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**COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2023-24)**

SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of
Cooperation

TWENTY SIXTH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

December, 2023 / Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)



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Presented to Lok Sabha on 12.12.2023
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NEW DELHI

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2023-24)
Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson

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Rajya Sabha

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| 3. Ms. K. Muanniang Tunglut | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. Shri Anurag Sandil | - | Assistant Committee Officer |

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2023-24) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Twenty Sixth Report (17th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of Cooperation'.

2. The Committee selected the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of Cooperation' for detailed examination during 2022-23 and continued the examination during 2023-24. Briefing on the subject was held on 29 May, 2023. Thereafter, the Committee took oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs on 27 July, 2023 in which representatives of the Ministry of Commerce and the Department of Economic Affairs were also present.

3. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at their Sitting held on 7 December, 2023. The Minutes of the Sitzings of the Committee are appended to the Report.

4. The Committee wish to express their gratitude to the Ministry of External Affairs for placing material information, tendering evidence and views before the Committee as well as the Ministry of Commerce and the Department of Economic Affairs for appearing before the Committee.

5. For facility of reference, the Observations/Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold letters in the Report.

NEW DELHI
December, 2023
Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)

P.P. CHAUDHARY,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S RELATION WITH GCC COUNTRIES

1.1 The Gulf region has historical, political, economic, energy, strategic and cultural significance for India. The region constitutes the extended neighbourhood of India separated only by the Arabian Sea. India's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have seen exceptional growth in all domains in the past decade. There has been intense high-level engagement between India and GCC countries during this period.

1.2 The GCC organisation comprises of six countries i.e. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. GCC headquarters is located in Riyadh.

Objectives of GCC

1.3 The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established by an agreement concluded on 25 May 1981 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia among Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE in view of their special relations, geographic proximity, similar political systems based on Islamic beliefs, joint destiny and common objectives. Presently it encompasses a total area of 2,672,700 sq.km. The official language is Arabic.

1.4 The GCC Charter states that the basic objectives are to have coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States in all fields, strengthening ties between their peoples, formulating similar regulations in various fields such as economy, finance, trade, customs, tourism, legislation, administration, as well as fostering scientific and technical progress in industry, mining, agriculture, water and animal resources, establishing scientific research centres, setting up joint ventures, and encouraging cooperation of the private sector.

Organizational Structure

1.5 The structure of the GCC consists of the Supreme Council, the Ministerial Council and the Secretariat General. The Secretariat is located in the city of Riyadh.

1.6 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) elaborated on the long standing and deep rooted relationship between India and the Gulf countries in his opening statement:

“...as far as India's relations with the Gulf countries are concerned, we have long-standing historic deep-rooted relationships with all the Gulf countries which goes back to several centuries. In fact, it goes back to almost 3000 BC when India had relationship with the Mesopotamian Civilisation; and we also had 1000 BC relationship between India and Egypt. So, it is a long relationship which we have been consolidating over a period of time. Then, you are also aware that India has a trading relationship particularly, with the Gulf countries what we known is the Hejaz area of the Saudi Arabia. Our people have been going on for pilgrims. Also, in the history, you would have seen that a large number of Arabian Persian scholars had come here like Ibn Battuta and Alberoni. There is also record of Guru Nanak Dev-ji

having visited Baghdad. So, that is the basis of our ties with the Gulf. So, these relationships have actually consolidated in the modern times, in the form of a very strong relationship.

....when we celebrated the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, 75 years for our Independence, at the same time, we have also celebrated 75 years of the establishment of formal diplomatic relationship with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. With Kuwait, we are celebrating 60 years of our relationship. With Bahrain, we are celebrating Golden Jubilee.

So, what we say is that these historic relations have been transformed in the modern times into very dynamic and mutually beneficial relationship....We have maintained good relations all these years.

1.7 In a written reply furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has further stated that our relationship with Gulf countries have consolidated in modern times, in the form of a very strong relationship. The GCC as a collective entity has tremendous significance for India. GCC has emerged as a major trade and investment partner for India. The GCC's substantial oil and gas reserves are of vital importance for India's energy security. Defence and security cooperation with GCC has also been increasing. The GCC countries collectively host 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community. The cultural and people-to-people ties between India and Gulf are a bedrock of the bilateral relations.

1.8 This strong cordial historical relationship has continued to flourish. Formal engagements between India and GCC Secretariat started in 2003 with the commencement of India-GCC Political Dialogue held on the sidelines of the UNGA. There are various institutional mechanism between India and GCC, including political dialogue at the level of Foreign Ministers; MoU on Mechanism for Consultations; India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting at Secretary level and India-GCC Industrial Conference. There is also a framework on India-GCC FTA negotiations.

1.9 When asked to state the specific steps being taken to ensure strong and stable relations with all GCC countries, the Ministry has informed that India has excellent relations with all countries of GCC, straddling almost all domains of cooperation like political, economic, energy, security, culture and people-to-people ties. The strong and stable relations with all GCC countries are ensured through several specific steps which *inter alia* included the following:

- i. Regular exchange of high-level visits between India and Gulf countries. Prime Minister Modi has visited Gulf countries 10 times since May 2014. These include 5 visits to UAE, 2 visits to Saudi Arabia and one each to Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain have conferred their highest civilian awards on PM Modi. There has been regular exchange of ministerial visits.
- ii. Maintaining strategic partnership with three countries, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman. All three GCC strategic partners have been invited for G20 meetings under India's presidency. Saudi Arabia is a member of G20 while

Oman and UAE are special invitees. India is also actively engaged in the I2U2 together with UAE.

- iii. Improving trade relationship with all GCC countries. The GCC region contributes to about one-sixth of India's total trade. UAE is India's third largest trade partner while Saudi Arabia is at the fourth place. In FY 2022-23, India's trade with GCC countries was approximately USD 184 billion. This was almost a 20% rise from FY 2021-22. To further enhance trade relationship, India signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with UAE on February 18, 2022. We are also discussing FTA with GCC.
- iv. Promoting investments from GCC countries into India by engaging sovereign wealth funds in the region as well as private companies. Total FDI from GCC countries into India currently stands at about USD 20 billion.
- v. Expanding energy cooperation by moving from a buyer-seller relationship to a more comprehensive relationship by encouraging participation in India's strategic petroleum reserves, negotiating long term gas supply arrangements, getting concessions in oilfields and renewable energy cooperation.
- vi. Strengthening defence and security cooperation with GCC countries including through exchange of high-level visits, bilateral exercises, training and participation in exhibitions. There is good cooperation on counter terrorism, intelligence sharing, cybersecurity, maritime security, prevention of human trafficking and narcotics smuggling. Our strengthened relationship was also evident recently when Saudi Arabia provided excellent cooperation to Indian Air Force and Indian Navy for Operation Kaveri under which we evacuated about 3800 Indian nationals through Jeddah. India has also become Associate Partner in the multilateral Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain in 2022.
- vii. Working with Gulf countries for the welfare of the Indian workforce. The meetings of Joint Working Groups on labour and manpower issues with various Gulf countries are regularly convened to discuss issues related to Indian workers. Government is also working with the GCC countries on issues like skill harmonization and connecting worker recruitment platforms so that Indian workers get better and more transparent working conditions.
- viii. Strengthening cultural cooperation by organizing events such as International Day of Yoga with involvement of local authorities in Gulf countries and promoting educational cooperation through Indian schools and higher education institutes.
- ix. Enhancing cooperation in multilateral organization such as with UAE in UN Security Council in 2022 when both India and UAE were non-permanent members of the Council.
- x. Strengthening institutional relationship through the GCC Secretariat. In September 2022, India and GCC signed an MOU on Mechanism of Consultations for regular political dialogue between India and GCC Troika at EAM/FM level.

1.10 The growing relationship between India and GCC countries has been highlighted by the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023 as under:

“....India’s relations with all the GCC countries are moving ahead rapidly in a very positive direction, covering cooperation in all domains like political relations, trade and investment, energy, defence and security, culture and people to people ties. The regular high level visits between India and GCC countries reflect strong political will to strengthen the relations”.

1.11 The Committee have also been informed that India is maintaining strategic partnership with three GCC countries, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman. When further asked the status of the remaining GCC countries and the efforts being made in this regard, the Ministry responded that the Gulf constitutes to be the “extended” neighborhood of India separated only by the Arabian Sea. The GCC has emerged as a major trade and investment partner for India. The GCC’s substantial oil and gas reserves are of vital importance for India’s energy security. Defence and security cooperation with GCC has also been increasing. The GCC countries collectively host 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community. The cultural and people-to-people ties between India and Gulf are a bedrock of the bilateral relations. Even though India has strategic partnership with three Gulf countries, it has maintained a multifaceted relationship with all GCC countries, with cooperation in diverse domain including political, defence, commercial, etc. There are various institutional mechanisms with GCC countries to elevate the relationship to higher level based on mutual interests and cooperation.

1.12 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, when the Committee sought to know the developments taking place under I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) grouping on specific issues in the Gulf, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) responded as under:

“....I2U2 which consist of India, Israel, UAE and USA is aimed at encouraging joint investments in mutually identified areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security....in the virtual summit of I2U2 leaders which happened on 14 July, 2022.... an announcement of investments worth USD 2 billion were made by UAE to develop integrated food parks in India. Subsequent to that, we have had visits from UAE delegations to India and we have facilitated their interaction with the relevant stakeholders both in Government as well as the private sector. There was another project that was announced in the Leaders’ Summit last year which was a project that entailed US Trade and Development Agency funding a feasibility study on 300 MW wind and solar hybrid renewable and energy storage project in Dwarka in Gujarat. All these ideas were discussed to further the business and innovation and economic links in the I2U2. The Sherpas further met in February 2023 earlier this year and at that time a business forum was also held at the same time. So, there are ideas which are coming in the I2U2 which we will be taking forward along with our other partners in the I2U2.”

1.13 On the initiatives taken so far under I2U2, the Ministry has stated that I2U2 demonstrates the strategic convergence of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. The I2U2 is aimed to encourage joint investments in six mutually identified areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security. It intends to mobilize private sector capital and expertise to help modernize the infrastructure, decarbonise industries, improve public health, and promote the development of critical, emerging and green technologies. I2U2 aims to maximize innovation, technology, skilled workforces, and entrepreneurial dynamism in all the 4 countries to benefit the people in the region. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi participated in the first virtual summit of I2U2 leaders, along with the Prime Minister of Israel, the President of the UAE and the President of the USA on 14 July 2022. They announced two joint projects on Food Corridor and Wind-Solar Hybrid Renewable energy and Battery Storage to be set up in India.

1.14 Observing that a critical aspect that needs to be addressed for strengthening the relationship between India and the Gulf countries is the potential differences in ideological and religious beliefs, the Committee sought to know whether the Ministry outlines the strategies or initiatives that have been taken/needs to be implemented in order to foster better understanding and cooperation with the Gulf nations despite such differences. In response, the Ministry has stated that India shares close political, economic ties with all GCC countries. There have been regular high level political exchanges between India and GCC countries. The various engagements and multifaceted ties between India and GCC countries have further deepened our partnership with all GCC countries. There is understanding and appreciation for India's diversity and secular and democratic traditions in GCC countries. During the recent visit of Secretary General of Muslim World League, Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa to India in July 2023, he appreciated India's multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religion society and emphasized his respect for the rich Indian heritage that upholds harmony and unity.

1.15 Concluding his opening statement during evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) summed up the prospects for enhanced relationship between India and GCC countries, as under:-

“....there are great opportunities for continuous enhancement of our cooperation in multiple areas between India and GCC countries and we are making progress in the right direction”

1.16 The Committee note that India has a long standing historic deep-rooted relationship with GCC countries comprising of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain which has consolidated into a very strong relationship in modern times. The GCC countries are home to 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community and cultural and people-to-people ties

between India and Gulf are bedrock of the bilateral relations. The Committee further note that GCC has emerged as a major trade and investment partner for India. The GCC's substantial oil and gas reserves are of vital importance for India's energy security while defence and security cooperation with GCC has also been increasing. There are various institutional mechanism between India and GCC, including political dialogue at the level of Foreign Ministers; MoU on Mechanism for Consultations; India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting at Secretary level and India-GCC Industrial Conference. The Committee understand that India has been maintaining close political and economic ties with all the GCC countries but strategic partnership is mostly with three countries, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman. In view of the GCC as a collective entity having tremendous significance for India, the Committee desire that the Government should consider to elevate India's strategic partnership based on mutual interests and cooperation with the remaining GCC countries viz. Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain to a higher level. The efforts and progress made in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

(Recommendation No. 1)

1.17 The Committee find that there are great opportunities for continuous enhancement in India's relationship with GCC countries in multiple areas of interests and new and emerging fields for cooperation. In Committee's view, India and the GCC countries have significant scope to enhance their cooperation in various multilateral bodies including the UN bodies. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to formulate a fresh strategy encompassing all these aspects and establish a robust Institutional mechanism for strengthening its relationship with GCC countries and

expanding it to multilateral bodies. New initiatives may also be taken to deepen the cultural and people-to-people ties between India and GCC countries including the active participation of the 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community to foster better understanding and cooperation.

(Recommendation No. 2)

1.18 The Committee note that India, together with UAE is actively engaged in the I2U2 grouping which aims to encourage joint investments in six mutually identified areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security. In the first virtual summit of I2U2 leaders on 14 July 2022, two joint projects on Food Corridor and Wind-Solar Hybrid Renewable energy and Battery Storage have been announced to be set up in India. The Committee are pleased at the initiatives taken by the I2U2 as these projects would contribute towards India's energy and food security and urge the Government to ensure its effective implementation. New ideas and innovation in the field of water, space, health, technology, skilled workforces and entrepreneurial dynamism etc. may be taken forward in the I2U2 so that India is able to fully capitalize on its partnership with UAE and further with other GCC countries.

(Recommendation No. 3)

CHAPTER II

INDIA'S POLITICAL RELATION WITH GCC COUNTRIES

2.1 India's excellent relations with all countries of GCC are reflected in the regular exchange of high-level visits between India and Gulf countries, at top leadership level as well as ministerial levels. Prime Minister Modi has visited Gulf countries 10 times since May 2014. These include 5 visits to UAE, 2 visits to Saudi Arabia and one each to Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. The last visit of PM to UAE was on July 15, 2023. Prime Minister also attended a virtual summit of I2U2 (India, UAE, Israel, US) in July 2022. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain have conferred their highest civilian awards on PM Modi.

2.2 During his short visit to UAE on 15 July 2023, Prime Minister met HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and the Ruler of Abu Dhabi. The two leaders witnessed the exchange of three significant MoUs:

(i). MOU for the establishment of a framework to promote the use of local currencies (INR-AED) for cross-border transactions by Governors of the respective Central Banks.

(ii). MOU on interlinking payment and messaging systems by Governors of the respective Central Banks.

(iii). MOU for planning to establish Indian Institute of Technology – Delhi in Abu Dhabi.

2.3 A Joint Statement was also issued in which both sides *inter alia* appreciated the plan of Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) to set up a presence in GIFT City, a financial free zone in Gujarat, in the next few months. Both leaders also reiterated their commitment to further enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields including energy (traditional, renewable and grid connectivity) and food corridors project in India.

2.4 Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince/Prime Minister HRH Mohammed bin Salman held a telecon on June 8, 2023 and discussed issues of mutual interest with the two countries putting further momentum in strategic partnership.

2.5. Vice President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu paid a visit to UAE in May 2022 to convey condolences on behalf of India on the demise of then UAE President. He also paid a visit to Qatar in June 2022. Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar also visited Qatar in November 2022 for attending the Opening Ceremony of FIFA World Cup. Speaker of Lok Sabha, Shri Om Birla visited UAE in February 2022 during which he addressed the Federal National Council of UAE. He also led the Indian delegation to Bahrain in March 2023 for 146th Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU).

2.6 Over the past few years India hosted visits of Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi (2016 & 2017), Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia (2019) and Amir of Qatar (2015). PM Modi also had several telephone calls with Gulf leaders during Covid to ensure the welfare of Indian community and coordinate response to the pandemic. India has strategic partnership with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman in the Gulf. All three countries have been invited for G-20 meetings under India's presidency: Saudi Arabia as a G-20 member and UAE and Oman as special invitees. India conferred Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 on Sultan Qaboos in March 2021.

2.7 India got the support of all GCC countries for its membership of UNSC for 2021-22 term. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Bahrain have joined the International Solar Alliance. India's firm stand against terrorism has been acknowledged by GCC countries.

2.8 India had welcomed the Abraham Accords for normalization of UAE and Bahrain's relations with Israel in September 2020. Similarly, India also welcomed the Gulf rapprochement achieved at GCC Summit in January 2021. India had hoped that both these developments will promote peace, progress and stability in the Gulf region. Similarly, India has also welcomed initiatives for peace and political dialogue in Yemen.

2.9 When asked to state whether India is planning to take further steps to strengthen its relations with GCC countries and Iran for greater regional security and stability, the Ministry responded that India has always advocated dialogue and diplomacy for peaceful resolution of differences between countries, including in Gulf. India had welcomed the reconciliation and rapprochement between Saudi Arabia-UAE-Bahrain-Egypt and Qatar at GCC Al Ula Summit in January 2021. Similarly, India had also welcomed the Abraham Accords signed by UAE, Bahrain, Israel and US in September 2020. India will continue to work with all partners in the Gulf for peace, progress and stability in the region. India has also increased its defence ties with Gulf countries and continues to engage as the region is on our extended neighbourhood and critical for us for trade, investment, energy and security of Indians living in Gulf.

