



INDIA SPEAKS

(Monthly Digest of Official Indian Statements on Middle East)

No. 54

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. BAHRAIN

1. Official visit of External Affairs Minister to the Kingdom of Bahrain, New Delhi, 6 December 2013

Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs is visiting the Kingdom of Bahrain on 7-9 December 2013 to hold bilateral discussions with the leadership of Bahrain and to attend the 9th edition of the “Manama Dialogue.” This is his first official bilateral visit to Bahrain.

India and Bahrain enjoy cordial and friendly relations, marked by close people to people contacts. Bahrain is an important trading partner for India with our non-oil bilateral trade in 2012-13 exceeding US\$1.3 billion. Over 350,000 Indian nationals work and contribute to the development of Bahrain. Their positive and well-appreciated contribution in the development of Bahrain has been an important anchor of our excellent bilateral engagement.

Khurshid will also take this opportunity to address a special session of the annual regional security summit- Manama Dialogue- organized jointly by the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the government of Bahrain.

India has vital stakes in the security and stability of the entire Gulf and the Middle East region which hosts around 7 million Indians. The region is the source of roughly two-third of India’s crude oil requirements and is the largest trading region for us accounting for over 26 per cent of our global trade.

During the visit, Khurshid will lay the foundation stone of the new Indian Chancery premises to be built in Bahrain. He will also chair a Conference of Indian Heads of Mission in the region.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22590/Official+visit+of+External+Affairs+Minister+to+the+Kingdom+of+Bahrain>

b. EGYPT

2. Visit of Nabil Fahmy, Foreign Minister of Egypt to India, 4-6 December 2013, New Delhi, 3 December 2013.

Ministry of External Affairs

(XP Division)

MOST IMMEDIATE/MEDIA ADVISORY

As on 3 December 2013 at 1200 hours

Visit of His Excellency Nabil Fahmy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt to India from 4-6 December 2013.

Wednesday, 4 December 2013

0310 hours Arrive Delhi

1145 hours: Call on the Vice President

Venue: 6, Maulana Azad Road

Photo Op: Agencies Only

1245 hours: Meeting with Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs

Venue: Hyderabad House

Photo Op: AV Media

Friday, 6 December 2013

1815 hours: Departure

Please note:

Media is requested to arrive 45 minutes before each event.

Access restricted to holders of PIB card only.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-advisory.htm?dtl/22547/Visit+of+Mr+Nabil+Fahmy+Foreign+Minister+of+Egypt+to+India+December+4+2013>

3. Mohamed Sarwat to Distribute Prizes to Winners of the "Glimpses of India" Painting Competition, Cairo, 5 December 2013.

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC), Embassy of India, Cairo, is pleased to announce that veteran Egyptian Singer Mohamed Sarwat and Ambassador of India to Egypt, Navdeep Suri will distribute prizes and certificates to the 80 winners of the 20th annual

“Glimpses of India” painting competition at a ceremony that will be organized at the Gomhouria Theatre at Abdeen at 1800 hours on 16 December 2013.

Mohamed Sarwat is a prominent Egyptian singer, born in the city of Tanta in Egypt into religious environment nourished by Sufi teachings. He later joined the prestigious Arabic Music Troupe, singing the hits of Mohamed Abd Al-Wahab, Abd Al-Halim Hafez and Farid Al-Atrach. He also organized many concerts for religious occasions at Opera House. Sarwat sang several hits for children grouped together into an album under name of “Racha.” He also performed a famous duet with Hani Chaker for a national Song Entitled “Baladi” and more recently “Ahmou Miser Ya Misreen.” Sarwat was also a co-star in some Egyptian movies and T.V Soaps.

To commemorate the birthdays of Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation, Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India’s first Education Minister, the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) has been conducting a painting competition for Egyptian school children called the “Glimpses of India” painting competition in November every year in cooperation with the Ministry of Education of ARE. This year, around 1,800 children in the age groups from 6-18 years including children with special needs from 437 government, private and national institutes in Cairo and Giza governorates participated in the competition which was held from 28-30 October 2013 at Al Azhar Park. A 3-member independent jury selected 100 winners. A catalogue carrying all the winning paintings of the children will be distributed at the ceremony.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=748

4. Exhibition of Photographs "Facets of Indo-Islamic Architecture in India", Cairo, 8 December 2013.

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) will host an exhibition entitled "Facets of Indo-Islamic Architecture" by Dr. Mohamed El Deeb from 11- 24 December 2013 at its premises. The exhibition will include a selection of photographs from a variety of different Islamic monuments in India, including the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort, and the Charminar in Hyderabad. The Ambassador of India, Navdeep Suri will inaugurate the exhibition on 11 December 2013 at 1800 hours.

Indo-Islamic architecture encompasses a wide range of styles from various backgrounds that helped shape the architecture of the Indian subcontinent from the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent around the 7th century. The Mughal Empire, an empire that ruled India from 1526 to 1764 left a mark on Indian architecture that was a mix of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and native Indian architecture. A major aspect of Mughal architecture is the symmetrical nature of buildings and courtyards. The most important symbol of Indo-Islamic architecture in India is the tomb or the mausoleum which evolved from the basic cube and hemisphere of the early phase into a more

detailed form during the Mughal period. The tomb chamber houses the cenotaph below which is the grave. The most famous example of tomb in India is the Taj Mahal.

Dr. Mohamed El Deeb is an Orthopaedic surgeon and a passionate photographer, with numerous exhibitions to his credit. He is the General Secretary of the Egyptian Salon of Photography, and member of various Societies of Photography including the Royal British Society and the Saudi Photography Society. He has held exhibitions at various cultural centres in Egypt as well as abroad, including Switzerland, London and Vienna.

The exhibition will be open daily till 24 December 2013 from 10 am to 5pm from Sunday-Wednesday and on Thursdays from 12:30pm to 7:30pm. Fridays and Saturdays are closed. For more information, contact the Centre at macic@indembcairo.com, the Information Wing at info.cairo@mea.gov.in or visit the Indian Embassy Facebook page: Indian Embassy Cairo.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=752

5. Social Fund for Development hold an exhibition entitled “Our Heritage” for Egyptian handicrafts products at India House, Cairo, 15 December 2013.

The Social Fund for Development (SFD) organized an exhibition entitled “Our Heritage” in cooperation with the Indian Embassy in Egypt on 14 December 2013, as part of its strategy to support small enterprises and provide marketing and promotional services to heritage products. Jointly hosted by the Ambassador of India H.E. Navdeep Suri and Ghada Wali, SFD Secretary General, the exhibition was inaugurated by the Minister for Industry and Foreign Trade, Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour and attended by a number of prominent dignitaries, including the Minister for Environment Laila Iskander, the Governor of Monoufiya Dr. Ahmed Shreen Fawzi in addition to members of the diplomatic corps.

Speaking at the event, the Minister for Industry and Foreign Trade congratulated the Social Fund for Development for organizing the exhibition and thanked the Indian Embassy for its support. He further added that there was much to be learned from the Indian experience in the fields of small enterprises and handicrafts, particularly its success in marketing and export. Ambassador Suri, while welcoming visitors, mentioned that the handicrafts sector in India had empowered the weaker sections and has been successful on account of the active cooperation between Government, NGOs and the private sector. NGOs have played a key role in marketing products, and have provided the artisans with latest designs, enabling them to compete effectively on the global stage. He also mentioned the cooperation between Dr. Heba Handousa's Egypt Network for Integrated Development (ENID) and Indian artisans collective. Dr. Handousa was leading a team to India in January 2014 to study ways of collaboration and to share best practices in the field.

The exhibition offered various heritage products and handicrafts to visitors with the objective of spreading information about them and providing enterprises with marketing opportunities. Nine

NGOs and more than 45 enterprises for Egyptian handicraft products (from carpets and kilims to wooden artefacts and Hagaza products) participated in the exhibition. Dalia El Allamy, exhibiting a variety of traditional Egyptian handicrafts, under the banner of Turath (heritage), expressed her happiness at being part of the exhibition, and that India House had been opened to the traditional artisans of Egypt.

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has signed a tripartite MOU with Social Fund and the World Bank under which SIDBI and its associates will provide consultancy for three year period to SFD and establish credit guarantee system for micro, small and medium enterprises in Egypt. India has established itself as one of the leading countries in the field of SMEs.

For more information contact the Press and Information Wing, Embassy of India, Cairo, or write to us at info.cairo@mea.gov.in

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=764

6. Arab League Secretary General visits India to sign Memorandum of Cooperation, Cairo, 16 December 2013.

The Secretary General of the Arab League, Dr. Nabil El Araby, is visiting India on 17 December to sign a new Memorandum of Cooperation as well as an Executive Programme of Action between the two sides. He will hold talks with the External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, and call on the Vice President Hamid Ansari. This will be the first time that Dr. Nabil el Araby is visiting India since assuming the post of Secretary General of the Arab League.

