



**“India’s role and contribution have a real weight and value in the international arena - our close and friendly relationship with GCC countries has seen constant upward trajectory.”**

*Ambassador Piyush Srivastava of India*

*On the occasion of the 76th Indian Independence Day, Ambassador Piyush Srivastava spoke to Salaam Bahrain about the pivotal role of Gulf Indians and India’s growing prestige on the global stage*

**1. Excellency, our warmest wishes on this special occasion. Now that the world is emerging from the crisis of the pandemic, what is the role of Gulf Indians in helping the Indian economy find steady growth? After all, West Asia and the GCC have emerged as important players in India’s ambitious \$5 trillion growth vision.**

Indeed, this region is important for our global trade as well as the target of achieving a US\$ 5 trillion economy. Our close and friendly relationship with GCC countries has seen constant upward trajectory over the past few years. 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.

In the last financial year, India’s trade with GCC countries has risen sharply to over US\$ 155 billion, registering an impressive growth of about 75% compared to last year. The role of Indian expatriates has always been significant. It is a known fact that Indian expatriate workforce is respected for its work ethics, integrity and apolitical approach. Around 10 million Indians live and work across the Gulf, sending big chunk of remittances to India.

Indians own large businesses across the region and are involved in almost all sectors of economy. Their contribution to economic development of their host countries and India, as well as in promoting bilateral and regional trade & investment ties has been recognised by the leadership of these countries as well as India.

**2. We are nearing the completion of the celebration of 50 years of Indo-Bahrain diplomatic ties – what would you say are the milestones in this diplomatic journey and how did the celebrations help to prepare for the future bilateral vision?**

The year-long celebrations of Golden Jubilee of establishment of Diplomatic Relations between India and Kingdom of Bahrain kickstarted in October 2021 in a grand manner. India was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Bahrain in 1971. I must though add that our bilateral ties are historical, rich and diverse, dating back to thousands of years. There are several milestones in this journey.

The visionary Leadership of our two countries have guided our relations through regular dialogues and bilateral visits. Even during the pandemic, the high level interactions, bilateral visits and meetings of structural mechanisms continued. Now with COVID restrictions being considerably eased everywhere, we expect more bilateral visits and interactions, including high level visits.

The Indian community in Bahrain has been an integral part of Bahrain’s developmental journey. The continued strong bonds of friendship between our peoples provides depth and resilience to our bilateral ties. Indian merchants have settled in Bahrain from close to two centuries. Many Bahraini businessmen and dignitaries travelled to India and stayed in Mumbai and other places for business and study. Bahrain hosts 200-year old Shreenathji temple which was the only Hindu temple in the region at that time.

In recent times, the path breaking visit of His Majesty the King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to India in 2014 laid the roadmap for our present bilateral collaboration. His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa's visit to India in 2012 gave strong push to our trade and economic ties. The historic visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Bahrain in 2019 provided momentum to our partnership and diversified it into new and emerging areas. Our two countries have established structural mechanisms of regular consultation and dialogues on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest, as well as signed a number of MoUs/Agreements in key areas. Our two countries achieved their highest-ever bilateral trade of US\$ 1.65 billion in last financial year. Bahrain joining International Solar Alliance this year will open up further avenues of bilateral as well as multilateral collaboration in renewable energy sector.

### **3. Indian-run medical facilities dominate the Bahrain private medical sector. In addition, Indian alternative medicine (Ayurveda) is also well-represented in Bahrain.**

The health sector including traditional medicine has been an important component of the deep-rooted and multifaceted bilateral cooperation between India and Kingdom of Bahrain.

The first Indian doctor, Dr. Bhandarkar arrived in the Kingdom as early as 1920s. I am sure, many in Bahrain would still be familiar with his name. Today, the Kingdom's health sector has a strong presence of over 8000 healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses and technical staff. There is also significant Indian investment in this sector with presence of large Indian hospitals including KIMSHealth, Apollo, and diagnostic chains such as Thyrocare. There is also good presence of the Indian alternative medicine sector including in Ayurveda, yoga and homeopathy in Bahrain. This sector has acquired significance, particularly in the post COVID-19 scenario. Bahrain has a strong healthcare sector and favourable regulatory environment. Indian healthcare sector including traditional medicine and pharmaceutical industry are among the leaders in the world. There is thus complementarities and strong possibilities of further collaboration in this sector. This is being propelled by the regular meetings of government level institutional mechanisms as well as private sectors of both countries.

### **4. What are other Indian sectors that will grow in Bahrain in the coming months?**

In addition to health, the outlook for trade and economic cooperation between our two countries is very bright in diverse sectors of IT, Fintech, big data, space, entertainment, construction and infrastructure, education, food security, energy, technology, start-ups and Govt. SMEs. I want to give you some numbers to put this in perspective. Our bilateral

trade in FY 21-22 has registered an increase of over 55% compared to last year, and reached its highest ever value of US\$ 1.65 billion. Indian investment have grown over 35% in last three years. Over 3000 companies are registered in Bahrain with Indian partnerships.

### **5. Increasingly, Bahrain MSMEs are seeking support from Indian companies and to do business in India. Is there any plan to link India's vast expertise in this field to Bahrain's start-ups?**

You are right. This is a very important sector. The Economic Vision 2030 as well as Economic Recovery Plan 2022-26 of Government of Bahrain place a lot of emphasis on development of SMEs and start-up sector in Bahrain. Indian SME sector is well-developed. Further India is a major start-up hub in the world with more than 75,000 start-ups and around 100 unicorns.

There has been positive movement in furthering our bilateral collaboration in this sector. This figured prominently in the recent virtual meetings between the concerned Ministers of our two countries. The strong delegation from Bahrain SMEs Society will be participating in the 8th India International MSME-Start-Up Expo & Summit to be held later this month in New Delhi. We are also working to encourage collaboration in start-up sector among the youth of our two countries as well as for starting India-Bahrain start-up Bridge.

### **6. India is celebrating 75 years of Independence. What are the significant achievements of India?**

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. India is at the forefront of fight against climate change and has emerged as a first responder in the crisis situation from natural disaster to the pandemic.

India's economy is also well poised. India has the largest young skilled talent pool and is among the fastest growing major economies of the world.