

Brief on India - Oman Bilateral Relations

The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner of India and an important interlocutor at Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fora. India and Oman are linked by geography, history and culture and enjoy warm and cordial relations, which are attributed to historical maritime trade linkages, intimacy of the Royal family with India and the seminal role played by Indian expatriate community in building Oman, which is acknowledged by Omani Government. While people-to-people contact between India and Oman can be traced back 5000 years, diplomatic relations were established in 1955 and the relationship was upgraded to Strategic partnership in 2008.

Bilateral Visits

Visits at the highest level have been exchanged frequently between India and Oman:

- Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi visited Oman in February 2018.
- Shri Suresh Prabhu, the then Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation visited Oman on 15-18 July 2018 for co-chairing the 8th session of India-Oman Joint Commission Meeting and 9th session of India-Oman Joint Business Council.
- Dr. Mahesh Sharma, the then MOS (I/C) for Culture, visited Oman in December 2017 to participate in the Second UN World Tourism Organization/UNESCO World Conference on Tourism and Culture.
- Shri M J Akbar, the then Minister of State for External Affairs, visited Oman to attend the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference, held in Muscat in December 2016.
- Shri Manohar Parriker, the then Raksha Mantri had visited Oman from 20-22 May 2016 accompanied by a high level delegation.
- Smt. Sushma Swaraj, the then External Affairs Minister (EAM), paid an official visit to Oman from 17-18 February 2015.

From Omani side:

- Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs (MRDA) visited India in September 2018 and had separate meetings with Raksha Mantri and National Security Adviser. Mohammed Salim al-Toobi, Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs, visited New Delhi in October 2018 for attending the 2nd IORA Ministerial meeting.
- Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, visited

India in February 2014. He again visited India in June 2014 for extending greetings to the new NDA Government. FM Alawi visited India again on 2-3 April 2017 when he held official level discussions with EAM and called on Vice President and Prime Minister of India.

Political relations

The historical India-Oman bilateral ties were transformed into a strategic partnership in 2008. Pursuant to this decision, the Higher Committee on Economic Cooperation, led by Adviser to HM the Sultan for Economic Planning and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India, concluded a Report which identified nine areas of cooperation between the two countries, i.e. agriculture, healthcare, infrastructure, tourism, chemicals & fertilizers, education, oil & gas, power and mining.

India and Oman have JWG's in Manpower, Agriculture, Health and Science & Technology currently. Under the MoU on Manpower signed in 2008, India-Oman JWG was set up to review bilateral cooperation in the field of manpower. It has held six meetings. The 7th Meeting was held in New Delhi in February 2019, in which Omani delegation was led by Welfare Advisor to the Manpower Minister. The 1st JWG on Agriculture held its first meeting in Muscat in November 2012 and the 2nd meeting is to be held in India. There used to be a JWG on higher education under Agreement for cooperation in the field of Higher Education signed in 2007 which expired in 2013. 1st JWG on S&T was held recently in September 2019 and JWG on Health is scheduled to be held in December 2019.

Key bilateral agreements/MoUs between India and Oman cover cooperation in Health; Tourism; Military Cooperation; peaceful uses of Outer Space; visa exemption for diplomats/officials; Legal and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters; Extradition; legal and judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters; Agriculture; Civil Aviation; Avoidance of Double Taxation; Standards and Measures; Manpower; Maritime Issues; Joint Investment Fund; and Cultural Cooperation. There is also MoUs for Cooperation between Oman's National Defence College (NDC) and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) of India; Cooperation between FSI and Omani Diplomatic Institute; and State Audit Institution of Oman and the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Commercial Relations

Both India and Oman accord high priority to strengthening economic and commercial relations between the two countries. Economic cooperation between India and

Oman is reviewed through the institutional mechanism of Indo-Oman Joint Commission Meeting (JCM). Traditionally, Indo-Oman Joint Business Council (JBC) also runs parallel with JCM and serves as a platform for interaction between captains of Industry in India and Oman. The 8th Session of JCM and 9th Session of JBC were held on 16-17 July 2018 in Muscat, co-chaired by Ministers of Commerce and Industry of the two countries.

