

## India, UAE agree to institutionalize India-GCC dialogue process

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to institutionalize the India-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) dialogue process with regular meetings.

The two sides agreed to institutionalize the dialogue process, which as of now is held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting, during a meeting between visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

'A proposal was put forward by the Indian side to institutionalize the India-GCC dialogue process and the UAE side has agreed to this,' India's ambassador to the UAE Talmiz Ahmad said here Tuesday, briefing reporters about Mukherjee's two-day visit to this Gulf nation concluding Tuesday.

The two leaders had met in the UAE capital of Abu Dhabi late Monday night.

The India-GCC dialogue process started in 2003 on the sidelines of the UNGA meeting and the practice has continued over the years.

The GCC - comprising the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar - is increasingly coordinating the political, economic and defence and security policies of its member states.

The GCC Customs Union, formed in 2005, constitutes the world's second largest trading bloc. The group is now working on adopting a single currency by 2010.

It is in the face of this that the India-GCC dialogue process was started so that the region can have a combined political relationship with India.

'As of now the dialogue process is held in a very ad hoc manner on the sidelines of the UNGA. The meetings don't get the importance these deserve due the presence of a large number of other foreign leaders,' Ahmad said.

'This is why we are trying to institutionalize the process whereby the meetings between the two sides are held annually in either one of the six GCC capital cities or in New Delhi,' he said.

During the meeting, it was also decided that the India-UAE Joint Commission, which was revived after a gap of 13 years last year, would now meet annually.

'The other two major areas the ministers looked at are enhancement in (bilateral) investment and cooperation in the energy sector,' Ahmad said.

'Also discussed was the situation in Lebanon, the Middle East peace process, developments in Iraq, the Iranian nuclear programme issue with the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as latest developments in the Indian subcontinent,' the state-run Emirates News Agency (WAM) said in a report.

Mukherjee met Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Tuesday and discussed matters of mutual interest.

'The meeting was held in a very warm and cordial atmosphere,' Ahmad said.

'The minister expressed his gratitude to the crown prince for the warm treatment accorded to Indians in the UAE. On his part, the crown prince highly appreciated the contributions of Indians in the growth of the UAE.'

There are around 1.5 million Indians in the UAE.

The crown prince, according to the ambassador, said the Indian workers were the most in demand in this country among all expatriate workers and specifically mentioned the Indians' tendency to stay away from crime.

Mukherjee arrived in Dubai later Tuesday and attended a presentation on Dubai companies' investment plans in India.

He was later scheduled to address the Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC), Dubai.

The minister will leave Dubai Wednesday morning for the Russian city of Yekaterinburg to attend a meeting of foreign ministers of the BRIC countries and a trilateral meeting between India, China and Russia.

*Aroonim Bhuyan* ( © IANS / India eNews)