Aise mauke par, aise haal mein, it is not correct and it is not appropriate that we allow people to repeat. Hum yahi kehte hain, jiska

koi nahin hota uska khuda hota hai. Toh, usi ke liye humne yeh lagaya ki zindagi mein ek hi baar Hajj karne ko milega hamaare paise se, jisko subsidy milega.

Ek hi humne us mein exception kiye hain aur yeh hai ki agar kisi mohatarma ko unke apne biradari mein mehram nahin milta. Ab kya karein? Mehram ke liye humne alag sa solution diya. Theek hai, mehram ke liye hum repeater ko allow karte hain. Chod dete hain. Lekin shart yeh hai ki subsidy nahin milegi unko. Aap poora air fare joh hum charge karte hain usko dijiye, hum aapko subsidy nahin denge.

Doosri baat, vahan pahunchne ke baad bahut taqleefein hoti hain logon ko. Zyada tar dekhiye Hindustan se jo Hajji jaata hai, voh umar ka bada hota hai. Buzurgon mein zyada hote hain log. Hamaare yahan se 15 hazaar se 20 hazaar log 70 ya 80 se saal upar ke hote hain. Pichhle saal dus, barah log 100 saal se bhi upar ke the. Aur voh itmeen se Hajj karke vapas bhi aaye hain.

Aur baaki mulkon mein ek zubaan boli jaati hai. Aur hamaare yahan har kism ke boli bole jaate hain. Once you go there you have to look after him. We have Khadim-ul-Hujjaj. Teen sau ke liye ek le jaate hain. We have 150 doctors and 75 pharmacists to look after them. And we have Hajj Coordinators and Hajj Assistants, another 200 of them, who are there available to them all the time. We have now given them SIM cards, telephones, so that they cannot get lost, so that we can easily track them and bring them back to their place.

Official Spokesperson: Let me quickly tell you the additional features for this year which you wanted to know. Is saal Hindustan ke saare Haaji hopefully Jamaarat ka jitna daayra hota hai uske andar honge. Yeh nahin hai ki, jaise aap keh rahein hain, bees kilometer door aur kahin rahenge. Sab Hajji is saal, jitne bhi Hindustan se Hajj Committee ke aur private tour operators ke zariye se jaayenge, voh sab Jamaarat ke dayre ke andar rahenge.

Doosri baat yeh hai ki pehle hub and spoke system hota tha. Iska matlab yeh tha ki Srinagar se nikle, Dilli aaye, aur phir yahan se havai jahaz badlein hayan par aur yahan se Jeddah jaayen. Ab voh hub and spoke system khatm ho gaya hai. Direct flights rahenge. Jitne locations Ghanashyam sahab ne bataya vahan se direct flight rahenge Saudi Arabia jaane ke liye.

Question: ... (Inaudible)...

Official Spokesperson: Anecdotal incidents can be there from any side. You can give those. I have listened to these for eight years in my life. So, I understand that.

Question: ... (Inaudible)...

Official Spokesperson: You can always have anecdotes of one type and anecdotes of another type. I can give you fifty anecdotes of another type. Please understand that we try our best within the compulsions of a system which takes 175,000 Indians to a foreign country where they have never travelled before, they have never boarded an aircraft, the average age of the ordinary

Indian who does Hajj is 58 years, he has never walked such long distances but are required to walk ten kilometres every day. These are difficulties you have to understand in a foreign country where you do not know the language. There are restrictions. And after all Hajj is a pilgrimage. So, there are difficulties that you can envisage in that pilgrimage. We can only try and ameliorate the situation. We cannot do away with all difficulties.

On that note, I will thank Ghanashyam and end this session. Thank you.

Source: *Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi*, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/21514/Transcript+of+the+media+briefing+by+Joint+Secretary+Gulf+amp+Haj+and+Official+Spokesperson+April+3+2013>

39. Hajj quota for Andhra Pradesh, New Delhi, 25 April 2013.

Question:

- (a) Whether Government has increased the Hajj Quota for some States including Andhra Pradesh;
- (b) If so, the details thereof comparatively during the last five years; and
- (c) The actual demand from the Hajj Pilgrims from each State for the said period?

Answer

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

- (a) No.
- (b) & (c) The statement indicating state-wise number of Hajj applications, original quota allocated to the State/UT and the number of pilgrims who proceeded for Hajj through the Hajj Committee of India during last five years is at Annexure I.

For the annexure, see: <http://164.100.24.219/annex/228/Au3286.docx>

Source: *Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 3286 asked by Mohd. Ali Khan*, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

I. SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

40. Statement by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Permanent Representative in the Security Council Open Debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”, New York, 24 April 2013.

Thank you, President,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your Presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I also would like to express our appreciation for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank Under Secretary General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

President, the Middle East Peace Process is passing through its most difficult phase in recent times. For more than two years, the parties have not held any official meeting. Efforts of the international community, including that of the Quartet, have failed to make any impact on the ground. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, intensification of settlement activities is fast

eroding the very foundation of a two-state solution. The plight of ordinary Palestinians is worsening everyday due to roadblocks and related infrastructure of occupation that put restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods.

The blockade of Gaza has also continued causing a great deal of hardships to Palestinians. The plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails requires immediate attention. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is facing one of the worst financial crises that threaten to erode the progress made in building Palestinian state institutions. If the present situation persists, the international community will risk a serious destabilization in the region. It is therefore imperative that efforts aimed at breaking the deadlock and resumption of peace process is reinvigorated.

President, any political process in order to be meaningful must put an end to Israeli settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities are a violation of international law and harmful to the peace process. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

President, we have noted that Israel has recently taken some measures to allow flow of essential goods into Gaza. Still the continuing blockade remains in force, and is adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. We continue to call for complete lifting of the blockade. The parties should also fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement reached in November 2012.

Mr. President, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in its recent meeting in Brussels last month underscored the urgent need of closing the Palestinian Government's financing gap, estimated at \$1.2 billion for the current year. In this context, it is important that international community continues to support financial needs of the Palestinian authority.

President, since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. Since then, India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated by regular interactions. As a member of this Council during 2011-12, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. Continuing this support, India co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution in November 2012 that upgraded the status of Palestine to a non-member Observer state. India has consistently supported a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, 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.

India has also partnered Palestine in socio-economic development and extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority. As in previous years, India pledged an amount of US\$10 million in 2012 as budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes US\$1 million annually

to UNRWA. India is in the process of implementing projects, bilaterally and through IBSA fund, including in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and construction of schools.

In conclusion, President, let me express our deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria. We believe that the Joint Communiqué of the Action Group, adopted in June 2012, provides a good basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis. A Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society can alone resolve the crisis, and must be seriously pursued by all parties concerned.

I thank you.

Source: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, <http://www.un.int/india/2013/pmi30.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 Websites <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/> of Rajya Sabha and <http://loksabha.nic.in/> of Lok Sabha.

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