

INTERVIEW PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA

Great strides in Bahrain-India ties

By Sandeep Singh Grewal

Bahrain and India bilateral relations continued its 'momentum and upward trajectory this year, according to Indian Ambassador Piyush Srivastava.

He said 2022 witnessed great strides in the historical ties between the two nations, and he extended his warm greetings to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, and the people of Bahrain on the occasion of the 51st National Day.

Mr Srivastava said the year witnessed increased engagements between the two countries and he highlighted key achievements in an interview for the *GDN Annual Report 2022*.

"High level defence and security delegations from both sides took part in each other's flagship events, including the Defence Expo in India in October, and Bahrain International Airshow and Manama Dialogue in November," he said.

"Another significant milestone this year was that Bahrain joined International Solar Alliance as its 86th Member and India joined the (Bahrain-based) Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) as Associate Partner," he said.

He further highlighted the visit of Foreign Affairs Ministry's Undersecretary for Political Affairs Dr Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa in March, to hold 5th Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) in New Delhi.

"Both sides agreed to further strengthen their co-operation in the diverse fields of trade and investment, hydrocarbons and renewable energy, health and pharmaceuticals, IT, fintech, food security, civil aviation, space, defence and security and people-to-people connect focusing on youth, skill development and startups," the ambassador revealed.

"Since the meeting, there has been an exponential increase in engagements to push further co-operation for these sectors."

The envoy, who assumed office in 2020, said several business to business (B2B) meetings and visits of delegations were held in person and virtually across different sectors.

"Further impetus was provided by incoming delegations to Bahrain, including a National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) delegation with representatives of leading IT companies," said Mr Srivastava.

"The high-level visit of an Economic Development Board (EDB) delegation to India also opened avenues for investments in India and Bahrain," he said.

A high-powered EDB delegation, led by its chief executive Khalid Humaidan, visited Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad in September to open further avenues for bilateral trade and investment.

India and Bahrain have achieved record levels of bilateral trade and investments this year.

India remains among the Top 10 trading partners of Bahrain.

"Bilateral trade registered growth of about



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55% in the year 2021-2022 and reached its highest ever level of \$1.65 billion," said the diplomat, who said two-way investments had also increased.

"Bahrain's investments into India have also shown an increasing trend, with a cumulative investment from Bahrain of about \$185 million.

"In addition, portfolio investment from Bahrain, particularly by Investcorp, a leading Bahraini investment group, has increased to more than \$600 million.

"The bilateral relations between India and Kingdom of Bahrain continued its momentum and upward trajectory this year as well," he said.

Bahrain and India share long-standing ties spanning 5,000 years, tracing their origins to the Dilmun civilisation in Bahrain and the Indus Valley civilisation in India.

Ancient Bahraini traders are believed to have enjoyed flourishing trade links featuring Bahraini pearls and spices from India.

When Bahrain was a British protectorate, the Indian Rupee was the legal tender in the country.

Many of Bahrain's prominent figures have close Indian connections too.

There are more than 350,000 Indian residents in Bahrain

– the largest expatriate population.

Mr Srivastava praised Team Bahrain's 'efficient policy' in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to Bahrain's leadership and the government for their support and care provided to our community in these difficult times, including providing free vaccinations for citizens and residents," added Mr Srivastava.

"An early start, efficient and quality medical care and other necessary support, along with vaccination which were made available to citizens and expatriates alike, made the kingdom's policy of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic efficient, progressive, inclusive and, indeed, amongst the best in the world," he highlighted.

Bahrain also promptly responded in sending oxygen supplies in time of need to India, while the Indian government ensured to keep the supply lines open for medicines, medical and paramedical professionals and other essential items required by Bahrain.

"The seamless logistical cooperation included continuous flight connectivity and recognising each other's vaccines and vaccination certificates," said Mr Srivastava.

On the cultural front, the diplomat added the two nations this year celebrated the Golden Jubilee of establishment of diplomatic relations and Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (75th Anniversary of India's Independence).

The Indian Embassy marked the iconic week of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav in association with Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities and Bahrain Keraleeya Samajam (BKS) in May, featuring more than 50 top artists from India, as well as renowned artists from Bahrain.

"These events provided a platform for engagement between young Bahrainis and the Indian diaspora in Bahrain," said Mr Srivastava.

Mr Srivastava also cited the visit of world-renowned yogi and spiritual leader Sadhguru in May who was warmly received in Bahrain.

He said the events also highlighted the vibrant, rich and diverse Indian culture as well as the strong historical bond of friendship between the two sides.

"The far ranging and diverse events witnessed great participation," he added.

"These events showcased the rich heritage of our two countries as well as the historic connection and contemporary bilateral relations." ■

1. India's trade with Bahrain (values in US\$ millions)

Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 (April-June)
India's Export	471.71	556.82	742.14	559.09	528.25	899.90	342.86
India's Import	290.69	431.12	539.63	421.50	547.49	753.29	475.82
Total	762.40	987.94	1281.77	980.59	1075.74	1653.99	818.68

A breakdown of the bilateral trade between the two sides over the years