

## 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 a 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 *dhow*s carrying dates, Arabian horses and pearls that were traded for wood, cereals, clothes and spices. The year 2021-22 marked 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between two countries.

**2. Political Relations:** India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait following its independence from British Protectorate in 1961. Prior to establishment of diplomatic relations, India was represented by a Trade Commissioner. The following have been the high-level visits at HoS/HoG level from both sides:

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

**VVIP visits from Kuwait to India:** Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (1964); Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (1980) and again in 1983 (*for the NAM Summit*); Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (2006); Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (2013). Amir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabar Al Sabah visited India on a week-long private visit to Greater Noida in July 2017.

### **Recent Ministerial Visits:**

- Minister of Oil and Natural Gas of India (MoPNG), Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, visited Kuwait on 17 December 2023, as PM's special envoy to pay condolences on the sad demise of previous Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al- Sabah.
- Minister of State of External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan visited Kuwait on 23-24 August 2023. He called on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior and Foreign Minister of Kuwait.
- 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.
- 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.

### **3. Bilateral Mechanisms/Cooperation:**

**i. Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC):** Following the visit of the Amir of Kuwait to India in 2006, an India-Kuwait Joint Ministerial Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation was set up at the level of MOS. Both sides agreed to elevate on Joint Ministerial Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers in 2021.

**ii. Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs):** The First FOC between India and Kuwait was held in New Delhi on 7 May 2012. The last round (5<sup>th</sup>) of FOC was held in New Delhi on 2 May 2023 at the level of JS(Gulf), MEA and AFM for Asia Affairs, MoFA Kuwait.

**iii. UN/Multilateral consultations:** The first meeting on UN/Multilateral consultations between India & Kuwait was held in Kuwait on 1 June 2023 at the level of JS(UNP), MEA and Assistant Foreign Minister (IO), MOFA Kuwait.

**iv. Hydrocarbon sector:** A Joint Working Group on the Hydrocarbons Sector was set up and its first meeting was held in Kuwait in December 2009. The last (6<sup>th</sup>) meeting was held virtually on 31 July 2023.

**v. Medical cooperation:** India and Kuwait signed an MOU on Medical Cooperation in April, 2012. A Joint Working Group on Medical Cooperation (JWG) was set up and its first meeting was held in Kuwait in November 2013 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting was held virtually in August, 2021. There is a sizable presence of Indian doctors and nurses in Kuwait who are regarded highly for their professionalism.

**vi. Manpower cooperation:** Indians are the largest expatriate community in Kuwait (approximately 1 million), both in terms of number of Indian citizens and also workforce-wise. Labour and Manpower issues form an important part of our relations. 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 7<sup>th</sup> JWG meeting was held virtually in 2021.

**vii. Civil Aviation:** India and Kuwait signed Bilateral Air services agreement in June, 2007. 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 to Nine destinations whereas from Indian side, Air India, Air India Express and Indigo operates flights to Kuwait City. There are multiple ports of call in India (Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Goa, Kochi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai).

**viii. Science & Technology:** India and Kuwait 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.

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

information, there are not many Indian students pursuing higher education in Kuwait. Similarly, there are few Kuwaiti students in Indian Universities. 'India Corners' were setup in Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Kuwait Technical College, and Kuwait College of Science and Technology in 2024.

**4. Commercial Relations:** Indo-Kuwaiti relations have always had an important trade dimension. India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait. Total bilateral trade with Kuwait during FY 2023-24 was US\$ 10.47 billion. Indian Exports have increased from US\$ 1.56 billion in 2022-23 to US\$ 2.1 billion in 2023-24 with YoY growth of 34.7% with top Five export items being Aircraft parts, Cereals, organic Chemicals. Vehicles, Electric machinery. During FY 2023-24, Kuwait was the 9th largest oil supplier with about 3.0 % of India's total energy needs.

Indian PSUs viz. TCIL, New India Assurance, LIC, Oriental Insurance 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.

**5. Bilateral 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); MoU on Medical Cooperation (2012); Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons (2013); MOU on cooperation between KISR and Ministry of Earth Sciences (2014); MOU between ISRO and KISR (2015). 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*). The MoU on Defence Cooperation is also in advanced stages of finalization. Around 15 agreements / MoUs are under different stages of finalization.

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. The last round of negotiations for the new BIT have taken place in June 2023.

**6. Cultural Relations:** Historically, India-Kuwait relationship has been anchored by close cultural contacts and mutual exchange. 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 under the aegis of Ministry of Culture, India. A new Culture Exchange Programme(CEP) has been agreed between both sides.

**7. 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, as well as large NRI owned distributor companies have contributed to a growing range of Indian products in Kuwait. There are over 200 Indian associations registered with the Embassy. These associations are interested in organizing cultural programmes as well as charitable activities on regular basis.

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*June 2024*