



THE EPITOME OF LEADERSHIP

by Farah Baig

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bahrain and Republic of India, Indian ambassador, His Excellency Piyush Srivastava, reflects on the historic ties between the two countries, a prosperous future and the role of the Indian community in strengthening diplomatic ties.

Despite being in the early stages of his ambassadorship in the Kingdom, HE Piyush Srivastava has effectively managed to further fortify the historic relations between the two countries – his primary focus during his assignment in Bahrain. "It has been one year since I arrived in this beautiful Kingdom but it did not take much time for my family and I to settle here," he says. "The friendly people, welcoming society and, above all, deep-rooted civilisational and historical connect make you feel at home. I consider myself fortunate to serve as India's ambassador to Bahrain."

The embassy has achieved several significant feats with HE Srivastava at its helm, addressing pressing matters such as those stemming from the pandemic. "I have come here in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and accordingly, dealing with the pandemic has been the top most priority, whether it is the welfare of the Indian community here or the bilateral cooperation between our two countries," HE explains, highlighting that the highly-effective collaboration between India and Bahrain in dealing with the pandemic.

"I also take this opportunity to thank His Majesty King Hamad, His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, and the government of Bahrain for taking care

of the Indian community during these difficult times," says HE Srivastava.

A SIGNIFICANT PART OF SOCIETY

The Indian community has made significant contributions to Bahrain's society over the last 50 years and currently accounts for around a quarter of the Kingdom's population, which exceeds 1.7 million. "The Indian community in Bahrain has significantly contributed to the economic development of the Kingdom and has played an important role in developing our ties and partnership. The professionalism, hard work and work ethics of the vibrant and dynamic Indian community have been acknowledged and recognised by the leadership as well as people here," says HE Srivastava.

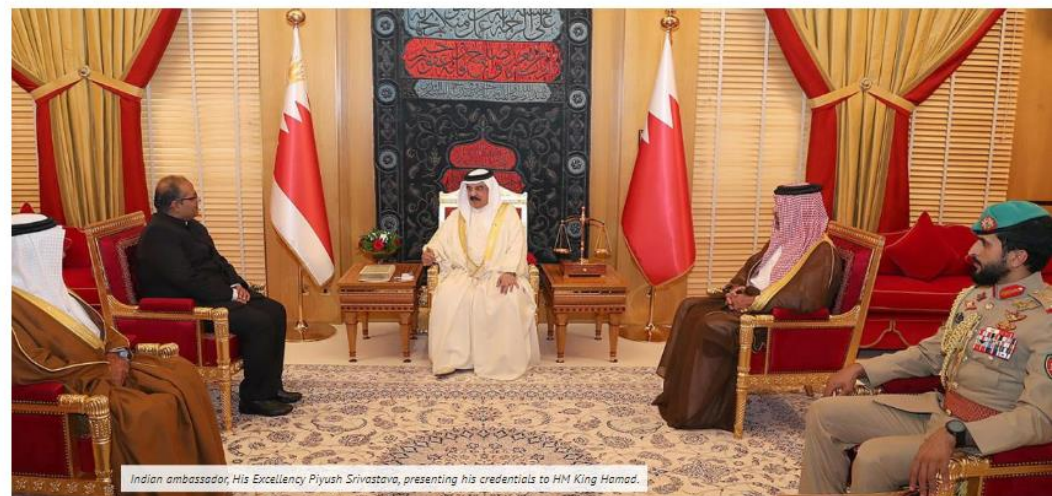
Bahrain has proved to be one of the preferred destinations for Indians, which is reflected in the steady growth of the Indian community here over the years. Interestingly, some Indian families and communities have had a presence in the Kingdom for over two centuries. "The visionary leadership of the Kingdom, has provided an environment where our community not only excels in its profession, but also enjoys a social and family life. The 200-year-old Manama temple at the heart of Manama is a shining example of Kingdom's liberal policies," says HE Srivastava.

"The Indian community here, like in other countries, represent a vibrant microcosm of India and truly reflect the multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious fabric of India," says HE Srivastava with zeal.

As the world moves towards a sense of normality, Indian nationals who had returned to India during the initial stages of the pandemic have been making their return to the Kingdom, resuming their professional roles – roles that they thrive in. "Indians are present in virtually all sectors in the Kingdom; there are old Indian settlers who own big businesses in Bahrain and then there are a lot of professionals in key sectors such as CEOs of companies, chartered accountants, bankers, doctors and nurses, teachers and more," explains HE Srivastava. "There is also a sizeable portion, which is engaged in blue-collar jobs - in the construction and maintenance sectors."