The new MOC and Executive Programme that Secretary General and the External Affairs Minister will sign represent significant upgrade of the relationship between India and the Arab League. Under the proposed EP, there will be an annual senior officials meeting in which senior diplomats from the 22 Arab members states will meet with their counterparts from India and every two years, a Ministerial meeting between the Arab League and India will be held at the level of Foreign Ministers. The broadening of the relationship is also attested to by the specific items of cooperation under the Executive Programme, which include the Arab-India Partnership Summit in the field of trade and investment, an Indo-Arab Cultural Festival, cooperation in the energy sector, agriculture, education and human resources, as well as the media. A conference of the Presidents of prominent Indian universities with their counterparts in the Arab world is being planned in Kuwait in 2014, and a media symposium is also on the anvil.

The new Memorandum of Cooperation and Executive Programme is an acknowledgement of the vital political and economic interests that link India and the Arab world. As much as the historical and cultural interactions, today the Arab world is one of the largest partners for India with over US\$110 billion in trade, as well as a large expatriate population. India and the Arab League first established a formal mechanism for dialogue and consultations in 2002. In 2010, the

Indian Ambassador in Cairo was designated as the Observer to the League. During the last eleven years, there have been a number of high level visits and consultations. Dr. Araby, a distinguished diplomat who has served as Egypt's Foreign Minister and the Permanent Representative at the United Nations was the Egyptian Ambassador to India in the early 1980s.

For more information please contact the Information Wing of the Indian Embassy at info.cairo@mea.gov.in or visit us on Facebook at Indian Embassy Cairo.

Source: Embassy of India, Cairo, http://www.indembcairo.com/en-us/presscentre/pressreleases.aspx?udt_656_param_detail=767

c. IRAN

7. Indian fishermen in jails of Iran, New Delhi, 5 December 2013

Question:

- (a) whether many Indian fishermen were being held in a jail in Iran since December last year; if so, the details thereof; and
- (b) Whether Government has made any attempt to get these fishermen detained in Iran released; if so, the details thereof?

Answer

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

(a) & (b) 26 Indian fishermen are reportedly held in Iranian jails that include a group of 21 fishermen held since March 2013, and a group of 5 fishermen held since October 2013. The nationality of these 26 fishermen is yet to be confirmed pending consular access being granted to the Indian Embassy in Tehran by the Government of Iran.

Government has been regularly requesting consular access to the fishermen and has also requested the Government of Iran for their early release and repatriation to India.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 52, asked by S. Thangavelu, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

8. Oil import from Iran, New Delhi, 17 December 2013

Question:

- (a) Whether India is considering increasing crude oil imports from Iran so as to save US\$ 8.5 million in foreign exchange;
- (b) Whether it is a fact that India has slashed crude oil imports from Iran by 26.5 per cent during 2012-13, importing just 13.1 million tons against 18.1 million tons, the previous year;
- (c) Whether it is also a fact that during the remainder of the year, India is considering to import 11 million tons of crude oil from Iran; and
- (d) If so, the details thereof?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (Panabaaka Lakshmi)

(a) to (d). Quantum of crude oil imported by Indian refineries from various sources is decided by them on the basis of technical, commercial and other considerations. The oil companies finalize the Term Contract volumes based on techno-economics and energy security point of view.

The total crude oil imported from Iran by Indian companies during the last three years is as under:

Year	Quantity (MMT)
2013-14*	05.82
2012-13	13.14
2011-12	18.11
2010-11	18.50

* upto November 2013.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 1377, asked by Dr. K.P. Ramalingam, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

d. ISRAEL

9. India s relation with Israel, New Delhi, 5 December 2013

Question:

- (a) Whether it is a fact that India's relations with Israel have been growing rapidly; if so, the details in this regard; its likely benefits to India; and
- (b) Its implications on the Global situation?

Answer

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

(a) Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, India-Israel bilateral relationship has grown steadily. India has cordial and diversified relations with Israel which are mutually beneficial. Cooperation with Israel brings benefits to India in sectors such as defence, agriculture, water management, R & D and science & technology.

(b) India's relations with Israel stand on their own and are not at the expense of strong, time-tested and historic ties with the Arab world. Notwithstanding growing ties with Israel, there has been no change in the traditional policy of strong support to the Arab and the Palestinian cause.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No. 56 asked by Mohammed Adeb, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/QResult.aspx>

e. KUWAIT

10. Visa structure for Kuwaiti nationals, Kuwait, 12 December 2013.

India and Kuwait have enjoyed historically close, warm and friendly ties. The visit of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait to India in November 2013 has imparted a new thrust to the strengthening further of the bilateral ties. To

facilitate travel of Kuwaiti nationals to India for business, tourism, medical and study purposes, the Embassy has adopted the following visa structure for Kuwaiti nationals with immediate effect:

S.No.	Type of visa	Duration	No. of entries	Indian Visa fee in KD(*)
(i)	Business	5 Years	Multiple	63.100
(ii)	Business	1 Year	Multiple	38.100
(iii)	Tourism	6 months	Multiple	13.100
(iv)	Medical	1 year	Multiple	38.100
(v)	Student	Period of study	As required	24.100

(*) In addition, a service charge of KD 5 will also apply for each visa service provided.

Please apply Indian visa online at www.bls-international.com and deposit visa application, with applicable visa fee and service charge, at either M/s. BLS International Services, Emad Commercial Centre, Basement floor Ahmed Al Jaber Street, Sharq, Kuwait city (Telephone: 22986607 – Fax: 22470006) or M/s. BLS International Services, Mujamma Unood, 4th floor, Office No.25-26 Makka Street, Entrance 5, Fahaheel, Kuwait (Telephone: 22986607 – Fax: 22470006). For additional information, please contact Second Secretary (Consular) in the Embassy at sscons@indembkwt.org

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=316>

11. New Indian Ambassador Sunil Jain presented credentials to Foreign Minister, Kuwait, 18 December 2013.

Newly appointed Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain met Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and handed a copy of his credentials.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a ceremony on this occasion that was attended by Kuwait's Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khalid Suleiman Al-Jarrallah, Chairman of the Protocol Department Ambassador Dhari Ajran Al-Ajran and Deputy Director of Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid's Office Saleh Al-Loughani.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=317>

12. BLS International Visa Services Company Co updated processing fees, Cairo, 23 December 2013.

As a goodwill gesture, BLS International Visa Services Company Co. (KSCC), which is operating as a sole partner for the Embassy of India in Kuwait to handle Passport and Visa Services, has reduced the Indian Passport processing fee from KD 1.500 to KD 1.000 and Indian

Visa processing fee from KD 5.000 to KD 3.000. These rates have been implemented with effect from 17 December 2013.

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=318>

13. Advisory to Indian nationals in Kuwait, Kuwait, 24 December 2013.

The Embassy has been often receiving reports from the members of Indian community residing in Kuwait regarding thefts, robberies assaults and damages to their property etc. All such incidents should be immediately reported to the local police station. In order to extend help the members of our community, please contact us with the following information so that the matter could also be taken up by the Embassy with Kuwaiti authorities:-

- (a) Brief details of the incident;
- (b) Civil ID of the affected member(s) and their passport details;
- (c) Contact telephone number and the proof of residence of the person(s) affected;
- (d) Copy of FIR along with address of the Police station.

Please contact either Ms Hend, Ambassador's office at Telephone No. 22561276, Fax No. 22546958 (E-mail: amb.kuwait@mea.gov.in OR ambss@indembkwt.org) or Shri. Balram Kumar Upadhyay, Counsellor (Consular and Chief Welfare Officer) on Telephone No. 22533125, Fax No.22573910 (E-mail: counsellor@indembkwt.org).

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=319>

14. Embassy of India - Holiday Notice, Kuwait, 29 December 2013.

The Embassy of India will be closed on the following dates during the month of January 2014.

1 January 2014, Wednesday – New Year's Day

14 January 2014, Tuesday – Id - E - Milad

26 January 2014, Sunday – Republic Day

Source: Embassy of India, Kuwait, <http://www.indembkwt.org/DispNews.aspx?ID=320>

f. LIBYA

15. Meeting of the Ambassador of India with H.E. Nuri Al-Abbar, Chairman of the Libyan High National Elections Commission, Tripoli, 3 December 2013.

On 2 December 2013, Anil Kumar Trigunayat, Ambassador of India met with Nuri Al-Abbar, Chairman of the Libyan High National Elections Commission (HNEC) to discuss matters related to the MoU signed between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and HNEC in November 2012 for cooperation in the field of elections. Other senior members of HNEC including. Khaled Al-Sahli, Commissioner, HNEC were also present in the meeting. In the meeting views were also exchanged on the ongoing electoral and political process in Libya inter alia.

His Excellency Nuri Al-Abbar, on his part, said that India was the only country with which HNEC had a MoU for cooperation in the field of elections and was appreciative of the Indian democratic process. Expressing his optimism about the ongoing electoral and political process he added that security was amongst the foremost of concerns for HNEC. He also thanked

Ambassador for the Indian offer for assistance in capacity building to HNEC as part of the MoU concluded in November 2012 and said that he looked forward to working together with the Election Commission of India.

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=73&cntnt01pagelimit=4&cntnt01returnid=15>

16. Annual ITEC Day celebration at Ambassador's residence, Tripoli, 19 December 2013.

On 18 December 2013, Embassy of India, Tripoli organized the Annual ITEC Day at Ambassador's residence attended by a number of Libyan ITEC scholars, senior Libyan Government officials from the Foreign and other Ministries and by the Libyan media.

