**Press Release**

**Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri M J Akbar to Tunisia**

**from 26-28 February 2017**

Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, Shri M J Akbar paid an official bilateral visit to the Republic of Tunisia from 26-28 February 2017. As part of his official engagements, Minister Akbar met with President of the Republic Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, Minister of Energy, Mining and Renewable Energy, Mrs. Hela Cheikhrouhou, Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahda Party and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Mr. Sabri Bachtobji. Discussions covered all aspects of bilateral relations, and regional and global affairs of mutual interest. The warmth during the meetings reflected the strong desire to build on the existing cordiality between Tunisia and India, the youngest democracy and the largest democracy, as well as the effort to coordinate on security cooperation and expand the relationship on an economic horizon to meet the aspirations of the people. Both sides identified terrorism as the most dangerous menace to prosperity and the architecture of international stability.

Minister Akbar held detailed discussions with Minister of Energy, Mining and Renewable Energy, Mrs. Hela Cheikhrouhou, which focused on strengthening the traditional co-operation in the mining sector and explored new avenues like pharmaceuticals, agriculture, information technology, biotechnology, renewable energy etc. In his address to the business community organised by the apex chamber of commerce and industry (UTICA), Minister stressed that it was the responsibility of the government to become an enabler for the public and private sector businesses as they develop partnerships. Minister Akbar also visited Tunisia-India Fertilizer project (TIFERT), a US$ 450 million joint venture between Tunisian and Indian companies.

Minister Akbar had the opportunity to exchange views on wide ranging issues encompassing bilateral and regional matters during the meeting with Ennahda leader Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, who received in November 2016 the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for spreading Gandhian values outside India.

Minister Akbar delivered a keynote address at the Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies during which he described the core objective of India’s foreign policy: Indians were determined to join the high table of prosperity and to challenge the threat to this aspiration - Terrorism. Indians understood that prosperity was impossible without peace.

The visit underlines the importance that India attaches to expanding and deepening its relations with Tunisia. This visit offered an opportunity to reinvigorate the dialogue at a crucial juncture as both India and Tunisia are embarking upon a phase of rapid economic progress.

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