

INDIA SPEAKS

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BILATERAL ISSUES

a. BAHRAIN

1. President of India's message on the eve of National Day of Bahrain, New Delhi, 16 December 2016

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the King and people of the Kingdom of Bahrain on the eve of their National Day (16 December 2016).

In a message to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, the King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the President has said, "On behalf of the Government and the people of India and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in extending to Your Majesty and the friendly people of the Kingdom of Bahrain warm greetings and felicitations on the occasion of your national day.

Our two countries have historically enjoyed close and cordial relations anchored in our shared interests and extensive people-to-people contacts. I am confident that our mutually beneficial partnership encompassing various spheres of engagement will continue to diversity and strengthen in the years to come.

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

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

b. EGYPT

2. First Dialogue between India and Egypt on Cyber Issues held in New Delhi (December 20-22, 2016), New Delhi, 22 December 2016

The first Dialogue between the Governments of India and Egypt on Cyber Issues was held in New Delhi on 20-22 December 2016. The Indian delegation was led by the National Cyber

Security Coordinator, Dr. Gulshan Rai, while the Egyptian delegation was led by Ambassador Hisham Badr, Assistant Foreign Minister for Multilateral Relations and International Security. The dialogue was a follow up on the high level meeting between the National Security Advisers of India and Egypt in December 2015 in New Delhi where both the countries agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in the area of Cyber Security.

The discussions during the dialogue covered a wide range of issues including a broad overview of the cyber threat scenario, policies, exchange of viewpoints in various multi-lateral platforms and Capacity Building including practical training in operational handling of cyber incidents. Egypt and India further explored the possibility of working together to train cyber professionals as part of South-South Cooperation. Both sides decided to nominate points of contact (POC) for coordination both at policy and technical level to implement actionable points for cooperation.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27890/First Dialogue between India and Egypt on Cyber Issues held in New Delhi December 2022 2016](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27890/First_Dialogue_between_India_and_Egypt_on_Cyber_Issues_held_in_New_Delhi_December_2022_2016)

c. ISRAEL

3. Indo-Israel Defence Cooperation, New Delhi, 2 December 2016

Will the Minister of Defence be pleased to state:-

- (a) Whether the Government has taken steps to expand its strategic ties with Israel through joint ventures and research and development projects and if so, the details Thereof; and
- (b) Whether the Government proposes to seek cooperation for sharing of technology with Israel and if so, the details thereof?

Answer

Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar

(a) & (b): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Source: Lok Sabha (Council of People), Starred Question No.246, asked by Shivaji Adhalrao Patil and Vinayak Bhaurao Raut,

<http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=43591&lsno=16>

4. Visit of Israeli President, New Delhi, 14 December 2016

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to State:

- (a) Whether the President of Israel recently paid a visit to India and held discussions with Prime Minister of India and other leaders at New Delhi;
- (b) If so, the details of discussions held;
- (c) Whether several agreements were signed between India and Israel on various issues; and
- (d) If so, the details thereof and the likely benefit to India on the signing of such agreements?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs Gen. (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd.)

(a) Yes, President of Israel H.E. Reuven Rivlin paid a State visit to India from 14-21 November, 2016. He held discussions with the President and Prime Minister. Vice President called on Israeli President during his visit.

(b) A range of issues were discussed to intensify bilateral cooperation, which include agriculture, water, Science & Technology and education. Our Prime Minister highlighted the need for technology transfer particularly in defence through joint ventures under make in India. Israel has shown keen interest to participate in our "Make in India" campaign.

(c) Yes.

(d) An MoU on Water Resources Management and Development Cooperation between India and Israel and a Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture were signed during the visit.

The MoU on Water Resources Management and Development Cooperation will facilitate means and ways to bring Israeli know-how into India in a greater way to address water shortages in India as Israel is considered to have great expertise in desalinization and recycling of water.

Whereas, Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture will help India in increasing agricultural productivity through crop management, recycling of irrigation water, soil treatment, green house farming etc. through the Centres of Excellence (CoE) set up in collaboration with Israel. It will help to bring a large number of farmers in India to increase their productivity.

Source: Lok Sabha (Council of People), Starred Question No.4509, asked by Jyotiraditya Madhavrao Scindia, Kamal Nath and Raksha Nikhil Khadse, <http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Questions/OResult15.aspx?qref=45388&lsno=16>

d. KUWAIT

5. Fifth session of India-Kuwait Joint Working Group on Labour, Employment and Manpower Development, New Delhi, 16 December 2016

5th Session of JWG on Labour and Manpower with Kuwait was held in New Delhi on 14 December, 2016. The Indian side was led by Manish Gupta, Joint Secretary (OIA-I Division), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, while the Kuwaiti delegation was led by Dr. Mobarak Al-Aazmi, Deputy Director General, Public Authority for Manpower, Sector of Planning and Professional Skill Levels Verification.