His Excellency Anil Kumar Trigunayat, Ambassador of India in his welcome speech, giving a brief overview of the India-Libya bilateral cooperation, both existing and proposed including the setting up of a Vocational Training Centre in Libya, urged the Libyan friends to avail of opportunities like the ITEC programme to the fullest extent and also offered to arrange tailor made programmes for Libyans, if needed. He reiterated India's continued support to Libya, with which India has always had friendly and warm relations, in her transition to democracy and nation building.

His Excellency Saeed Ibrahim Al Khattali, Assistant Under Secretary of Technical Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was the Chief Guest in his opening remarks appreciated India's continuing support and assistance to 'New Libya' particularly in capacity building through programmes like ITEC.

Three of the Libyan ITEC scholars or the so called 'Goodwill Ambassadors of India in Libya' fondly reminisced and shared their experiences on how they enjoyed and benefitted immensely from the ITEC courses in terms of skill enhancements that helped better their career prospects among other things on the occasion.

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme was born out of the vision of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and was instituted on 15 September 1964 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India with the belief that "it was necessary to establish relations of mutual concern and inter-dependence based not only on commonly held ideals and aspirations, but also on solid economic foundations. Technical and economic cooperation was considered to be one of the essential functions of an integrated and imaginative foreign policy." The ITEC Programme is essentially bilateral in nature. However, in recent years, ITEC resources have also been used for cooperation programmes conceived in regional and inter-regional context through regional and multilateral organizations and cooperation groupings.

The ITEC Programme, a flagship initiative for capacity building through innovative forms of technical cooperation is fully funded by the Government of India, has evolved and grown over the years. It is a visible symbol of India's role and contribution to South-South cooperation, a partnership born out of a shared sense of solidarity and that is a fundamental pillar of India's foreign policy and diplomacy. It is entirely voluntary and free of conditionality that furthers the national development priorities of India's partners with national ownership at its centre. Under the ITEC programme not less than 8,000 candidates annually from 161 countries in Asia, Africa, East Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean as well as Pacific and Small Island countries are invited to share in the Indian developmental experience acquired over six decades of India's existence as a free nation. As a result of different activities under this programme, there is now a visible and growing awareness among other countries about the competence of India as a provider of technical know-how and expertise as well as training opportunities, consultancy services and feasibility studies. These programmes have generated immense goodwill and substantive cooperation among the developing countries.

Since 2005, several hundred Libyans applied and not less than 85 of them availed of scholarships under the ITEC programme to undergo training in a host of fields like IT and E-Governance, Animation, Agriculture, Banking and Finance, English Language, International Trade, Management and Entrepreneurship, Pharma, Renewable Energy and others. They mostly came from Government organizations and bodies and were desirous of doing short-term refresher courses in their fields/areas for skill enhancement and to improve their career prospects. A third of these Libyan scholars came from outside Tripoli with less than a tenth being women. During the revolution unfortunately not many Libyans could avail of the scholarships. However since 2012, the programme has once again gathered momentum and given the positive response, for the year 2013-14, the number of slots for Libya has been increased from 25 (2012-13) to 30. And this number may hopefully see further increases in the coming years.

Embassy of India also offers scholarships under other schemes like ICCR, IAFS, C V Raman Scheme etc. To know more about the Scholarships which could be availed of for studies/training in India interested individuals are requested to contact the Education wing of the Embassy or visit: www.indianembassy.ly

Source: Embassy of India, Tripoli,

<http://indianembassy.ly/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=74&cntnt01pagelimit=4&cntnt01returnid=15>

g. OMAN

17. Press Release, Muscat, 26 December 2013.

All Omani nationals and foreigners residing in the Sultanate of Oman, who are applying for Indian visa, are hereby advised that they should fill online visa application form on the website www.indianvisaonline.gov.in which is the only website authorized by the Government of India to apply for online visa. As per the laid procedure, after filling the information, applicants should

take the printout and then visit the BLS International LLC in Al Wattayah or its authorized collection centres and submit the application and make payment at BLS International office/collection centres only. Applicants are further advised that payment for visa services should be made only in the office of M/s BLS International LLC, Wattayah or its authorized collection centres and there is no mechanism to make online payment for visa services in the Sultanate of Oman.

Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,

<http://www.indemb-oman.org/inner.aspx?type=AllPressRelease&id=0>

h. QATAR

18. Text of Letter of Warm Greetings and Felicitations sent by Pranab Mukherjee, Honourable President, Doha, 12 December 2013

Your Highness,

On the occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar, I have the pleasure to extend warm greetings and felicitations on behalf of the Government and the people of India and on my own behalf to Your Highness and to the people of the State of Qatar.

Our two countries have historically enjoyed close and friendly relations anchored in shared interests and extensive people to people contacts. I am confident that the ongoing cooperation across the full spectrum of political, economic, defence and cultural activities between our two countries will continue to diversify and strengthen, to our mutual benefit in the years to come.

I take this opportunity to convey to Your Highness my best wishes for your personal and good health and well-being, as also for the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly people of the State of Qatar.

Please accept, Your Highness, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Source: Embassy of India, Doha,

<http://www.indianembassyqatar.org/pages/importantannouncements.php>

19. Open House, Doha, 21 December 2013

Embassy of India will hold an Open House on Tuesday, 24 December 2013, to address any urgent consular and labour problems of Indian nationals in the State of Qatar.

The Open House will be held from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm. written information on issues/cases proposed to be discussed with the Embassy may please be given from 5.30 pm to 6 pm. This will be followed by meeting with Embassy officials from 6 pm to 6.30 pm.

Salient information would be sent to the media after the Open House.

Source: Embassy of India, Doha,

<http://www.indianembassyqatar.org/pages/importantannouncements.php>

20. Labour & Community Welfare – Salient information for December 2013, Doha, 24 December 2013.

Embassy of India, Doha attaches utmost importance to the welfare of Indian nationals in Qatar and works closely with the authorities concerned towards this end. The Embassy deeply appreciates the cooperation of the Government of Qatar in following up any consular/labour issues/cases of Indian nationals.

A team of Embassy officials visited the Central Prison and the Deportation Centre during this week to enquire about the welfare of detainees from India. The total number of Indian nationals in the Central Prison and the Deportation Centre currently is 61 and 232, respectively.

During the current year, the Labour and Community Welfare Section of the Embassy have received a total of 3,484 complaints so far. The number of complaints during the last two years is as follows:

Year	Number
2011	3,186
2012	3,385

The number of deaths registered in the Embassy in December 2013 was 20. During 2013, a total of 232 deaths have been registered in the Embassy so far. The number of deaths registered in the last two years is as follows:

Year	Number
2011	239
2012	237

On the basis of requests received from the authorities concerned in Government of Qatar for travel documents for detainees in the Deportation Centre, the Embassy has issued 11 Emergency Certificates (ECs) in December 2013. The Embassy also provided air tickets to 16 Indian nationals detained in the Deportation Centre to return to India.

The Embassy conveyed its deepest condolences on the passing away of HAJIKKA, a long standing and well known Indian social worker in Doha. Ambassador Sanjiv Arora and other officials attended a condolence meeting in memory of HAJIKKA convened by Indian community organizations at the Indian Cultural Centre on 22 December 2013 and paid rich tributes to him for his dedicated services.

The Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), functioning under the aegis of the Embassy for the welfare of Indian workers, continues to assist Indian workers through welfare measures such as air tickets, medical treatment, providing financial assistance, etc.

The ICBF, in pursuance of its mission to extend medical assistance, will be organizing a medical camp, in association with Indian Doctors Club and other partners, in Zikreet on 31 January 2014, for the welfare of low paid workers residing in Dukhan/Zikreet Industrial area.

The Embassy had organized its monthly Open House to address urgent consular and labour issues/cases of Indian nationals on 24 December 2013. The Ambassador and other officials along with ICBF President Kareem Abdulla, were available till late in the evening. While there were no fresh complaints, the meeting was utilized to review progress on old complaints received by the Embassy.

Source: Embassy of India, Doha,

<http://www.indianembassyqatar.org/pages/importantannouncements.php>

i. SAUDI ARABIA

21. Embassy to honour the schools at SIBN Seminar, Riyadh, 9 December 2013

Saudi India Business Network (SIBN) under the aegis of Embassy of India, Riyadh, will organize a Seminar on “Higher Education in India” at the Embassy premises on 13 December 2013 (Friday) at 1730 hours. The seminar will provide a brain storming session to participants to explore ways and means to promote Saudi participation in Higher education sector in India. At the seminar, Embassy would honour the services of 10 Indian community schools, which contributed immensely in the efforts of the Embassy in fully utilizing the grace period announced by the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud which ended on 3 November 2013.

In India, the number of universities/academic institutions and colleges has increased manifolds since independence. There are many Indian institutions imparting quality education, foremost among them being Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), etc. and have earned a name for themselves world over. The quality of Indian Education is monitored and ensured by the government bodies like University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Association of Indian Universities (AIU), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

Thousands of foreign students from across the globe are currently pursuing higher studies in India; many of them are on scholarships and student exchange programs. The high quality education imparted by Indian Universities, combined with moderate fee-structure and right learning environment are the factors attracting thousands of students from different parts of the

world to pursue different courses in India. Higher Education in India has witnessed a tremendous increase in its institutional and infrastructural capacity.