2.10 The Committee also observed that India's relation with the GCC plays a pivotal role in world political arena but the presence of China and Pakistan is potential threat for the position of India in the Gulf and sought to know the steps being taken by the Ministry to neutralize their presence. In response, they have been apprised that India continues to strengthen its historical relations with GCC countries across a wide range of areas. Our historical and cultural relations and geographic nearness give us a distinct advantage. India is also working with other like-minded countries on specific issues in the Gulf. I2U2 is one such grouping. Our NSA also visited Saudi Arabia recently and met NSAs of Saudi Arabia, UAE and US. India is focused on building stronger relationship with Gulf countries by working on several areas of mutual benefit such as infrastructure, oil and petrochemicals, grid connectivity, green hydrogen, food security, health care, logistics and new

technology like AI. The two-way investments between India and Gulf countries are also building mutual inter-dependencies.

India-GCC Political Dialogue

2.11 The first-ever India-GCC Political Dialogue between EAM and the GCC Chairman, the Secretary General and Ambassadors/representatives from GCC countries was held on the sidelines of the UNGA in September 2003. Further Political Dialogues were held on the sidelines of UNGA in the years 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015. The 10th India-GCC Political Dialogue was held in the troika format on the margins of 74th UNGA in September 2019 in New York. The 11th India-GCC Troika Meeting was virtually held in November 2020.

2.12. Then GCC Secretary General Dr. Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf visited India in November 2021 and in November 2022. During EAM's visit to Saudi Arabia in September 2022, he also met GCC Secretary General. Both leaders signed an MOU on Mechanism of Consultations to institutionalize the political dialogue between India and GCC. Under this MOU, the first round of India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting, at Secretary level, was held on March 20, 2023 in Riyadh. Both sides proposed formation of Joint Working Groups to cater to particular areas of cooperation between India and GCC countries.

2.13 India and GCC have also discussed resumption of negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. This issue has been discussed in meetings of EAM and CIM with GCC Secretary General in 2021 and 2022 but GCC is yet to firm up its position. Two meetings for negotiating an FTA between India and GCC took place between 2006 and 2008. India and GCC have also held four industrial conferences to discuss ways of enhancing trade and investment, the last being in 2015.

2.14 The Committee enquired about the Dialogues/ Summits held so far between India and GCC, the details of issues discussed, outcome of the said dialogues/summits as well as the agenda and preparedness for the next India and GCC dialogue. The Ministry has informed that ten rounds of India-GCC Political Dialogue were held on the sidelines of UNGA (from 2003 – 2019). The dialogues usually happen with our EAM in a troika format comprising GCC Secretary, current chair of GCC and the next chair of GCC. 11th India-GCC Political Dialogue was held virtually in November 2021. In September 2022, India and GCC signed an MoU on Mechanisms for Consultation between both sides. The MoU encapsulates a dialogue between EAM and the GCC troika (GCC SG, FM of the country holding the GCC presidency and FM of the next country to hold the GCC presidency) and also instituted a dialogue at the SOM level. The first India-GCC SOM meeting took place on March 20, 2023. During this meeting Indian side proposed to form five JWG's in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism.

2.15 When further enquired about the status and areas of cooperation of the Joint Working Groups, the Ministry has informed that during the first India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held in March 2023, it was proposed to form five Joint Working Groups in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism. They are in touch with GCC side regarding the proposed JWG.

2.16 When the Committee sought to know the steps being taken for peace and political stabilization in the Gulf region, the Ministry in a written reply, has informed that India has always advocated dialogue and diplomacy for peaceful resolution of differences between countries, including in Gulf. India had welcomed the reconciliation and rapprochement between Saudi Arabia-UAE-Bahrain-Egypt and Qatar at GCC Al Ula Summit in January 2021. Similarly, India had also welcomed the Abraham Accords signed by UAE, Bahrain, Israel and US in September 2020. India will continue to work with all partners in the Gulf for peace, progress and stability in the region.

GCC and India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council

2.17 In its Background note furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has stated that India got the support of all GCC countries for its membership of UNSC for 2021-22 term. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Bahrain have joined the International Solar Alliance. India's firm stand against terrorism has been acknowledged by GCC countries. India is also working together with Gulf countries on the issue of Climate Change. UAE is the President of COP28 and India is actively engaged with UAE side.

2.18 On the stand of the GCC members on India's permanent membership in the UNSC, the Ministry in its written reply, has stated that among the GCC countries, Oman, UAE and Bahrain have conveyed support to India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council. However, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have not, so far, publically expressed their support for India's claim to a permanent seat and as such, eliciting support remains a work in progress. India is regularly and consistently engaging at the highest levels to seek expressions of support for its claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council.

GCC and India's G20 Presidency

2.19 India is hosting the G-20 Summit this year and Saudi Arabia as a G-20 Member and the UAE and Oman have been invited as special invitees. When enquired about other GCC member nations, especially Kuwait, the Ministry

responded that during its G20 Presidency, India has invited Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE as Guest countries. With 9 Guest countries, India has one of the largest geographic and varied representations in its G20 meetings. Among the three Gulf countries that are participating in G20 this year, Saudi Arabia is a member of G20. UAE and Oman are the invitee countries. All three countries have a strategic partnership with India.

2.20 On the issue of Kuwait, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023 stated:

“The participation is primarily of G-20 member countries. But there are a few countries where we have extended invitations as guests. Among the Gulf countries, we have extended invitation to Oman and UAE. Both these countries are strategic partners of India. That is one parameter to see that we already have a strategic partnership and so to say, we would like to continue our engagement with them. With Kuwait, we do not have any such strategic partnership as of now....

However, we are keen to elevate the relationship with Kuwait. You are aware that Kuwait has been facing internal issues. There have been so many changes within their own Governments in the last two years. Many Governments have come and fallen.

So, this is one of the issues. But at other levels, we have been engaging with Kuwait and we have recently concluded the Foreign Office Consultations. Kuwait is a very important country from our manpower perspective”.

India-GCC Cooperation on Climate Change

2.21 India is also working together with Gulf countries on issue of Climate Change. UAE is the President of COP28 and we are actively engaged with UAE side.

2.22 On being asked about the progress regarding India and UAE’s consultations on climate change issues including India’s initiatives and priorities in this regard, the Ministry has stated that India and UAE have held regular consultations on climate change issues this year in view of our G-20 presidency and UAE’s COP-28 presidency. UAE’s Climate Change Envoy and COP-28 President-designate started his international consultations with a visit to India in February 2023. Our Ministry of Forests and Climate Change has also established a Joint Working Group with UAE.

2.23 India has also pioneered several global initiatives contributing to fight against climate change and impacts of climate change. India has launched the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) to bring individual behavioral change at the forefront of the global climate action narrative, and envisions replacing the prevalent use-and-dispose economy with a circular economy. Through various initiatives, India has been assisting developing countries in scaling up rural households’ use of renewable

energy, developing climate disaster risk financing framework, climate information and early warning systems in vulnerable communities and capacity building. The India-UN Development Partnership Fund supports demand-driven and transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world with a focus on least developed countries and SIDS. Together with partner countries, India has also launched important global initiatives including International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CRDI), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT).

2.24 Under India's Presidency, G20 has accorded high priority to climate change. The commitment to implement sustainable, inclusive and just transitions globally is underlined in the G20 Development Minister's outcome documents: *G20 2023-Action Plan on Accelerating Progress on the SDGs* and *High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development*. These documents highlight that the access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is a moral imperative and a basic human need. The G20 members have also adopted a *High Level Voluntary Principles on Hydrogen* to build a sustainable and equitable global hydrogen ecosystem that benefits all nations. The Indian Presidency is coordinating with other G20 countries towards delivering other initiatives at the G20 Summit on 09-10 September 2023.

2.25 The Committee note that the Gulf region is considered as our extended neighbourhood and critical for trade, investment, energy and security of Indians living in the Gulf. The Committee also note that India is having good long standing relations with all the GCC countries. To maintain peace, progress and stability in the region, the Committee desire that the Government should make constant endeavour to strengthen and deepen its political, economic and cultural ties with the GCC countries. India should remain focused on building stronger relationship with Gulf countries through regular exchange visits including high level interactions and working on several areas of mutual benefits and emerging areas of cooperation. At the same time, India should work with GCC countries to create architecture for safety and security of the region and a coordinated response mechanism to deal with threats

including piracy in high seas, environmental threats, response during disasters etc.

(Recommendation No. 4)

2.26 The Committee note that political dialogues between India and GCC have been held over the years. A Memorandum of Understanding on Mechanism of Consultations to institutionalize the political dialogue between India and GCC was signed in September 2022. This MoU also instituted a dialogue at the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) level. The Committee further note that during the first India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting held in March 2023, it was proposed to form five Joint Working Groups in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism. The Committee welcome the proposal for formation of five mutually beneficial JWG's and urge the Government to make all out efforts for the finalization of all the groups and start working at an early date.

(Recommendation No. 5)

2.27 The Committee note that out of the six GCC countries, Oman, UAE and Bahrain have conveyed support to India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council. However, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have not, so far, expressed their support for India's claim publicly. The Committee feel that India should continue its diplomatic efforts to gain support of India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council.

(Recommendation No. 6)

2.28 The Committee note that during India’s G20 Presidency, Saudi Arabia as a member of G20 and UAE and Oman as invitee countries have participated in the G20 summit. The Committee further note that these three countries are having strategic partnerships with India. The Committee understand that India is keen to elevate its relationship with Kuwait and have been engaging with Kuwait at other levels. In view of the importance of Kuwait from our manpower perspective, the Committee urge the Government to actively engage with Kuwait including at the highest level for a positive outcome of the engagements.

(Recommendation No. 7)

2.29 The Committee note that India is also working together with Gulf countries on issue of Climate Change. India and UAE have held regular consultations on climate change issues this year in view of our G-20 presidency and UAE’s COP-28 presidency. Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has also established a Joint Working Group with UAE. Under India’s Presidency, G20 has accorded high priority to climate change. India has also pioneered several global initiatives contributing to fight against climate change and impact of climate change such as Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), India-UN Development Partnership Fund, International Solar Alliance(ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CRDI), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT) etc. The Committee desire that the Government should impress upon the GCC countries to join and actively participate in the global initiatives pioneered by India for combating climate change and its impact.

(Recommendation No. 8)

CHAPTER III

COOPERATION IN ENERGY, HEALTH, SPACE, EDUCATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

I. Energy

3.1 GCC has been an important partner in catering to India's energy security. GCC countries contribute almost 35% of India's oil imports and 70% of gas imports. India's overall crude oil imports from the Gulf in 2022-23 were about \$58 billion of which Saudi Arabia contributed \$29.07 billion, UAE \$16.08 billion, Kuwait \$8.02 billion, Oman \$2.65 billion, Qatar \$1.87 billion and Bahrain negligible amounts.

3.2 India's overall LNG and LPG imports from the Gulf in 2022-23 were about \$26 billion of which Qatar contributed \$12.36 billion, UAE \$7.08 billion, Saudi Arabia \$2.8 billion, Kuwait \$2.31 billion, Oman \$1 billion and Bahrain \$0.12 billion. India and the Gulf countries have also been discussing enhancing their partnership in the field of renewable energy.

3.3 The crucial role played by GCC countries towards India's energy security has been emphasized by the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during briefing on 29 May 2023, as under:

“We are a net energy importing country, and GCC countries are indispensable in this regard. The share of GCC countries is about thirty-five per cent in crude oil and seventy per cent in natural gas. We are having long-term energy partnerships with some countries.”

3.4 The Secretary (CPV & OIA) further reiterated this position while tendering evidence before the Committee on 27 July 2023:

“The Gulf countries have been indispensable partners in our energy security. The share of the GCC countries is about 35 per cent in our crude oil imports and 70 per cent in our gas imports. During the last financial year, our crude oil imports from Gulf countries were about USD 58 billion and our gas imports from GCC were in the range of USD 26 billion. We are also working together with Gulf countries on renewable energy, including solar and green hydrogen. On July 13, 2023, UAE's ADNOC and IOCL signed a long-term agreement for supplying 1.2 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG for a 14-year period starting from 2026 to 2039.”

3.5 The Ministry has further stated that India has also been working to transform the energy partnership between India and the Gulf countries from a buyer-seller to a more comprehensive relationship. UAE was the first country to participate in the India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves in 2018. It also awarded concession to Indian companies in one of its oil fields in Lower Zakum (2018) and to BPCL and IOC in Abu Dhabi Onshore Block I (2019). On July 13, 2023, UAE's ADNOC and IOCL

signed a long-term agreement for supplying of 1.2 MMTPA LNG for 14 years from 2026-39. Oman awarded stakes to IOC in its Mukhaizna oilfields in 2018. With Qatar, long term LNG contracts were renegotiated during PM's visit to Doha in 2016.

3.6 On the efforts made to evolve the energy partnerships with GCC countries from a mere transactional buyer-seller relationship into a comprehensive energy partnerships, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023 stated as under:

“...We have a very strong energy partnership with all the GCC countries and our effort has been to evolve this partnership into a comprehensive energy partnership rather than mere transactional buyer-seller relationship. Towards this effort, the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited in January 2017 signed a definitive agreement on oil storage and management with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company for storage of 5.86 million barrel of crude oil in Mangalore SPR at its own cost. Additionally, with Aramco, the national company of Saudi Arabia, an MOU was signed in October 2019 during the visit of Prime Minister for similar thing. So far, they have not started implementing the agreement, but the agreement is in place. It was also decided in April 2020 that the crude will be filled at our own cost and after the Cabinet approval in July 2021 for the development for the commercial-cum-strategic reserves under Phase-II at Chandikhol with 4 mmt capacity, and at Padur with 2.5 mmt capacity on PPP model. ISPRL has been engaging with GCC member countries for their participation in the Phase-II of their programme.

...IOCL and UAE's ADNOC has already signed a long-term agreement for supplying 1.2 million metric tonnes of LNG annually for 14 years. Also with Qatar, we have long-term LNG contracts which we have re-negotiated during hon. Prime Minister's visit to Doha in 2016. These contracts expire in 2028. A Task Force on energy has also been set up in Qatar. Also, you would be aware that the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia visited India in February, 2019. There was a major announcement made for the possible construction of the largest greenfield oil refinery called the West Coast Refinery at Raigarh in Maharashtra at a cost of USD 44 billion. Now, the discussions have been going on since then. Now, there has been a consensus between the two sides that instead of one big refinery of 60 MMTPA, they would go in for three small refineries of 20 MMTPA. So, these are some of the developments which are taking place on the energy side. At the same time, some countries have been awarding concessions to Indian companies. For example, UAE has awarded a concession in one of his oil fields, Lower Zakum in 2018 to BPCL, and to IOC in the Abu Dhabi Onshore Block 1. Oman has also awarded stakes to IOC in the Mukhaizna oil field in 2018. Likewise, we do have some progress in the renewable energy sector. Many Indian companies are looking at opportunities for investments in the green hydrogen and green ammonia sector in the GCC. There are some companies like ACME has invested in the green hydrogen in Oman. More companies are interested in making similar investments in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain”.

3.7 When asked about the planning of the Ministry to further strengthen and diversify the energy partnership with the GCC, the Ministry in a written reply has stated that India's relation with GCC member countries in the field of hydrocarbon is mutually reinforcing and beneficial. With GCC countries, India is working to elevate this existing buyer seller relation to a strategic partnership. NOC's of GCC countries are partnering Indian PSUs under the overall value chain of oil & gas sector including E&P assets, participation in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves, and technological advancement in clean energy. Towards this, Indian PSUs have also made investment in producing blocks in UAE & Oman. The Indian PSUs IOCL (30%), OVL (40%) and BPRL (30%) own Falcon Oil & Gas B.V. has a 10% PI in the Lower Zakum Concession, UAE which produces approx. 350,000 barrels of oil per day (b/d). IOCL (50%) and BPRL (50%) are partners in Block Onshore-1, UAE. Indian PSUs are constantly on the lookout to acquire more hydrocarbon assets in the GCC countries.

3.8 The Committee further enquired about the strategies/initiatives being pursued by the Ministry to deepen the comprehensive energy cooperation between India and the GCC countries, the Ministry responded that India is engaging with the GCC countries on multiple levels to deepen the cooperation in the area of energy. This includes exchanges/dialogues at various levels, Ministerial level meetings, institutional frameworks such as JVGs and Free Trade Agreements. India has commercial arrangements including the storage of UAE's crude oil in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. After the participation of the UAE in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in 2018, an MoU was signed with Saudi Arabian National Oil Company – Saudi Aramco for its participation in India's SPR in 2019. However, in order to benefit from low crude oil prices fall in 2020, India purchased the crude for filling up the SPR. India is now executing Phase-II of the SPR and several countries, including GCC countries, have expressed interest in participation in the Phase-II of India's SPR.

3.9 In a written reply furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has also stated that India has been engaging with GCC member countries at multiple levels to strengthen the energy security of the country including through participation of GCC member countries in Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) of India. As a result of these efforts, Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), on 25th January 2017, signed a Definitive Agreement on Oil Storage and Management with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) for storage of 5.86 million barrels crude oil in the Mangalore SPR at its own cost. Additionally, with Aramco, the National Oil company of Saudi Arabia, a MoU was signed between ISPRL and them on 29.10.2019 to explore possibility of filling one cavern of Padur on the sidelines of PM visit to Saudi Arabia. However, given the benefit which would accrue, on account of the low prevailing crude prices at that time (April 2020), it was decided to fill the crude at our own cost. After the Cabinet approval in July 2021, for development of Commercial cum Strategic reserves under Phase II at Chandikhol (4MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT) on PPP mode, ISPRL has been engaging with GCC member countries for their participation in Phase -II program.