The meeting of the Joint Working Group provided an opportunity to discuss and review labour and manpower cooperation related issues between the two countries.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27872/Fifth_session_of_IndiaKuwait_Joint_Working_Group_on_Labour_Employment_and_Manpower_Development

e. OMAN

6. India invites Omani businessmen to invest in India, Muscat, 12 December 2016

Embassy of India, Muscat, organized third 'Invest in India' Seminar at Sheraton Oman Hotel in Muscat on 07 December 2016. The Seminar highlighted the attractive investment opportunities in India. Three presentations on 'Investment opportunities in India', 'India's attractiveness as an investment destination' and 'India's taxation policies and ease of doing Business in India', showcased to over 250 Omani businessmen, Government Officials and others, the immense opportunities for investment available in India. H.E. Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi, Chairman, Al Nab'a Group, shared his experiences of doing business with India and explained how the business opportunities offered by India has been benefitting Oman.

The seminar was graced with the presence of H.E. Eng Ahmed Bin Hassan Al Dheeb, Undersecretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry; H.E. Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi, Executive President, State General Reserve Fund (SGRF); H.E. Sulaiman Al Rahbi, Deputy Secretary General, Supreme Council of Planning; and H.E. Redha Juma Al Saleh, Vice Chairman, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). Over 250 representatives of public sector organizations, investment funds, banks, business enterprises and institutions in Oman attended the Seminar.

H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in his welcome remarks, conveyed India's keenness to bilateral trade and investment relations with Oman. He explained how the economy of India has been transformed to become the fastest growing major economy of the world and a preferred investment destination for the world business community. With recent improvements in ease of doing business, India has been receiving a record amount of foreign direct investment (FDI)- US\$ 44 billion during April 2015-March 2016, and US\$ 29 billion during April-September 2016.

Ambassador drew attention to the decline in bilateral trade between India and Oman from US\$ 5.7 billion during the year ending March 2014 to US\$ 3.8 billion during the year ending March 2016, and invited business communities of India and Oman to expand their mutual trade and investments. He underlined that India, as always, is keen to work with the Government and business community of Oman to achieve the goal of diversification of Oman's economy, with focus on sectors identified through Tanfeedh.

Ambassador also announced that the Government of India has launched a new scheme for grant of permanent residency status to foreign investors valid for 10 years and extendable for another 10 years. Apart from free entry and no restrictions on the duration of stay, foreign investors are allowed to purchase one residential property in India for residential purposes. The spouses and dependents of investors will be allowed to work or study in India. The only requirement is to invest INR 100 million (RO 571,000) within 18 months or INR 250 million (RO 1.43 million) in 36 months, and create 20 jobs for Indians every year. With a view to promote visits by Omani businessmen to India, the Embassy of India has streamlined business visa processes and issues

multiple entry visas with a minimum six month validity. For high-level Management of Omani companies, the Embassy is issuing visas valid for one to five years.

‘Invest India’, (www.investindia.gov.in) the official agency of the Government of India, facilitates investments into India and provides complete handholding for foreign investors. Embassy of India has been facilitating development of business between the two countries through providing information and guiding Indian and Omani companies. For more details on doing business with India, the Embassy can be contacted at com.muscat@mea.gov.in.

Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,

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

7. India’s Minister of State for External Affairs, H.E. M.J. Akbar, is visiting Oman Muscat, 13 December 2016

India’s Minister of State for External Affairs, H.E. M.J. Akbar, is visiting Oman on 13-15 December 2016. This is his first visit to Oman since his appointment as Minister of State for External Affairs in July 2016. He is leading the Indian delegation to the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference. The Conference is being organized by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in collaboration with Arab League Secretariat, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), General Union of Chambers of Commerce & Industry in the Arab Countries (GUCCIAC) and Federation of the Arab Business (FAB). FICCI is mounting a large delegation of Indian businessmen to participate at the Conference. H.E. Rajendra Shukla, Minister for Commerce, Industries and Employment of the Indian State of Madhya Pradesh is also leading a delegation of senior officials from his State to participate at the Conference.

The theme of the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference is “Partnership towards Innovation and Information Technology Co-operation”. After the inaugural and Ministerial Sessions, the Conference will hold panel discussions on the following topics identified for the Conference: Technology and Innovation; The renewable Energy and Clean Technology; The Health and Drug Industry; The Higher Education and Skill Development; Food Security and Safety; and Tourism. The presence of high level Ministerial and business delegations from India at the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference reflects the important that India attaches to its trade and investment relations with 22 Arab countries, which have emerged as India’s important trade partners.