The seminar being organized under the umbrella of the SIBN is part of sector specific activities which aims at promoting bilateral trade and investment by acting as a nodal point to facilitate interaction between the business communities of India and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and is 4th event in this series.

The Seminar is proposed to be interactive in nature and provide a forum to bring all relevant players together on one platform for information sharing and discussions. A representative from Education Consultants India Limited (EdCIL) which offers consultancy and technical services in different areas of Education and Human Resource Development will brief the audience and interact with them during the seminar. The seminar is expected to be attended by Professors, scholars, academicians, representatives from Indian/Saudi Universities, Members of Higher Board/Managing Committees of International Indian Schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

22. Press Release, Riyadh, 11 December 2013

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Government of India, will be organizing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2014 (PBD) in New Delhi from 7-9 January 2014.

PBD is a unique platform that connects over 2,000 overseas Indians across 60 countries. Besides opportunities to connect with different stakeholders from Industry and Government, PBD 2014 will offer new synergies to Indian Diaspora to network and collaborate across sectors in different states.

The Indian expatriate community members interested to participate in PBD 2014 can register their participation online at <http://www.pbd-india.com/registration.html> before 15 December 2013 and avail early bird discount. For more information please visit the website <http://www.pbd-india.com/>

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

23. Ambassador's address during the meeting of Managing Committee members of all International Indian Schools in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, 13 December 2013

President, Higher Board, Chairmen and Principals of International Indian Schools in Saudi Arabia and my dear friends!

Let me begin by thanking all the members of the Higher Board, Managing Committees and Principals of International Indian Schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for spending their time and efforts to travel to Riyadh and visit their Embassy for this unique meeting, which I believe is taking place for the first time. I would also like to thank all the community schools for

supplementing the Mission's efforts during the Grace Period few months back, which enabled us to meet the daunting challenge posed by the Saudi drive to streamline its labour market. Your support and cooperation helped the Indian expatriates to fully utilize the concessions announced by the Saudi authorities. I would like to honour today our schools and teachers who contributed in a big way in helping our brothers and sisters to fully utilize the concessions announced by the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques during the grace period.

I am very happy to see you all today. I called this meeting here to discuss issues which impinge on the effective functioning of our community schools and take feedback and suggestions from each one of you in this regard. I want each one of you to feel to be part of our bigger family. We are among the best schools in the country. Some of our schools are among the largest in the world. In recent years I have seen significant progress in the functioning of each of our schools. But there is scope for improvement.

As Patron I have a clear vision on the way the community schools are to function. I always wanted a rule based administration which focuses on total formation of our children by giving them quality education and training in values. I would like to give the motto 'Children First'. Today, I would like to highlight a few issues which are important to achieve our objective of Children First. I don't need to emphasize the enormous responsibilities entrusted upon us, it is only incumbent upon us that we discharge our duties to the fullest extent possible and must satisfy our conscience. This task should be undertaken with a sense of commitment, dedication and selflessness and by transcending the barriers of region, religion, language and caste.

I feel proud to announce that all the 10 International Indian Schools today have a democratically elected and functioning managing committee, a commitment which I made when I assumed the charge of Patron of the International Indian Schools. I assume that all those who are now part of community schools have thoroughly imbibed the Charter of the School, Higher Board rules and other guidelines put in place. We must understand that we are living in a foreign land and must work under the Saudi rules and regulations. We must not do anything in contravention to these laws or which adversely affect the image of our country.

I am glad to notice that most of the schools have their websites. I urge that those schools which still don't have websites to take steps in this regard, and those who already have, must display information like Charter of the School, Organization Rules, Higher Board Rules, Unified Service Rules, etc. in a prominent way. We can have one standard website template for all the 10 International Indian Schools for the sake of uniformity, consistency and balance. I would like the Higher Board to work on it and complete this task within a month.

I am happy to note that the Patron's Medal for "India Quiz Contest" that we launched this year is progressing well.

We must ensure that utmost propriety be exercised while incurring any expenditure and that it should be done in a transparent manner, open to scrutiny by anyone. It must be borne in mind that it is the hard earned money of our brothers and sisters which is entrusted to the school. We must work hard to give maximum returns on this investment by our fellow countrymen. We must be geared to meet the rising expectations of both the students and parent community. There should be well defined and set grievance redressal mechanism for each school.

In the conclusion, I would mention that everybody here in the Kingdom and back in India has pinned high hopes and expectations on the International Indian Schools and we have to work hard to reach the high exacting standards in the field of academics and overall performance. Despite several constraints we have continued to make progress. I hope that together we would continue on this path for a bright future of our country and always keeping in mind our motto: “Children First”.

I hope you will have a very useful interactive session.

Thank you.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=879&PID=691>

24. Ambassador's address at the Seminar on Higher Education in India, Riyadh, 13 December 2013

Excellencies, My friends from Saudi Arabia, fellow Indians, teachers and dear students!

Good evening to you all.

Let me begin by welcoming all of you who came here today to join us in this session on Higher Education in India. Today's event is the latest in the sector-wise programmes that Saudi India Business Network (SIBN) has been organizing since its inception in September this year. The objective of this interactive session on Higher Education is to explore ways and means to have more engagement, exchanges and interaction in the field of higher education. Higher Education is one of the sectors where both our countries can deepen our engagement as part of our strategic partnership.

The leadership of our two countries has given us a clear vision in the form of Delhi Declaration of 2006 and Riyadh Declaration of 2010. The Riyadh declaration said, I quote, “The two leaders reiterated their mutual desire to develop as knowledge-based economies based on advances in the areas of information technology, space science and other frontier technologies. They welcomed the agreements signed between the two sides in the field of Research and Education, Information Technology and Services, Science and Technology, and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The two leaders agreed on the role and importance of the youth in consolidating and strengthening the relations between their peoples, and directed the concerned authorities to prepare necessary programmes for activating this role in the framework of Memorandum of Cooperation in the educational field signed between the two countries in 2006, and also providing all necessary facilities to their students studying in both countries.” We need to do

more to achieve the vision of our leadership. This meeting today is a humble first step to realize this vision.

I see many scholars, educationists and policy makers who came here to join us. I welcome our Saudi friends who found time to join us. We also have amongst us this evening people who have come all the way from India to participate in this seminar. This reflects the importance which we Indians attach to education. This is also testimony to the fact that we share the responsibility to further build up on our capabilities and capacities by contributing in whatever way we can to the cause of higher education.

The founding fathers of India recognized the importance of higher education and laid foundation of many institutes of higher education many of which have earned global reputation today and are Institutes of National Importance. Some of our institutes like IITs and IIMs are of world repute.

The history and tradition of learning dates back to several millennia in India and finds mention in the Indus Valley civilization. What is known to us today as the Nalanda International University was once a flourishing centre of learning attracting students from as far as China and Middle East. Established in the 5th Century A.D., it is the world's oldest ancient higher learning institution. It is also world's first residential university which housed dormitories accommodating over 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers.

We as Indians are proud inheritors of this great tradition and we value and nurture this. In the modern world, education has transformed the human society in unthinkable and unimaginable ways. Today we are living in an era of science and technology and every walk of our life is affected and moved by it in one way or the other. I feel proud to say that India is at the frontier of many cutting edge technologies and has developed many state-of-the-art modern technologies indigenously. The immense human resource potential present in India coupled with the highly competent faculty and teaching staff have been churning engineers, scientists, doctors, IT professionals, business executives, whose foot prints are visible all across the world including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Now more private sector universities are entering this sector and are supplementing the efforts of the Government. In India today, many private universities and colleges are imparting world class education to both Indian and foreign students. Many of these institutions have entered into collaborations/joint cooperation with foreign universities and have faculty/student exchange programmes. There are many foreign students who are pursuing education in India in fields as diverse as Information Technology, bio-technology, fine arts, animation, business management, and are benefitting from the high quality educational environment which the Indian system offers. Many do come for short term specific training programmes which are offered by Indian universities for up gradating technical skills and knowledge.

Similarly, I am impressed with the importance that the Saudi authorities give to higher education here. Riyadh is becoming home to some of the best educational institutions in the region. It is time that we join hands together to make our efforts more useful for our two peoples.

We have today lined up a number of presentations and interactive sessions in this seminar which would attempt to discuss threadbare various aspects of education in India. We would like this to be brain storming session, a first session in several specific sessions to follow in coming months. I need to hear your constructive suggestions to make this engagement more fruitful.

Thank you all of you including our media partners for your enthusiastic participation and wish you all the best.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

<http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/Content.aspx?ID=879&PID=691>

25. Visa online Services, Riyadh, 15 December 2013.

The Embassy of India announces the starting of its online visa services with immediate effect. Those intending to visit India for tourist, business and other purposes can access the website at <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/indianVisaReg.jsp> to fill up the application form online.