3.10 When enquired whether any long-term agreements or collaborations are in the pipeline following recent milestones like the NOC-IOCL-LNG agreement as well as the stakes awarded to Indian companies, the Ministry has informed that the national oil companies of Abu Dhabi (UAE)- ADNOC & Saudi Arabia - Saudi Aramco are interested to participate in the upcoming Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemical Complex in Maharashtra and have signed an MoU with the Indian promoters – IOCL, BPCL and HPCL of the Refinery.

3.11 The Committee observed that India along with GCC member countries are also giving impetus to the ongoing momentum to tap the huge potential in terms of trade, investment and collaboration under the clean energy transition and sought to know the status in this regard. The Ministry has informed that despite GCC being a major oil and gas exporter, they have shown keen interest in clean energy related discussions including green hydrogen and bio fuels. India and Saudi Arabia have had two rounds of discussions replicating the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in 2022 under the aegis of the Saudi Green Initiative and the Middle East Green Initiative and has requested for further sharing India's experience in designing and implementation of PMUY. GCC countries are focusing on India as preferred investment destination under natural gas, green hydrogen, and clean energy technologies on broadening our relationship.

Green Energy

3.12 During briefing on 29 May 2023, the Committee sought to know the projection regarding green hydrogen and its likely impact on the trade deficit with the GCC countries. In response, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) stated:

“...there are large number of companies which are looking at investing in these countries in the green technologies. We do have MoU signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE and others. For example, we have four companies which have committed \$18 billion investment in green energy typically to set up the green hydrogen and green ammonia in Oman and in Egypt. Similarly, one of these companies called Occior which was known as Azure power before, has also expressed interest in setting up of plants in Saudi Arabia with an investment to the tune of \$2 billion. Similarly, what is also happening is that, Saudi Arabia under its Vision 2030 and other countries with similar long-term visions are giving encouragement to increments in the field of renewable energy. When these partnerships blossom, we would also have a distinct advantage because our companies are actually, investing there and producing there, much of it is for buy back. For example, a company called Sanmar Group from Chennai, has been a major investor in Egypt in the petrochemical sector. Its entire produce is imported back. We are trying to adopt a similar strategy for fertilizers and other products. Although we cannot match our exports with the deficit coming out of the energy imports, I think, there is a long-term trend which we can see, of our companies committing huge investments in these sectors which are of interest to us including the renewable energy sector automobile sector, not very much as of now on the EV sector, as also but other sectors.

International Solar Alliance

3.13 International Solar Alliance (ISA) is the first treaty based inter-governmental organization headquartered in India. Since its inception in 2018, ISA has been working with the objective of making solar as the energy source of choice, through the development, deployment, and funding of solar-powered energy solutions and applications on a large scale.

3.14 It aims to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through rapid and massive deployment of solar energy. The ISA aims to bring together countries to provide a collective response to the main common obstacles to the massive deployment of solar energy in terms of technology, finance and capacity. ISA has three key global drivers – Energy Access, Energy Security, and Energy Transition. As of date, 116 countries have signed the Framework Agreement of the ISA, of which 94 countries have also ratified it. Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE and Bahrain have signed and ratified the ISA Framework Agreement.

Green Grids Initiative and the One Sun One World One Grid Initiative

3.15 The Ministry, in a written reply has informed that India and GCC Countries are also engaging within Green Grids Initiative and the One Sun One World One Grid initiative. This initiative was Hon'ble PM of India's vision in 2018 which was launched in May 2021 by the United Kingdom and India jointly at the COP26 Summit. The GGI- OSOWOG will interconnect generators and demand centres across continents with an international power transportation grid. Cross-border connections would also be combined with community grids, smart vehicle charging and interactive appliances to ensure that grids are green and resilient at all levels. In this regard, India is looking forward to explore potential cooperation and has invited GCCIA, UAE and Saudi Arabia to OSOWOG- GGI initiative for setting up interconnected cross border grids.

II. Health

3.16 The Committee observed that during COVID-19 pandemic, both India and GCC had extended their assistance to each other because of which the health sector cooperation emerged as a big opportunity for the two sides and enquired about the manner in which the Ministry will explore this cooperation further ahead. They have been informed that India and the GCC countries cooperated closely during the Covid pandemic. Initially, in 2020 India supplied Hydrochloroquine (HCQ) tablets in large quantities to Gulf countries. Subsequently, India supplied 4.5 million Covishield vaccine doses to Saudi Arabia and 200,000 doses each to UAE and Kuwait. In addition, 100,000 vaccine doses each were gifted to Bahrain and Oman. GCC countries also helped India with supply of Liquid Medical Oxygen and containers during the Delta wave of Covid in 2021.

3.17 India and GCC countries continue to take forward their healthcare cooperation following Covid pandemic. This includes discussions between India and

GCC countries on promoting medical and wellness tourism to India, collaborations between hospitals and medical institutions, development of reliable supply chains of vaccines and medicines, investments in rapidly growing health infrastructure in India, enhanced access of Indian pharmaceuticals to GCC countries and joint health cooperation in third countries especially in Africa. As needed, these objectives will be taken forward through signing of MOUs.

3.18 On being asked about the details and status of MoUs on health cooperation, the Ministry in its written reply has stated that India has ongoing cooperation in health sector with GCC countries and has also entered into various agreements. With Oman, MoU on Cooperation in Health-care has been signed. Under this MoU, the Joint Working Group (JWG) has been constituted, to discuss various areas of cooperation like pharmaceutical cooperation, exchange of medical professionals, medical value travel etc. India and Saudi Arabia are currently negotiating an MoU on Health. This will further expand the existing cooperation in the health sector including areas such as investments in health care industries, capacity building, exports of medical products, joint ventures, exchange of knowledge and service exports. A draft MoU for Cooperation in the Healthcare and a MoU for cooperation in traditional medicines such as AYUSH, Unani and Homeopath, etc. are also under discussion with UAE.

3.19 There is a MoU for cooperation in the field of traditional medicine and homeopathy under discussion with Qatar. India has signed an MoU on Medical Cooperation with Kuwait, under which Joint Working Group (JWG) on Medical Cooperation has been set up to discuss areas like medical technology, generic drugs, exchange of knowledge etc. India and Bahrain have signed an MOU for cooperation in the field of Healthcare. JWG meeting has been held to discuss cooperation in the field of pandemic management, exchange of medical professionals and ways to enhance trade in pharmaceuticals & medical devices and medical value travel. India has proposed an MoU on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation and an annex titled "Bilateral Cooperation on Pharmaceutical Products" under the existing MoU with Bahrain.

III. Space

3.20 Space is another area of cooperation between India and the GCC countries. In 2017 India launched a UAE nano-satellite on a PSLV. India also has space cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Oman and other GCC countries. Recently, a Department of Space delegation from India visited Oman in June 2023 to discuss enhancing cooperation *inter alia* in building communication satellite.

3.21 Regarding the specific initiatives and collaborative projects being considered to enhance space cooperation in the GCC region and the plan of the Ministry to further strengthen and expand space cooperation with the GCC countries, the Committee have been informed that India has been actively engaging with all GCC countries to strengthen partnership in Space cooperation. There are ongoing

discussions between the Space Agencies of India and GCC countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman to explore further collaboration. Under the framework of Strategic Partnership Council, space agencies of India and Saudi Arabia have been coordinating regarding potential areas of collaboration. Both sides are also negotiating an MoU on cooperation in space sector. A MoU on Space cooperation signed with Oman lays the foundation for collaborative efforts in space exploration, satellite technology, academic collaboration and research. There have been efforts to further expand the horizon of bilateral cooperation with Qatar in Space sector, especially in Satellites. India has signed a MoU with Kuwait on Cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. India and Bahrain have signed a Statement of Intent for cooperation in Space Sector. A Collaboration Framework between New Space India Limited (NSIL), India and National Space Agency (NSSA) Bahrain in the areas of capacity building; space technology & applications; Ground Segment support; and Consultancy services is under discussion.

IV. Education

3.22 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) explained the importance accorded to the education sector between India and GCC countries as under:

“Education is another area....which has emerged as a strong area of cooperation between India and GCC. This will get further strengthened with the signing of the MoU for establishment of an IIT campus in Abu Dhabi”.

3.23 On the issue of educational collaborations, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) stated:

“Now, you have also talked about the educational collaborations, particularly, when the hon. Chief Minister, Kerala, visited UAE. There was a talk of the University in Sharjah and other places also. As a matter of policy, we encourage educational collaboration between institutions. In fact, with many countries, we have MoUs for collaboration in the field of education. Having said that, I would like to say that much of these collaborations are university to university in the private sector where the Government’s role is rather limited. Only in case of IIT Delhi recently during the Prime Minister’s visit there was a role for Government. For example, if any State University wants to open up or enter into a collaboration with any university in the Gulf countries, our embassies would be very happy to facilitate. It can be a university-to-university collaboration or department-to-department collaboration or faculty exchange. So many options are there and we would certainly like to do facilitate”.

3.24 During briefing on 29 May 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) apprised the Committee on the initiatives being taken for educational and cultural collaborations with universities globally, as under:.

“....we are identifying 40 top universities globally in which our diaspora is playing a role in the form of faculty members or senior researchers. You are aware that Indian students are one of the largest in many countries like US, UK and

Australia. Again, this is an initiative which we are taking on the directions of the Hon. Prime Minister so that in the leading 40 universities in the world, we will have educational and cultural collaborations”.

3.25 When asked to state the role of the Ministry in facilitating higher and technical education, the Ministry has informed that an MoU was signed during the visit of Prime Minister to UAE in July 2023 to establish an IIT campus in the UAE. As per the MoU, IIT Delhi-Abu Dhabi (IIT-DAD) will start its first Master’s program from Jan 2024 in Energy Transition and Sustainability and bachelor’s, other master’s and PhD programs will follow from September 2024 onward. As a matter of policy, collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad is encouraged. Our Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector.

V. Digital Technology

3.26 The Committee observed that India’s Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) is a success story that has attracted worldwide attention and sought to know the steps taken by the Ministry to promote and facilitate the adoption of India’s DPI by the GCC countries. The Ministry informed the Committee that India has held discussions related to the UPI platform with various Gulf countries. The Rupay card is already functional in UAE and MoUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. Similarly, India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies.

3.27 The MEA has further stated that proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait.

3.28 On the progress made regarding the initiatives related to the UPI platform, its impact and the merits of UPI platform established with UAE and Japan also, the Ministry has stated that UPI is not merely a Real Time Payment system providing Person to Person Payment system but it is a comprehensive payment scheme where the online transaction processing, Interbank settlements and Customer dispute life cycle management are encompassed holistically. At present, Indians who visit different countries have to pay for any expenses via international cards. With the introduction of UPI, Indians will now be able to use multiple bank accounts to make payments via a single mobile application. UAE has accepted India’s UPI interface while talks are ongoing with the Central Bank of Oman for technical integration of UPI.

3.29 The Reserve Bank of India has allowed transactions in domestic currencies to promote growth of global trade with emphasis on exports from India and to support the increasing interest of global trading community in INR. This mechanism will allow businesses to directly trade in Indian Rupees thereby reducing risks related to

dependence on hard currencies. As of August 1, 2023, RBI has permitted 20 Authorized Dealer banks in India for opening of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts from 22 countries including Oman from GCC.

3.30 The implementation of UPI in overseas markets is a significant step towards promoting digital transactions and fostering closer economic cooperation between India and foreign countries. With UPI's user-friendly and secure interface, Indian tourists will be able to make payments seamlessly, eliminating the need for currency exchange. This will enhance our bilateral trade as well as tourism. Internationalization of UPI will also help in reducing the cost of cross border payments.

3.31 The Committee note that GCC countries are contributing almost 35% of India's oil imports and 70% of gas imports. India and the GCC countries have a very strong energy partnership and efforts have been made to evolve this partnership into a comprehensive energy partnership rather than mere transactional buyer-seller relationship. UAE was the first country to participate in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in 2018. An MoU was signed with Saudi Arabian National Oil Company – Saudi Aramco for its participation in India's SPR in 2019. India is now executing Phase-II of the SPR and several countries, including GCC countries, have expressed their interest for participation in the Phase-II of India's SPR. The Committee further note that National Oil Companies of GCC countries are partnering Indian PSUs under the overall value chain of oil & gas sector including E&P assets and technological advancement in clean energy. Indian PSUs have also been awarded stakes in oilfields in UAE & Oman. Long term agreements for supply of LNG was also signed with UAE and Qatar. The Committee are pleased at the progress made towards a comprehensive energy partnership with GCC countries. Keeping in view India's energy security needs, the Committee desire that the Government should keep up the ongoing momentum and make constant efforts to enhance the energy partnership including in the field of

renewable energy. The Committee also urge the Government to actively engage with the GCC countries to secure their participation in Phase II of its Strategic Petroleum Reserve for an early implementation.

(Recommendation No. 9)

3.32 The Committee further note that India is engaging with the GCC countries on multiple levels to deepen the cooperation in the area of energy through exchanges/dialogues at various levels, Ministerial level meetings, institutional frameworks such as JWGs and Free Trade Agreements. The Committee desire that through these exchanges/dialogues and Agreements, GCC countries may be persuaded to invest in India as well as provide more investment opportunities to Indian PSUs, including in renewable energy sector like solar and green hydrogen, green ammonia sector and hydrocarbon assets. Indian PSUs may also be facilitated and incentivized by the Government for such investments in GCC countries. The Committee also desire that the Government should explore the opportunity of signing more MoUs/Long Term Agreements and collaborations for India's energy security.

(Recommendation No. 10)

3.33 The Committee note that GCC countries are focusing on India as preferred investment destination under natural gas, green hydrogen and clean energy technologies on broadening our relationship. India and Saudi Arabia have had two rounds of discussions replicating the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in 2022 and has requested for further sharing of India's experience in designing and implementation of PMUY. The Committee desire that the Government should maximize the focus on India as preferred investment

destination by GCC countries and reciprocate through creation of favourable environment and incentives/concessions for investment, where applicable.

(Recommendation No. 11)

3.34 The Committee further note that Indian PSUs have invested in green energy/technologies in GCC countries. India has signed MoU with Saudi Arabia, UAE and others. Large number of companies in India are looking at investing in these countries in the green technologies. Saudi Arabia under its Vision 2030 and other countries with similar long-term visions are giving encouragement to increments in the field of renewable energy. The Committee desire that as per India's Long Term Vision for the energy sector to cater to our energy security needs, the Indian PSUs should be encouraged, facilitated and incentivized to invest in green energy/technologies in GCC countries so that they can contribute towards our energy security through importing/buying back of the product.

(Recommendation No. 12)

3.35 The Committee note that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Bahrain have joined the International Solar Alliance while two GCC countries namely, Kuwait and Qatar are yet to join the ISA. The Committee desire that all the GCC countries should be brought under the ISA as India is already having cooperation with GCC countries in the energy sector. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to make extra efforts to persuade Kuwait and Qatar to join the Alliance at an early date.

(Recommendation No. 13)

3.36 The Committee note that India and GCC countries are also engaging within the Green Grids Initiative and the One Sun One World One Grid initiative

under the aegis of the International Solar Alliance. The GGI-OSOWOG will interconnect generators and demand centres across continents with an international power transportation grid. Cross-border connections would also be combined with community grids, smart vehicle charging and interactive appliances to ensure that grids are green and resilient at all levels. The Committee further note that India is looking forward to explore potential cooperation and has invited GCCIA, UAE and Saudi Arabia to GGI-OSOWOG initiative for setting up interconnected cross border grids. The Committee are of the view that cooperation between India and GCC under the GGI-OSOWOG initiative would greatly enhance its partnership in the renewable/green energy sector and urge the Government to make vigorous efforts for meaningful dialogues so that interconnected cross border grids with GCC countries are set up at the earliest.

(Recommendation No. 14)

3.37 The Committee observe that India and the GCC countries cooperated closely during the COVID pandemic. India supplied Hydrochloroquine tablets and Covishield vaccine doses to the Gulf countries. GCC countries helped India with supply of Liquid Medical Oxygen and containers during the Delta wave of COVID in 2021. In the post pandemic period, both countries continue to take forward their healthcare cooperation which includes discussions on promoting medical and wellness tourism to India, collaborations between hospitals and medical institutions, development of reliable supply chains of vaccines and medicines, investments in rapidly growing health infrastructure in India, enhanced access of Indian pharmaceuticals to GCC countries and joint health cooperation in third countries especially in Africa. The Committee feel that mutually beneficial healthcare cooperation between India and GCC

countries should continue unabated even in the post COVID world and thus urge the Government to formalize/institutionalize the said objectives in the form of MoUs/Agreements.

(Recommendation No. 15)

3.38 The Committee note that India has entered into various agreements/MoUs in the health sector with Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain while several MoUs are under negotiation with the GCC countries. India and Saudi Arabia are currently negotiating an MoU on Health; a draft MoU for Cooperation in the Healthcare and a MoU for cooperation in traditional medicines such as AYUSH, Unani and Homeopath, etc. are under discussion with UAE and an MoU for cooperation in the field of traditional medicine and homeopathy is under discussion with Qatar. India has also proposed an MoU on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation and an annex titled “Bilateral Cooperation on Pharmaceutical Products” under the existing MoU with Bahrain. The Committee are pleased at the progress made so far and the initiatives and ongoing discussions/negotiations for cooperation in the health sector. They, however, desire that MEA should facilitate appropriately so that the discussions/negotiations are concluded at the earliest and the agreements/MoUs on health cooperation between India and some of the GCC countries are signed and operationalized.