Apart from participation at the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference, H.E. M.J. Akbar will also hold bilateral meetings with the Government of Oman with a view to review the existing bilateral cooperation between India and Oman in all its dimensions and to explore the opportunities for expanding further the strategic partnership between the countries. India and Oman are maritime neighbours joined together by Indian Ocean. The historical relations between India and Oman have evolved into a strategic partnership, which has continued to expand in all its dimensions. India has regarded Oman as a key and trusted partner in the Gulf region. India-Oman relationship is based on shared values, common interests and respect for each other’s

concerns and priorities. It is hoped that the visit of H.E. M.J. Akbar will provide further boost to India-Oman strategic partnership.

In view of the presence of Indian community in Oman, which numbers over 800,000, H.E. M.J. Akbar will also be meeting the Indian community in Oman at a Reception hosted by Ambassador at the Embassy. The Government of India has always accorded a high priority to promoting the welfare of Indian diaspora and has enhanced interaction with the Indian communities living abroad. External Affairs Minister, H.E. Sushma Swaraj, had also met the Indian community during her visit to Muscat in February 2015

Source: Embassy of India, Muscat,

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

8. Address by M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs at the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference in Muscat, New Delhi, 14 December 2016

His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Assistant Secretary General for the Cabinet of Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers of the Sultanate of Oman,

H.E. Ahmed Ben Helli, Deputy Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

H.E. Yahya Al Jabri, Executive President of the Capital Markets Authority of Sultanate of Oman,

Fellow Ministers from Arab League member States,

Esteemed Officials of various Chambers of Commerce and Industry from India and the Arab World,

Business delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are delighted to be in Muscat, a city that breathes serenity and offers great promise under the calm and sagacious leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. We are grateful for the excellent arrangements for our 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference, topped by the warmth of hospitality; it is a wonderful blend of modern mind and traditional heart.

The Partnership Conference began in 2008. Earlier conclaves witnessed enthusiastic participation of policy makers, business leaders and analysts. But this conference, I believe, can be a real game changer, for our partnership has acquired critical mass.

India and the Arab world have always been bridged by enormous goodwill. Our merchants have improved the quality of life on both sides of the waters since before recorded history, but that was only a part of the equation. Our civilizations were in the vanguard of human progress: the Nile, Tigris, Indus and Ganges nurtured ideas, philosophy, learning and values that laid the foundations of world thought. Our scholars, monks, sufis, intellectuals, scientists, architects, musicians, poets, farmers, mathematicians and – never forget them – chefs, established and expanded the horizons of knowledge. Let us pay homage to them now as we seek to recover the momentum and advance that was our forte before our progress was interrupted by colonialism. Unlike the one-way traffic of foreign domination, our indigenous relationship flourished because

it was built in peace – the peace of equals. Nothing beneficial walks on a one-way street. I am not surprised, therefore, that Indian terms for crop seasons – Kharif and Rabi – are derived from Arabic roots; or that the lotus is a sacred symbol of regeneration in India as well as Egypt.

My fellow Ministers from Arab league member states and distinguished delegates, governments are best when they act as enablers and pave the way for citizens to find one another. This has already happened. There are 700 flights a week between India and UAE alone! Our annual bilateral trade has crossed USD 184 billion - it is more than 25% of India's global trade. India's energy security pillar is the Gulf and West Asia. The Maghreb is our major source of phosphate and fertilizer.

India and Oman have a relationship that can be a model: we are maritime neighbours across the Indian Ocean. It is a friendship that defines a neighbour, not proximity or distance. The historical maritime trade and cultural exchanges, spanning over 5000 years, have evolved over the past 7 decades into a strategic partnership between India and Oman. Our relationship has been sustained by mutual trust and is based on shared values, common interests and respect for each other's concerns and priorities. Apart from extensive defence and security co-operation and people-to-people exchanges, bilateral trade and investment are key pillars of the India-Oman bilateral partnership. Today, there are around 3000 joint ventures between Indian and Omani partners in Oman with a total investment of around USD 7.5 billion. These statistics tell their own story.

But, while these laurels would distinguish any record, they are nothing compared to what we, from India and the extensive Arab world, can achieve. I do not see the glass as half full; in fact it is not even quarter full. Normally, such a statement might be tinged with a trace of regret, but for me, the empty space represents the wealth of opportunity and the energy of positive excitement. Imagine what we can do, if only we put our capacities into harmony.

This is why I believe we are at critical mass. There is an energy explosion around the corner that is seeded in the greatest natural resource of creation, human aspiration working in conjunction with collective will.

