

Ambassador's Interview- Bahrain This Month
(25 July 2022)

Q1- Your Excellency, on the occasion of the 75th year of independence of the Republic of India, what can you tell us about the country's achievements?

This year is a milestone in the journey of Independent India. We are celebrating 75th anniversary of India's independence with the theme "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahostav". The celebrations spanning over two years were inaugurated by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 12 March, 2021, commemorating the historic Dandi March.

India's progress and achievements are there for all to see. A pluralistic society and the largest democracy on earth, India has made tremendous strides in socio-economic development, and in industrial, scientific and technological advances.

In almost all sectors, from agriculture, heavy engineering, infrastructure, services, health, education, to hi-tech areas of space, defence, IT, AI, big data, pharmaceuticals and medical, India is today at the top of the ladder. Indian economy, the 3rd largest (in PPP terms) in the world today, is well poised to become the growth engine of the world.

Q2- What do you consider to be some of the most significant achievements in India over recent years?

As I said before, Indian growth story has been phenomenal. I can go on and on. But I will talk about sectors relevant to the contemporary times. In the post-Covid period, when economic recovery is major focus of all governments, Government of India's substantial efforts have led to India becoming the fastest growing major economy in the world today. In the FY 2021-22, India attracted its highest ever FDI with USD 83.6 billion. This is testimony to our aggressive push for economic and infrastructure development, and business and investor friendly climate.

India is steadily claiming its place in the global value chain of manufacturing. It is the largest two-wheeler and 4th largest car manufacturer in the world. However it has not left traditional sectors behind. As food security increasingly threatens global markets, India has remained the second largest food grains producer in the world.

India is also spearheading progressive movements. India has built its renewable infrastructure to claim the 4th largest capacity of renewable energy; thus playing key role in global community on environment and climate change matters.

In the 75 years journey of independent India, we have followed the principle of 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam' i.e. 'the world is one family'. This was evident in India's

leading role in the global fight against Covid-19 pandemic, the most difficult health and economic challenge the world has seen in recent times. With its top class and highly competitive pharmaceutical industry which is 3rd largest in the world by volume, and world's largest vaccine production capacity, India provided vaccines, medicines and other medical assistance to over 150 countries across the world.

Q3- The Kingdom of Bahrain and the Republic of India have a rich history of trade relations spanning several decades. How do you see the current status of the commercial and economic relationship between the two countries?

Actually our trade and people to people exchanges go back to thousands of years tracing their origins to the period of Dilmun and Indus Valley civilizations. Ancient Bahraini traders had carried out flourishing trade of Bahraini pearls with spices from India. Many Indian traders have come to Bahrain as early as 200 years ago and made the Kingdom their home.

India and Bahrain enjoy excellent bilateral relations characterized by regular high level political exchanges and interactions, and cordial political, security, economic, trade, cultural and people to people ties.

Our Bilateral trade registered growth of about 55% in year 2021-22 and reached to the highest ever level of USD 1.65 billion. Investments from both directions are also increasing. Indian cumulative FDI in Bahrain has reached to approx. \$1.5 billion increasing by more than 35% since 2019.

Our bilateral cooperation is diversifying from traditional areas to the new emerging areas of pharmaceuticals, IT, space, Fintech and renewable energy reflecting contemporary times.

The cooperation is set to intensify in the coming days as India and Bahrain find themselves in a complimentary position to benefit each other. Technology, economy, IT, health, education, energy, manufacturing, skill and youth will be the key drivers.

Q4- In a recent interview with BTM, you mentioned that were several key sectors of the Indian economy including hydroponics, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals and food security which offer good potential for Bahrain investment. Have there been any further recent developments on this front?

As I already mentioned, these are important sectors of our bilateral cooperation and there is continuous engagement and several developments in these fields between our two countries. We have, in association with Government agencies and trade bodies in both countries, taken a number of initiatives to accelerate trade and investments on both sides. This is reflected in tremendous growth in bilateral trade and investment last year.

Both in health and pharmaceuticals and renewable energy sectors, the Government agencies as well as private sectors of our two countries are working to increase collaboration in bilateral trade and investment, capacity building and exchange of professionals.