A print out of the filled in application form duly signed is required to be submitted along with fee, two recent passport size photographs, photocopy of ID card/Iqama, proof of confirmation of hotel accommodation, airlines booking and passport-valid for at least six months beyond the applicable visa period- be submitted at the Visa application centre of M/s VFS GCC LLC at Umm-Al-Hammam in Riyadh or Al Mustafa building in Dhammam between 0830 hours to 1500 hours on all working days (i.e. Sunday to Thursday).

Visas will be normally issued on the 3rd working day except in cases which require detailed procedural formalities and clearances. In case of any difficulty the visa applicants may contact Attaché (Visa) at visa@indianembassy.org.sa or 011-4884144 Ext 205.

Source: Embassy of India, Riyadh,

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

j. SYRIA

26. India offers support for destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, New Delhi, 3 December 2013.

Government of India has decided to offer a financial contribution of US\$1 million to the Trust Fund set up at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) at The Hague for use in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and related facilities.

India would also offer the services of its experts to be used by the OPCW in the destruction verification activity as well as training slots for the personnel participating in the UN/OPCW mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

India is an original state party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and as a possessor state it has completed the destruction of its chemical weapons in accordance with the Convention.

India welcomes progress on the time-bound safeguarding and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. India's assistance to the OPCW is a concrete demonstration of India's consistent position of support for the complete destruction and elimination of chemical weapons worldwide.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22546/India+offers+support+for+destruction+of+Syrias+chemical+weapons>

k. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

27. Official visit of H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Foreign Minister of UAE, New Delhi, 9 December 2013.

His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Foreign Minister will pay an official visit to India on 12 December 2013 at the invitation of Honourable External Affairs Minister. He earlier visited India in May 2012 for bilateral discussions.

During the visit, the two sides will discuss bilateral, regional and other issues of mutual interest. It is expected that an agreement on Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection will also be signed.

India enjoys close and multifaceted comprehensive partnership with UAE which is our largest trading partner. Our well-balanced bilateral trade has crossed US\$ 74 billion during 2012-13. The UAE is the tenth largest investor in India in terms of foreign direct investments. It contributes significantly to India's energy security and is the fifth largest supplier of crude oil to India. Our 1.9 million strong vibrant Indian communities is the largest expatriate group in the UAE.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22598/Official+visit+of+HH+Sheikh+Abdullah+Bin+Zayed+Al+Nahyan+Foreign+Minister+of+UAE>

28. Visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of United Arab Emirates to India (December 11-12, 2013), New Delhi, 11 December 2013.

Ministry of External Affairs
(XP Division)

MOST IMMEDIATE/MEDIA ADVISORY

As on 11 December, at 1700 hours

Visit of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of United Arab of Emirates, 11-12 December 2013.

Wednesday, 11 December 2013

1900 hours: Arrive Delhi

Venue: Air Force Station, Palam

Photo Op: AV Media

Thursday, 12 December 2013

1200 hours: Meeting With Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs

Venue: Hyderabad House

Photo Op: AV Media

1430 hours: Emplane for Abu Dhabi

Please note: Media is requested to arrive 1 hour before each event

Access restricted to holders of PIB/organization card only

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-advisory.htm?dtl/22634/Visit+of+Minister+of+Foreign+Affairs+of+United+Arab+Emirates+to+India+December+11+2013>

29. New Indian Ambassador Arrives in Abu Dhabi, 30 December 2013

Ambassador of India to the United Arab Emirates T. P. Seetharam arrived in UAE on 29 December 2013.

Ambassador Seetharam was nominated as the Indian Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates by Government of India on 11 November 2014. He is expected to soon present his credentials to His Holiness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

Previously, he served as Indian High Commissioner to Mauritius from September 2011 to November 2013. He has handled India's bilateral relations with countries in Europe as well as the European Union in New Delhi as Additional Secretary, West Europe (2010 – 2011) and as Joint Secretary Central Europe (2009 – 2010).

In Permanent Mission of India in Geneva, he was the Minister (Disarmament) dealing with Conference on Disarmament (2000 – 2003). He has worked as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bangkok (Thailand) and dealt with UNESCAP (2003 – 2006). He also served in Indian Embassy in Phnom Penh (Cambodia) (1992 – 1993). He was Press Secretary to President of India Mr. K.R. Narayanan (1997 – 2000).

Ambassador Seetharam has considerable experience in Southern Africa having worked in Lusaka, Zambia (1984 – 1986) and having helped open Indian offices in Windhoek, Namibia (Jul 1989 – Nov 1989) as well as in Johannesburg (1993 – 1995) and Cape Town (1996 - 1997) in South Africa

A Chinese (Mandarin) speaking officer of 1980 batch, he was Director General of India- Taipei Association (2007 – 2009) and has also worked in Indian Embassy in Beijing (1990 – 1992) and Indian Commission in Hong Kong (1982 – 1984).

Born in Valliyil family in Kayamkulam, Kerala in 1956, Ambassador Seetharam is married to Deepa of Elenkath family in Trivandrum. They have a son Navneeth and a daughter Devi.

Source: Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, <http://indembassyuae.org/news11.html>

SPECIFIC ISSUES

I. ARAB LEAGUE GENERAL SECRETARY IN INDIA

30. Visit of Secretary General of the League of Arab States to India from (December 16-18, 2013), New Delhi, 15 December 2013.

Ministry of External Affairs

(XP Division)

MOST IMMEDIATE / MEDIA ADVISORY

As on 15 December, 2013 at 0900 hours

Official visit of the His Excellency Dr. NABIL ELARABY, Secretary General of the League of Arab States to India from December 16-18, 2013.

Monday, 16 December 2013

1445 hours: Arrive Delhi

IGI Airport Terminal III

Tuesday, 17 December 2013

1215 hours: Meeting with Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs

Venue: Hyderabad House

Photo Op: AV Media

1245 hours: Signing of Agreements & Joint Press Conference

Venue: Hyderabad House

All Media

1630 hours: Call on the Vice President

Venue: 6, Maulana Azad Road

Agencies Only

Wednesday, 18 December 2013

1035 hours: Emplane for Dubai

Please note: Media is requested to arrive 1 hour before each event

Access restricted to holders of PIB card only

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-advisory.htm?dtl/22650/Visit+of+Secretary+General+of+the+League+of+Arab+States+to+India+from+December+16+2013>

31. Transcript of Joint Media Interaction of External Affairs Minister and Secretary General of the League of Arab States, 17 December 2013.

Official Spokesperson (Syed Akbaruddin): Honourable dignitaries, members of the delegations, and friends from the media:

As is usual we will have a brief media event. I would now request the External Affairs Minister of India, Salman Khurshid, to make his opening remarks.

External Affairs Minister (Salman Khurshid): Thank you very much Your Excellency, Dr. Nabil Elaraby, an old friend of India and has been Ambassador for Egypt in our country some years ago and it is good to have our old friend back amongst us.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, my colleague E Ahamed, distinguished Ambassadors, excellencies, it is indeed really a great pleasure to be welcoming Dr. Nabil Elaraby on his first visit in the capacity of Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. He is no stranger, as I said, to our country having served as Ambassador; and I believe that this is really a homecoming in a sense even if it is his second home.

The Secretary-General and I have concluded extensive discussions. We have had very productive exchange of views. I need hardly say that it was marked by warmth and friendship that is characteristic of the very special nature of the relationship that we have between Arab countries and ourselves in India.

I expressed my respect and admiration for the work the Arab League has done over the years to strengthen Arab solidarity in which we have a stake, and to enhance the economic well-being and social developmental of the Arab peoples.

We have expressed our belief that India and the Arab world share deep historical and civilizational ties, and these have evolved collectively in our South-South cooperation. We have noted that both sides have a great deal to learn from each other, and build firm partnerships that would have a positive effect for our common and extended neighbourhood. As our extended neighbour ends, your extended neighbourhood begins. So, we really are in that sense in the extended neighbourhood.

In particular we noted the success of three Indo-Arab investment summits that have taken place so far. The training programmes that we believe are the most extensive that we have with anyone in the world, and that is giving young Arab diplomats at our Foreign Service Institute a special feel, and special ability to link our two regions.

At the same time, there was a realistic acknowledgement that while a significant amount of work has been done in the formal cooperation between the League and India since 2002, I need hardly say that enormous potential for deepening, widening and taking our relationship to a higher level

remains. So, the new memorandum of cooperation between the League of Arab States and India and the new executive programme that we have just signed represent a beginning - if I may not be exaggerating - of a new era of our partnership.

The schedule for the coming two years includes Ministerial and senior officials meetings in addition of course to the business summits and cultural festivals. The Secretary-General and I have agreed that the new format for the high-level political interaction includes Ministers from 22 Arab nations, and this would energize this relationship in a very special way.

The Secretary-General and I have also exchanged views on a range of regional and international issues. The Arab countries that lie in our immediate extended neighbourhood and we are closely linked in many ways both with history, commerce and of course community ties. We have shared interest in peace and stability in the Arab world and the rest of the world.

I have conveyed our steadfast support to the Palestinian cause and expressed our support for the role played by the League in partnering the Middle East Peace Process towards establishment of State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. And I am grateful that His Excellency reiterated the recognition of India's constant and steady support on this issue.