Today, my fellow Ministers and distinguished colleagues, we are capable of taking command of the 21st century. If the 20th century was the century of invention, the 21st will be the century of reinvention. New worlds are being born even as we meet, through discoveries made at the cutting edge of exploration, in science and technology. The internet and its vast boundless spaces are reimagining every aspect of life. In 2030, we will not recognize how we live today. Or more accurately, today's children and teenagers will wonder how we managed to get along with such limitations in connectivity and mobility. Or why we suffered medical conditions that still kill in such numbers; or why our personal libraries were so insufficient if they existed at all.

The future will be stupendous because this future is in the hands of the young.

My country, I am pleased to say, is playing its part in nourishing this future. India is poised to become the world's manufacturing hub; it is already a hub for R&D and innovation as well as technology start-ups. The Indian start-up industry has over 20,000 companies, creating over 80 billion dollars of value, employing nearly 3,25,000 people. Large numbers of young educated, aware, aspirational Indians are employed in the Indian IT industry, which itself is generating revenues of over USD 170 billion and exports of over USD 110 billion annually; Indian software start-ups and entrepreneurs are rapidly emerging and beginning to make their mark globally. Indians are at the helm of affairs at global technology companies like Google and Facebook, and are among the most regarded entrepreneurs and investors in Silicon Valley and elsewhere. Indians have helped create the driverless car already visible today; by 2018 an Indian company will be the first private sector company to achieve a soft landing on the moon. And of course you all know that our successful mission to Mars cost less, per kilometre, than a taxi ride.

India is preparing itself for transformation under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi through sweeping changes in regulatory and administrative reforms. The Goods and Services Act provides a single tax framework across the country for all goods and services by April 2017. FDI regime has been liberalized; even the defence sector has been opened to FDI. More sectors are now opened for 100% investment through the automatic route. The new bankruptcy law will be operational soon. Streamlining of clearances has been one of our top priorities. By 2017, the average time for pending IPR application will come down from 5-7 years to 18 months and Trade Mark registration to 1 month (down from 13 months). The time taken to obtain environmental clearances for projects has already been brought down from 600 days to 180 days. The aim is to reduce this to 100 days. Our government has created a single window – an "Invest India" authority - to facilitate and hand hold investors looking to invest in any part of the country. We want the world to "Make in India". Because we have the talent at every level of human resource needed for the new economy. To offer only one example, that sovereign wealth funds of Gulf countries can be profitably invested in India's burgeoning infrastructure sector, which offers healthy returns. India too is getting ready for Make in India.

But, the key lies in the reform of conventional behaviour and thinking. We, in India, are moving our systems into the banking age to eliminate the corruption and crime that has become the unfortunate collateral of cash payments. Direct benefits are being transferred to the poor to the newly created bank accounts. We want to double the size of our domestic purchasing power within a few years by placing resources in the hands of those who have been denied them. Think, and consider what this will mean for those who invest in manufacturing in India.

There is one dark, vile, cloud however; a cloud that can pour acid rain on such a shining prospect. There can be no prosperity without peace and the existentialist challenge to peace in our times comes from a barbaric evil: Terrorism. We have already seen the havoc it has inflicted, the wars it has instigated, the massive instability it has triggered in regions that had begun to move towards social calm and economic growth. Terrorism generates not only conflict on battlefields; it sows fear in the midst of plural societies, building walls of dread among people who have lived together for ages. We can witness the political consequences of this phenomenon in nations that believed, till recently, that they had overcome such dangers through economic success and liberal co-existence.

We must become partners against this life threatening menace, terrorism. As our Prime Minister has said and repeated: There is no good or bad terrorism. Such evil does not have shades. Hypocrisy and complacency in dealing with this evil is suicidal. We need partnership in security, and there is substantial space for co-operation in both conventional instruments of security as well as new approaches as in cyber security. We welcome a dialogue that is backed by ability, need, confidence and confidentiality.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude to our hosts Government of Oman, the Arab League, the esteemed Chambers of Commerce of the Arab countries for the excellent arrangements made for this conference and gracious hospitality extended to me and the members of my delegation. I also wish to thank my fellow participant Ministers and the League of Arab States for joining me in taking our relations to a new high.

Excellencies,

The future is ours, if we know how to seize it.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/27813/Address by MJ Akbar Minister of State for External Affairs at the 5th IndiaArab Partnership Conference in Muscat](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/27813/Address%20by%20MJ%20Akbar%20Minister%20of%20State%20for%20External%20Affairs%20at%20the%205th%20IndiaArab%20Partnership%20Conference%20in%20Muscat)

f. PALESTINE

9. ITEC Day Celebration, Ramallah, 28 December 2017

The Representative Office of India in Ramallah organized a reception for celebrating 'ITEC Day 2016'. Around 150 Palestinian alumni of the ITEC courses, Palestinian graduates from Indian Universities, journalists, and officials from Universities, Governorates and the Palestinian Authority attended the function.