Given traditional reliance of Gulf countries on India in Food Sector, as well as recent focus of Government of Bahrain in ensuring food security, this sector has emerged as key area of bilateral economic cooperation. India intends to be a partner of Bahrain in its food security efforts. We aspire to turn the traditional trading relations in this sector into a strategic one. There are significant opportunities for investment in food parks in India. The Embassy facilitated business meetings between the private sectors of the two sides involving the nodal Indian agency, Agricultural Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), which stressed on improving connectivity and logistics to further promote bilateral trade and economic cooperation in this sector.

Q5- How many Indians reside in the Kingdom? Which sectors are they primarily involved in?

Indian community numbers around 350,000, and constitutes almost a quarter of the population of Bahrain. They play a significant role in the economic development of Bahrain. Our vibrant community in Bahrain plays an important role in promoting our bilateral ties and further strengthening the existing goodwill between our two countries.

Indians are employed in almost all sectors of the Bahraini economy. While a large chunk of them are employed in blue collar jobs; many are CEOs, CFOs, and Professionals, including Chartered Accountants, Doctors, Engineers, Teachers and Nurses. A number of Indian families own and run successful businesses.

It is a matter of pride for all of us that with their professionalism and high standards of work ethics, our community has made a name for itself in Bahrain. This is a fact which has been acknowledged by the Leadership of both countries.

The people of this small island nation have welcomed Indian community with big heart. Thanks to Kingdom's rich tradition of diversity, tolerance, co-existence and harmony, Bahrain has become amongst the preferred destinations for the Indian community.

Q6- A recent report stated that a large number of workers in Bahrain earn a low salary considering the standard of living in Bahrain. How does the embassy ensure that Indians employed in Bahrain are fairly compensated in the workplace?

Bahrain is among the most preferred destinations for work not only by Indian community but also by other expats. This is indicative of Kingdom's welcoming society, conducive economic environment and worker-friendly policies.

As far as Indian workers are concerned, there is a transparent processes for their recruitment in foreign countries. Government of India has created an E-migrate portal, which lists the required processes and documentation for employment of Indian workers abroad. It also contain the list of authorized Indian agents. Any foreign employer including Bahraini employers are required to register at this portal for recruitment of Indian workers.

There are bilateral mechanisms to ensure that the agreed employment contracts are adhered to. Also, minimum wages for different categories of workers have also been fixed by Government of India.

Further, the Embassy has a dedicated Labour Section which remains in constant touch with the workers. We work in close coordination with the LMRA and other local authorities including the Ministry of Labour on any issues our community face.

Q7- The embassy is known to make regular visits to assess the living conditions of blue-collar workers in Bahrain. What can you tell us about the findings and outcome of the embassy's intervention on such visits?

I and my Consular team, regularly visit labour camps. Personally it also provides me an opportunity to spend time with them and listen to their problems as well as suggestions.

In most of the camps I visited, I found workers happy and satisfied with the living conditions. I must mention here that the Ministry of Labour, LMRA as well as other concerned Bahraini authorities have taken various measures for welfare of the workers and labourers. I take this opportunity to convey gratitude to the Leadership and the Government of Kingdom of Bahrain for ensuring the welfare of Indian community in Bahrain.

I was astounded by the feeling of community within the camp, and also the role played by the members of the wider Indian community and Indian community organisations in comradery and lending a helping hand. I would particularly like to commend the work of ICRF functioning under the patronage of Indian Embassy in this regard.

Q8- What can you tell us about the impact of the CBSE curriculum and Indians employed in the education sector in Bahrain? How many Bahrainis are

currently pursuing their higher education in India, considering that restrictions caused by the pandemic have now relaxed somewhat?

Indian Education System has earned good reputation around the world. The New Education Policy launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi in 2021 has introduced further reforms in country's education system as per contemporary times, with the aim of making India a global knowledge superpower.

I am very happy to share that more than 24,000 students are studying in the 8 Indian CBSE Schools in Bahrain. CBSE schools are among the best, and are known for their quality education in the region. These schools also demonstrate the effectiveness of Indian education system as thousands of locals and other expatriates prefer to admit their children in the CBSE schools.

Education has been a traditional area of bilateral cooperation with Bahrain and our CBSE schools continue to play an important role in cementing this cooperation. Many of the prominent dignitaries from Bahrain have studied in India in the past. In 2019, just before pandemic, more than 100 students from Bahrain went to India to pursue their studies. The trend got temporarily disrupted during the pandemic. However, I am happy to share that recently we are seeing an increase in education visa to Bahraini students.

