

India-Kuwait Bilateral Relations

India and Kuwait enjoy traditionally friendly relations, which are rooted in history and have stood the test of time. India has been a natural trading partner of Kuwait and until 1961 Indian Rupee was the legal tender in Kuwait. Till the discovery and development of oil, Kuwait's economy revolved around its fine harbour and maritime activities which included ship building, pearl diving, fishing and voyages to India on wooden *dhows* carrying dates, Arabian horses and pearls that were traded for wood, cereals, clothes and spices. The year 2021-22 marked 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between two countries.

2. Political Relations: The following have been the high-level visits at HoS/HoG level from both sides.

A. VVIP visits from India to Kuwait: Vice President Dr. Zakir Husain visited Kuwait in 1965. Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi visited Kuwait in 1981 and Vice President Shri Hamid Ansari visited Kuwait in 2009.

B. VVIP visits from Kuwait to India: Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah visited India in 1964, the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 1980 and again in 1983 (*for the NAM Summit*). The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited India in 2006. The Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited India in November 2013. Late Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabar Al Sabah visited India on a week-long private visit for relaxation – cum –medical checkup from 25th June to 2nd July 2017. A State visit to India of the late Amir was scheduled in October 2019; however, due to his health condition, the visit got deferred indefinitely.

3. Recent Ministerial Exchanges:

A. From India:

(I) Minister of State for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan visited Kuwait on 23-24 August for an official visit. During the visit, MoS called on H.E. Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Sabah, First DPM and Interior Minister and Sheikh Salem Abdullah, Foreign Minister of Kuwait on 24 August 2023. MoS also met Sheikh Jarrah Jaber, Deputy Foreign Minister for a luncheon meeting. He also interacted with a wide cross section of members of Indian community, including from the fields of business, health, education and other professionals.

(ii) EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar, paid an official visit to Kuwait from 09-11 June, 2021. He called on Prime Minister of Kuwait and delivered a letter from Hon'ble PM addressed to HH the Amir of Kuwait. A MoU for 'Cooperation in the Recruitment of Domestic Workers' was signed during the visit. Both Ministers launched the joint celebration of India-Kuwait establishment of 60 years diplomatic relations. EAM unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the Chancery premises.

(iii) Minister of Petroleum, Natural Gas and Steel, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, visited Kuwait on 11-12 October 2020 to offer condolences on the demise of late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah. During the visit, he called-on HH Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and met his counterpart Mr. Khaled Ali-Fadhel, Minister of Oil, Electricity and Water.

(iv) Minister of State of External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs Shri V. Muraleedharan paid an official visit to Kuwait on 14-15 September 2019 and met Minister of State for Economic Affairs of Kuwait and also held bilateral talks, on a wide range of issues, with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Kuwait.

(v) EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj paid an official visit to Kuwait on 30-31 October 2018 and called on the Amir H.H. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister H.H. Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah; and held wide ranging discussions with H.E. Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kuwait.

(vi) Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Housing & Urban Affairs met Mohammed Abdullatif Al-Fares, Minister of Oil of State of Kuwait on 15 November 2021 at Abu Dhabi during ADIPEC-2021.

(vii) MOS (MJA) paid a visit to Kuwait in September 2017 for the 3rd Joint Ministerial Commission Meeting (JMC) .

(viii) Gen. V.K. Singh (Retd.), Minister of State for External Affairs visited Kuwait from 10-11 January 2018 and met Minister of State for Social Affairs & Labour of Kuwait to help resolve the Indian labour issues with Kharafi National Company. MOS (VKS) had earlier visited Kuwait from 6-7 September 2016 and met Deputy PM and Interior Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister, Minister of Social Affairs & Labour and Governor of Farwaniya Governorate. MOS (MJA) again visited Kuwait on 13 February 2018 to attend International Conference for reconstruction of Iraq (ICRI) hosted by Kuwait.

(ix) National Security Advisor, Shri Ajit Doval, led a five member official delegation to Kuwait for the 3rd India-Kuwait Security Cooperation Dialogue from 13-14 March 2017.

(x) Other previous high-level visits included those of Shri S. M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs (*February 2010, February 2011*), Shri E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs (*15 January 2014, twice in 2013, October 2012*), Dr. K. Rahman Khan, Minister of Minority Affairs (*11-12 May 2014*) Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission (*1-3 July 2013*), Shri Vayalar Ravi, Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, (*Nov 2012*), Minister of State for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Shri R. P. N. Singh (*April 2011*), Shri Rahul Gandhi, MP (*June 2012*) and Shri Yashwant Sinha, MP (*Feb 2014*).