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme popularly known as "ITEC", administered by the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India was launched in Palestine in 1998 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India, and so far

around 850 Palestinian nationals have participated in these programmes. As many as 55 Institutions in different parts of India have been empanelled for conducting more than 300 training courses. Since 1964, India has provided over US \$2 billion worth of technical assistance to developing countries.

*Source: Representative office of India, Ramallah,
<http://www.roiramallah.org/press.php?id=68>*

g. QATAR

10. Official visit of Prime Minister of Qatar to India (December 02-03, 2016), New Delhi, 3 December 2016

At the invitation of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, HE Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the State of Qatar undertook an official visit to India from 2-3 December, 2016.

HE the Prime Minister of Qatar was accompanied by senior Ministers, including Finance, Transport & Communication and Municipality & Environment, apart from the CEOs of Qatar Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Qatar Airways as also Deputy CEO of Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and several key captains of Industry.

The visit is significant as it comes in the context of efforts to review progress made on key tracks of the bilateral relationship to build on the agreements reached during the visit of the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to Qatar on 4-5 June 2016.

The two Prime Ministers had a delegation level meeting followed by a working lunch. During the talks, the two Prime Ministers reviewed the state of bilateral relations and exchanged views on ways and means to further expand and consolidate the close, multi-faceted relationship between the two countries, underpinned by age-old trade and people-to-people contacts.

The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction with the close ties of friendship and understanding between India and Qatar and reiterated their resolve to further strengthen cooperation in all fields.

They emphasized that all existing bilateral institutional mechanisms be convened regularly and steps be taken to push forward the bilateral agenda in an effective manner.

Both sides agreed to increase the level of participation in infrastructure development projects on either side and undertook to exchange information on available investment opportunities in a regular and timely manner.

It was agreed to expedite steps to put in place the necessary framework so that economic actors on both sides can take full advantage of the opportunities available, particularly in the area of

infrastructure, special economic zones, civil aviation, energy, petrochemicals, health and pharmaceuticals, information technology, education, tourism and agriculture.

The two leaders also emphasized the need to take practical steps to build on the framework provided by the Agreement on Defence Cooperation signed in November 2008 by enhancing cooperation in the fields of specialized training, exchange of information and joint production of defence equipment.

The visit provided another opportunity for the two sides to exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, with particular reference to the security situation in West Asia, Middle East and South Asia.

The talks were held in an atmosphere of utmost cordiality and warmth, reflecting the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries.

Three Agreements/MOUs were signed, including the Agreement for Exemption of Visa Requirement for Holders of Diplomatic, Special and Official Passport Holders, and MOUs on Technical Cooperation in Cyber Space and Combating Cyber Crime; and between the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy of Qatar and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in addition to a Letter of Intent for e-visas for tourists and businessmen. Separately, an MoU between Qatar Ports Management Company ("Mwani Qatar") and Indian Ports Global Private Limited was concluded.

During the visit, Prime Minister of Qatar called on Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee.

The Home Minister of India, Rajnath Singh, called on the Prime Minister of Qatar during the visit. The two sides resolved to work closely to combat terrorism and radicalization and noted the importance of consolidating the values of tolerance and preventing the spread of sectarianism. They discussed cooperation on counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing and countering terror-financing and money laundering, apart from other transnational crimes.

The visit of the Prime Minister of Qatar to India further reinforces the tradition of regular visits at the highest levels, and the extensive exchange of views between the leadership of the two countries, as we seek to build a strong partnership for the 21st century.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27740/Official_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_Qatar_to_India_December_0203_2016

11. Prime Minister of Qatar Calls on President, New Delhi, 4 December 2016

His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, Prime Minister of Qatar called on President Pranab Mukherjee at Rashtrapati Bhavan yesterday (December 3, 2016).

Welcoming the Qatar Prime Minister to India, the President said that the third high-level visit in two years highlights the importance that both countries attach to strengthening their bilateral relations. India accords very high importance to relations with countries in the Gulf, which is its extended neighbourhood. India sees Qatar as a key interlocutor in the Gulf and Arab world.

The President said India's relations with Qatar are deep-rooted in history and have been nurtured by active contacts amongst our two peoples through trade and commerce ties over centuries. The two countries have a common goal of intensifying co-operation. We should identify opportunities to make trade more broad-based and balanced. Indian companies are willing to be partners in infrastructure development being undertaken by Qatar in preparation for the FIFA 2022 World Cup and Qatar's development plans under "Vision 2030" for Qatar.

The Qatar Prime Minister warmly reciprocated the President's sentiments and said that he had good discussions with the Indian Prime Minister. Qatar sees India as a strategic partner and is keen to expand relations.

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

12. Union Home Minister calls on Prime Minister of Qatar, New Delhi, 13 December 2016

Union Home Minister Sri Rajnath Singh called on the Prime Minister and Interior Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al Thani here today.

