

INTERVIEW

1) Your Excellency, could you speak on the significance of India observing the nation's 75 years of independence with special vigour and enthusiasm?

75th anniversary of India's Independence is a significant milestone in the history of our nation. The whole nation is celebrating 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the glorious journey of 75 years of progressive India, and its rich cultural heritage and traditions. India's tremendous strides in socio-economic development and in all spheres of economy – from traditional areas of agriculture, industry, education and health to high-tech areas of IT, Artificial Intelligence, medical and pharma, space, defence and renewable energy is there for all to see.

As a democratic polity, pluralistic society, innovative economy and a culture of unmatched diversity, India's role and contribution have a real weight and value in the international arena. Our principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' i.e., 'the world is one family' was clearly visible in our efforts in the global fight against COVID-19 pandemic, in which India provided vaccines, medicines and other medical assistance to over 150 countries across the world.

2) Being a senior member of India's diplomatic team, Your Excellency, could you throw light on India's foreign policy towards the GCC nations including Bahrain?

India's relations with the countries in this region are historical and deep-rooted, forged by generations of travelers across the Arabian Sea.

India deeply values its close and friendly ties with GCC countries. The region hosts a large Indian diaspora of close to 10 million and is important for our trade and energy security interests.

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi has visited almost all GCC countries. The regular interaction and exchanges at the highest level between India and GCC countries have been the hallmark of our relations. As a result of these interactions, the relationship has seen constant upward trajectory over the past few years, due to the convergence in interest between the countries in the region and India. It has diversified beyond traditional sectors, and now include maritime security, robust trade and investment collaboration especially in the sectors of technology, energy, food and agro products, engineering goods, infrastructure, health, and education.

India joining Combined Maritime Forces, headquarters in Bahrain as Associate Partner underlined India's commitment towards collective responsibility of maritime security of the region. India is committed to build upon the solid foundation of trust and friendship between our countries and peoples for mutual prosperity and peace. I am confident that our close and strong ties with Bahrain and with other GCC countries will further deepen to diverse areas in the coming years.

3) What have been the major milestones in Indo-Bahrain relations during your tenure as the Ambassador?

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 deep rooted historical bilateral ties have further strengthened and diversified over the years. Despite the restrictions posed by the pandemic, our relations continued on upward trajectory in the past 2 years. I will try to give a snapshot of major milestones.

Our two countries closely collaborated in the global fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Even during the pandemic, the high level interactions, bilateral visits and meetings of structural mechanisms continued. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra 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 and held telephonic conversations. The Minister of State for External Affairs and Deputy Naval Chief of India visited Bahrain, and Undersecretary for Political Affairs, MoFA visited India.

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 include 3rd meeting of High Joint Commission led by Foreign Ministers of the two countries; 5th meeting of Foreign Office Consultations; Joint Working Groups in the areas of Health, Renewable Energy, Security and Counter Terrorism; and several meetings between private sectors of two countries in diverse areas of trade & economy.

Bahrain joined International Solar Alliance as its 86th member in March 2022. India joined Combined Maritime Forces, headquartered in Bahrain, as Associate Partner, last month. Both countries have achieved record level of bilateral trade and investments. In fact, bilateral trade between India and Bahrain in

FY 2021-22 was highest ever at USD.1.65 billion and registered a growth of over 55% compared to last year.

You all have seen the year long celebrations of Golden Jubilee of establishment of Diplomatic Relations between our two countries which are still continuing. The enthusiasm and participation of the people of our two countries in these celebrations commemorating our historical bonds of friendship and multi-faceted bilateral cooperation was remarkable.

I see immense opportunities, potential and complementarities for greater collaboration and partnership between our two countries in diverse areas in times to come.

4) As a diplomat, Your Excellency would have served many Indian missions across many countries. What makes the Indian diaspora in the Kingdom unique, compared to those in other nations?

The Indian diaspora has been an integral part of India's growth story. Indian Embassies around the world are committed to ensuring their welfare, and maintain regular interaction with their respective Indian diaspora.

This is my 5th foreign posting. I have closely interacted with Indian diaspora in all countries wherever I have been posted to. With their hard work and professionalism, Indian diaspora has made a name for itself and contributed to raising India's profile in their respective host countries.

Bahrain hosts a large Indian diaspora. The Indian community (about 350,000) constitutes over 25 percent of the population of Bahrain. It is a diverse diaspora coming from different parts of India and engaged in professions ranging from owning businesses, working as CEOs, professionals including Chartered Accountants, doctors, teachers and nurses to blue collar workers.

Our people to people relations with Bahrain go back thousands of years. Some of the well-known Indian families have come here as early as 200 years ago, and made Bahrain their home. The people of Bahrain have welcomed Indian community with open arms. The Leadership and the Government of the Kingdom have provided them an environment in which they have not only excelled professionally, but also enjoy social, cultural and religious freedom. Indian community, on its part, contributed significantly to the development of the Kingdom, which is acknowledged by all sections of the Bahraini society.

To me, this historical bonds of friendship and mutual respect between the Indian and Bahraini people makes Indian diaspora in the Kingdom unique.

5) What are the core strengths of India that could make the nation a leader amongst the nations of the world, especially in the backdrop of an ambitious \$5 trillion economy plan along with many other soft power strategies that are at work?

India today is among the fastest growing major economies in the world and is a global success story. It is a pluralistic society and the largest democracy on earth. Our rich history, culture, heritage and tradition of 'Unity in Diversity' along with tremendous strides in socio-economic development, industrial, scientific and technological advances are among India's core strengths.

Our young skilled talent pool is a unique strength for India, bolstered by our advances in hi-tech sectors and the skilling of this young demography in advanced fields. Our large consumer base, along with a stable market, makes it an attractive destination for investments.

India's economy is also well poised. Our Ease of Doing Business and openness and transparency have attracted investment from across the world making it the 7th largest recipient of FDI of about USD 85 billion in FY 2021-22. Indian economy, the 3rd largest (in PPP terms) in the world, is the world's growth engine. India is steadily claiming its place in the global value chain of manufacturing.

With the inherent strengths of 5 pillars of Atma Nirbhar Bharat – Economy, Infra-structure, System, Demography and Demand, India is well on its way to reach the target of \$5 trillion economy.

6) Your Excellency, could you share with our readers one memorable moment you cherish the most during your diplomatic tenure in the Kingdom?

There are so many! It is not easy for me to single out one memorable moment. Soon after my arrival in this beautiful Kingdom, I was struck by the warmth and friendliness of people of Bahrain. The mutual respect, trust and friendship between Indian and Bahraini people forms the bedrock of our close and multifaceted bilateral ties. The visionary policies of tolerance and peaceful coexistence of the Leadership and Government of Kingdom of Bahrain have made the Kingdom among the preferred destinations for Indian community.

All aspects of bilateral relations – high level visits, dialogue mechanisms and progress in diverse areas of bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation, as well as welfare of our diaspora – is something which every diplomat cherishes. And there has been excellent progress on all these fronts during my tenure so far, as I have already told earlier.

If I have to single out one moment, it has to be the simultaneous illumination of the historic monuments of Bab Al Bahrain and Qutub Minar in Indian tricolor and Bahraini national colours respectively, on the occasion of Golden Jubilee of establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. It symbolized the shared culture, civilizational relationship and deep bonds of friendship between our peoples. I am sure that these majestic visuals will forever remain etched in the memory of all who witnessed this momentous occasion.