(Recommendation No. 16)

3.39 The Committee note that Space Agencies of India and GCC countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman are in the process of discussion to explore further collaboration while space agencies of India and Saudi Arabia have been coordinating regarding potential areas of collaboration under the framework of Strategic Partnership Council and also negotiating an MoU on

cooperation in space sector. Efforts have been made to further expand the horizon of bilateral cooperation with Qatar in Space sector, especially in Satellites. Moreover, a Collaboration Framework between New Space India Limited (NSIL), India and National Space Agency (NSSA) Bahrain in the areas of capacity building; space technology & applications; Ground Segment support; and Consultancy services is under discussion. In order to enhance and strengthen partnerships in space cooperation and bring about further collaboration in this sector between India and GCC countries, the Committee urge the Government to bring all the ongoing discussion and collaborative efforts to a fruitful conclusion for an early implementation.

(Recommendation No. 17)

3.40 The Committee note that the education sector has emerged as a strong area of cooperation between India and the GCC countries. As a matter of policy, collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad is encouraged. Indian Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector.

There is an ongoing process of identifying 40 top universities globally in which Indian diaspora are playing a role in the form of faculty members or senior researchers as a part of educational and cultural collaborations with universities across the world . The Committee also note that an MoU was signed in July 2023 to establish an IIT campus in the UAE. The Committee feel that educational collaborations between India and GCC countries should be enhanced and urge the Government to explore more avenues for partnerships in this sector so that more MoUs for facilitating higher and technical education would be signed. Indian Missions abroad may be pursued to play a more

proactive role in facilitating educational collaborations between institutions in India and in the GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to complete the exercise regarding identification of top universities having involvement of diaspora at the earliest for promotion of educational and cultural collaborations.

(Recommendation No. 18)

3.41 On the adoption of India's Digital Public Infrastructure by GCC countries, the Committee note that the Rupay card is already functional in UAE while MoUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. Moreover, proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that besides promoting digital transactions, integration of the UPI platform with the payment platforms of GCC countries would go a long way in fostering closer economic cooperation through enhanced bilateral trade as well as tourism and at the same time, reduce the cost of cross border payments. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to pursue the GCC countries and enter into constructive talks with UAE, Kuwait and others for an early finalization of India's UPI connectivity and its integration with the payment Platforms of the GCC countries. Efforts made and success achieved in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

(Recommendation No. 19)

CHAPTER IV

INDIA-GCC COOPERATION ON DEFENCE AND SECURITY

4.1 India's defence and security relationship with the Gulf countries is continuously expanding, with high level visits, bilateral exercises, ship visits, training and participation in exhibitions. There is also good cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, cyber security and maritime security. Saudi Arabia provided good assistance to Indian Air Force aircrafts and Indian Navy ships for evacuation of Indian nationals from Sudan under Operation Kaveri in April and May 2023. Similarly, during the second wave of Covid in April 2021, Gulf countries provided timely access to Indian Navy ships for transportation of liquid medical oxygen and containers.

4.2 A number of high-level defence visits have taken place between India and Gulf countries in recent years. For example, the first ever visit of Army Chief to Saudi Arabia took place in December 2020. In return, Commander of Saudi Land Forces visited India in February 2022. Our Army Chief also visited UAE in December 2020 while Air Chief visited UAE in August 2021. Chief of Naval Staff visited Oman in September 2021. UAE has also provided assistance in the transport of Rafale jets from France to India.

4.3 Joint naval and air exercises have also taken place bilaterally with GCC countries. The first ever joint naval exercise between India and Saudi Arabia called 'Al-Mohed al-Hindi' took place in August 2021 while the second edition took place in May 2023. A joint exercise between Indian and Omani armies, Al Najaf IV, was held in August 2022 in India. Air Forces of both countries held Eastern Bridge Exercise-VI in February 2022 in Jodhpur. MOUs on defence cooperation have been signed with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman in past few years. Two MOUs on defence cooperation with Oman were renewed in May 2021. India also joined the multilateral Combined Maritime Forces, headquartered in Bahrain as an Associate Partner in 2022. This will strengthen cooperation in regional security in the western Indian Ocean.

4.4 There have also been NSA/Dy. NSA level dialogues with various GCC countries. NSA visited Saudi Arabia in May 2023 and met his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, US and UAE. NSA also visited Oman in June 2023 and met his counterpart. A Dy. NSA level dialogue with Oman was held in January 2023.

4.5 During briefing on 29 May 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) highlighted the important developments on defence and security aspects between India and GCC countries, as under:-

“...there is a growing cooperation with GCC at all levels in the defence and security matters. There have been contacts at senior levels but more important is that we have been inviting them for our joint exercises. In fact, in Saudi Arabia, recently, we have the second joint naval exercise. With UAE and Oman, we already have such a mechanism. On Duqm, construction work has started. So, these are very important developments on the security side. We are also in touch with Gulf countries enhancing for cooperation in maritime security and cyber security”.

4.6 The Secretary (CPV & OIA) also elaborated on the strengthening cooperation between India and GCC countries in defence and security in the past few years during evidence on 27 July 2023:

“India and all the GCC countries have strengthened defence and security cooperation in the past few years, including through exchange of high-level visits, bilateral exercises, shipping visits. There is also a very good cooperation on counter terrorism, intelligence sharing, space cooperation, cyber security, maritime security, prevention of human trafficking, narcotics, and narcotics smuggling. There have also been NSA and Deputy NSA level dialogues with various GCC countries. NSA visited Saudi Arabia in May 2023 and met his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, USA, and UAE. NSA had also visited Oman last month in June 2023 and met his counterpart. Recently, the Secretary, Department of Space, and the Chairman, ISRO visited Oman to discuss avenues for cooperation in the field of space”.

4.7 The Committee further enquired about the efforts being made by the Ministry to foster collaboration in emerging areas such as cyber security, science & technology, artificial intelligence, etc. The Ministry responded that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MOUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. Ministry continues to facilitate meetings and road shows between the relevant stakeholders, public and private, to promote cooperation in these areas. There are many institutional mechanisms with various countries to deepen the partnership in area of technology including Joint Working Groups. There are also various exchanges, delegation visits to further deepen cooperation in science and technology. Various Indian IT companies also have presence in GCC countries.

Cyber Security

4.8 The Committee observed that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries.

4.9 On being asked to furnish the details and efforts being made to finalize these MoUs at the earliest, the Ministry has reiterated that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The MoUs on Cyber Security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries are currently under discussions at various stages.

II. Maritime Security

4.10 The Ministry, in a written reply furnished to the Committee, has stated that maritime security has been high on the agenda of cooperation between India and GCC countries. This is reflected in high level visits such as that of Chief of Naval Staff to Oman in September 2021, joint naval exercises such as ‘*Al-Mohed al-Hindi*’

exercises between India and Saudi Arabia that took place in August 2021 and May 2023, signing of MOU on White Shipping Information with Oman in 2021 and India joining the multilateral Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain as an Associate Partner in 2022. Maritime security is discussed in various security and defence meetings between India and GCC.

4. 11 The Committee note that India's defence and security relationship with the Gulf countries consist of high level defence visits, joint naval and air exercises, NSA and Deputy NSA level dialogues, ship visits, training and participation in exhibitions, cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, cyber security, maritime security, etc. The Committee further note that MoUs on defence cooperation have been signed with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman in the past few years and two MoUs on defence cooperation with Oman were renewed in May 2021. The Committee acknowledge the growing cooperation between India and GCC countries in defence and security matters but are surprised that MoUs have been signed with only few countries so far. The Committee, are, therefore of the view that India-GCC cooperation on defence and security needs to be scaled up with proper mechanism for intelligence sharing on terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling of narcotics, etc. An institutional framework for cooperation in new and emerging areas such as cyber security, maritime security, use of science and technology and artificial intelligence in the detection and countering of terrorist threats, etc. may be evolved to strengthen our partnerships in the field of defence and security. The Committee also desire that security dialogues between India and GCC countries may be held regularly at the highest level.

(Recommendation No. 20)

4.12 The Committee note that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and

security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The MoUs on Cyber Security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries are currently under discussions at various stages. The Committee are of the view that MoUs on cyber security between India and GCC countries are long overdue especially in the backdrop of severe challenge posed by cyber terrorism globally. They, therefore, desire that the Government should make concerted efforts to evolve a mechanism for cooperation with GCC countries through MoUs/Agreements on cyber security expeditiously. The Committee also urge the Ministry to facilitate the ongoing discussion on MoUs regarding cyber security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries for its early and successful conclusion.

(Recommendation No. 21)

4.13 The Committee note that high priority has been attached to maritime security in India's cooperation with GCC countries. Given the pivotal role of the Gulf countries in maritime trade, its enormous oil and natural gas resources and India's dependence on these countries for our energy security, the Committee desire that India-GCC cooperation on maritime security should be considerably enhanced including signing of more MoUs/Agreements, if required, so as to ensure maritime safety and unhindered transportation of energy resources in the region. The Committee also urge the Government to extend all support to the GCC countries for protection of its maritime routes to prevent instability which has the potential to impact our economy as well as the global economy.

(Recommendation No.22)

CHAPTER V

TRADE AND INVESTMENT WITH GCC COUNTRIES

5.1 The GCC region contributes to about one-sixth of India's total trade. UAE is India's third largest trade partner while Saudi Arabia is at the fourth place. During FY 2022-23, India's trade with GCC countries was approximately USD 184 billion. This was almost a 20% rise from FY 2021-22 when our total trade with GCC was about USD 154 billion. In FY 2022-23, India's imports from GCC were USD 133 billion and India's exports were USD 51 billion.

5.2 Country-wise figures (in billion USD) of India's trade with GCC countries during F.Y. 2022-23 were as follows:

Country	India's exports	India's imports	Total trade
UAE	31.6	53.2	84.8
Saudi Arabia	10.72	42.03	52.76
Qatar	1.96	16.8	18.77
Kuwait	1.56	12.24	13.80
Oman	4.47	7.91	12.38
Bahrain	0.96	1.01	1.97
Total	51.27	133.19	184.46

5.3 The major items of India's imports and exports from/to GCC countries have been highlighted by the Secretary (CPV & OIA) in his opening statement during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, as under:

"Petroleum and petroleum products are the main export items for GCC countries to India. From India, the main items of export include cereals and food items, jewellery, synthetic fibres and yarns, textiles, apparels, machinery, iron and steel products and plastic products".

5.4 Explaining the reasons for the trade deficit between India and GCC countries, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during briefing on 29 May 2023, stated as under:

"One of the important reasons of our trade deficit is high energy prices. Of late, as you know the energy prices have really gone up. Since we are a net importer of energy, this is actually widening our trade deficit. At the same time, the important part is also that our exports are also increasing. So, in some measure, it is actually bridging this gap.

...for exports to UAE, which were \$ 16.68 billion in 2020-21, are now standing at \$31.6 billion. The exports to Saudi Arabia, which were \$5.85 billion in 2020-

21, now, again nearly doubled, \$10.72 billion. It is the same trend for all the countries”.

5.5 The Committee observed that trade between India and GCC Countries is actually a UAE and Saudi Arabia dominated trade as both of these country have lion share of almost 75% of the total trade between India and the GCC. India’s trade with GCC countries stood at 184.46 billion US dollar in FY 2022-23 with Indian exports of 51.27 billion US dollars and Indian imports of 133.19 billion US dollars indicating a negative trade balance.

5.6 On being asked to state the steps being taken by the Ministry to address these issues, the Ministry responded that the underlined trade balance is owing to heavy energy dependence of India on Gulf nations, which are raw material imports. Excluding trade in Chapter 27 of the Customs Tariff of India 2023 (oil trade), non-oil trade is relatively more balanced with India’s non-oil (exports excluding those in chapter 27) exports to the GCC totalling USD 37.98 billion in FY 2022-23 and India’s non-oil imports from the GCC during the same period stood at USD 42.45 billion.

5.7 Regardless, the Government of India is constantly working towards enhancing Indian exports to Gulf countries. As a result, Indian exports to all GCC countries has seen an increase in recent years. Exports to Saudi Arabia increased from USD 5.85 bn in 2020-21 to USD 10.7 billion in 2022-23, similarly exports to UAE increased from USD 16.68 bn in 2020-21 to USD 31.6 bn in 2022-23. The efforts are also being made towards further diversification of India’s exports basket by including sectors such as pharma, gems and jewelry, electronic and engineering goods among others. Our Missions in association with Industry bodies/associations, has been taking efforts, including through trade and investment promotion events, facilitation of visits of delegations, addressing non-tariff barriers, and so on, to increase Indian exports to GCC countries.

5.8 When enquired about the areas and sectors, apart from oil and gas, where trade and commerce can be increased between India and GCC, the Ministry has informed that GCC is one of the most important trading and investment partners of India. Our bilateral trade with GCC was close to US\$ 184 billion in FY 2022-23, making it our largest regional trading partner. Petroleum and petrochemical products are the main export items for GCC countries to India.

5.9 Based on secondary data research, there seems be a scope in a number of products, including mineral fuels and mineral oils, for increasing exports and overall trade to GCC countries. Some of the non-oil products with export potential are as follows: gems and jewellery, machinery and mechanical appliances, automobiles, pharmaceutical products, electrical machinery and equipment, iron and steel, plastics and articles thereof, articles of iron and steel, chemical products and foodstuff.

5.10 The Committee further sought to know the steps being taken by the Ministry to improve India’s trade deficit with Saudi Arabia and whether the MEA is in touch

with Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ministry of Finance to improve the trade imbalance in favour of India. They have been informed that as per DGCIS data, India's bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia stood at USD 52.76 billion in FY 2022-23 with Indian exports of USD 10.73 billion and Indian imports of USD 42.03 billion indicating a negative trade balance. However, bulk of the imports from Saudi Arabia are energy imports (crude petroleum - raw material).

5.11 Bilateral non-oil trade (excluding products under Chapter 27 of the Harmonized System at 2-digit level) between the two countries is balanced with India's non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia and Indian non-oil imports from Saudi Arabia being almost evenly matched around USD 8.8 billion in FY 2022-23.

5.12 Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Commerce are working together, including in partnership with the Indian Missions in Saudi Arabia, and making dedicated trade and investment promotion efforts to enhance Indian exports to Saudi Arabia and also to increase inward investments from Saudi Arabia to India.

5.13 When asked to state the manner in which the MEA can use India's dominance in sectors like IT, space, automobiles, etc. for balancing the trade with GCC countries in its favour, the Ministry responded that the trade deficit with Gulf countries is mainly due to high imports of oil and gas from these countries. Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Commerce are working together, including in partnership with the Indian Missions in Gulf countries, and making dedicated trade and investment promotion efforts to enhance Indian exports to these countries and also to increase inward investments to India. Efforts are being made to further enhance trade relations through trade and investment promotion events, facilitation of visits of delegations, addressing non-tariff barriers, and so on, to increase Indian exports to GCC countries.

i) Free Trade agreement between India and GCC Countries

5.14 The Ministry has also stated that one of the major achievements in recent years has been the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) which was signed between the two nations on February 18, 2022 and officially entered into force on May 1, 2022. The Agreement was negotiated in a record time of 88 days and is the first free trade agreement of India with an Arab country. CEPA is expected to increase the total value of bilateral trade in goods to over US\$100 billion within five years. India and GCC are also discussing re-launch of their Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.

5.15 During briefing on 29 May 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) elaborated on the status of the FTA negotiations between India and GCC countries as under:

“Now, coming to the FTA negotiations, we have resumed the FTA negotiations with GCC countries and as you would be aware that the former GCC Secretary General Dr. Nayef Falah Mubarak Al Hajraf had visited India twice - in November, 2021 and in November, 2022. So, what we have done now is that both

sides have exchanged the Terms of ReferenceThe terms of reference have been exchanged and we are discussing to finalize this. There is keenness and willingness on GCC to conclude this very soon with us and we are also hopeful that this may be done in the next six months or so. Our side is also keen but we have to cross this bridge. At the same time, we are getting feelers from some other countries like Oman who would like to start similar FTA negotiations. In fact, some discussions have taken place and some suggestions have come from Oman whereby they have said that can they make use of our CEPA with UAE. We have the provision under the UAE to add some other countries. This issue of the FTA has been discussed in meetings both with CIM and EAM and this is continuing. At the same time, we also have a mechanism of industry conferences between of GCC and India. Four industrial conferences have taken place so far”.

5.16 Explaining the reason for the delay in the FTA negotiations, the representative of the Department of Commerce (JS, FT-WANA) during briefing on 29 May 2023, stated:

“...we have re-launched the negotiations with the GCC countries in November last year and we have exchanged the drafts of the terms of reference. So, both the sides are keen to conclude the terms of negotiator of the GCC side who is a Saudi official has been appointed as their Ambassador to Beijing and now he is posted in there. The GCC Secretariat has requested the Saudi side to re-nominate a new official. There is a slight delay because of this. We are awaiting the nomination of the GCC chief negotiator. As and when it happens, we are willing to conclude the terms of reference quickly and re-launch the formal negotiations.... Whenever we start the formal negotiations, we hope to conclude in about six to eight months' time. That is what we are expecting”.