Regarding the security cooperation between the two countries, the Prime Minister of Qatar suggested to send a delegation from the Interior Ministry to study different aspects of security cooperation. Qatar side also agreed to send a team of officers for exchange of information between the two countries and asked for a suitable date. The Union Minister assured to indicate a suitable date to the Qatar side at the earliest. The Prime Minister of Qatar invited the Union Home Minister to visit Qatar to strengthen bilateral security cooperation with special arrangements for security of FIFA World Cup – 2022 in Qatar. Rajnath Singh offered training of police personnel to the Qatar side which was accepted in the meeting.

Regarding defence cooperation between India and Qatar, it has been agreed that the Defence Minister of Qatar will visit India very soon. The Prime Minister of Qatar desired for cooperation between the two countries to be extended even to the field of defence equipment.

India thanked Qatar for their amnesty scheme of facilitating Indian workers with irregular visa status to return to India without visa or get their visa extended in Qatar. The Prime Minister of Qatar went a step ahead and assured of similar amnesty as well.

The two leaders also discussed the facilitation of opening Indian community schools in Qatar. The Home Minister thanked the Prime Minister of Qatar for cooperation in the field of education for facilitating the education of Indian community in Qatar and requested for facilitation of Indian community schools in view of the large community in Qatar.

The bilateral cooperation in the field of food security was also discussed in detail by the two leaders. It was mentioned that the food companies of various countries are ready to invest in Qatar but the Prime Minister of Qatar desired for a large number Indian food companies to come to Qatar for investment. He also offered priority assistance to the Indian food companies for promotion of their activities in Qatar.

The meeting was held in very cordial atmosphere which was attended by the senior officers from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs in addition to the visiting delegation of Qatar.

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

13. President of India's Message on the Eve of National Day of Qatar, 18 December 2016

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the Emir and people of the State of Qatar on the eve of their National Day (December 18, 2016).

In a message to His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, the President has said, "I am pleased to extend to Your Highness and to the friendly people of the State of Qatar warm greetings and heartiest felicitations on the occasion of the Your National Day.

India deeply values its close and time-tested relations with Qatar, which have been enhanced by regular high-level exchanges. Our mutually beneficial ties, based on extensive people-to-people contacts and historical linkages, are marked by exceptional warmth and goodwill. I firmly believe that our bilateral cooperation will further deepen and strengthen in the coming years for the benefit of our two peoples.

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

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

h. SYRIA

14. Safety of Indians in Syria, New Delhi, 1 December 2016

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to State:

- (a) Whether adequate steps have been taken for the safety of life and property of Indians in Syria, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) Whether Government is aware of any cases of missing/abduction of Indians in Syria in the last three years and the current year; and
- (c) Whether Government has provided the people, who have returned from Syria, adequate financial aid and employment opportunities, if so, the details thereof?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs M. J. Akbar

(a) Government continues to closely monitor the situation in Syria and take necessary steps for the safety and security of Indian nationals residing there. Ministry of External Affairs has issued travel advisory for Indian nationals to avoid all travel to Syria.

(b) There are no cases of missing/abduction of Indians in Syria in the last three years and current year. However, four Indians, namely, S/ (1) Arun Kumar, (2) Sarvjeet Singh, (3) Kuldeep Singh, and (4) Joga Singh, who entered into Syria from Jordan on their way to Lebanon for employment without valid visas, were caught by the Syrian authorities as illegal immigrants. Their release was secured and they reached their homes in Haryana on 03.04.2016.

(c) The question did not arise as majority of Indian nationals returned from Syria immediately after issue of travel advisory in 2012.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No.1771, asked by Pratap Singh Bajwa, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/OREsult.aspx>

i. TURKEY

15. Statement by Finance Minister at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process (4 December 2016), New Delhi, 4 December 2016

Distinguished Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to deliver India's country statement.

Earlier this morning, the Prime Minister of India shared India's vision and commitment to a united, stable, prosperous, peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. This Conference today is geared to international cooperation to see the emergence of such an Afghanistan. India takes pride in being an active participant in the Heart of Asia Process. This unique platform brings together the countries and organizations of the region and beyond in their efforts to consolidate Afghanistan as a modern and growing democracy. It has been India's endeavour to promote political consultations and regional cooperation through this platform for a strong, independent and prosperous Afghanistan. Our co-hosting the Heart of Asia Process this year is a reflection of this commitment.

The theme for the Heart of Asia Process this year is 'Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity.' As Afghanistan faces the challenges related to its multiple transitions, focused and sustained support will be required from all friends of Afghanistan in the international community for overcoming these challenges and achieving durable peace and prosperity.

A key focus during India's co-chairmanship of this Process has been to centre-stage the importance of connectivity for Afghanistan. Promoting it remains at the very core of India's cooperation with Afghanistan and also in the region.

