



**DRAFT ADDRESS BY HON'BLE MOS (EA) AT THE WORKING  
SESSION ON THE 'GULF' REGION**

**Shri Vyalar Raviji, Hon'ble Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs;  
Respected members of the panel;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is a privilege to be present amongst this august gathering to exchange views on the topical subject of the concerns of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas provides an invaluable platform to all of us- representatives from the Government, corporate sector, our diaspora in the Gulf and others- to exchange views and ideas on the role of the Indians in the Gulf and to forge closer ties in the areas of business, education and culture.

2. Joined by the Arabian Sea, the Gulf region, by its very proximity, constitutes an immediate neighborhood of ours. Very few nations can claim to have more ancient and civilizational links with this region than India. The exchange of ideas, trade links, visits by travelers between India and this region have left an indelible imprint on the history and culture of both sides. Arab traders carried Indian spices, precious metals and stones. It was through them that the concept of zero and Indian numerals were transmitted to the West. India received the rich Islamic Culture, the Arabic script, Arabic chemistry and philosophy. Arab writers have left us the recorded history of our medieval courts and our peoples.

3. In recent times, the bonds between India and the countries in the Gulf have both diversified and strengthened considerably. The region's energy resources are of vital importance to us as nearly 65 per cent of India's oil and gas requirements are met from the Gulf. The Gulf is also a major trading partner of ours, with the current annual two-way non-oil trade worth over \$ 20 billion, making it one of India's largest trading partners.

4. There is a growing awareness of India in the GCC countries, based on the realization of its rising economic profile and increasing energy requirements. The GCC itself is expected to play a substantial role in the global economy in the coming decades with a considerably diversified economy and higher GDP levels. The surplus generated will seek new investment opportunities, particularly in the Asian markets that would include India in a substantial measure. As a major player on the international

economic scene, Indian companies are also investing in other countries in larger numbers. There is no doubt that the countries in the Gulf will discover enhanced opportunities for investment in India as will Indian capital for investment in the Gulf.

5. The recent past has witnessed consolidation of the warm and friendly ties that characterize the multi-faceted relationship between India and the countries of the Gulf. The intensification of high level interactions and the visits of the Heads of States of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain, have provided considerable impetus to further strengthening of our ties. In fact, it could be said that India has launched a “look west” policy.

6. The region, as a whole, is home to the largest expatriate Indian community abroad with strength of over 4.5 million. The Indian workforce in the Gulf countries is an important ingredient in our bilateral relationship. We are committed to engage the Non-Resident Indians actively not only to tap into their expertise and wealth of ideas but also to address their contemporary concerns, expectations and aspirations. We want them to catalyse the potential for a mutually beneficial interaction into reality.

7. Our Missions, including in the Gulf countries, closely interact with the Indian diaspora and their representative associations. Despite huge pressures faced by our Missions in the Gulf countries, they have been successful in providing efficient labor and consular services to the Indian community. The Ministry of External Affairs has been actively pursuing the

proposal for recruitment and posting of additional manpower in our Missions in Gulf. I am hopeful for a positive decision in this matter shortly.

8. I would like to point out some of the issues and concerns pertinent to the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region- violation of job contracts in regard to salaries, poor living conditions, leave and terminal benefits; lack of institutional measures for rehabilitation; grant of voting rights to the NRIs; facilities for professional education to the NRIs; and simplification of the emigration procedures, to name a few. These issues are well known and I need not expand on them. There has been considerable progress on several fronts while the concerned Ministries and agencies are working actively towards resolving the remaining. The process of entering into institutional mechanism in this direction has received a boost through the finalization of arrangements on labour matters with the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. The Government is also looking at creating awareness among workers through compulsory familiarization and orientation programmes before taking up employment in the Gulf countries. We are actively pursuing setting up a Council for Promotion of Overseas Employment as an agency responsible for streamlining hiring practices. Emigration procedures and passport issuance process have also been simplified considerably.

9. While focusing on the concerns of the Indians living and working in the Gulf, I would like to mention that these countries hold out considerable opportunities for us. The Gulf economies are witnessing an expansion in sectors like services, education, tourism, construction, infrastructure,

finance, pharmaceuticals and healthcare. These sectors will open new avenues for Indian investment, and equally important, for employment both in the skilled and the unskilled categories.

10. We have to look at the ways in which the non-resident community in the Gulf can contribute its wealth and experience to the development process and quality of life back home in India. They can play the role of a partner in the challenges and opportunities that a developing India offers.

11. I would like to share some possibilities with you:

- We could consider issuing NRI Infrastructure Development Bonds which would not only contribute towards the much needed funds in the infrastructure sector but also provide the Indian workers with a safe option for long-term investment. Incentives to boost remittances by NRIs through banking channels could also be looked at.
- Strengthen Public-Private Partnership by conceptualizing development projects with the consortium of Government, private players and NRIs. In this regard, the success of the Cochin International Airport is worth mentioning and emulating.
- Setting up of training and technical institutions for skill upgradation of our workforce to enable them move up in the value chain.
- Utilising the resources and experience of NRIs in setting up quality educational institutions in India.

12. During my meetings with leaders from the Gulf countries, they have always praised the diligence of Indians working in their respective countries. I thank them for all that they have achieved, individually and together, for India and look forward to their support for our continued progress.

13. I would like to thank the organizers for giving me this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering here today. I am confident that this session will throw up several constructive ideas for discussion and debate.

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