5.17 The Committee further enquired about the outcome of FTA meetings held so far between India and GCC countries as well as the bottlenecks for the delay in the India-GCC FTA and the steps being taken by MEA to expedite the process. In its written reply, the Ministry has stated that in 2005, at the 4th Meeting of the Trade Economic Relations Committee (TERC), India and the GCC approved commencement of Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the two sides. Two rounds of negotiations (March 2006 and September 2008) were subsequently held in Riyadh. During these two rounds, the following broad progress was made: creation of four Joint Working Groups; adoption of generic Terms of Reference (ToR); exchange of trade and tariff data; and exchange of draft FTA texts.

5.18 However, in 2011, GCC announced deferral of FTA negotiations with all countries and economic groups. In 2019, GCC expressed interest in resumption of FTA negotiations; a formal request followed from the GCC Secretary General (SG) in November 2020. In November 2022, during the visit to India of the Secretary General of the GCC, India and the GCC announced their intent to resume the FTA negotiations at the earliest. New Terms of Reference for the FTA negotiations are currently being negotiated between the two sides.

5.19 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Economic Advisor from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry apprised the Committee regarding the status of the India-GCC FTA negotiations, as under:

“...regarding the India-GCC FTA we had negotiations in 2005 and 2006 which were stopped in 2011. In November 2019, GCC Secretariat again welcomed the resumption of FTA negotiations. After that, in March 2021, the Secretary General (GCC) again sent a message proposing resumption of India-GCC FTA negotiations. In December 2021 to January 2022, we worked on the constitution of Joint Working Group. The preliminary virtual meeting of the Joint Working Group to examine issues related to the proposed India-GCC FTA was held in February 2022. In November 2022, there was a visit of Secretary General of GCC Secretariat to India in which we announced the intent to pursue negotiations on the India-GCC FTA. So, Sir, the technical teams have been constituted and also, we are working on the modalities and terms of reference. But the recent delay was due to the non-appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side. Now, we have been informed by the GCC Secretariat that we have a new Chief Negotiator from the GCC in place. So, we have actually spoken to our Ambassador in Saudi Arabia to take up this issue with GCC Secretariat so that we can begin the formal negotiations on India-GCC FTA”.

5.20 On the prospects of trade enhancement between India and GCC countries after signing of the proposed FTA, the Economic Advisor from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry during the said evidence, submitted as under:-

“...the Department of Commerce has undertaken several FTA negotiations with our bilateral partners, including the UK and Canada. So, we have signed a Free Trade Agreement with Australia. Since the GCC is a significant trading bloc, we feel that the GCC FTA is great. Going by the early signs of the India-UAE CEPA, which we signed last year, we see a significant growth in our bilateral trade. Also, we have done feasibility studies in India with regard to what the gains of India-GCC trade would be. We have come to the conclusion that the tariff elimination that we would get for our products would lead to a substantial increase in trade. With the tariff barriers, both for goods and services, we would have more free flow of our goods and also more manpower to GCC countries, which would actually be a trade booster both in goods and services. This is the strategy that our Ministry is following.

The signing of trade agreements also integrates us into the global value chain. If we are more integrated into the global value chains, it is going to be a positive thing for us when we look at the global trade scenario in the future. We are very hopeful that this FTA will make a positive difference for us”.

ii) Foreign Direct Investment between India and GCC Countries

5.21 Gulf countries have also made substantial investments in India, both FDI and portfolio. The total FDI of GCC countries stood at about USD 20 billion as of December 2022. The data for FDI in India from GCC countries for the period April 2000-December 2022 is as follows: UAE (\$15.32 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$3.15

billion), Oman (\$588 million), Qatar (\$496 million), Bahrain (\$ 183 million) and Kuwait (\$89 million).

5.22 The Sovereign Wealth Funds of the Gulf countries such as ADIA and Mubadala (UAE), PIF (Saudi Arabia), QIA (Qatar) and KIA (Kuwait) have been positive on increasing their investments in India. They have invested in several companies in India. Other public/private companies from the Gulf have also been increasing investments in India. For example, Dubai based DP World has invested in India through National Investment Infrastructure Fund (NIIF). Some UAE companies have also shown interest in investing in the UT of J&K.

5.23 Having observed that more than 90% of the FDI inflow is from UAE and Saudi Arabia, the Committee sought to know the reason for the low contribution of other Gulf Countries and the efforts of the Ministry to improve the situation. The Ministry responded that Government has put in place a liberal and transparent policy for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), wherein most sectors, except certain strategically important sectors, are open for 100% FDI under the automatic route. The Government reviews the FDI policy on an ongoing basis and makes changes from time to time, to ensure that India remains an attractive & investor friendly destination. It has been the endeavour of the Government to put in place an enabling and investor friendly FDI policy. The intent is to make the FDI policy more investor friendly and remove the policy bottlenecks that have been hindering investment inflows into the country.

5.24 FDI policy provisions have been progressively liberalized and simplified across various sectors such as Pension, Other Financial Services, Asset reconstruction Companies, Broadcasting, Pharmaceuticals, Single Brand Retail Trading, Construction & Development, Power Exchanges, e-commerce activities, Coal Mining, Contract Manufacturing, Civil Aviation etc. In the recent past, reforms in the FDI Policy have been undertaken in sectors such as Defence, Insurance, Petroleum & Natural Gas and Telecom. Further, all proposals seeking Government approval under FDI route are now filed on National Single Window System (NSWS) Portal.

5.25 Trade and Investment is an important component of our bilateral relations with GCC countries and our Missions are undertaking various initiatives like organising trade and investment promotion events, facilitation of visits of delegations, addressing non-tariff barriers to showcase India has an attractive investment destination.

5.26 When asked about the possibilities for further improvement in investments by Gulf countries in India, the Ministry has stated that Gulf countries have made substantial FDI investments in India over the past few years and the figure currently stands at close to USD 20 billion. Ministry is actively engaged with the relevant stakeholders, both government and private, in the Gulf countries for promotion of investments in India. There has, in particular, been regular engagement with the sovereign wealth funds in the GCC countries for attracting their investments in India. These include Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Mubadala of UAE, Public

Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and Qatar Investment Authority (QIA). Our Embassies also organize various investment promotion campaigns in GCC countries, including some focussed on specific sectors and states. India is also currently negotiating Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait which should also help in enhancing investments into India.

iii) Trade Settlement in Local Currencies

5.27 The Ministry has further stated in its Background note furnished to the Committee that the MoUs on establishment of a framework for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies (INR-AED) and interlinking payment and messaging systems of both countries signed between RBI and Central Bank of UAE on 15 July 2023, will further enhance the economic engagement between India and UAE.

5.28 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the representative of the Ministry of External Affairs elaborated on the MoUs exchanged with UAE regarding RuPay card, linking of India's UPI with UAE's Instant Payment Platform and trade settlement in Indian rupee and Dirham, as under:

“First is the acceptance of RuPay Card in the UAE. That is now fairly acceptable across many points of sales in the UAE, and it has been in the works for the last 2-3 years or more....

The second aspect which happened recently during the hon. Prime Minister's visit was the exchange of an MoU on interlinking payment and messaging systems by the Governors of the respective Central Banks. With this MoU, once it becomes operationalised, it will link India's UPI with UAE's Instant Payment Platform, and this will then help users in either country to make safe fast and cost-effective cross-border transactions.

And, the third thing that we have worked with the UAE is the trade settlement in Indian rupee and Dirham. On this, again there was an MoU exchanged in front of the two leaders, the hon. Prime Minister and the UAE President, during the Prime Minister's visit to establish the framework to promote the use of local currency, that is, the Indian rupee and the Emirati Dirham for cross-border transaction. This was again done by the Central Banks of both the countries. With this, the exporters and importers in both the countries can invoice in their local currencies. There are lots of technical details which are associated with it. A whole consignment happened under this MoU. So, this is already functional with that but greater details and guidelines, etc., will be coming through this MoU as well.”

5.29 When asked whether the Ministry plan on facilitating such agreements with other countries of the GCC in the near future, the Committee have been informed that India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. The Rupay card is already functional in UAE and MoUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. The proposals

related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait.

5.30 The Committee note that the contribution of the GCC region to India's total trade is about one-sixth while the total volume of India's trade with GCC countries stood at 184.46 billion USD during the FY 2022-23. Out of the total volume, India's exports stood at 51.27 billion USD and its imports at 133.19 billion USD indicating trade imbalance between the two countries. The Ministry has stated that the trade deficit is owing to heavy energy dependence of India on Gulf nations and high imports of oil and gas. Petroleum and petrochemical products constitute the main items of export for GCC countries to India while the main items of export by India include cereals and food items, jewellery, synthetic fibres and yarns, textiles, apparels, machinery, iron and steel products and plastic products. The Committee feel that the trade imbalance between India and GCC countries should be addressed through collective efforts of all the Ministries/Departments/Agencies concerned and urge the Ministry to facilitate the process of devising a fresh strategy for enhancing India's exports to GCC countries as well as to increase inward investments to India. Diversification of India's exports basket by including other sectors such as IT, space, automobiles, chemical and pharmaceutical products, etc. should also be taken up for enhancing our exports to GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to impress upon our Missions in these countries to make vigorous efforts in trade and investment promotion events, facilitation of visits of delegations, addressing non-tariff barriers, and other measures, in association with Industry bodies/associations.

(Recommendation No.23)

5.31 The Committee observe that trade between India and GCC countries have been dominated by UAE and Saudi Arabia. UAE is India's largest trade partner among the GCC countries with the total volume of trade at Rs. 84.8 billion USD while Saudi Arabia occupies the second position at 52.76 USD during the FY 2022-23. In terms of trade imbalance, India's exports to Saudi Arabia stood at 10.72 and its imports at 42.03 billion USD. The Committee find scope for enhancement in India's trade and investment with the other GCC countries like Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain and desire that the Government should explore the opportunities collectively with all the Ministries/Departments/Agencies concerned. On the issue of the huge trade deficit between India and Saudi Arabia, the Committee urge the Ministry of External Affairs in coordination with all related Ministries, to make all out efforts for improving the trade imbalance in favour of India.

(Recommendation No.24)

5.32 The Committee note that commencement of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between India and GCC was approved in 2005 and two rounds of negotiations were subsequently held in 2006 and 2008. However, in 2011, GCC announced deferral of FTA negotiations with all countries and economic groups. GCC Secretariat again welcomed the resumption of FTA negotiations in November 2019 and followed it up in 2021. After the constitution of Joint Working Group and preliminary virtual meeting of the Joint Working held in February 2022, the intent to pursue negotiations on the India-GCC FTA was announced in November 2022. As of now, the technical teams have been constituted and the modalities and terms of reference are being worked upon. The Ministry has also stated that the recent delay was due

to the non-appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side. GCC Secretariat has now informed that a new Chief Negotiator from the GCC is in place. The Committee feel that the process of negotiation and finalization of the FTA between India and GCC has been delayed for long and in view of the prospects of substantial increase in trade between India and GCC countries as well as India's integration into the global value chain through the signing of the FTA, urge the Government to maintain close coordination with the GCC Secretariat so that formal negotiations on the India-GCC FTA commence soon for its early conclusion.

(Recommendation No. 25)

5.33 The Committee note that the total FDI of GCC countries to India stood at about 20 billion USD as of December 2022. The Sovereign Wealth Funds of the Gulf countries of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait have been positive on increasing their investments in India while other public/private companies from the Gulf have also been increasing investments in India. The Committee further note that some UAE companies have also shown interest in investing in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir. India is also currently negotiating Bilateral Investment Treaty with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Committee find it encouraging that FDI inflow to India from GCC countries have been increasing over the years but would like to point out that more than 90% of the FDI inflow has been from two countries only i.e UAE and Saudi Arabia. Investments from the other four GCC countries like Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait have been low. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Government should assess the factors for low FDI inflow to India from these countries and work out a strategy for increased investments in India by these countries. The opportunity

presented by some UAE companies for investing in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir should also be followed up promptly. The Committee also urge the Ministry to take proactive role in facilitating the ongoing Bilateral Investment Treaty negotiation with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for its early and fruitful conclusion for an enhanced FDI inflow into India. Indian Embassies/Missions in GCC countries may also be pursued to organize sustained and vigorous country and sector specific investment promotion campaigns to bring more FDI inflow to India.

(Recommendation No. 26)

5.34 The Committee note that MoUs were signed between India and UAE on establishment of a framework for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies - the Indian rupee and the Emirati Dirham for cross-border transaction and interlinking payment and messaging system of both countries. With the operationalization of the MoUs, exporters and importers in both the countries can invoice in their local currencies. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. The proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and interlinking payment and messaging systems of India and GCC countries will greatly enhance the economic engagements between the countries resulting in increased trade and FDI inflow and urge the Ministry to facilitate the signing of such MoUs with all the GCC countries at an early date.

(Recommendation No. 27)

CHAPTER VI

CULTURAL AND OTHER AREAS OF COOPERATION

6.1 The Gulf region has cultural significance also for India. The cultural and people-to-people ties between India and Gulf are a bedrock of the bilateral relations.

6.2 Some of the steps being taken by the Ministry to enhance cultural and social association with all Gulf countries are as follows:-

- i. India regularly signs Cultural Exchange Programmes for enhancing cultural cooperation with various Gulf countries. There are regular cultural exchanges between India and GCC countries under the CEPs.
- ii. Ministry has been showcasing India's cultural diversity in Gulf countries through celebrations of Indian festivals, organizing cultural events, holding of special bilateral cultural events. For example, India participated as the 'Guest of Honour' in prestigious Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Culture – Janadriyah in 2018. The year 2019 was celebrated as India-Qatar Year of Culture in Qatar. Our Embassy in Kuwait organized a Festival of India in 2023.
- iii. As part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) celebrations, many events were organised in the Gulf countries. The AKAM events in Gulf countries included Indian dance and music events, illuminations of iconic buildings in tricolour, painting exhibitions, promotion of Indian cuisine etc.
- iv. As we celebrate International Year of Millets, our Embassies in Gulf countries are also popularizing Millets based Indian dishes by organizing specific events and campaigns.
- v. Popularization of Yoga among Gulf countries is also an important component of deepening cultural ties with GCC countries. Saudi Arabia signed an MOU with India in 2021 to promote Yoga. ICCR has also posted Yoga teachers in some Gulf Embassies.
- vi. Our Embassies regularly organize Indian cultural programs and also associate with Indian associations for organizing social and cultural programs.
- vii. Ministry also encourages media cooperation between organizations in India and Gulf countries. For example, a visit by mediapersons from some Gulf countries was organized in 2023.

6.3 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) apprised the Committee regarding the ongoing nature of cultural cooperation between India and GCC countries as under:

“As far as cultural cooperation is concerned, we do have cultural cooperation agreements with many countries. So, it is an ongoing exercise”.

6.4 On being asked the manner in which the Ministry intends to capitalize on India's vast potential in tourism, entertainment and culture to forge strong partnerships with GCC countries over the next five years ensuring substantial growth and collaboration in these industries, the Ministry has stated that our Missions have been proactive in strengthening cultural cooperation with all GCC countries. Indian contingents, including cultural troops regularly participate in cultural events. Series of events such as roadshows, cultural exhibitions, and festivals that celebrate the rich heritage of India are also being organized regularly. Apart from government agencies a large number of private organizations and individuals are actively engaged in the fields of entertainment and culture to promote cultural ties in these countries. Our Missions in association with the local communities are supporting such initiatives of private organizations and individuals to promote cultural interactions.

6.5 Food security has emerged as another important area of cooperation after the Covid pandemic and Russia-Ukraine conflict. India kept open its supply to Gulf countries during the pandemic, which was highly appreciated by the Gulf leadership. Similarly, India supplied wheat on request from Gulf countries in 2022 after the May 13, 2022 DGFT Notification restricting export of wheat from India. UAE has also discussed investments in building food corridors in India for processing and export of food items.

6.6 On being asked about the details of efforts made and initiatives taken by the Ministry on the issue of food security, the Ministry has stated that food and food-related products constitute the bulk of Indian exports to GCC countries. Government of India through its Embassy in these countries is encouraging to invest in food and agro industries in India. The Integrated Food Corridors Project under I2U2 Framework was announced during I2U2 Leader's Summit on 14 July 2022. Under the project, the UAE will invest \$2 billion USD to develop a series of integrated food parks across India while India will provide appropriate land for the project and will facilitate farmers' integration into the food parks. U.S. and Israeli private sectors will provide technical and innovative solutions in agriculture and food-processing. In this regard, UAE delegations have visited India and held meetings with different stakeholders.

6.7 The Committee note that under Cultural Exchange Programme, regular cultural exchanges have been held between India and GCC countries. Besides, specific events and campaigns were conducted including celebration of Indian festivals, Indian dance and music events, promotion of Indian cuisine,

popularization of yoga, etc. The Committee further note that media cooperation between organizations in India and Gulf countries is also encouraged by both the parties. Indian embassies regularly organize cultural programmes and Indian associations have also been involved in organizing social and cultural programmes. Keeping in view the fact that cultural and people-to-people ties are bedrock to the bilateral relations between India and the Gulf and presence of significant number of Indian diaspora, the Committee desire that the number, frequency, scope of cultural exchanges, events and campaigns and scale of participation should be expanded in a planned manner. More number of cultural exchange programmes/cultural cooperation agreements should also be signed to deepen the cultural ties and people-to-people contacts. The Committee also urge the Ministry to actively facilitate/further escalate media cooperation between organization in India and the GCC countries.

