



**PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY
PUDUCHERRY**

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

In collaboration with
Ministry of External Affairs Government of India

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER

AMBASSADOR ANIL TRIGUNAYAT
Former Ambassador of India to Jordan, Libya and Malta

on

India's Outreach to Middle East and West Asia

Prof. Gurmeet Singh
Vice-Chancellor, Pondicherry University
has kindly consented to preside over the Lecture

Venue
UMISARC Auditorium
Silver Jubilee campus
Pondicherry University

**Date : Tuesday, March 27, 2018 at
Time: 3:15 PM**

ALL ARE INVITED TO ATTEND


P.P. MATHUR
Coordinator

India's outreach to Middle East and West Asia

(Amb Anil Trigunayat at Pondicherry University March 27, 2018)

India always had historic and civilizational links and interactions with the region at least from the Indus- Dilmun and Mesopotamia times around 3000 BC through trade and intellectual exchanges. Indian Rupee was a legal tender in the gulf countries even until the 1970s. India's relations with the region have grown, deepened and diversified over decades although they have been tested and sometimes even strained especially during the 1973 oil crisis. But Indian equanimity and long term commitment to the region and its prosperity and stability were able to tide over the short term hiatuses. India's policy of 'Look West' has been converted to 'Link West'. In recent times, high level exchanges have become frequent which is clearly the way forward in the Arab world. India and Indians, despite the West Asia's misplaced empathic relations with Pakistan, enjoy tremendous good will and continue to be liked and respected by the people and governments in the Middle east as they are looked at as stable and committed work force contributing to the well being of the host countries. No wonder even in GCC alone we have over 8 million Indians and thousands of Indian companies and businesses making the region as India's major trading partner. The region is also extremely important for India's energy security as almost 65-70% of our oil and gas requirements are met from there. In addition the Indian diaspora remittances contribute greatly to India's foreign exchange reserves. In recent times the richer countries in the region have begun to see India as a reliable investment opportunity and India is trying to veer the sovereign wealth funds to invest in over a trillion dollar Indian opportunity- the fastest major economy in the world. The countries in the region also look to India as a stabilising force and would like to see more and more Indian security presence in the region. Hitherto we have been somewhat reluctant.

Although we have maintained excellent bilateral relations with all the countries in the region including with Israel since 1992 hitherto we had predicated the engagement on the basis of our policy on the Palestinian issue both due to our historic stand and domestic compulsions which had been greatly appreciated by the Arab world. Of course with the 2014 onset of the BJP Government led by PM Narendra Modi there was a definite concern among the Arab countries that India will surely bend towards Israel at the expense of Palestinian cause and Indo-Arab relations. Apart from crucial relations be it the concern for diaspora welfare or energy security and volume of investments the fact that PM Modi's first visits were not to Israel but to UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran. He also became the first PM to visit Palestine while visited UAE twice and Oman too only early this year. And the way PM Modi developed great personal bonhomie with the leaders there cemented the trust and put them at ease and reinforced their interest in India. No doubt UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar despite being on the opposing sides of the horizon are looking to deepen ties with India as it is also in their own interest. Of course the two PM level visits with Israel within a span of six months have not dampened that spirit. This has also been possible as the countries in the Middle East especially Saudi Arabia and UAE and several others want to or have begun to normalise the relations with the Jewish state and are supporting the American project which was clearly evident during the recent Jerusalem controversy when Jordan and Turkey were on the fore front to rally and oppose the US and Israeli position that undermines the well-established principles and red-lines.

During the talk I will explore on our age old ties and current strategic dispensation in the Middle East while it remains in a flux.