

GULF INSIDER INTERVIEW

The trade relations between India and Bahrain can be traced back 5000 years ago to the Dilmun civilization of Bahrain and Indus valley civilization of India. Ancient Bahraini traders are believed to have carried out flourishing trade of Bahraini pearls with spices from India. Since then India and Bahrain have enjoyed an unbroken link of engagements and interactions with each other. The merchant Indian families who settled in Bahrain more than two centuries ago and the 200 year old Shreenathji temple in Manama are a testimony to this fact.

A multi-faceted Contemporary relationship

India and Bahrain enjoy excellent multifaceted bilateral relations characterized by cordial political, economic, cultural and people to people contacts. Regular high level political interactions have been a hallmark of our close bilateral ties. The landmark visit of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, to India in 2014 had set the roadmap for our present bilateral engagement. Our bilateral relations got further boost and diversification to new and emerging areas during the historical visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi to Bahrain in August 2019. Earlier His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's visit to India in 2012 gave further impetus to the relationship. The high foreign policy priority that India attaches to Bahrain was reflected in the recent visit of Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar in November 2020, which was among his first physical visits abroad as soon as the opportunity opened up for the same in these COVID-19 pandemic times. Foreign Minister of Bahrain H.E Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani visited India in April 2021 for the 3rd meeting of India-Bahrain High Joint Commission which reviewed and discussed ways to further push the diverse areas of our bilateral cooperation.

Our two sides have robust institutional mechanisms in trade, economic, cultural, education, security and defence sectors. Despite restrictions imposed by COVID, the relationship at all levels have remained stable and strong, including in trade where the bilateral trade figures have remained stable at around USD 1 billion, total Investment from India to Bahrain including that of Indian community in Bahrain is over US\$ 1.25 billion, making India the 6th largest investor in Bahrain. Similarly, investments from Bahrain to India have also increased to around US\$ 180 million in 2019.

Improving COVID situation in India and Bahrain and the opportunities

Our two countries have had excellent collaboration in dealing with Covid-19 pandemic - be it the support of the Government of Bahrain for medical and other care of the Indian community, facilitating their repatriation by 'Vande Bharat Mission', the 'Air Bubble' arrangement between the two countries for facilitating travel of people of both sides, supply of oxygen; or the supply of medicines, vaccines and facilitating travel of doctors and paramedics to the Kingdom by India.

Bahrain is among the most successful countries in dealing with the pandemic, as well as for providing medical, financial and other support to its people. The Kingdom has also taken exceptional care of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain in terms of providing medical and other support, in addition to free vaccination at par with its citizens. I would like to express our gratitude to His Majesty the King, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister and the Government of Bahrain for ensuring welfare of the Indian community, particularly during the difficult times of COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the most important parts of maintaining this co-operation between Bahrain and India is connectivity. Bahrain is the only GCC country that never banned flights from India. India also kept its supply lines open for trade, food products, essential commodities, medicines and medical supplies.

India had successfully handled the first wave of the pandemic and has also now swiftly recovered from the severe second wave. By providing speedy medical care to the infected people, enhancing the existing medical infrastructure and creating new ones as well as accelerating the pace of vaccination, we have now been able to contain the spread of the virus. As of today, over 490 million people have already been vaccinated in India, and the daily rate of infection for the whole of India has drastically come down to around 40000. India's recovery rate of 97% is among the world's highest.

Economic and Trade opportunities

As both countries are gradually and cautiously opening up, the focus of both Governments is again on the economic revival and to open up further opportunities for both bilateral trade and investment.

Today the main exports from India to Bahrain include food and agro products, engineering goods, machinery, IT, polymers, jewellery etc. and the main imports from Bahrain include urea, aluminium, iron, steel and other metal products including items for reprocessing. Indian investments in Bahrain are in IT, construction, health, and finance sectors; while Bahraini investments are in sectors of health, real estate etc.

We are working closely with concerned authorities and the private sector of the Kingdom of Bahrain to expand bilateral cooperation into the new and emerging areas of space, Fintech, IT, renewable energy as well as existing areas of hydrocarbon, infrastructure, health, education, and agro/food security.

Indian Community in Bahrain

Indian community constitutes almost a quarter of the population of Bahrain and plays a significant role in the economic development of Bahrain. They are a key link of our relations with the Kingdom. Our vibrant community in Bahrain plays an important role in promoting our bilateral ties and further

strengthening the existing goodwill between our two countries. It is a matter of pride for all of us that with their professionalism and high standards of work ethics, our community has made a name for itself in Bahrain. This is a fact which has been acknowledged by the leadership of both countries.

This has been possible due to the Kingdom's rich tradition of diversity, tolerance, co-existence and harmony. The Kingdom has provided an environment where the Indian community enjoys their cultural and traditional celebrations the same way as they do in India.

The Future Path

The two countries have a tradition of regular high level interaction and exchanges, which has been a key for our ever expanding and diversifying bilateral cooperation. With the improved COVID situation in both countries, we hope to see increased visits to each other's countries of the high-level political and official delegations.

Several measures taken by both governments for economic recovery are expected to lead to increased collaboration in Trade and Investment, particularly in the segments such as health and pharmaceutical, energy including renewables, education, tourism, IT, financial services and infrastructure. Both sides are also working to expand the new and strategic areas of cooperation in Space, Fintech, Defence & Maritime security, IT and food security.