(Recommendation No. 28)

6.8 The Committee note that apart from Government agencies, a large number of private organizations and individuals are actively engaged in the fields of entertainment and culture to promote cultural ties in GCC countries. Indian Missions, in association with the local communities, have also been supporting such initiatives of private organizations and individuals in promoting cultural interactions. The Committee desire that in addition to encouraging and extending support to the private organizations and individuals actively engaged in promoting cultural interactions as well as local communities/diaspora associations in GCC countries, Indian Missions should provide incentives, whether monetary or otherwise to such entities to achieve the goal of deepening cultural ties and people-to-people contacts. The Committee further desire that the Ministry should formulate a strategy to capitalize on India's vast potential in tourism, entertainment and culture to

forge strong partnerships with GCC countries over the next five years for ensuring substantial growth and collaboration in these fields.

(Recommendation No.29)

6.9 The Committee note that food and food-related products constitute the bulk of Indian exports to GCC countries. Under the Integrated Food Corridors Project under I2U2 Framework, the UAE will invest \$2 billion USD to develop a series of integrated food parks across India while India will provide appropriate land for the project and will facilitate farmers' integration into the food parks. The Committee further note that UAE delegations have already visited India and held meetings with different stakeholders. The Committee understand that integrated food parks across India would greatly contribute towards food security as well as bring benefits to farmers in the country. They, therefore, urge the MEA to facilitate the discussions with all the stakeholders, actively coordinate with the Ministry/Department concerned for allotment of appropriate land and work out the modalities so that integrated food parks are established across the country at an early date. The Committee also urge the Ministry to explore avenues for food security cooperation/agreements with other GCC countries.

(Recommendation No. 30)

CHAPTER VII

WELFARE OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN GCC COUNTRIES

7.1 Around 8.7 million Indians reside in Gulf countries. This includes roughly 3.5 million in UAE, 2.5 million in Saudi Arabia, 1 million in Kuwait, 810,000 in Qatar, 673,000 in Oman and 350,000 in Bahrain. The Indian diaspora in the GCC countries has been recognized for their contribution to the development of the region and are also appreciated for their hard working, law-abiding and peaceful nature. The region is also an important source of inward remittance to India.

i) Remittances from Indian Diaspora

7.2 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) highlighted the role played by the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region as strong pillars for our economic development through inward remittances to India as under:

“...remittances from the NRIs form a very important dimension of our engagement and our economic development. NRIs, especially from the Gulf countries have been very instrumental. The last figures for remittances abroad from the diaspora and the overall Indians have been more than \$120 billion, which is a significant figure. It has been a jump from the previous figure of \$87 billion, which was in 2021. In 2022, we saw more than \$115 billion, which is there.

According to the figures released by the World Bank Report, remittances by the workers contributed to about US \$54.42 billion during 2020-2021 and earlier also the remittances were in the range of \$60 billion and this trend is continuing. So, the Indian people who are in the Gulf this Region -- 8.7 million people -- are very strong pillars for our economic development in the overall picture”.

ii) Specific Welfare Measures for Indian Diaspora

7.3 The Ministry has further stated that Government of India has taken several measures for the welfare of the Indian diaspora in Gulf. These include e-Migrate for more transparent and orderly migration of Indian workers to the Gulf and other ECR countries, MADAD portal for addressing consular grievances and further widening of the scope of Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF). Government of India has started organizing IIT and NEET exams in several locations in the Gulf, in view of the large number of Indian school students in the Gulf.

7.4 India is also working with the GCC countries on issues like skill harmonization and connecting worker recruitment platforms so that Indian workers get better and more transparent working conditions.

7.5 In a written reply furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has informed that Government of India has taken several measures for the welfare of the more than 8.5 million Indian diaspora living in the Gulf. All Indian Missions have been sensitized

to extend prompt help to any Indian in distress abroad. The specific measures include *inter alia* the following:

- i. Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) provides financial assistance to Indians in distress abroad on a means-tested basis. The scope of ICWF was considerably expanded in 2017.
- ii. The on-line MADAD portal enables Indian nationals and their family members to register their consular grievances on-line and track their redressal.
- iii. Grievances related to overseas employment in notified Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries can also be lodged directly by emigrants/relatives on e-Migrate portal or through the Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK).
- iv. Indian Missions conduct Open Houses on a regular basis where Indians can seek redressal of their grievances. Missions have also established 24x7 Helplines and Toll Free Helplines for the benefit of Indians seeking help.
- v. A multilingual 24X7 Helpline of Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK) in New Delhi provides information, guidance and grievance redressal on all issues and problems pertaining to overseas employment of Indian nationals.
- vi. PBSKs have been set up abroad in Dubai (UAE) and Riyadh and Jeddah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) to provide guidance and counseling on all matters pertaining to overseas Indian workers.
- vii. Kshetriya Pravasi Sahayata Kendras (KPSK) have been setup in Kochi, Hyderabad, Chennai, Lucknow and Delhi to assist emigrants or their relatives to redress their problems/complaints regarding overseas employment.
- viii. Grievances brought to the notice of the Ministry and the Missions through social media, including twitter, are promptly addressed.

7.6 The Ministry's engagement with the Indian diaspora mainly consisting of workers, skilled and unskilled in the Gulf countries has been enumerated by the representative of the Ministry during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023 as given below:

“Basically, Gulf countries are very important for us in various aspects including politically and a very important aspect of these engagements is people-to-people contact which is mainly represented by our expatriate workers including professionals and labours. Indians continue to be the largest group of expatriate workers in the GCC region. Indian migrants are highly regarded in the GCC countries for their hard work and lawful nature. The pull factor behind this trend have been the employment opportunities, presence of an extended network of Indian migrant workers, geographical proximity, and financial benefits, that accrue linguistic compatibility and cultural affinity. It has been largely observed that there has been a shift in the employment landscape in the GCC region. However, the demand in the labour-intensive industries is expected to remain high in the foreseeable future as well. Therefore, the remittance flow from the region is also expected to have a strong edge. It has been reflected in the recent past trend. The demand for household domestic workers is also going to stay and that needs more specialisation for which the Ministry of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and NSDC are taking care of imparting necessary skills.

We have also started Pre-departure Orientation Programme which is a kind of soft skill which provides necessary information to our workers who are going through safe and legal channels to their destination countries about dos and don'ts and cultural sensitivities of that country and what are the legal remedies available to them. We also provide them Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana which mainly covers accidental death and any kind of accidents and also repatriation and certain other benefits are there in case of employment contract breach. So, this Bima Yojana also provides our workers legal assistance. Otherwise, we have Indian community Welfare Fund and that assists any Indian citizens in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases on a means-tested basis like boarding and lodging, air passage to India, legal assistance, emergency medical care, transportation of mortal remains and payment for small fines and penalties etc. ICWF is extended to all Indian missions and posts abroad. Since 2014 till June 2023, around Rs. 588 crores have been utilized towards ICWF assistance by Indian missions and posts abroad. During this period, around 339 lakh Indians were extended ICWF benefit.

The Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs and agreements signed by the Government of India provide the necessary framework for cooperation on labour and manpower related issues with GCC countries. These MoUs and agreements have provisions of implementation through Joint Working Groups and our prevailing labour and manpower related issues can be discussed during these JWG meetings. We have more safeguards for the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC countries. Agreements on labour cooperation for domestic sector have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait. Separately, for workers, we have established and advertised safe and legal channel of migration which can be done through e-Migrate portal. On this portal, we have registered recruitment agents who can take benefit of this e-Migrate portal and our embassies register foreign employers. As of now, we have more than two lakh foreign employers registered in e-Migrate portal whereas more than 2000 active recruitment agents are there who work through immigration clearance system for ECR passport holders in case they are migrating abroad".

iii) Labour and Manpower Agreements/MoUs

7.7 The Committee further sought the details of success achieved through Labour and Manpower Agreements/MoUs signed by India with various Gulf countries in securing the rights of Indian skilled and unskilled workers in the GCC countries. In a written reply, the Ministry has stated that the Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements that provide the overarching framework for cooperation on labour and manpower related issues are in place with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) and Jordan. Further, to safeguard the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC Countries, agreements on Labour Cooperation for Domestic Sector have been signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. These MoUs and Agreements have been found very useful in securing the rights of Indian workers in GCC countries as they have provided institutional mechanism to discuss and resolve all prevailing

Indian labour and manpower-related issues through regular meetings of Joint Working Groups.

iv) Challenges faced by the Diaspora in Gulf Countries

7.8 When asked about the challenges being faced by the diaspora in Gulf countries, the Ministry responded that Indian diaspora workers in GCC countries report several problems faced by them in their respective countries of residence to the Missions in the GCC countries and the Ministry from time to time. Major problems reported by the diaspora are legal cases and imprisonments on false allegations and employment related issues, harassment by the employer, cheating by recruiting agents, non- payment of wages, emergency medical problems, lack of financial resources for returning to India etc.

7.9 Taking serious note on the common problems faced by the diaspora, the Government has established various mechanisms to resolve these problems and to ensure welfare and safety of Indian diaspora working abroad including in GCC countries, such as Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF), Dedicated Community Welfare/Labour Wings in the Missions and Posts, 24x7 helplines in Missions and at PBSK, New Delhi, Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) and organizing open Houses in Mission/Posts. Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras (PBSK) have been set up in Dubai, Jeddah and Riyadh to provide guidance and counselling on all matters pertaining to the problems faced by Indian diaspora workers. Kshetriya Pravasi Sahayata Kendras (KPSK) have also been set up in Kochi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Lucknow to assist emigrants and their relatives to redress their problems/complaints regarding overseas employment. The online MADAD Portal created by the Ministry enables the emigrant workers and their family members to register their consular grievances online and track their redressal. India has signed bilateral labour agreements with all Gulf countries to safeguard Indian workers and also follow-up the issues of the migrant workers in the Joint Working Group Meetings at regular intervals.

7.10 Apart from above, prospective Indian emigrant workers are imparted Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) to sensitize them about culture, important labour laws and Dos & Don'ts about the destination country. They are also made aware of the welfare schemes like ICWF and PBBY and grievance redressal mechanisms established in the Ministry and Missions/ Posts abroad. The above institutional mechanisms have been found successful in resolution of various problems faced by Indian diaspora in GCC countries.

7.11 The Secretary (CPV &OIA) also highlighted some of the challenges faced by emigrant workers in the Gulf, during briefing on 29 May 2023 as under:

“Of course, there are many challenges which they face. There is a problem of passports which are held by the sponsors. Sometimes, the salaries are not paid on time or in the case of unfortunate death, the death compensation is getting delayed. Then, there are social issues like in many places, there are no Temples or Hindu

crematorium. Also, in some places, we find the difficulty of equalisation of degrees. The degrees which obtained here are not recognised in those countries. For example, currently, in Kuwait, we are facing this difficulty where the Engineering degrees are not being fully recognised. Despite all this, I would say that the satisfaction level of our people working in the Gulf is increasing”.

v) Safety of Domestic Sector Workers

7.12 Responding to the concerns raised regarding harassment and exploitation of housemaids, the Secretary (CPV &OIA) stated during the said briefing:

“...we do get complaints of exploitation of housemaids. Particularly, we have been receiving complaints recently in Oman and Kuwait. A large number of them are seeking refuge in our shelter homes in these missions. Primarily, the root cause of this is that there is a parallel industry which is luring people to go out of India on visit Visas and bypassing our Immigration systems. So, we have no authentic record of who are going abroad for what purpose. Let us say, if somebody wants to go on a job in Oman, they will go for a visit Visa to Dubai and from Dubai, they will enter Oman and get absorbed in the job market there. So, they are out of our immigration system and no records are available for this. So, this is where we are in touch with the State Governments, trying also to seek their help firstly in instituting awareness campaign. We have also launched a campaign named ‘Surakshit Jaaye Prashikshit Jaaye’ so that people are trained and be aware”.

7.13 When enquired whether the MEA is having a proper mechanism to ensure that recruitment and placements of housemaids to the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, are done in a proper manner, the Ministry has informed that recruitment of Indian female Domestic Sector Workers (DSWs) is regulated through the provisions of Emigration Act, 1983. To safeguard interests of female DSWs, process of their recruitment for employment abroad has been restricted only through 10 State Run Recruiting Agencies. The Government of India accords highest priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian nationals abroad, including DSWs, and encourages migration from India only through e-Migrate portal. The Ministry regularly organises outreach programs to sensitise various stakeholders about benefits of safe and legal migration and on possible ways of preventing illegal migration through fake or unregistered recruitment agencies. A Videsh Sampark Programme to Punjab and Haryana was undertaken by the Ministry in May 2023. The information about illegal agents is also uploaded and updated on regular basis on the e-Migrate Portal.

7.14 Whenever, instances of illegal recruitment and/or cheating by unauthorised agents come to the notice of the Ministry, quick and decisive action is taken. Such complaints, along with details and addresses of illegal agents, are forwarded to the Police authorities of the concerned State Government urging them to apprehend and prosecute such illegal agents as per extant laws and Standard Operating Procedures shared by the Ministry.

7.15 The complaints are also referred to Mission/Post abroad for providing immediate relief and assistance to the affected Indian national. The concerned Mission/Post provide all necessary assistance to the distressed Indian national with

particular focus on female workers, irrespective of category of their passport, including legal assistance, boarding & lodging, medical and repatriation to India using the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF), on means-tested basis. Since its launch, a total of 3,33,612 Indian nationals, including DSWs, have been assisted by Indian Missions/Posts using the ICWF till March 2023.

vi) Skilling and Skill mobility for Emigrant Workers

7.16 Explaining the emphasis given to skilling and upskilling of workers going abroad, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during briefing on 29 May 2023 stated:

“...our emphasis now is also on skilling and upskilling of our people who are going abroad. So, as the External Affairs Ministry, we go and discuss with various State Governments as part of a programme called Videsh Sampark. So, the idea is that we talk to the State Governments, especially those having the NRI departments or those which look after skilling and training. We have various departments like NORKA in Kerala and TOMCOM in Telangana. So, my team goes there, and they discuss with them about the pre-departure training (PDOT) so that once the people are trained and familiar with the customs and traditions and foreign languages, they are better prepared for the jobs. At the level of the Missions, what we have done is that there is a regular mechanism of interaction which has been established with the Ministries of Social Welfare or the Ministries of Labour of those countries so that the teething issues are resolved”.

7.17 The Secretary (CPV & OIA) further added:

“For skilling, the Government has been laying emphasis on it. Hon’ble Prime Minister himself launched the Skill India mission; new skilling centres have come up. In one of the meetings of the Secretaries, Hon’ble PM said that there should be proper global mapping of demand in various professions done by the Indian Missions, through our Ambassadors and Consuls General.

There is an integrated approach between MEA and the Ministry of Employment, Skill Development and NSDC, and others. What we have seen is also the National Skill Development Corporation, which is concentrating on this aspect. For instance, the NSDC has launched a project called TEJAS for the UAE, one of the successful programmes to provide skills as per global standards. It is focused on training and certifying 10,000 Indian workers in the UAE in 2022–2023, with the help of many companies”.

7.18 The representative of MEA also elaborated on the role played by the Ministry for facilitating skill mobility of emigrant workers during the said briefing:

“...skill mobility is one of the top priorities. To that extent, MEA plays a part between this and the soft skilling. We concentrate ourselves on providing facilities for mobility and providing a pre-departure orientation training programme.

The labour and manpower agreement is a cooperation agreement that we have in place with all the GCC countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. These are very strong components of gradual redevelopment and skilling, according to the requirements, in technology and skills. Every year, under these agreements, we work with partners in joint working groups to discuss various issues and see how we can improve the skilling and reskilling of the workers.

We also have the pre-departure orientation training programmes, where we focus on giving pre-departure training to our emigrants on various aspects, including their culture, tradition, social aspects, and languages. We have developed modules in several Indian languages that provide pre-departure training. We do it through our State Governments and through NSDC. We also work closely with the Ministry of Skill Development and NSDC to facilitate the skill development of workers.... But NSDC has also expanded to other parts of the GCC, including Saudi Arabia, chiefly, but also to other countries. Our Missions and Consulates are also assisting.

The focus of NSDC is on three aspects: one is to expand employment opportunity for our workers in these countries or wherever they go; the second is to provide a platform for recognition and harmonization of skill qualifications. Also, the MEA, our Missions and Consulates work very closely with the NSDC. Finally, provide skill development according to the demands of these countries. The NSDC also does skill surveys. We have also done labour market studies across the entire GCC. Once these studies are completed which are in their last phase, we will provide a package of information to various RAs and workers that will give them an idea of these markets and how they are going to develop in the future. These are some of the ways in which we are assisting skill mobility.

vii) Transparent Working Conditions for Emigrant Workers

7.19 The Committee have been informed that the Government is working with the GCC countries to harmonise employee recruitment platforms so that Indian workers are provided with better and more transparent working conditions. When further enquired the extent to which the Ministry and the Government have been successful in achieving these objectives of providing more transparent working conditions for Indian workers looking to work in GCC countries, the Ministry has stated that Government of India has always ensured that all its policies relating to international migration keep the individual migrant worker at the very centre for its formulation. To ensure the welfare and protection of its migrant workers, the e-Migrate platform provides mechanism for safe and legal migration and grievance redressal for Indian migrant workers. The system also makes it mandatory for migrant workers to take insurance cover under Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojna (PBBY) to cover job losses and accidental deaths.

7.20 In order to create awareness and facilitate safe and legal migration, Ministry of External Affairs has launched the '*Surakshit Jaaye Prasikshit Jaaye – Go Safe, Go Trained*' campaign. The idea behind using this campaign is to enhance awareness among the public about the need to use safe and legal channels for migrating for employment purposes. Through PDOT (Pre Departure Orientation training Programme), useful and important information is imparted to aspiring emigrants free of cost. The PDOT programme is aimed at enhancing the soft skills of our migrant workers in terms of culture, language and local rules and regulations of the host country.