We have also discussed the situation, the distressing and deteriorating situation, in Syria and condemned the violence and the loss of life on both sides. We have agreed on the urgent need for a comprehensive peaceful resolution of all issues through dialogue in keeping with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The Secretary-General and I have agreed on the need for strengthening our cooperation at multilateral fora such as the United Nations. We have noted that our delegations had worked closely in the past for coordinating our positions, and would seek to enhance those links through planned high-level political consultations that I have mentioned earlier.

So there is no doubt, ladies and gentlemen, that the visit of the distinguished Secretary-General is an important step in a natural and historical partnership between India and the Arab peoples, which is poised, we say with confidence, to grow strategically and dramatically in the coming years.

Thank you very much.

Secretary-General, Arab League (Nabil Elaraby): Your Excellency Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid, Your Excellency Ahamed, Their Excellencies the Arab Ambassadors:

It is a great pleasure for me to be in India. As the Minister rightly pointed out, I was the Egyptian Ambassador here. And I was very happy when I came in presenting my credentials to President Zail Singh to say that I have read in a book that when the Great Indian King Ashoka took over he decided to send three letters to leaders of the whole world at that time and one of them was to Egypt. So, the relations between my own country and India are very old.

But in our modern time the relations have been exemplary between the whole Arab world. I had the pleasure to tell His Excellency the Foreign Minister today that in all Arab problems, India is there to support. The number one problem in the Arab world is of Palestine and India has been a steadfast supporter of Palestine. I remember when I was here during 1983 NAM Summit; President Arafat himself was telling us that when I have a problem, I go to the Prime Minister of India. So, the relations are old and we feel the bonds between our parts of the world, which you call West Asia. And I think it is very important to renew these efforts.

The Arab League signed in 2008 an agreement with India which has been renewed, and added new elements. Now every year we are going to have high-officials meeting; every two years, Foreign Ministers meeting. It is very important that they should come and discuss everything, thrash out all problems and try to find solutions. And I am sure they will find solutions because the background of the two areas - here in India and in the Arab world - are similar. We all came out of colonialism and maybe the same colonizer sometimes. And we are looking for the future to have our rights and to play a role in building the world.

Cooperation in the United Nations is very important. The United Nations as we know needs a lot of reform. The Security Council needs a lot of reform. And it is important that we all work together to attain a just and workable solution for the problems the United Nations is facing, the Security Council in particular.

The type of cooperation between India and the Arab world which has been agreed upon covers all fields really not only political but technical and which is very important educational. India has reached a level of education which is very high. And it is very important to exchange views and see how we can mutually benefit from the achievements of India and the achievements in the Arab world.

I think as His Excellency has just said rightly, this is a new era, we have to build on it, and we have to continue to pay great attention to relations between our two countries because we have a lot in common in this world.

Thank you very much Mr. Minister. I do appreciate and I am sure all my colleagues appreciate the very close relationship between India and the Arab world.

External Affairs Minister: Thank you.

Official Spokesperson: The two dignitaries have agreed to respond to a couple of questions.

Question (Dr. Akhilesh Suman, Rajya Sabha TV): Sir, the warmth was very visible on the faces of both of you. What was that special thing, Mr. External Affairs Minister, that you discussed and what is the outcome of this discussion?

This question is addressed to His Excellency the Secretary-General. There have been many discussions about India's role in Middle East and Arabian world. What do you think India role has been in the Middle East and Arab world? What prospects do you see in the coming days after the visit is over?

External Affairs Minister: I will give it to the Secretary-General to answer first.

Secretary-General, Arab League: What I expect after the visit here is that the Chancellors throughout the Arab world would be working on programmes that would be able to enhance the relationship between India and the Arab world. As for the Arab world itself, we are going through a transitional period. There is no doubt about it.

We have on the one hand our perennial problem of Palestine which has to find a solution and as soon as possible. The Arabs took a decision last year, 2012, at Ministerial level that this conflict has to end. It is enough that we have gone through over 65 years now. We have to end this conflict. The whole world has accepted that, and the Americans have proposed that they will work for that. They are still working on it; I do not want to give an opinion now because it is a very delicate part of negotiations.

But the Arab Foreign Ministers are meeting in Cairo on the 21st in the premises of the League of Arab States and they will be addressed by His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas who will explain where we stand now on all matters relating to the Arab-Israeli talks. I had never used 'peace process' because this is part of what has been called 'managing the conflict'. I would not say attaining peace, not a peace process... (Inaudible)... because peace process takes time and we have no time for that.

On the other hand there is no doubt the Syrian problem, and maybe I should say something on that before the next question. No doubt we see a very ugly situation. A civil war, people are dying every day from both sides, all Syrians, three million refugees, the countries neighbouring Syria cannot any more find the resources to provide for these refugees who are suffering. And we have very cold weather now, exceptionally cold weather, in the area. Then we have six million displaced persons who cannot find food and shelter. No medicine, no hospital, no school. So, it is a very ugly situation, as I said. It is a very dangerous situation: it has to end.

I am very happy that the Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon issued a statement yesterday calling for cessation of hostilities during the Geneva Conference. I hope the Geneva Conference will take place - I have every indication that it will take place on the 22nd – and that there will be an effort, a real effort, from the Security Council. I regret very much that India is not on the Security Council now like last year.

So, to work for a cessation of hostilities and to save lives, the most important thing now is to save lives, Syrian lives very dear to all of us in the Arab League, and to save Syria as a country

from destruction. The country has seen a lot of destruction in the last two years and we hope this is going to end. The people in Syria like every people in the Arab world and everywhere are always looking for liberty and democracy. And I hope the regime that will come out of Geneva will provide them with liberty and democracy.

External Affairs Minister: To the question that you have asked me I can only say that the historical dimension of our relationship is in itself extremely important and just continuing with that heritage itself is very important. But now there are additional ties, the additional ties such as our concern about strategic stability of the region not only for the world but also because we are hugely dependent on that region for our fuel supply. We also have more than six million of our people who are working. We are grateful to Arab countries for the livelihood they provide to our people. The remittances that come into India every year are a huge help to balancing our foreign exchange requirements.

Therefore, it is very important for us that we should be able to contribute both in terms of ideological position that we have consistently held on issues such as Palestine and Arab unity, but also in terms of our combined common interest and our enlightened interest in the welfare of the Arab people. And this is why every instrument, every platform, and every architecture that serves this overall purpose for the Arab world and for us is of high significance.

And I do believe that there are few relationships that can have the same quality, tenor, the feel, the content and the value that the relationships that we have with the Arab world. So, what we are now doing is, in signing these agreements we are trying to ensure that we have the right sort of existing functional architecture in order to maximize on the desire on both sides to be able to help and to work together for the betterment of our own people but also of human kind in general.

Question (Ashish, ABP News): My question is for External Affairs Minister Salman sahib. Sir, beg to invite your attention to what has happened to the Indian diplomat by the US authorities. In the light of new details that are coming, what action are you taking? What is your reaction to it? So far there has been no lawyer also for the diplomat. Has anything been done in that regard?

External Affairs Minister: I think that we have expressed our deep distress and a sense of disquiet that has been very strongly felt. In strongest words possible we have communicated the sense that we feel both in terms of diplomatic responsibilities, of relationships between friendly countries, but also we feel a very extreme level of distress in terms of the human element that is involved.

The person of the officer being subjected to that form of indignity is for us completely unacceptable. Therefore, I can only say this to you that whatever needs to be done is being done. It is already in process. We have put in motion what we believe would be effective way of addressing this issue but also in motion such steps that need to be taken to protect her dignity. I

think there are some larger questions involved that we will deal with in good time. But the immediate concerns we are going to address first.

The External Publicity Division and the Spokesperson will keep you posted and informed. I do not want to say anything in haste. I think that everything that can be done will be done, I can assure you. We take this thing very seriously. I think that our sense has been adequately communicated to our friends in the United States of America. Let us just now see what happens. You will be kept posted.

Official Spokesperson: Thank you very much. With that we come to the end of this interaction.
(Concluded)

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/22659/Transcript+of+Joint+Media+Interaction+of+External+Affairs+Minister+and+Secretary+General+of+the+League+of+Arab+States+Dec+17+2013>

32. List of documents signed during the Visit of H.E. Dr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States to India, New Delhi, 17 December 2013.

S.No.	Title	Signatory from Indian side	Signatory from Arab League side	Details
1.	Memorandum of Cooperation between the League of Arab States and the Republic of India	Salman Khurshid, External Affairs Minister	H.E. Dr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States	The new Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) replaces the existing MOC signed in December 2008. The new MOC provides for replacing the High Level Joint Committee of the existing MOC with new formats for future meetings, namely Ministerial and Senior Officials meeting, involving all the member states and the Arab League Secretariat. It also provides for setting up of an Executive Programme which will be renewed every two years.
2.	The Executive Program of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum between the	Salman Khurshid, External Affairs Minister	H.E. Dr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary General of the League of	The Executive Programme is much more specific in terms of the cooperation envisaged in diverse areas like trade & investment, energy, small and medium

S.No.	Title	Signatory from Indian side	Signatory from Arab League side	Details
	League of Arab States and the Republic of India for 2014-2015		Arab States	enterprises, culture, capacity building, etc. and attempts to specify the modality for each major activity. As per the EP, the League of Arab States Mission in New Delhi and the Indian Embassy in Cairo have been designated as the nodal points for coordination.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?22657/List+of+documents+signed+during+the+Visit+of+HE+Dr+Nabil+Elaraby+Secretary+General+of+the+League+of+Arab+States+to+India>

33. Official Visit of the Secretary General of the League of Arab States to India, 16-18 December 2013, New Delhi, 17 December 2013.