PARTNERS IN TRADE

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, trade values between Bahrain and India amounted to roughly USD1 billion. "The trade and economic relations between the two countries have been robust – in fact for this year, there are encouraging trends," states HE Srivastava. "Bilateral trade figures are up more than 30 per cent compares to the same period last year. Similarly, investment from both sides



Indian ambassador, His Excellency Piyush Srivastava, presenting his credentials to HM King Hamad.

have shown a positive trend with India being one of the top investors in Bahrain with investments amounting to around USD1.3 billion."

HE Srivastava believes that, despite the encouraging trade figures, there is a lot of untapped potential for enhancing both by richer data and investment. "Some of the sectors which I believe present excellent opportunities, including health, pharmaceuticals, IT data centers, food security, logistics, infrastructure, hydroponics and renewable energy," says HE Srivastava.

The embassy has been making efforts to put together businessmen on both sides, to tap into these key sectors, through the organisation of webinars such as those focusing on the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector. However, moving forward, the embassy aims to organise physical visits and business delegations.

"There is a huge potential, not only for the export of Indian medicines, but also a collaboration in terms of setting up some manufacturing units for pharmaceutical products. The second area which I believe has great potential is the set up of IT data centers and renewable energy. India has a lot of expertise so companies who can supply the required materials can set up a joint venture or invest," says HE Srivastava.

CONNECTED THROUGH CULTURE

The role of cultural exchange between the two countries, which has stood the test of time and spanned thousands of years, has always been an important one. "There are similarities in many aspects when it comes to the Indian and Bahraini culture."

I have noticed a lot of footprints of the Indian culture in Bahrain in various ways, whether it is cuisine, dance, yoga, traditional medicine and more. The early traders and merchants who have travelled to each other's countries, as well as the Indian diaspora present in Bahrain have been instrumental in this regard," HE explains, adding that the embassy aims to further strengthen these cultural ties. To celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of bilateral relations, the embassy hopes to organise a lot of cultural events featuring significant cultural extravaganzas from both sides. "In this context, I must mention that the cultural exchange program between our two countries, which was signed in August, 2019 during the visit of the Honourable Prime Minister of India to Bahrain has actually provided a road map for the future culture collaboration," says HE Srivastava.

THE BEST OF EDUCATION

Historically, India has always been at the forefront when it comes to the education sector and related achievements. Over

time, the Republic of India's education system has blossomed to be one of the largest education systems in the world with well over one million schools and 36,000 higher education institutes. "Education is an area which is very close to my heart," says HE Srivastava.

Notably, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum has been available to the local and expatriate community through private schools in the Kingdom for several years. The Republic of India has earned a stellar reputation for its standard of higher education, not only in the Kingdom of Bahrain but across the GCC too. "The cooperation in the education sector between our two countries has been quite an old one. In fact, here are a lot of dignitaries in Bahrain who have been educated in India. However, in between, this trend was somewhat affected, but this is an area which I believe has a huge potential," says HE Srivastava.

The embassy wishes to increase the cooperation between the two countries in the field of education in the years to come. "I am working with the concerned authorities on both sides to look into the possibility of a more active collaboration between the universities and students. A lot of universities have opened in Bahrain, and similarly, the education sector in India has developed to a great extent. A



External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar, visits the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2020.

significant number of Bahraini students go to India for specialised training courses, but we do wish to further extend this chain and increase the educational cooperation between the two countries," says HE Srivastava.

DIPLOMATIC TIES AT ITS FINEST

High-level bilateral interactions including VIP visits continued despite the restrictions posed by the pandemic in the last year-and-a-half. "Regular high-level visits and interactions have been a hallmark of our bilateral ties. So, the continued visits provided momentum to our robust bilateral partnership," states HE Srivastava.

In the past 10 years, there have been several high-level VIP visits. "A few of the most important ones include the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister to India in 2012 and 2013. The landmark visit of His Majesty King Hamad to India in 2014, set that roadmap of our present bilateral engagement, while a visit of the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Bahrain in 2019 provided a much-needed boost and diversification to the bilateral relations," says HE Srivastava.

In addition, the External Affairs Minister of India, Honourable Dr. S. Jaishankar, visited the Kingdom in November last year. "As

landmark year as India is celebrating its 75th Independence Day. The bilateral relations between our two countries go back by thousands of years even to the Indus valley civilisations," explains HE Srivastava.



Our two countries have the tradition of regular high-level bilateral visits and interaction, and today our relations are all encompassing, multifaceted and covers all important areas of political security, economic, and trade culture and education," says HE Srivastava.

The embassy will be celebrating the milestone occasion through a number of events including a celebration in the historic, Little India, situated in Manama, in association with the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) and the Indian community. "We have already launched the logo for the celebration and look forward to celebrating this momentous occasion with our Bahraini friends and Indian community," concludes HE Srivastava.



As part of the two nations efforts to combat COVID-19, Bahrain receives its first batch of Covishield - AstraZeneca vaccines from partners in India.