



Trade between Bahrain

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

BILATERAL trade between Bahrain and India has reached between \$750 million and \$800m since the start of the year, based on preliminary data of the past few months – and there is an increased interest from both sides to boost the commercial ties further.

Revealing this, new Indian Ambassador Vinod Jacob said the historic ties between the two nations continue to be strong, with both looking to explore new opportunities in different sectors.

In his first interview since he assumed office in August, he spoke about trade ties, plans to promote tourism, labour issues and community outreach programmes.

“The emphasis on trade is a reflection of the strength of the bilateral partnership between India and Bahrain, and for over centuries, we have had this strong engagement in the commercial sphere between the two nations,” he told the *GDN* yesterday.

“If you look at the trade (figures) last year, it reached \$1.6

Increasing interest to visit kingdom

THERE is an increasing interest among tourists and official delegations from different Indian states to visit Bahrain, stated an envoy.

Indian Ambassador Vinod Jacob said Bahrain is now on the travel list of not only tourists but also senior Indian government officials to explore new areas of travel co-operation

“Demand for travel is globally on the rise and it’s very visible to see Indian tourists in Bahrain.

“Latest data shows that more than 500,000 Indians visited Bahrain in the first six months of this year com-

pared with more than 269,000 during the same period last year.”

Mr Jacob said Indian markets have also witnessed tourism influx from Bahrain while citing examples of several high-level trade visits from the kingdom travelling to New Delhi.

He said the tourist footfalls were evident with recent delegations from Karnataka and Goa who visited Bahrain reflecting the interest in Manama as an ideal getaway destination.

“I would encourage our Bahraini friends also to make use of the opportunities available in India for tourism

and enjoy their stay.”

Mr Jacob said the Embassy in Seef District issued a total of 4,990 visas of which 70 per cent were tourism and as of last month they issued close to 4,000 visas.

He said the visas were issued mainly to Bahrainis travelling for leisure or medical tourism.

“We also issued a new category of Ayush (AY) visa for foreign nationals for treatment under Ayush systems/ Indian systems of medicine like therapeutic care, wellness and yoga.”

The new category of visa is for

foreign nationals seeking medical treatment and is part of India’s roadmap for the ‘Heal in India’ initiative, which aims to promote India as a medical value travel destination.

Meanwhile, the diplomat also reiterated his support for working with relevant authorities in Bahrain to increase the number of flights to several Indian destinations.

Bahrain has announced plans to attract 14.1 million tourists by 2026 as part of its new 2022-2026 tourism strategy as part of the Economic Recovery Plan.

of billion, which, I would say, is a little bit of an abnormal figure.

“This was largely due to the response to pent-up demand during the Covid-19 lockdown period, and the restrictions lifted thereafter due to which trading took place at very high levels.

“I expect this year to see a sort of correction, and the data shows that in the past few months since the start of the year between \$750m to \$800m

of bilateral trade has taken place.”

Mr Jacob explained that in 2005 the India-Bahrain bilateral trade was worth \$575m.

He added that he expected the trade to reach an estimated \$1.3bn during the financial year with both sides stepping up bilateral engagement.

Bahrain’s imports from India include rice, boneless meat, shrimp, sugar, fresh fruit and vegetables, machinery and

engineering goods, medicines, jewellery and polymers.

Meanwhile, its exports to India include urea, methanol, mineral fuel, mineral oils and products, iron ore, aluminium, copper and bridge sections.

“Cumulative Indian investment in Bahrain was \$1.4bn between April 2000 and June this year, while Bahraini investments are slowly increasing and as of today it stands at \$185m worth of foreign direct investment in India,” said Mr Jacob.

During a high-level Bahrain delegation visit to India in March backed by the Bahrain Economic Development Board, it was announced that two leading India-based companies, Aerolam Middle East and Titan Company Limited (Titan), would launch their operations in Bahrain with a total investment of approximately \$45m.

The envoy also pointed out that Bahrain-based Investcorp, a leading alternative investment manager, had inaugurated its office in Mumbai in 2019.

Mr Jacob has been a diplomat for more than two decades, and his last posting was as the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Sri Lanka. He has also tackled India’s bilateral relations with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

When asked for an update on the introduction of RuPay card and India’s Unified Payment Interface (UPI), the envoy said discussions continue with relevant stakeholders.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his state



■ Mr Jacob



■ A sample of the RuPay card

visit to Bahrain in 2019 first announced the launch of the RuPay scheme following the signing of an agreement.

RuPay, which is the Indian payment network, allows Indians to use the card abroad, and Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal announced last week that the scheme would be operational in the UAE by mid-next year.

The *GDN* previously reported that RuPay was set for wide acceptance at ATMs and point

of sale (PoS) terminals across Bahrain under a new collaboration between NPCI International Payments (NIPL) and Benefit.

“India is keen to promote the ease of digital payments and this is a priority to even reach the rest of the international community,” said Mr Jacob.

“Talks started between the two sides but there were interruptions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“We hope to pick up the pieces very soon and make substantial progress.”

On the potential GCC-India Free Trade Agreement, the diplomat added that similar agreements were signed with Sri Lanka, while trade agreements were inked with the UAE and Australia.

“There are efforts to have an FTA between the GCC and India, and discussions have been going on for a few years.

“I am hopeful that now we have gone over the Covid-19 challenges and restrictions there will be space or opportunity opening up for the two sides to sit and discuss.”