Afghanistan has the potential to be the land bridge between various parts of the vast and dynamic Eurasian landmass. There are many promising projects like the TAPI gas pipeline, TAT railway line, CASA 1000. They will bring prosperity to Afghanistan and also bring the Central Asian and South Asian regions closer together.

Excellencies,

For India, the issue of connectivity for Afghanistan is not a mere talking-point. We strongly believe that the lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan. A well connected Afghanistan will be economically vibrant and prosperous and also politically stable. It will be able to engage the energies of its youth and attract its talents back from the foreign lands.

Earlier this year, we achieved a milestone by signing the trilateral transit and transport agreement among India, Iran and Afghanistan for provision of year-round and reliable connectivity to Afghanistan via Chabahar in Iran. This endeavour will overcome the lack of direct overland access for Afghanistan through Indian markets. Afghanistan will further benefit from the zero duty available to Afghanistan's exports to India. Benefits to Afghanistan will accrue if Afghan trucks could carry Indian products to markets in Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond and indeed visa-versa. In this regard, India is willing to receive Afghan trucks on its territory, at Attari. We will be happy to create necessary facilities for Afghan products at Attari.

To fully achieve these benefits it is essential that trade and transit agreements that Afghanistan enters into need to be fully inclusive, comprehensive and are most importantly fully activated. Particular mention may be made of the International North South Corridor and the Ashgabat Agreement which can provide the catalyst for greater integration at the regional level.

India's engagement in the Trade, Commerce and Investment (TCI) CBM within the Heart of Asia process as the lead country complements our bilateral development cooperation with Afghanistan, including in the spheres of infrastructure, connectivity and capacity building.

In the run-up to this Ministerial Conference, the Ministry of External Affairs of India has also supported a number of events aimed at promoting the ideals and objectives of the Heart of Asia Process. Noteworthy among them are the international seminar organized by the Indian Council of World Affairs in Delhi on 10 to 11 November 2016, the international conference on "Addressing the challenges of international terrorism and radicalization" in Delhi on 23 November 2016 and the seminar that was held yesterday here in Amritsar by RIS & FICCI on Heart of Asia and Connectivity. We are very happy to note that all these events had enthusiastic participation from several Heart of Asia countries.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan has faced gruesome violence for decades. In the last few months, terrorism in Afghanistan has grown in both intensity and scope. Terrorist groups have made concerted efforts to capture and hold territory. Taliban have tried to expand its influence to territories in North and North East along with South West where they traditionally were not so strong. These developments only underline the fact that these groups have changed neither their ideology nor objectives. The evil of terrorism, which threatens not merely one or two countries but our entire region, has made the current year the worst in a very long time.

We salute the Afghan National Security Forces and the Afghan people for countering the forces of terrorism and extremism with courage and resilience. Their role was also critical in safeguarding the diplomatic community's presence in Afghanistan. India saw two of its Consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad attacked in this year alone. It was only the courage and dedication of the Afghan security forces that ensured the safety of our personnel. Clearly, it is not merely in Afghanistan's interests if its unity and integrity are safeguarded.

For its part, India is happy to work with Afghanistan to strengthen its capabilities to fight terrorism and violence directed at it. It is also our collective duty to ensure that resurgent forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries and safe havens in any name, form or manifestation. Neighbours of Afghanistan have a particular responsibility in this regard. There is also a need to neither differentiate between good and bad terrorists, nor to play one group against the other. Taliban, Haqqani Network, Al-Qaeda, Daesh, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, etc. are all terror organizations and should be treated as such.

End to terrorism and extremism, and adherence to internationally accepted redlines including renouncing of violence, severing ties with Al Qaeda and other terrorist outfits and commitment to democracy and human rights are essential for successful reconciliation and lasting peace in Afghanistan.

I thank you, Excellencies, for this opportunity, and for your attention.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/27744/Inaugural+Address+by+Prime+Minister+at+the+Sixth+Ministerial+Conference+of+the+Heart+of+Asia+Istanbul+Process+on+Afghanistan>

16. India condemns terrorist bomb attacks in Istanbul, New Delhi, 11 December 2016

India condemns the terror attacks that occurred in Istanbul on 10 December 2016 in the strongest words and stands in solidarity with the people of Turkey. We offer deep condolences to the bereaved families and wish speedy recovery to the injured. Terrorism in any form and manifestation is completely unacceptable. The heinous attack in Istanbul again highlights the urgent need for collective resolve on the part of the world community against the scourge of terrorism.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27802/India condemns terrorist bomb attacks in Istanbul](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27802/India%20condemns%20terrorist%20bomb%20attacks%20in%20Istanbul)

17. India condemns assassination of Russian Ambassador in Ankara, New Delhi, 20 December 2016

India strongly condemns the tragic assassination of the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Turkey. We are deeply saddened and shocked by this dastardly act. We offer our condolences to the family of Ambassador Andrey Karlov and share their pain and grief. There can never be any justification for violence and terrorism.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27868/India condemns assassination of Russian Ambassador in Ankara](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27868/India%20condemns%20assassination%20of%20Russian%20Ambassador%20in%20Ankara)

j. UAE

18. President of India's Message on the Occasion of National Day of UAE, New Delhi, 2 December 2016

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee has extended his greetings and felicitations to the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates on the occasion of their National Day (December 2, 2016).