7.21 The proposed Emigration Bill of 2023 envisages comprehensive emigration management by instituting regulatory mechanisms and developing a regime for safe and orderly migration governing overseas employment of Indian nationals for their

protection and welfare. The purpose is to establish a robust, transparent and technically advanced structure and maintain a shared database for emigration to facilitate and promote overseas employment.

7.22 Briefing the Committee on the proposed Emigration Bill on 29 May 2023, the Secretary (CPV &OIA) stated:

“A new draft Immigration Bill is being prepared and after getting the opinions of other Ministries, we will try to submit it to the Parliament.”

7.23 The Secretary (CPV &OIA) further added:

‘We have an Emigration Act of 1983 which needs to be replaced. The orientation of this new Bill, instead of being regulatory, will be more affirmative and helping the migration issue. So, the orientation has changed now.

....it is more diaspora-centric.”

viii) Indian Community Welfare Fund

7.24 The Committee observed that the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) was set up in 2009 and enquired about the manner in which the Ministry ensure transparency in the utilization of the fund. The Ministry responded that ICWF was set up in 2009 with Cabinet's approval in Indian Missions in 17 ECR countries & Maldives. Subsequently, in April 2010, the Fund was extended to another 24 Missions and in March 2011, it was extended to cover all Missions and Posts abroad. Guidelines for utilization of ICWF were revised in 17 September 2012 and again in July 2017, which came into effect from 1st September 2017 after the approval of the Cabinet. Under the revised ICWF guidelines, the scope of welfare measures was expanded. Legal/financial assistance to Indian women deserted by Overseas Indians/foreign nationals has also been permitted from ICWF. Missions/Posts have also been authorized to incur expenditure from the ICWF Funds within the scope of the guidelines on Community Welfare and Consular Services besides the core welfare activities. Prior to the revision, there were no provisions for community welfare activities and improvement in consular services. Main objective of setting up of ICWF was to assist overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency. Fund is used to provide legal assistance, boarding & lodging assistance, emergency medical care, air passage to stranded Indians and transportation of mortal remains of Indian nationals etc.

7.25 Detailed guidelines for utilization of ICWF were issued to all Indian Missions and Posts in August 2017. These guidelines are to be used by the Missions as SOP. Guiding principles to be followed by the Indian Missions to decide on the eligibility of persons to be provided assistance from ICWF are given below:

(a) ICWF funds can be used to assist only Indian citizens residing in the host country or those in distress while visiting a foreign country. Persons of Indian Origin and Overseas Citizens of India Card Holders are not eligible for individual financial assistance from ICWF.

(b) ICWF can be utilized for the benefit of Indian nationals in distress on a means tested basis provided the officer approving ICWF expenditure has satisfied himself that the beneficiary deserves to be assisted.

(c) Ordinarily, only such Indian National(s) who have entered the host country legally shall be eligible to receive benefits under this Fund. In cases where it is not so, assistance may be provided after the Head of Mission/Head of Post has recorded his satisfaction to the effect that the circumstances of the case necessitate providing assistance under ICWF.

7.26 To ensure transparency, proposals for expenditure from ICWF are considered by the ICWF committees designated in Missions /Posts. Approval for expenditure from ICWF is at the level of HOM /HOP on the recommendation of the ICWF committee of the Mission. For expediency, HOM / HOP may authorize DCM/DHC/DCG to approve expenditure upto US\$2000 per case in ECR countries and US\$ 1000 per case in other countries. ICWF accounts of all Missions and Posts are audited by the office of Principal Chief Controller of Accounts and the office of C&AG of India at regular intervals.

7.27 Responding to a query regarding the size and source of the ICWF, the representative of the Ministry during the course of evidence on 29 May 2023, stated as under:

“As on March 31, 2023 the fund had approximately Rs.558 crore or so. We have spent about Rs.565 crore from 2014 to 2023. This assistance has been extended to 3,33,607 Indians during this period.

.....this fund is a separate fund. It does not come from the Consolidated Fund. It is collected from a portion of the consular and fees that are collected by the various Missions. It is administered by the Head of Mission or the Consuls General, as the case may be. It is supervised by the Ministry of External Affairs.

ix) Legal Assistance

7.28 On being asked whether there is any mechanism for providing legal or financial assistance to those Indians who are imprisoned by the legal bodies/arrested in GCC countries, the Ministry has stated that legal assistance to those Indians who are imprisoned by the legal bodies/arrested in GCC countries is provided through panel of lawyers appointed by the Mission/Post and expenditure on lawyers fee is paid from Indian Community Welfare Fund. Missions are also authorized to use ICWF to make payment of small fines & penalties in respect of Indian nationals for minor offences/crimes; for illegal stay in the host country where *prima facie* the worker is not at fault, and to enable release of Indian nationals from jail/detention center (and to enable his repatriation). Financial assistance is also provided from ICWF for payment of air fare of such workers for their return to India. Details of Legal Assistance provided from ICWF in each of GCC countries from 2018 till June 2023 is given below:

Country	Expenditure incurred on legal assistance from ICWF (INR)
Bahrain	5,16,230
Kuwait	14,20,689
Oman	32,50,966
Qatar	8,54,84,905
Saudi Arabia	11,85,890
UAE	26,62,916

x) Transportation of Mortal Remains

7.29 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the issue of transportation of mortal remains and charges for the same was raised wherein the Secretary (CPV & OIA) clarified the rule position, as under:-

“...mortal remains is one of the most sensitive issues. The suggestions from both the hon. Members were not to charge for the transportation of mortal remains from whichever country back home. Now, the rule position in the Gulf countries is like this. It is the responsibility of the company and the sponsor to pay the charges for dispatch of mortal remains. This is by law in the Gulf countries. It is not the liability of the employee but it is the liability of the employer.

7.30 On the observation of the Committee regarding defraying of expenses for transportation of mortal remains by family members to avoid delay in transportation, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) submitted, as under:-

“The time taken is not because of the expenditure. For example, the time taken in Saudi Arabia and other countries, is generally due to cumbersome procedures which are there. Even for natural deaths, they are taking a longer time. We have been telling them to reduce the time required for completion of formalities. First, you need a police report, post-mortem report and many other things. The only thing is required to from the embassy in the NOC. The NOC is issued on the spot. This is the service given instantly and for which there no charges. If you remember, Sir, in the erstwhile Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, a decision was taken not to charge for the consular fee for giving the NOC for death cases. The Government of India has done away with this fee. Our people go under some sponsorship and from that sponsorship, they go away to some other place. So, that is a destitute case. In those cases, we cannot trace the employer. So that becomes like a destitute Indian. In all such cases, Sir, we ensure that the entire expenditure is borne by the ICWF. In case where the company details are available, we try that this is done through the company itself so that we do not have to necessarily use the ICWF fund. We use this fund primarily to assist the destitute Indians which includes boarding, lodging, legal assistance, emergency medical assistance and transportation of mortal remains. This has been the practice so far. The ICWF fund has been utilised for helping 3.39 lakh distressed overseas Indians as of 30th June. So, it has been used”

xi) Pravasi Bhartiya Divas and Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Awards

7.31 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) apprised the Committee about the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas and the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Awards as under:

“Though our Diaspora engagement policies are holistic for the entire globe, there are special elements that I want to highlight which we do for Gulf countries. One is of course the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas celebrations that we do but we always make an effort that we have a regional PBD element in that where we take a theme related to the Gulf countries. Last time, in 17th PBD, we took workmen as one of the themes and there was exchange of views on how there can be betterment for the workmen, what their difficulties are and how best we can address them. That way, we are also able to engage them with the policy-makers in India. There was a good contingent of workmen which had come to participate in this PBD programme.

Also, we got a student contingent from UAE which also came into the youth PBD. So, these were the aspects. This is just one example. In previous PBDs also, there was some element or the other which was especially focused on the Gulf region.

....Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award is there. Effort is made that from each region and from each country, at least, one awardee is selected”.

7.32 On the initiatives being taken to engage with the diaspora in a more structured manner, the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during briefing on 29 May 2023, stated as under:-

“We have been hosting the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas every two years and we have been conferring Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards but the thinking is that we should go beyond this. The Prime Minister himself has directed us to first and foremost create an alumni of all the award winners with their specialisation. Many of them are doctors, scientists. It is not that we engage with them once and leave them. Of course, our Missions are engaging with them at the local level but we as a Government and as the Ministry of External Affairs would like to engage with them in a more structured manner. So, a diaspora directory based on professions is being prepared. We propose to organise an interactive session of PBS awardees with all the Ministries using their specialisations so that the diaspora could be mainstreamed into our national priorities”.

7.33 The Committee also enquired about the status and the criteria for selection for Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards and whether it is being awarded to big people. In its written reply, the Ministry has clarified that the allegations that Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards is awarded to big people are fallacious. The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are given by the Government of India to recognize and honour exceptional achievements and contributions made by overseas Indians in various fields. These awards are typically bestowed upon individuals who have demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in areas such as science, business, culture, education, and public service, and who have significantly contributed to the welfare of the Indian diaspora or to India itself. The criteria for selection for the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are quite stringent, involving a thorough assessment of an individual's accomplishments, and its broader impact. Recognizing and honouring exceptional individuals and institutions in this manner helps inspire

others and draws attention to outstanding contributions that can serve as examples for others to follow.

xii) Educational Support for Diaspora Children

7.34 The initiatives taken by the Ministry for educational support to diaspora children has been highlighted by the Secretary (CPV & OIA) during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, as under:-

“...we also have a scholarship programme for diaspora children. Largely, this is for PIO and NRI children but in that case, we have about 50 scholarships reserved for workmen in the region in ECR countries. If their children are studying in India in 11th and 12th and they want to do tertiary education out here, in that condition, they are given preference. These 50 scholarships are given so that our workers and people whose income is at a certain level can really make their children study in India”.

[Verbatim Proceedings dt. 27.7.2023 page 18]

7.35 When enquired about the initiatives likely to be taken by the Ministry to reduce the high fees charged to diaspora children for education in India, the Committee have been informed that the Ministry has always communicated the concerns about high fees to Ministry of Education. Apart from this, the diaspora children from the Gulf region are the major beneficiaries of the scholarship program of MEA. The Ministry offers 150 scholarships under the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) providing financial assistance to pursue under-graduate courses in India for specific professional and non-professional courses (except medical and related courses). For Academic Year 2022-23, a total of 131 scholarships were given to children of Indian workers in Gulf countries

Gulf Countries	No. of students granted SPDC scholarship (AY 2022-23)
Saudi Arabia	25
Kuwait	7
Qatar	22
Oman	32
UAE	36
Bahrain	9
Total	131

xiii) Demolitions in Jeddah area

7.36 The Committee further observed that Indians are investing their money in countries like Dubai, which has made some important provisions, like the provision for hundred percent ownership. In view of this, people are investing abroad. But in Saudi Arabia, a lot of development is happening, and a lot of demolitions are also happening, especially in the Jeddah area.

7.37 When enquired about the manner in which the MEA create confidence in the minds of the diaspora residing there, the Committee have been informed that there has been demolitions in old Jeddah area and other places. Saudi authorities have conveyed that some of the structures demolished had become structurally weak, therefore demolition had to take place. Embassy has taken up the cases where compensation to any Indian diaspora is to be made.

iv) Bilateral Air Service Agreement

7.38 During the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, when the issue of high price of flight tickets to the Gulf was raised, the Secretary (CPV &OIA) responded as under:

“....we have always been flagging this to the Civil Aviation Ministry and our Embassies have also been talking to two airlines. But you know that this is more of a market-driven exercise and the Government can do very little in this matter. But at the same time, what we are trying to do is to have the bilateral Air Services Agreements reviewed with many countries so that the capacities are reviewed very frequently.

For example, in 2019, we had reviewed the bilateral Air Service Agreement with Saudi Arabia and increased the seating capacity to 50,000 seats a month. Of course, the current utilisation is around 30,000 seats. It means if airlines carry more passengers, then there is a competition and it will bring down the prices. That is the logic. Similar discussion with Civil Aviation Ministry is going on”.

xv) Passport Service

7.39 The Committee sought to know the success achieved in reducing the appointment time in the issuance of passports for Indian citizens, particularly migrants during briefing on 29 May 2023. The Chief Passport Officer stated as under:

“Regarding delays within India, the demand is extremely high. So, we are doing our best to release more and more appointments. We have also increased the slots for morning and evening. We are opening on several Saturdays. Last year, as well as in January-February this year, we opened our Seva Kendras to address this demand. Furthermore, we cooperate with the Post Offices. Just last week, we opened up our Post Office Passport Seva

Kendras, which number 431 currently, in full strength. Going forward, when we launch Passport Sewa Programme version II, we hope to be upgrading not only the software but also locations. Many of them are in the pipeline to be expanded further so that we can address these long appointments.”

7.40 Adding further, the Secretary (CPV &OIA) stated:

“The External Affairs Minister had chaired a meeting to review this a few weeks back. We have analyzed that there are about 12 offices out of 36 where the appointment cycle is quite high. Among them, the highest is in Punjab where sometimes the appointment cycle is going up to 60 days and beyond. So, of all the measures what we are talking about like opening on Saturdays, extending the time daily, one of the things what we have seen is that the PSKs have actually reached their capacity. You cannot expand them because you cannot put an extra table and chair to place a person. So, we have directed the TCS to search for new building so that we are in a position to expand. TCS has already identified about a dozen odd places where all these PSKs would be moved, starting from Punjab and then going to other places like Ahmedabad. This is going on.

Also, when we plan to migrate from PSP version 1 to 2, which is most likely before the end of August, in then, I think our systems will be in a better position cope up with enhanced demands. There are two major changes in the passport by them that are in the office. One is the launching of the e-passports and the other is the migration of PSP from version 1 to 2. Both are in the pipeline. As said, our target is to do it before the end of August this year.”

7.41 On the issue of seizure of passports of Indian truck drivers who came back after traveling to Yemen which was raised during the course of evidence on 27 July 2023, the Secretary (CPV &OIA) responded as under:

“You are aware that there is a ban imposed by the Government of India on travel to Yemen. Those people who have travelled to Yemen after the notification was issued and when they came back, generally their passports are seized. So far, we have 422 passports seized. Generally, after seizure the immigration officials are giving them to the passport offices and individuals have been given the opportunity to make an appeal to RPO and also to the Ministry. The Ministry is the appellate authority. Out of 422, we have released 169 passports based on the appeals made to us on a case-by-case basis. Somebody is having a job there, etc. We are very sympathetic towards these causes. The ban is still in force and so, we cannot instruct the immigration officers not to seize passports. It is because there is a proper ban levied on this sector but at the same time, we have been very sympathetically viewing it so that those who have found jobs elsewhere, we have been releasing their passports. So far about 169 cases have been released”.

7.42 The Committee note that the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region comprising of around 8.7 million are an important source of inward remittances to India. The last figures for remittances from the diaspora has been more than \$120 billion as compared to the previous figures of \$87 billion in 2021 and \$115 billion in 2022. The Committee recognize the potential for further increase in inward remittances and desire that the Ministry should motivate the Indian diaspora to make enhanced remittances through acknowledgement of their role as strong pillars for our economic development. It is also expedient upon the Ministry to bring out a diaspora-centric policy focused to Gulf region keeping the welfare and protection of Indian diaspora at the foremost of our national development agenda.

(Recommendation No. 31)

7.43 The Committee note that the Ministry has taken up specific measures like Indian Community Welfare Fund, online MADAD portal, e-migrate portal, Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras, Kshetriya Pravasi Sahayata Kendras, Open Houses, multilingual 24x7 Helpline, etc. for the welfare of the Indian diaspora and for redressal of their grievances. All the Indian Missions have been sensitized to extend prompt help to any Indian in distress abroad. The Committee further note that Pre- Departure Orientation Training Programme has been started to facilitate safe and legal migration while the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana covers accidental deaths and injury and also provides legal assistance. Besides, a number of MoUs/Agreements on Labour and Manpower Cooperation have been signed with the GCC countries. India is also working with the GCC countries on issues like skill harmonization and connecting worker recruitment platforms so that Indian workers get better and

more transparent working conditions. The Committee appreciate these measures undertaken by the Ministry for the welfare and protection of the Indian diaspora. The Committee, however, desire that the Ministry should also focus on the implementation aspects of such measures and assess the impact of such initiatives and schemes on the migrant workers and domestic sector workers. Since the Ministry is yet to come out with a rehabilitation scheme for migrant workers who lost their means of livelihood due to global pandemics or natural disasters, the Committee also desire that a comprehensive scheme for such workers may be formulated in consultation with all the Ministries/Departments concerned.

(Recommendation No. 32)

7.44 The Committee observe that Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements provide institutional mechanism to discuss and resolve all prevailing Indian labour and manpower-related issues through regular meetings of Joint Working Groups. Such MoUs/Agreements are in place with GCC countries and Jordan, while specific agreements on labour cooperation for the domestic sector have been signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. The Committee desire that the Ministry should further identify the gaps in this regard and work out country-specific MoUs/Agreements to secure the rights of Indian workers in the GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to strengthen the Joint Working Groups to serve as effective mechanism for redressing the grievances of migrant workers and domestic sector workers in the Gulf region.