Secretary General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Dr. Nabil Elaraby, paid an Official Visit to India, at the invitation of Honourable External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, from 16-18 December 2013.

During the visit, Dr. Nabil Elaraby met with Honourable Vice President M. Hamid Ansari and Honourable External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid and exchanged views on a wide gamut of bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest including Syria and the Middle East Peace Process.

The new Memorandum of Cooperation between India and the League of Arab States and the new Executive Programme for the years 2014-15 were signed during the visit. These documents are aimed at imparting fresh momentum to the institutional links by providing for a structured engagement between India and the 22-member Arab States at the senior official and ministerial levels. It also envisages cooperation in diverse areas like trade & investment, energy, small and medium enterprises, culture, capacity building, etc.

India and the Arab world share deep historical, cultural and civilizational links. The shared belief in anti-colonialism and south-south cooperation together with the staunch commitment to achieve, preserve and enhance international peace and security through dialogue and consultation forms the basic framework of the cooperation.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22656/Official+Visit+of+the+Secretary+General+of+the+League+of+Arab+States+to+India+1618+December+2013>

m. CONVENTIONAL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

34. Inaugural Address by External Affairs Minister at 3rd Convention of International Studies Scholars at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 10 December 2013.

... I just would add. I was at the Manama Dialogue last two days and there was a constant refrain of asking whether a drawdown of the United States of America from the Middle East, what we have been calling West Asia, would require a country like India to fill the gaps left by, the vacuum left by the retreating American forces. Of course the United States of America has emphasised over and over again that it has no intention to retreat, that it continues to see itself in a role of providing security and strategic balance in that part and indeed in other parts of the globe as well...

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/22604/Inaugural+Address+by+External+Affairs+Minister+at+3rd+Convention+of+International+Studies+Scholars+at+Jawaharlal+Nehru+University>

n. DIVERSION OF GULF ROUTES

35. Diversion of Gulf Routes, New Delhi, 5 December 2013.

Question:

Will the Minister of Civil Aviation be pleased to state:-

- (a) Whether certain profitable Gulf routes of Air India have been diverted to Jet Airways in the past resulting in losses to Air India;
- (b) If so, the details thereof including the routes which have been withdrawn from Air India and given to Jet Airways during the last three years and the reasons therefore;
- (c) Whether any inquiry has been conducted by the Government in this regard;
- (d) If so, the details thereof and the action taken against the officials responsible for the losses to Air India and if not, the reasons therefore; and
- (e) The step taken/being taken to augment the revenue generation by Air India?

Answer

Minister of Civil Aviation (AJIT SINGH)

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

STATEMENT REFERED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION () No. 4 FOR ANSWER ON 5.12.2013 REGARDING DIVERSION OF GULF ROUTES.

(a) : No Madam.

(b) to (d): Does not arise.

(e) : Several steps have been taken to augment the revenue generation by Air India, the details thereof is at Annex.

For the annexure, see: <http://164.100.47.132/Annexure/lsq15/15/as4.htm>

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Starred Question No. 4 asked by Ramesh Rathod, <http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/psearch/QResult15.aspx?qref=148430>

o. MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

36. Address by Minister for External Affairs on 'International Interests in Middle East Security and Non-Proliferation' at IISS Manama Dialogue, Manama, 8 December 2013.

Dr. Chipman,

Distinguished participants in the Manama Dialogue,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to begin by thanking the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) for inviting me to this prestigious event, the first time for an Indian Minister for External Affairs. I would also like to thank the Kingdom of Bahrain for the excellent sponsorship of this meeting.

The Gulf region is India's extended neighbourhood. It has historically been an important artery for the flow of goods and ideas and movement of peoples from and to India. Just one subject – seaborne trade – is enough to illustrate the learning that has happened in the two directions. In addition to these historical civilizational links, there are several factors of contemporary importance in our relationship with the countries of the Gulf.

Let me list the vital stakes that India has with the Gulf countries. As a region, the Gulf is our largest trading partner. Our bilateral trade with the Gulf has increased from US\$ 167 billion in 2011-12 to over US\$180 billion in 2012-13. The traditional dominance of oil imports persists but there are encouraging trends. For instance, our exports to Saudi Arabia increased by over 70 percent last year to reach nearly US\$ 10 billion.

Two-third of India's oil and gas requirement comes from the Gulf and thus the region plays a vital role in our energy security. About 7 million Indians live and work in the Gulf and their remittances contribute 40 per cent of our total inward remittances of US\$ 70 billion a year and thus play a critical role in our external finances. The contribution of Indian expatriates to the socio-economic development of their host countries is well recognized and they are respected for their technical competence, sense of discipline, non-involvement in regional political issues and for their law-abiding nature.

The Gulf region is also a potential source of sizeable investments for us. The GCC members have significant surplus capital and India is one of the few countries, having the capacity to absorb large capital flows for infrastructure development. The Gulf is now a significant platform for the operations of Indian companies. It is also a hub for outbound Indian passengers and tourists, with 700 flights a week between UAE and India alone.

Relevant to the theme of this meeting, there are new areas of growing importance in our bilateral partnership with the Gulf such as counter-terrorism, money laundering and anti-piracy. Defence is another emerging area of cooperation. We are adding joint military exercises, friendly visits of naval ships and broad-based MoUs on defence cooperation to the traditional templates of bilateral cooperation. This is not surprising as the vital security interests of the two sides are interlinked. We also remain engaged on issues of WMD proliferation and disarmament in the Middle East given the global impact of WMD proliferation, including on India's own security interests, and given India's consistent commitment to the global and verifiable elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. I will return to this theme in a little while.

The attention of the international community has been riveted in the past couple of years on West Asia, in particular on the after-effects of the so-called Arab Spring. In India too, we have been engaged with these developments, and their impact on the countries in the Arabian Peninsula as any instability in this region could affect our vital interests. India is a vibrant democracy and we find that such a political system best suits our national temperament and needs. We are in favour of democratic pluralism and religious moderation but it is up to the people of the region to decide the pace and the means to achieve those goals, keeping in mind their traditions and history. We are also against armed conflict or external intervention as a way of resolving political issues in the region or elsewhere in the world.

Two and half years after the Arab Spring, the earlier, exaggerated expectations of progress towards democracy have turned out to be misplaced. Initial optimism has given way to serious concerns about the aftermath of those much-hyped events. Let me list a couple of concerns as we see them from India. The first is that of the hijacking of genuine demands for democracy and pluralism by radical elements driven by narrow agendas. We see this for example in Syria. The second is the exacerbation of sectarian divides. The horrific sectarian killings in Iraq and Libya are a daily reminder of this danger. All those who live in plural societies, and we are all plural these days in some way or the other - can be affected by this growing divide. Jockeying to shift the strategic balance to the advantage of those unaffected by the Arab spring has further added to the climate of political uncertainty generated by the aftermath of the Arab spring. Such a climate of political upheaval makes developing stable bilateral cooperation difficult. Egypt, a vital partner in the Arab world, is a case in point.

The most serious situation today, however, is Syria. The Syrian uprising, which began in Daraa on 18 March 2011 and later spread to other cities in stages, has now developed into a full-fledged civil war with external dimensions. Nearly one-fourth of the country's population has been displaced. The humanitarian impact of the war has been heartrending. India condemns violence by all sides and supports dialogue and negotiations between the Government and the insurgents, leading to the formation of a Transitional Governing Body, followed by elections, as envisaged under the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. Any external military intervention is unlikely to help. Apart from the question of legality, there are concerns about the spill-over effects of any

such action and the possibly undesirable consequence of fuelling extremism. The only silver lining in recent weeks is the rapid progress achieved on destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and we do hope that the cooperation seen among the major powers and the Syrian government that led to the agreement of time-bound destruction of Syria's chemical weapons can now extend to the trickier area of a political resolution of the conflict. I am happy to share with this distinguished audience India's decision to provide US dollars 1 million as well as experts and training for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. This is in keeping with India's active participation in the Chemical Weapons Convention and our firm commitment to the global and verifiable elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. The peaceful resolution of the crisis over Syria's chemical weapons shows that global, non-discriminatory regimes on non-proliferation and disarmament matter and that they have a crucial role in resolving international security challenges.

The Iranian nuclear issue has been festering for several years, creating uncertainty across and beyond the region. Recent developments, however, are encouraging. We welcome the agreement in Geneva reached on 24 November between Iran and the E3+3. This agreement is consistent with India's position that the issue should be resolved diplomatically on the basis of recognition of Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and in accordance with Iran's international obligations as a non-nuclear weapon state. We also welcome the agreement reached on 11 November between Iran and the IAEA, which is the competent technical agency to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities, on practical measures for enhanced IAEA verification activity at Iranian nuclear sites. That should help rebuild confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities. It is our hope that the interim steps that have been agreed in Geneva would build trust and confidence between Iran and the international community and lead to a durable and long-term settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue.