“I expect the process to be interesting.”

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Trade between India and Bahrain (Non-oil Classified)
(In US\$ million)

Bilateral Trade (USD Mn)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023(till Apr)
	901	873	1130	1404	344.68
India's Exports (USD Mn)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	686	565	735	904	254.95
India's import (USD Mn)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	215	308	395	500	89.73

Source: IGA Bahrain

■ A table shows the latest bilateral trade figures between the two nations



and India tops \$750m

Safe and legal migration 'is a top priority'

PRE-DEPARTURE orientation sessions, insurance schemes and a digital outreach service are some of the steps taken by the Indian government to protect its nationals abroad – including Gulf States.

This was highlighted by Indian Ambassador Vinod Jacob who said a safe and legal migration continues to be high on the agenda of his government.

According to the Indian External Affairs Ministry of External Affairs, there are 13 million Non-Resident Indians globally of which nearly 9m are in the GCC.

Some of the labour issues failed by the Indian missions in Bahrain and other Gulf states include non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, contract substitution, forced labour, fraudulent debt and other restrictions.

The latest reported data from the Indian Embassies in the GCC shows that from 2019 until June this year a total of 48,095 labour complaints were documented from the Indian migrant workers.

Kuwait topped the list with the maximum number of com-

plaints followed by Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain in the fifth with 2,702 complaints and Qatar in the sixth spot.

According to the Indian Emigration Act of 1983, Emigration Check Required (ECR) passport holders – who have not completed high school – need to obtain emigration clearance to travel to 18 countries, including Bahrain.

“Bahrain as you know is amongst the 18 ECR countries and depending on the skill sets, there are certain avenues available for the workers,” said Mr Jacob.

“In the past few years, the Indian government has been providing pre-departure orientation training in various centres, and this is an ongoing process.

“It is an introduction to the worker to help understand the culture of his destined country, and some dos and don’ts to help them prepare when travelling to a foreign country.”

He added another area the Indian government is actively working on is encouraging low-skilled workers or those not literate to apply for affordable insurance schemes.



His Majesty King Hamad presents Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the King Hamad Order of the Renaissance during his state visit to Bahrain in 2019

“We also follow the policy of promoting legal migration and strongly encourage that people should come on proper visas while travelling and follow the rules of the land.”

Bahrain authorities have stepped up inspections against irregular workers, and deported several expats of different nationalities since last year. These campaigns have only stepped up across the four governorates, and one of the main violations they discover is an expat staying or working on an expired visit visa.

The envoy said they continue with their monthly open house at the Embassy to register grievances of distressed Indians, and address them.

“Open Houses are one important means of outreach where we emphasise this point when people come with problems that legal migration is the best route and following the visa regulations of the host country is important.

“We also urge workers to enter into legally binding contracts and contact the Embassy or the local authorities for help.

“I must say in this regard that the Bahrain authorities of have been very receptive and active in their response.”

Mr Jacob praised the efforts of the Labour Market Regula-

tory Authority, Interior Ministry and other entities for their humane approach in dealing with labour matters.

Furthermore, the diplomat encouraged Bahrain’s over 350,000 Indian community to register their grievances related

to consular services and other matters to the Madad (Help) portal that is available on Android and iOS platform.

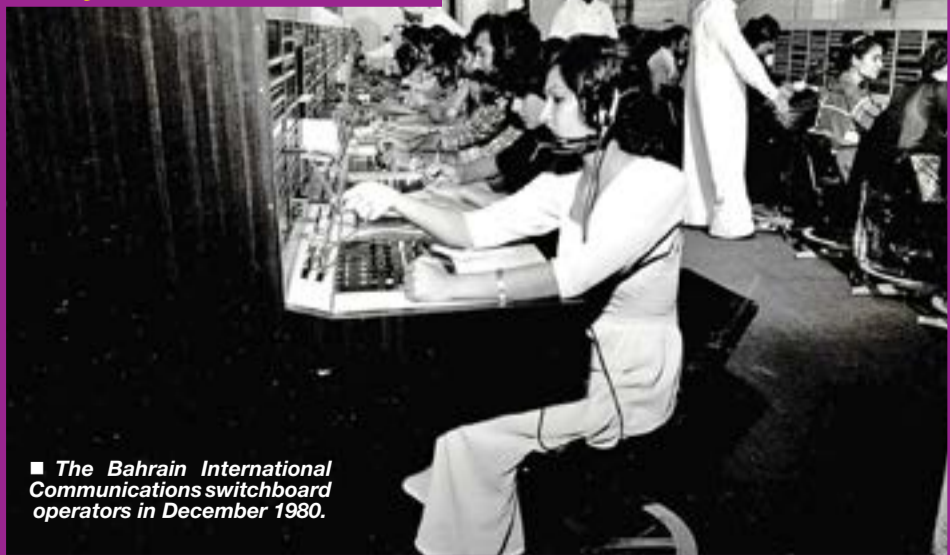
On the issue of passport retention, Mr Jacob added that – “Passport belongs to its holder.” “It is imperative that irrespec-

tive of the considerations and the circumstances in which this migration took place, the sanctity of the passport should be maintained and if there are any disputes it should be immediately brought to the attention of the authorities.”



Mr Jacob interacts with the community during the Open House last month

Bygone Bahrain



The Bahrain International Communications switchboard operators in December 1980.

A nostalgic trip through the GDN and Gulf Mirror archives

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