B. From Kuwait:

(i) Dr. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs of State of Kuwait visited India from 17-18 March 2021. A Joint Statement on establishment of a Joint Ministerial Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers was issued during the visit.

(ii) Hend Barak Al Sabeeh, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare visited India and held delegation level talks in New Delhi on 26 October 2018.

(iii) The Chief of Staff of Armed Forces Lt. General Mohd. Al Khoder visited India from 18-21 September 2017 and called on Minister of Defence, Mrs. Nirmala Sitaraman and other senior officials.

(iv) Other high level visits from Kuwait included: Dr Bader Hamad Al-Essa, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education (*September 2016, to participate in UNESCO International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education*), Dr. Abdul Mohsen Medejij Al-Medeij, Minister of Commerce & Industry (*January 2015 and November 2014*) and Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, President of the National Security Bureau of Kuwait (*February 2014*), Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Minister of Oil and Minister of Information of Kuwait (*September 2010*).

3. **Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC):** Following the visit of the Amir of Kuwait to India in 2006, both sides agreed to set up an “India-Kuwait Joint Ministerial Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation”. The 2nd JMC meeting was held in New Delhi in July 2008. The 3rd JMC meeting was held in Kuwait from 18-20 September 2017. MOS(MJA) headed the Indian side during the JMC. A Joint Statement on establishment of a Joint Ministerial Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers was issued during the visit of Foreign Minister of Kuwait to India on March 17-18, 2021.

4. **Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs):** The 1st FOC between India and Kuwait was held in New Delhi on 7 May 2012, the 2nd FOC was held in Kuwait on

11 September 2014, the 3rd FOC was held in New Delhi on 16 November 2016 and the 4th FOC was held in Kuwait on 01-02 August 2018. The 5th round of FOC was held in New Delhi on 2 May 2023.

5. The first UN/Multilateral consultations between India & Kuwait were held in Kuwait on 1 June 2023 at the level of JS(UNP) and Assistant Foreign Minister (IO).

6. **Hydrocarbon sector:** Kuwait remains a reliable supplier of crude oil & LPG to India, meeting our crucial energy needs. During the visit to Kuwait of Hon'ble Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Shri Dharmendra Pradhan in October 2020; delegation level talks were held between the two sides to strengthen bilateral engagement and cooperation in the oil domain. There is a mechanism of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Hydrocarbons that has been meeting regularly. The 6th meeting was held virtually on 31 July, 2023 at the level of JS(IC), MoPNG and Assistant Undersecretary, Ministry of Oil.

7. **Medical cooperation:**

i. India and Kuwait signed an MOU on Medical Cooperation on April 23, 2012 at New Delhi. A Joint Working Group on Medical Cooperation (JWG) was set up and its first meeting was held in Kuwait in November 2013. The 2nd Meeting of JWG on Medical Cooperation was held virtually on 31 August, 2021. The JWG reviewed bilateral cooperation in medical sector and agreed on a plan of actions to further deepen the extensive cooperation, with experience of joint fight against COVID-19.

ii. There is a sizable presence of Indian doctors and nurses in Kuwait who are regarded highly for their professionalism.

iii. **Cooperation during COVID-19 pandemic:**

➤ An Indian medical team travelled aboard a special aircraft from India to Kuwait in April 2020 to help fight COVID-19 in Kuwait.

➤ A consignment of 200000 doses of Covishield vaccines manufactured by Serum Institute of India (SII) was supplied to Kuwait in February 2021.

➤ During the Second wave of COVID-19 in India, the Council of Ministers of Kuwait, in a statement on 26 April 2021, expressed solidarity and extended support to India. An Air/Sea bridge was established to carry medical supplies from Kuwait to India. Kuwait sent a special aircraft with 282 oxygen cylinders, 60 oxygen concentrators,

ventilators and other medical supplies onboard reaching India on 04 May, 2021. This was followed by Indian Naval Ships, INS Kolkata, INS Kochi, INS Tarkash, INS Tabar & INS Shardul carrying liquid medical oxygen in ISO tanks, Oxygen cylinders, concentrators & other medical supplies to India. The empty tanks were ferried back to Kuwait from India by Indian Air force aircrafts. Indian community in Kuwait also contributed to the efforts. In total, over 425 metric tons of liquid medical oxygen, over 12,500 oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, ventilators and other medical equipment was sent from Kuwait to India during the month and half long operation. To show solidarity with India against its fight against COVID-19 pandemic, the seaside landmark of iconic Kuwait Towers were lit in Indian Tricolour on 26 May 2021 with 'Kuwait stands with India ("कुवैत आपके साथ है") message.

➤ The Embassy facilitated travel of about 2,20,000 Indians back to India on VBM flights from Kuwait during the Covid crisis.