I am pleased to share with this audience that we have not let the recent uncertainties come in the way of our growing engagement with all countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the broader Middle East. This mutually beneficial engagement is based on a clear-headed assessment of our national interest and our bilateral complementarities. Our successful efforts to upgrade our relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iraq are an illustration of this approach. The cooperation we are getting on counter-terrorism for example is a tribute to the mutual trust and understanding we have been able to build together. Further in the Middle East, another example is the bilateral engagement we have been able to construct with Egypt – my dear friend Nabil Fahmy was in India just a few days ago - despite the rapidly changing political landscape in the region.

Before concluding let me dwell for a while on some of the long-term strategic facets of India's relationship with the Gulf. Let us take energy security first. Four out of top five oil suppliers are from the region. This is a symbiotic relationship wherein, on one hand, India's energy security heavily depends on the Gulf region, and on the other, India is a dependable and long-term market for the Gulf countries. Serious efforts are being made to transform these relationships from a

buyer-seller one to a more broad-based one, with equity partnership in oil production, joint ventures in oil exploration, petrochemical complexes, fertilizer plants and partnership in strategic reserves storage facility being built up in India.

Due to the discovery of shale gas in US and its cost-effective extraction, the US dependence on the Middle East for oil/energy may decline. As a result, the current big oil consumer markets of India, China, Japan and ROK will gain even more importance for the Gulf States. If technology evolves and geopolitics permits, as I am sure it soon will, a number of different pipelines either overland or undersea can begin carrying gas from the Gulf to India, the nearest large-sized market for gas exports for the Gulf. This could herald the next phase of energy security cooperation between our two sides and could pull together Central, West and Southern Asia into a hub of energy driven economic cooperation.

Let me turn next to investment and economic cooperation. Despite being each other's largest trading partners, the investments by India and the Gulf in each other's territory has remained well below potential. While FDI investment from the Gulf countries into India stands modestly at around US\$ 3 billion from April 2000 to August 2013, the portfolio investment figure is higher. Sovereign Wealth Funds of the Gulf countries can be a game changer for infrastructure investment in India, which would add a stable and profitable element to the portfolio of assets held by them. In the other direction, the Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO) with an investment of US\$969 million is India's largest joint venture abroad and a successful example of the possibilities of economic integration between India and the Gulf. Bilateral cooperation in the field of higher education, skill development, agriculture, tourism, health-care, power, and infrastructure projects can add heft to the existing trade ties, for too long cantered on oil.

The third facet of our long-term cooperation has to be defence and security. Our security cooperation with the GCC countries is developing to mutual benefit. An example is the 2011 Agreement on Security Cooperation with UAE which provides for cooperation to combat terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, money laundering, economic crimes and cyber crimes. The region sits astride strategic Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and any disruption to these SLOCs can have a serious impact on the Indian economy, including in terms of energy supplies. It is important to keep the region out of bounds for pirates and other nefarious non-state actors. India has the capabilities and the will to not only safeguard India's own coastline and island territories, but also contribute to keeping our region's SLOCs open and flowing. The Indian Navy has continuously deployed one ship since October 2008 in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy duties with Operational Turnarounds (OTRs) at Salalah in Oman.

Let me conclude my presentation by underlining the high priority we attach to our economic, political and security relations with the Middle East in particular the countries of the Gulf region. These relations are poised to grow, with increasing realization of the existing enormous potential on both sides, even though the broader context in which we seek to pursue this cooperation

might seem fraught and unpredictable. The region will find in India a steady and stable long-term partner, sensitive to its needs and alive to opportunities to develop bilateral cooperation.

I thank you for your attention.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/22592/Address+by+Minister+for+External+Affairs+on+International+Interests+in+Middle+East+Security+and+NonProliferation+at+IISS+Manama+Dialogue>

p. PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS

37. Session on “Issues in the Gulf” In Pravasi Bharatiya Divas -2014, New Delhi, 10 December 2014.

Some organizations in the Gulf have requested for a session on the Gulf during Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) 2014 and there is a session on the gulf planned during PBD 2014.

The Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi has said in Rajya Sabha that traditionally PBDs have had sessions on the Gulf where issues relating to Indians in the Gulf were discussed.

He said, PBD Conventions provide a platform for exchange of views and networking to Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non- Resident Indians (NRIs) on matters of common interest. These Conventions assist the Government of India to better understand the expectations of the Overseas Indians from the land of their ancestors and to acknowledge their role in India’s all round development and its efforts to acquire its rightful place in the comity of nations.

The Minister said, eleven years since its inception, the PBD has grown to become a vital platform for evolving ideas, identifying actions and creating opportunities for the interaction between the home country and its overseas citizens. It is also a forum where the Government of India and various State Governments showcase investment opportunities and potential in various sectors. Separate sessions are held by State Governments in this regard to inter alia interact with potential investors.

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=101291>

q. REPATRIATION OF WORKERS

38. Workers Repatriated from Gulf Countries, New Delhi, 11 December 2013.

Question:

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

- (a) whether a large number of Indian workers employed in various Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia face the threat of repatriation due to implementation of stringent domestic labour laws including `Nitaqat Policy` and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) the details of the total number of such affected workers reported to have returned/ repatriated from various Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia, during the last one year, month and State-wise;

(c) whether the Government has taken up the issue with such countries including Saudi Arabia for legalizing their status and providing any other form of assistance and if so, the details thereof; and

(d) The details of the steps being taken/ proposed to be taken by the Government to rehabilitate returnees from the Gulf?

Answer

Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs (Vayalar Ravi)

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

Statement as referred to in reply to the Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 89 for 11-12-2013 regarding 'Workers Repatriated from Gulf Countries'.

(a) & (b): Stricter implementation of labour laws including 'Nitaqat' has only affected those workers who do not have valid documents to stay and work in the host country.

In case of Saudi Arabia, 'Nitaqat' was implemented in order to streamline their labour market and identifying illegal workers. However, as the grace period has been extended twice (first up to 3 July 2013 and then up to 3 November 2013), the policy has not had any significant adverse impact on Indian workers in Saudi Arabia except on those who were working there without proper valid documents. The grace period allows even workers without valid papers to have their status regularized.

In Saudi Arabia, more than 1.4 million Indians availed concessions during the grace period. This includes 4, 34,667 Indians who transferred their services to other firms, who are 'Nitaqat' compliant. Additionally 4, 81,233 Indians changed their jobs/profession. Apart from this over 4, 70,000 Indians got their licenses/job permits renewed.

During the grace period, Embassy of India, Riyadh received 66,729 applications for issue of Emergency Certificates (ECs), out of which, 41,283 Emergency Certificates were issued. Similarly, 26,600 applications were received in the Consulate General of India, Jeddah and out of which, 23,486 ECs were issued. State-wise statement of applications for ECs received and issued by the Indian Missions in Saudi Arabia is given at Annexure. The number of Indians who left on final exit availing the grace period (as on 27 November 2013) is 1, 41,301. They left without facing any penal action and with no ban on their return to Saudi Arabia on a new visa.

(c): India maintained high-level engagement with the Saudi leadership through our Mission and through Ministerial visits to impress upon Saudi authorities to have humanitarian approach to the workers without proper documents. A Ministerial delegation comprising Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Minister of state for External Affairs and Advisor to Prime Minister visited Saudi Arabia in April 2013. It was followed up by the official visit of Minister of External Affairs to Saudi Arabia in May 2013.

Indian Missions remained in regular touch with the host Government as well as emigrants for redressal of grievances of the workers.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has (a) waived off a fee of 7 Saudi Riyals for contribution to Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to issue Emergency Certificate (EC), (b) allowed Missions/Posts to bear cost of processing of EC of 40 Saudi Riyals per person, and to provide temporary accommodation, transportation, food etc. to Indian workers in need,

(c) to make use of Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to meet small penalties/fines in respect of workers who may require such payments for being permitted to return to India and

(d) Ministry of Civil Aviation had been requested for issuance of concessional return tickets for the Indians in distress.

On need basis and deserving cases, the Mission can also utilize ICWF for one way air ticket for repatriation of an Indian emigrant.

Special Help Desks were set up by Mission for helping the distressed Indians. Missions' 24X7 helpline was provided with more lines and Embassy mobile units were set up at the labour offices and tarheels (exit visa offices) all over Saudi Arabia and at major airports. Tents were erected, desert coolers were provided and when required, food and water was distributed to those who approached the missions.

Passports were issued by the Missions expeditiously to those Indians who wanted to change/regularize their residency/work permit status but could not do so due to lack of passports. The Missions organized major job fair to enable the expatriate Indians to correct their job status.

(d): The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs had called meetings of Ministries/representatives of major labour sending States twice, the first on 9 April 2013 and the second on 25mJune 2013. The State Governments were requested to formulate rehabilitation programmes for returnees from the Gulf, using existing State and Central Government programmes/schemes.

For the annexure, see: <http://164.100.47.132/Annexure/lsq15/15/as89.htm>

Source: Lok Sabha (House of the People), Starred Question No. 89 asked by P.T. Thomas and Baijayant Panda,

<http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/psearch/QResult15.aspx?qref=148182>

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