Both sides are taking several initiatives including furthering collaboration between the Universities and Technical institutions of both sides as well as exchange of students and youth.

Q9- Are there any facts or figures that you can share with us with regards to Indians employed in the healthcare sector in Bahrain? What are some of their most significant achievements/ what has been their impact in recent years? (Please feel free to name individuals, if necessary)

Health care is an important area of our bilateral cooperation. Our collaboration in this sector as well as exchange of medical professionals is not new. If I recall correctly, one Indian doctor, Dr. Bhandarkar visited Bahrain as early as 1925 and opened a clinic in Muharraq.

There are approximately 8000 Indian health professionals in Bahrain including doctors, nurses and technical staff across all government and private hospitals. There is also significant Indian investment in healthcare sector in Bahrain.

Indian healthcare professionals are respected, highly regarded for their professionalism with human touch, and preferred in Bahrain as well as in many countries abroad. During the pandemic, Indian healthcare workers rose to the

challenge, and worked shoulder to shoulder with their Bahraini counterparts to make Bahrain's fight against pandemic a success.

Q10- The Indian embassy recently organized a World Yoga Day event. What can you tell us about it? Can you tell us about the success of such events in raising awareness about Indian culture, and bridging the gap between communities?

Yoga is a gift of India to the mankind. As you may be aware, UNGA in its session in December 2014, passed the resolution sponsored by India and record 175 co-sponsors to celebrate International Day of Yoga on 21 June. Since then, International Day of Yoga is being celebrated world over with great enthusiasm.

The Embassy celebrated the International Day of Yoga (IDY) this year with two events on 21 June 2022 as part of the "Global Yoga Ring" which envisaged the live telecast of Yoga sessions, progressively from East to West across the world. The events on 21 June was a culmination of more than 30 events throughout the month of June to celebrate Yoga, with Curtain Raiser event organized on 3rd June.

The morning event on 21 June was simultaneous yoga protocol and exercises which was held at 7 Indian schools in Bahrain, with participation of more than 700 students from various nationalities. The evening session at the Isa Sports City in association with Ministry of Youth and Sports and National Health Regularly Authority, Kingdom of Bahrain was attended by around 400 yoga enthusiasts including yoga practitioners, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives from Indian associations, and members of Indian and Bahraini community.

I am happy to see the great enthusiasm of Indian as well as Bahraini community over the years towards Yoga. This year's events witnessed overwhelming participation of over 4000 people including Indian, Bahraini as well as people from other nationalities in Bahrain.

I would like to place on record my appreciation to the Government of Bahrain for facilitation and support to the Embassy in celebrating International Day of Yoga in a befitting manner.

Q11- What are some of the most significant developments between the two countries in recent years?

I have already spoken about our excellent and ever growing bilateral relations. The visionary Leadership of our two countries have guided our relations through regular dialogues and bilateral visits. Even during the pandemic period, the high level interactions, bilateral visits and meetings of structural mechanisms continued. Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi held telephonic conversations with His Majesty the King as well as with His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister. Both

our Foreign Ministers visited each other's countries. The Minister of State for External Affairs of India visited Bahrain, and Undersecretary for Political Affairs, MoFA visited India in March 2022.

Ministers of Oil, Youth Affairs and Sports and Education have held virtual meetings. Several meetings of bilateral mechanisms in diverse sectors have been held. These includes 3rd meeting of High Joint Commission led by Foreign Ministers of the two countries; 5th meeting of Foreign Office Consultations led by Undersecretary, MoFA from Bahraini side and Secretary, MEA from Indian side as well as Joint Working Groups in the areas of Health, Renewable Energy, Security and Counter Terrorism.

Bahrain joined International Solar Alliance as its 86th member in March 2022. Both countries have achieved the record level of bilateral trade and investments.

I can go on and on. The list is pretty long.

I see immense opportunities, potential and complementarities for greater collaboration and partnerships between our two countries.

As India and Kingdom of Bahrain celebrate Golden Jubilee of establishment of diplomatic relations, I am confident that our bonds of friendship will be further strengthened and the multifaceted bilateral cooperation will scale newer heights.

Q12- Is there anything else you would like to add?