8. Manpower cooperation: Labour and Manpower issues form the core of our relations with a large number of workers, both white collar and blue collar, working in Kuwait. Indians is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, both in terms of number of Indian citizens and also worker-wise. There is an existing mechanism of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Labour, Employment and Manpower Development to discuss these issues, which has been meeting regularly. The 7th JWG meeting was held virtually in 2021.

9. Civil Aviation: A weekly seat capacity arrangement of 12000 seats for carriers of each side is in place. From the Kuwaiti side, Kuwait airlines and Jazeera operates flights on this sector whereas from Indian side, Air India, Air India Express and Indigo operates flight between India and Kuwait. *There are multiple ports of call in India (Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Goa, Kochi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai).* During the COVID-19 pandemic, the two sides established an air bubble arrangement for movement of air traffic between the two countries.

10. Science & Technology: India and Kuwait have signed an S&T Agreement in April 2009. A delegation from KISR visited India in November 2013 and signed a Programme of Cooperation with Department of Science & Technology and an MOU with CSIR. Director General of Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research (KISR) led a two-member delegation to India in October 2019 and held fruitful discussions with various research institutions, including ISRO, CSIR, and IISC.

11. Education: There are 26 Schools in Kuwait following CBSE curriculum with over around 60,000 students, mainly Indians and some Arab and South Asian expats as well.

12. **Cultural Relations:** Historically, India-Kuwait relationship has been anchored in and nurtured by close cultural contact and mutual exchange. The Embassy has been promoting Indian culture and heritage through various programs and initiatives. During the year 2021-22, Embassy celebrated 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait by organizing various events and over 200 cultural programmes were organized. Cultural events like 'Splendors of India' and 'Namaste Kuwait' were held in 2022. A 'Festival of India' was held in Kuwait in March 2023 which was virtually inaugurated by MoS (External Affairs & Culture). It was previously held in year 2009. Programme for Cultural and Information Exchanges (2013-16) was signed in 2013. The Embassy participated in Kuwait summer festival in September 2023.

13. **Agreements:** Prominent amongst the various bilateral agreements signed are: Reciprocal Protection of Investment (2001); Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (2004); Extradition (2004); Juridical and Judicial Cooperation in Civil and Commercial Matters (2005); MoU on Labour, Employment and Manpower Development (2007); Scientific and Technological Cooperation (2009); Cultural and Information Exchanges (2009); Education and Learning Cooperation (2009); MoU on Medical Cooperation (2012); Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons (2013); MoU between Foreign Service Institute and the Saud N. Al-Sabah Kuwait Diplomatic Institute (2013); MOU on S&T Cooperation between CSIR and Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR); MoU on Sports & Youth Affairs (2013); MOU on cooperation between KISR and Ministry of Earth Sciences (2014); MOU between ISRO and KISR (2015). MOU between Office of CAG and State Audit Bureau of Kuwait (2016). The Protocol amending the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income between India and Kuwait, on 15 January 2017. Agreement on mutual exemption from visa requirements for holders of Diplomatic, Official and Special Passports (*concluded in October 2018*). Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation and Recruitment for Domestic Workers (*June 2021*).

14. Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement signed with the State of Kuwait with the initial tenure of 15 years, came into force on 28 June 2003 and expired on 27 June 2018. Two rounds of negotiations for the new BIT have taken place, the last one in June 2023.

15. **Indian Community in Kuwait:** The Indian community with a strength of approx. 1 million is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait and is regarded as the community of first preference among the expatriate communities. Professionals like engineers, doctors, chartered accountants, scientists, software experts, management consultants, architects; technicians and nurses; retail traders and businessmen are present in Kuwait, though a large proportion

consists of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The Indian Business Community in Kuwait has carved a niche in the Kuwaiti market in retail as well as distributorship. Many of the business houses are present in Kuwait for two-three generations. Presence of NRI owned retail outlets such as Lulu Hypermarket and Centre Point, as well as large NRI owned distributor companies have contributed to a growing range of Indian products in Kuwait and has helped meet the requirements of the large Indian community in Kuwait. There are over 200 Indian associations registered with the Embassy. These associations organize regularly socio-cultural programmes for the benefit of their members.

Indian PSUs viz. TCIL, New India Assurance, LIC, Oriental Insurance etc have offices in Kuwait, in association with local sponsors, as per prevailing regulations. Indian private sector companies such as Air India, L&T, Shapoorji Pallonji, Kalpataru Power Transmission Ltd, TERI, WIPRO, Tata, Ashok Leyland etc. are also present in Kuwait with local tie-ups .

October 2023