In a message to His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates, the President has said, "On behalf of the Government, the people of India and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in extending warm greetings and felicitations to Your Highness on the occasion of your National Day.

India deeply values its close, friendly and warm relations with the United Arab Emirates, which are firmly rooted in our age-old trade and cultural links, nourished by people-to-people contacts and regular exchange of high-level visits. I look forward to working closely with Your Highness to further expand and deepen our bilateral relations.

The recent contacts and exchanges at the highest political level have provided a fresh impetus to our mutually beneficial ties and elevated them to a comprehensive strategic partnership. We are delighted that His Highness the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi has agreed to be our Chief Guest at the Republic Day 2017 celebrations.

I take this opportunity to convey to Your Highness my best wishes for your personal good health and well-being, and for the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly people of the United Arab Emirates".

Source: Press Information Bureau, New Delhi, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=154766>

k. MULTILETERAL

19. Indian migrant domestic workers in Gulf countries, New Delhi, 15 December 2016

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to State:

- (a) The number of Indian migrant domestic workers in different Gulf countries;
- (b) Whether Government has received complaints of physical and sexual abuse of migrant domestic workers in Gulf countries in the last year;
- (c) If so, the details thereof and action taken by Government; and
- (d) Whether Government is considering restricting all women from travelling to Gulf countries to work in blue-collar jobs, if so, the details thereof?

Answer

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs Gen. (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd)

- (a) The number of Indian migrant domestic workers who have been given emigration clearance for recruitment in gulf countries since September, 2014 till date is 58163.
- (b) The Indian Mission in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reported that they do receive complaints from Indian workers, including domestic workers (both male & female), regarding maltreatment on the part of the Saudi employer. Most of these cases pertain to workers who do not have any proper employment contract or come without following the extant norms.

Indian Missions in Bahrain and United Arab Emirates have received 4 complaints each of physical abuse and harassment of migrant domestic workers. No complaints of physical abuse or harassment of Indian workers have been reported by other Missions in the Gulf countries.

(c) The complaints received by the Missions are dealt with on priority basis by taking up the same with the local employer, the agent in India and the local Government authorities for resolution of the complaints. The Embassy offers free boarding & lodging facility for the distressed workers in suitable accommodation maintained by the Missions. They are also provided free one way air ticket and travel expenses, emergency certificates on gratis basis, in cases where there were no travel documents. Further immigration clearances are also obtained from the concerned authorities for their smooth travel to India. If the emigrant is recruited through a registered Recruiting Agent, Show-cause notice is served on registered Recruiting Agent against whom complaints are received and the Recruiting Agent is directed to settle/resolve the complaint.

(d) The Government has already put in place the following measures to regulate emigration of Indian women workers holding ECR passports, for overseas employment in Gulf countries:

- i. Age restriction of 30 years has been made mandatory in respect of all women emigrants (Except Nurses) emigrating on ECR passports to ECR countries irrespective of nature/category of employment;

ii. Since August, 2016, emigration clearance of all female workers having ECR passports, for overseas employment in 18 ECR countries has been made mandatory through six State-run recruiting agencies only. These are NORKA Roots and Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultants (ODEPC) of Kerala, Overseas Manpower Corporation Ltd. (OMCL) of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation (UPFC) of Uttar Pradesh, Overseas Manpower Company Andhra Pradesh Limited (OMCAP) of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Overseas Manpower Company Limited (TOMCOM) of Telangana.

iii. Foreign Employer should deposit a security deposit of US \$2500 if he recruits the worker directly.

iv. Embassy attestation has been made mandatory in respect of direct recruitment of all ECR passport holder women workers in respect of all ECR countries;

v. With effect from June 2015, registration of foreign employers in the e-migrate system has been made mandatory.

Source: Rajya Sabha (Council of States), Unstarred Question No.3226, asked by R. Vaithiam, <http://164.100.47.5/qsearch/OREsult.aspx>

Note:

1 Crore = 10 million. Lakh = 100,000

For Lok Sabha and Press Information Bureau the items can be searched by Date and Ministries concerned.

Compiled by Jatin Kumar

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