



Piyush Srivastava with HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister



Indian flags were seen projected onto Bab Al Bahrain, and the Kutub Minar was illuminated in Bahraini colours during the 50th-anniversary celebration of Bahrain-India ties



Exclusive interview with Piyush Srivastava, the Indian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain

Enhancing Bilateral Relations

Indian Ambassador reflects on achievements and challenges in Bahrain

P. Unnikrishnan
The Daily Tribune

Excellency, What were some significant achievements or milestones accomplished during your tenure as the ambassador to Bahrain?

My tenure has been a remarkable and highly productive three years in Bahrain. Our relationship encompasses politics, security, economics, trade, culture, and people-to-people connections. I must emphasise both governments' commitment and sincere desire to strengthen further and diversify this relationship. As a result, numerous high-level engagements have taken place.

Even during the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, senior ministers continued their interactions, with the External Affairs Minister of India, Bahrain's Foreign Minister visiting India, the Minister of State for External Affairs visiting Bahrain twice, virtual meetings being held, and the honourable Speaker of Lok Sabha, India, visiting Bahrain. Furthermore, Bahrain's Minister of Commerce and Telecommu-



Indian Loka Sabha Speaker with the Indian ambassador during his visit to Bahrain



Piyush Srivastava with his wife Monika Srivastava with guests during an event at the Indian Embassy

nications visited India. These engagements have bolstered our relationship.

To provide some data, Our bilateral trade has nearly doubled since the onset of the pandemic, reaching close to \$2 billion. Similarly, investments and economic collaborations have grown significantly, reinforcing our strategic partnership. Bahrain joined the International Solar Alliance last year, and India became the Combined Maritime Forces associate partner. India has firmly supported Bahrain's dialogue participation in SCO (Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation).

As you rightly mentioned, our bilateral trade has reached nearly USD two billion. However, the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement between Bahrain and India needs to be signed. What are the reasons behind this?

Discussions have been ongoing between the finance ministries of both countries. The main hindrance to signing the agreement has been the absence of tax structures in Bahrain. However, I would like to highlight that continuous communication has been taking place. In the last foreign office consultation meeting led by His Excellency Dr Shaikh Abdulla, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, strong representation from the Ministry of Finance was present and held discussions on the sidelines. More recently, a virtual meeting between the two finance ministries occurred, indicating that negotiations are progressing. We will see positive developments in this regard in the next few days.

What challenges did you face as an ambassador throughout your term, and how did you overcome them?

Upon arriving in Bahrain, I immediately felt a sense of familiarity and warmth. My main challenge was assuming my post amidst the COVID-19 pandemic when vaccines were unavailable. The pandemic necessitated extensive coordination with government agencies, India's health ministries, and civil aviation authorities and close collaboration with the Indian community. However, we received tremendous support from both sides. The government of Bahrain provided exceptional care to the expatriate community, offering medical assistance and equitable vaccination opportunities.

Your Excellency, could you please recall some of your beautiful memories in Bahrain?

Undoubtedly, Bahrain has provided numerous beautiful moments during my tenure as a full-fledged ambassador. If I were to identify a remarkable moment, it would be the golden jubilee celebrations, commemorating 50 years of diplomatic relations between India and Bahrain. The celebrations witnessed the participation of people from various backgrounds, including artists, chefs, academics, and many seminars were conducted. During that time, the Bab Al Bahrain was illuminated in the In-

dian tricolour, while the Qutub Minar in India shone in Bahraini national colours. This memory will forever hold a special place in my heart.

What are the possibilities of bringing an Indian university to Bahrain, and what hurdles hinder such a project?

I wouldn't refer to them as hurdles. I am delighted to witness collaborations and the presence of several institutes and courses in Bahrain. Regarding universities, IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) are permitted to establish campuses abroad. Talks are underway to select a campus in Bahrain that has already been established in Abu Dhabi. From our discussions, it is evident that Bahrain is keen on hosting a reputed technical university.

Do you have any projects that still need to be completed or that will be handed over to your successor? What advice would you like to give to your successor?

My advice to my successor would be to acknowledge the friendly nature of this country. As for unfinished projects, I prefer to view them in a positive light. Collaborative agreements in space research are nearing finalisation. Similarly, contracts in the education and traditional medicine sectors are in progress. Some pending projects include the RuPay card implementation and the operationalisation of a cultural program. Many pro-

jects were initiated during my tenure and will continue during my successor's term.

With over 400,000 Indians in Bahrain, how would you rate the labour law and recent reforms compared to other countries?

The Indian community here is diverse and vibrant and has significantly contributed to the kingdom's economic development in various capacities, ranging from business people and professionals to doctors, engineers, teachers, and blue-collar workers.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has been exceptionally welcoming to the Indian community. Their policies and support, including recent labour reforms such as flexible work permits, have been highly receptive to suggestions from embassies. Sufficient time was provided to transition to the new system. Moreover, whenever individual issues arise, we have always received outstanding support from the LMRA (Labor Market Regulatory Authority), the Ministry of Labour, and other agencies. I want to utilise this platform to express my gratitude to the leadership, the government of Bahrain, and all relevant authorities for their unwavering support and care for the Indian community in Bahrain.

What message would you like to convey to the Indian community?

I am immensely proud of the Indian community, and it has been a privilege for me to work closely with them. They represent India with pride, and I encourage them to continue their efforts



Our bilateral trade has nearly doubled since the onset of the pandemic, reaching close to \$2 billion. Similarly, investments and economic collaborations have grown significantly, reinforcing our strategic partnership. These achievements are only a glimpse of the positive growth of our bilateral ties, and I am confident that our relations will reach new heights

PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA

Quick facts

1. If you had to choose one Indian dish to represent the essence of the diplomatic relationship, what would it be?

A: Samosa.

2. What aspect of Bahraini culture or tradition will you miss the most as you prepare to depart from Bahrain?

A: Majlis.

3. Which place is your wife's favourite for a weekend getaway in Bahrain?

A: Qalat Al Bahrain (Bahrain Fort) and Bab Al Bahrain.

4. What would the title be if Bollywood were to create a movie about your diplomatic journey in Bahrain?

A: 'The Depth of Friendship Between Our People.'

5. Who is the most remarkable personality you have met in Bahrain?

A: There have been many remarkable individuals. Mr Abdul Rehman Jumma and Mr Abdul Nabi Al Shoala have significantly contributed to the Bahrain India Society. In particular, Mr Abdul Nabi al shoala wrote a remarkable book on Gandhi, exemplifying our nation's goodwill.