(Recommendation No. 33)

7.45 The Committee note that Indian workers in the Gulf countries are facing many challenges on various issues such as legal cases, imprisonments on false allegations, employment related issues, harassment by the employer, cheating by recruiting agents, non- payment of wages, death compensation, exploitation of domestic workers, difficulty in equalisation of degrees, emergency medical problems, lack of financial resources for returning to India, etc. The Committee desire that the Ministry and Indian Missions should extend all assistance to the migrant workers for quick redressal of their grievances and ensure that the mechanisms to resolve their grievances such as ICWF, MADAD portal, PBSK/SPSK, PBBY, dedicated community welfare/labour wings in Missions and Posts are functioning effectively. The Committee also desire that fake or unregistered recruitment agencies involved in cheating and luring people to bypass the immigration system, should be rooted out completely through vigorous checking, identification and prosecution.

(Recommendation No. 34)

7.46 The Committee note that recruitment of Indian female Domestic Sector Workers is regulated through the provisions of the Emigration Act, 1983. To safeguard the interests of female DSWs, the process of their recruitment for employment abroad has been restricted only through 10 State run Recruiting Agencies. The Committee understand that regulating the recruitment for female DSWs is necessary for their safety, security and well being but at the same time, care should be taken to ensure that restricting the recruitment process through only ten State run RAs do not deprive them of the opportunity to find means of livelihood abroad. The Committee urge the Ministry to maintain a fine balance between strict regulation and employment

opportunities abroad and make all efforts to facilitate the migration of such workers through authorized RAs.

(Recommendation No. 35)

7.47 The Committee note that a new draft Emigration Bill seeking to replace the Emigration Act of 1983 is under preparation since long. The proposed Bill envisages comprehensive emigration management by instituting regulatory mechanisms and developing a regime for safe and orderly migration governing overseas employment of Indian nationals for their protection and welfare. The Committee understand that the proposed Bill would facilitate and promote overseas employment to a large number of Indian nationals and urge the Ministry to commence and conclude the deliberations and consultations with other Ministries/Departments and stakeholders while keeping the migrant worker at the very core of its formulation, and bring the Bill to Parliament within the shortest possible time.

(Recommendation No. 36)

7.48 The Committee note that while the National Skill Development Corporation focus on providing skills as per global standards, the focus of the MEA is to provide facilities for skill mobility and providing a pre-departure orientation training programme. However, MEA, Indian Missions and Consulates work very closely with NSDC. The Committee feel that there is an urgent need for a coordinated approach amongst MEA, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and NSDC and

hence, desire that a defined mechanism may be worked out for the purpose and the Committee may be apprised of accordingly.

(Recommendation No. 37)

7.49 The Committee note that MEA is conducting labour market studies across the entire GCC and these studies are in the last phase of completion. The Committee are of the view that the findings of the labour market studies would be invaluable for the aspiring emigrant workers in terms of its prospects for the coming years. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to complete the studies at the earliest so that the information could be disseminated to all the recruiting agents and prospective emigrants.

(Recommendation No. 38)

7.50 The Committee note that the Government is working with the GCC countries to harmonise employee recruitment platforms so that Indian workers are provided with better and more transparent working conditions. However, the extent to which the Ministry and the Government have been successful in achieving these objectives is not known. The Ministry has also not mentioned whether any specific MoU or Agreement have been signed with the GCC countries in this regard. Keeping in view the security and well being of the migrant workers at the foremost, the Committee urge the Ministry to commission a study on harmonization of employee recruitment platforms and working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure better and more transparent working conditions for Indian workers as well as prospective emigrant workers in GCC countries.

(Recommendation No. 39)

7.51 The Committee note that the Indian Community Welfare Fund was set up in Indian Missions in 17 ECR countries & Maldives in the year 2009. Subsequently, the Fund was extended to another 24 Missions in April 2010. In March 2011, it was extended to cover all Missions and Posts abroad. Revised guidelines for utilization of ICWF came into effect from 1st September 2017. Approval for expenditure from ICWF is at the level of HOM /HOP on the recommendation of the ICWF committee of the Mission. The Committee further note that as on 31 March 2023, the corpus of the ICWF is approximately Rs.558 crore or so. An amount of Rs. 565 crore has been utilized from 2014 to 2023 covering 3,33,607 Indians during this period. The Committee acknowledge the assistance rendered to overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency under the ICWF including air passage offered to stranded Indians during the COVID pandemic. In view of the crucial role played by the ICWF in providing relief to Indian nationals during extreme hardships and emergency conditions, the Committee desire that sanctioning of funds/expenditure should be prompt and decisive. The Ministry should ensure that there is no delay on the part of the ICWF committee to give its recommendations for approval of the expenditure and sanctioning of the same by the Competent Authority so that timely assistance is provided during exigencies. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure transparency in the utilization of the Fund for those in need.

(Recommendation No. 40)

7.52 The Committee note that legal assistance to Indian nationals imprisoned or arrested in GCC countries is provided through panel of lawyers appointed by the Mission/Post and expenditure on lawyers' fee is paid from Indian

Community Welfare Fund. ICWF can also be used by Missions for payment of small fines & penalties for minor offences/crimes, for illegal stay in the host country where *prima facie* the worker is not at fault and to enable release of Indian nationals from jail/detention center and their repatriation. The Committee are aware that there may be some section of the diaspora like labourers and domestic workers who could not afford the fees for lawyers and actually needed assistance while other sections could well afford legal fees for their court cases. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should differentiate between those who could afford fees for lawyers and those who could not, and ensure that priority is given to those who actually needed legal assistance under the ICWF.

(Recommendation No. 41)

7.53 The Committee note that as per the law in Gulf countries, charges for the transportation of mortal remains is the responsibility of the employer/company and the sponsor. In cases where the employer could not be traced, the entire expenditure is borne by the ICWF. The Committee further note that there has been undue delay in dispatch of mortal remains back to India generally due to cumbersome procedures for completion of formalities in most of the Gulf countries. Transportation of mortal remains being a sensitive and humanitarian issue, the Committee urge the Ministry to take it up at the Highest level with the Gulf countries for easing of the cumbersome procedures. Indian Missions may also play a more proactive role in coordinating with the local authorities for early completion of all the required formalities and timely dispatch of the mortal remains to India.

(Recommendation No. 42)

7.54 The Committee note that the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas celebrations and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are special elements undertaken by the Ministry in its engagement with the diaspora in the Gulf countries. The Ministry has also made efforts to have a regional PBD element taking a theme related to the Gulf countries. The Committee desire that the focus of the PBD celebrations should be to ensure maximum participation of migrant workers in these celebrations and events, consider/discuss their issues and prepare the policies for improving the working and living conditions of such workers. The Committee further desire that PBD and regional PBD elements should serve as platforms for engagement of these workers with the policy makers in India.

Regarding the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards given by the Government to recognize and honour exceptional achievements and contributions made by overseas Indians in various fields, the Committee urge the Government to ensure that at least one awardee is selected from each region and from each country.

(Recommendation No. 43)

7.55 The Committee note that Indian Missions are engaging with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winners at the local level and the Ministry is also proposing to engage with them in a more structured manner. A diaspora directory based on professions is being prepared. The Ministry is also proposing to organise an interactive session of PBS awardees with all the Ministries . Being aware of the benefits of deeper engagement with PBS Awardees with outstanding accomplishments in areas such as science, business, culture, education and public service and who have significantly contributed to the welfare of the Indian diaspora or to India itself, the

Committee urge the Ministry to create an alumni of all the PBS award winners within the shortest time possible specifying their specialization and utilize their expertise in achieving our national priorities.

(Recommendation No.44)

7.56 The Committee note that under the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), 150 scholarships are offered to pursue undergraduate courses in India for specific professional and non-professional courses (except medical and related courses). A total of 131 scholarships were given to children of Indian workers in Gulf countries for the Academic Year 2022-23. The Committee, however, observe that the fees charged to diaspora children for education in India are quite high. The Committee have also been informed that the MEA has always communicated the concerns about high fees to the Ministry of Education. The Committee are of the view that adequate educational support should be given to diaspora children to pursue their education in India and urge the MEA to make persistent efforts with the Ministry of Education to rationalize the fee structure for such children in Indian educational institutions.

(Recommendation No. 45)

7.57 The Committee observe that Indian diaspora are investing their money in Gulf countries including Dubai and Saudi Arabia. The Committee have been informed that there have been demolitions in old Jeddah area and other places. As conveyed by the Saudi authorities, some of the structures have become structurally weak and hence, demolition had to take place. The Committee further note that the Indian Embassy has taken up the cases where compensation to any Indian diaspora is to be made. To ensure that the Indian

diaspora who have invested their hard money do not suffer major losses, the Committee urge the Ministry and the Indian Embassy to identify the individuals entitled for compensation and pursue the competent authority in Saudi Arabia for payment of the said compensation at the earliest.

(Recommendation No. 46)

7.58 The Committee note that the MEA has always been flagging the issue of high price of flight tickets to the Gulf with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Indian Embassies have also been talking to two airlines. The Committee are aware that India has Bilateral Air Services Agreements with many countries and desire that such agreements should be reviewed frequently for assessing the capacities of air services at the ground level. Consistent efforts may be made to bring down the cost of air flights in coordination with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The Committee also desire that the Indian Embassies/Missions should hold regular discussion with airlines operating in the Gulf region to resolve the issue of high air fares.

(Recommendation No. 47)

7.59 The Committee note that based on a review conducted by the Ministry, there are about 12 Passport Offices out of 36 where the appointment cycle for passports is quite high. In Punjab sometimes the appointment cycle goes up to 60 days and beyond. It is informed that TCS has already started an exercise to shift several PSKs in Punjab to buildings with better infrastructure to accommodate more appointment slots. The Committee further note that migration from PSP version 1 to 2 would also enable the system to be in a

better position to cope up with enhanced demands for passports. The Committee are of the view that the issue of long appointment cycle for issuance of passports should be addressed urgently to facilitate aspiring migrants for getting employment abroad. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to complete the exercise of shifting the identified PSKs to the new locations and migration from PSP version 1 to 2 without further delay.

(Recommendation No. 48)

7.60 The Committee note that in pursuance of a ban imposed by the Government on travel to Yemen, 422 passports of Indian truck drivers who have travelled to Yemen after the notification was issued and came back to India, have been seized. The Committee further note that passports of those people who found jobs elsewhere, have been released. So far, about 169 passports have been released based on the appeals made on a case-by-case basis. The Committee view the causes of those people whose passports are still lying with the passport offices, sympathetically and desire that the Ministry/Passport Offices should take a lenient view of their cases and release their passports if their appeals have merit.

(Recommendation No. 49)

NEW DELHI
December, 2023
Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)

P.P. CHAUDHARY,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

ANNEXURES I

MINUTES OF THE NINETEENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2022-23) HELD ON 29 May, 2023

The Committee sat from 1145 hrs. to 1310 hrs. in Committee Room No. '3', Extension Building, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Shri P. P. Chaudhary – **Chairperson**

MEMBERS

LOK SABHA

2. Smt. Goddeti Madhavi
3. Shri P. C. Mohan
4. Shri Ritesh Pandey
5. Shri K. C. Patel
6. Shri Manne Srinivas Reddy
7. Shri Rehati Tripura
8. Dr. Harsh Vardhan

RAJYA SABHA

9. Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
10. Shri Prakash Javadekar

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

S. No	Name	Designation
1.	Dr. Ausuf Sayeed	Secretary (CPV & OIA) [Leader of Delegation]
2.	Shri Anurag Bhusan	Additional Secretary (EP & W)
3.	Shri T. Armstrong Changasan	JS (PSP) & CPO
4.	Shri Vipul	JS(Gulf)

5.	Shri Srikar Reddy	JS (FT-WANA), Ministry of Commerce
6.	Shri Anil K. Rai	JS (Parl. & Coord.)
7.	Shri Devesh Uttam	JS (CPV)
8.	Md. Noor Rehman Seikh	JS (ED)
9.	Shri Brahma Kumar	JS (OE&PGE)

SECRETARIAT

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. K Muanniang Tunglut | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. | Ms. Maya Menon | - | Under Secretary |

At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members of the Committee and the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs to the sitting of the Committee convened to take briefing on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of Cooperation'. Outlining the issues to be discussed in his opening remarks, the Chairperson drew the attention of all the witnesses to provision regarding confidentiality of the proceedings of the Committee and Direction 58 of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha. Then he requested the witnesses to introduce themselves before making submissions before the Committee.

2. Thereafter, Secretary (CPV & OIA) gave a briefing covering the following aspects namely, historical relationship between India and the GCC countries, trade and investment relationship, energy partnership specially in the field of green energy, cooperation in the area of Defence and Security between India and GCC particularly in maritime security and cyber security cooperation, DSW (Domestic Service Workers agreement) with many Gulf Countries, FTA negotiations between India and GCC etc.

3. Thereafter, the Members sought clarification on various issues which inter alia included the peace and political stability in the Gulf region; need of a clear policy for Diaspora community; trade deficit between India and GCC Countries;

movement of wealthy Indians to Gulf Countries; favourable ecosystem for Indian companies; status of FTA between India and GCC: Indian Community Welfare Fund; ongoing war in Yemen; happiness level of Indian Diaspora in Gulf Countries; status of skilled labour and skill mobility; hassle free issuance or renewal of Passport service, etc.

4. The representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs responded to the concerns raised by the Members. Before the Sitting concluded, the Chairperson directed the witnesses to furnish written replies to the points raised by the members of the Committee at the earliest.

The witnesses then withdrew.

The Committee then adjourned.

A verbatim record of the proceedings has been kept.

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ANNEXURES II

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY FIRST SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2022-23) HELD ON 27 JULY, 2023

The Committee sat from 1700 hrs. to 1840 hrs. in Committee Room 'B', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Shri P.P. Chaudhary – Chairperson

MEMBERS

LOK SABHA

2. Shri. Dileshwar Kamait
3. Smt. Preneet Kaur
4. Shri P. C. Mohan
5. Dr. K C Patel
6. Shri N. K. Premchandran
7. Shri Manne Srinivas Reddy
8. Dr. Harsh Vardhan
9. Shri E. T. Mohammed Basheer

RAJYA SABHA

10. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
11. Shri Abdul Wahab
12. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

S. No	Name	Designation
1.	Dr. Ausuf Sayeed	Secretary(CPV &OIA)
2.	Ms. Manika Jain	Additional Secretary (DE)
3.	Shri Vipul	JS (Gulf)
4.	Shri Aseem R Mahajan	JS (Gulf)
5.	Shri Anil K. Rai	JS (Parl. & Coord.)
6.	Shri Devesh Uttam	JS (CPV)

7.	Shri Brahma Kumar	JS (OE&PGE)
8.	Shri Siddharth Malik	Director (ED)

MINISTRY COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

S. No	Name	Designation
1.	Ms. Priya Nair	Economic Advisor (MoCI)

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

S. No	Name	Designation
1.	Ms. Preeti Jain	Director (DEA) - TBC

SECRETARIAT

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. K Muanniang Tunglut | - | Deputy Secretary |

At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members of the Committee and the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs and officials from other Ministries/Departments to the Sitting of the Committee convened for having oral evidence on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of Cooperation'. Outlining the issues to be discussed in his opening remarks, the Chairperson drew the attention of all the witnesses to the provision regarding confidentiality of the proceedings of the Committee and Direction 58 of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha. Thereafter, he requested the witnesses to introduce themselves before making submissions before the Committee.

2. Secretary (CPV & OIA) gave an opening statement covering the following aspects namely, historical relationship between India and the GCC countries; upcoming G-20 Summit in September in India; Food Security Cooperation between the two sides, trade and investment relationship; energy partnership specially in the field of green energy; cooperation in the area of Defence and

Security between India and GCC particularly in maritime security and cyber security cooperation; Domestic Service Workers agreement with many Gulf Countries; FTA negotiations between India and GCC, etc.

3. Thereafter, the Members sought clarifications on various issues which *inter alia* included, peace and political stability in the Gulf region; educational collaboration between universities in India and GCC countries; trade deficit between India and GCC countries; diversification of energy partnership with the GCC; favourable ecosystem for Indian companies; Indian Community Welfare Fund; status of FTA between India and GCC; ongoing war in Yemen; happiness level of Indian diaspora in Gulf countries; status of skilled labour and skill mobility; hassle free issuance or renewal of Passport service, etc.

4. The representatives of the Ministries responded to the concerns raised by the Members. Before the Sitting concluded, the Chairperson directed the witnesses to furnish written replies to the points raised by the Members of the Committee at the earliest.

The witnesses then withdrew.

The Committee then adjourned.

A verbatim record of the proceedings has been kept.

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**MINUTES OF THE SIXTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS (2023-24) HELD ON 7 DECEMBER, 2023**

The Committee sat on Thursday, 7 December, 2023 from 1030 hrs. to 1045 hrs. in Committee Room No. 'C', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

1. Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Dileshwar Kamait
3. Smt. Preneet Kaur
4. Smt. Goddeti Madhavi
5. Smt. Poonam Mahajan
6. Smt. Queen Oja
7. Dr. K.C. Patel
8. Shri N.K. Premachandran
9. Smt. Navneet Ravi Rana
10. Dr. Harsh Vardhan
11. Shri Vishnu Datt Sharma

Rajya Sabha

12. Shri Abdul Wahab

Secretariat

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. Ms. K. Muanniang Tunlut - | | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. Ms. Maya Menon | - | Under Secretary |

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee.

3. The Committee took up for consideration the draft Report on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Contours of Cooperation'.

4. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. The Members suggested some minor modifications. The Committee adopted the draft Report with these minor modifications.

5. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to finalize the Report incorporating the suggestions made by the Members and present the same to Parliament.

The Committee then adjourned.