India is among Oman's top trading partners. For Oman, India was the 3rd largest (after UAE and China) source for its imports and 3rd largest market (after UAE and Saudi Arabia) for its non-oil exports in 2018. During 2018-19, bilateral trade was US\$ 5 billion. Major items of Indian exports are mineral fuels and products of their distillation, textiles, machinery, electrical items, chemicals, iron and steel, tea, coffee, spices, rice and meat products and seafood. Among major Indian imports are: urea, LNG, polypropylene, lubricating oil, dates and chromite ore.

Bilateral Investment flows, have been robust, as reflected in numerous joint ventures, established both in India and Oman. According to Oman's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, there are over 3200 Indian enterprises and establishments in Oman with an estimated investment of US\$ 7.5 billion. Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF) is a 50-50 Joint Venture between State Bank of India and State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman, the main sovereign wealth fund of Oman. It was set up in July 2010 as a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to invest in India. OIJIF commenced its operations in 2011 with initial seed capital of US\$ 100 million which was fully invested across seven Indian companies from diversified sectors. OIJIF has raised another US\$ 220 million for its Tranche-II and is being invested in India.

Indian firms have invested heavily Oman in various sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilizers, textile, cables, chemicals, automotive, etc. In Sohar, with an estimated total Indian investment of over US\$2 billion, Indian entities comprise the largest foreign investors. In Salalah, Indian investments are in manufacturing of automotive parts, textiles, cables, guar gum, etc. In Duqm SEZ, an Indo-Oman JV Sebacic Oman is undertaking a US\$ 62.7 million project for setting up the largest Sebacic acid plant in Middle-East. A 'Little India' integrated tourism complex project in Duqm, worth US\$ 748 million investment has been undertaken by an Indian company. In addition, L&T, Jindal, EPIL, Shapoorji Pallonji, Shriram, Aditya Birla Group, Nagarjuna Construction Company, KEC International, etc. are some big Indian companies which have been executing various projects in Oman. Indian financial institutions like SBI, Bank of Baroda, HDFC Ltd and ICICI Securities as well as Indian PSUs like Air India, Air India Express, BEL, LIC, New India Assurance Co., TCIL, EIL, EPIL and NBCC have presence in Oman. The US\$ 969 million, Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO) in Sur, Oman, is a shining example of India-

Oman partnership. It started operation in January 2006 with a long term buy-back agreement (valid upto July 2020) under which India imports the entire production of 1.6 MTs of granulated urea and 0.255 MTs of ammonia at a price cheaper than international market prices.

Cooperation in Oil & Gas sector: India purchases oil from Oman in spot market. In 2018, India was the second largest (after China) importer of Oil from Oman and imported 21908 barrels in 2018. Indian Oil Corporation has acquired 17% stake of Royal Dutch Shell in Mukhaizna oilfield in Oman for US\$ 329 million. India has also invited Oman to participate in augmenting India's Strategic Oil Reserves.

Cultural Cooperation

India and Oman have close cultural relations. Omanis are familiar with Indian culture on account of millenia old people-to-people exchange, presence of large Indian community in Oman and geographical proximity. Indian Social Club and its various regional, linguistic and sports wings actively promote Indian Culture in Oman, celebrating National Days, Festivals and Cultural diversity of India. Yoga is quite popular in Oman specially among expatriates and local youth. The number of participants in celebration of International Day of Yoga has increased from around 3,000 persons in 2016 to 6000 in 2019. International Day of Yoga 2019 was also celebrated in other cities of Oman including Sur, Suhar, Nizwa and Salalah.

The Embassy organized many events in 2019 to celebrate 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji. An Indian Film Festival was also organized in Lunar Cinemas at three locations in Muscat. An Indo-Omani Art Exhibition and Workshop shall be held in Muscat in September 2019 with support of ICCR and Omani Society for Fine Arts. The Embassy receives good support from Omani Government in organizing various cultural programs and celebration of important occasions.

India and Oman signed MoU on Cultural cooperation in July 2010, which is automatically renewed every five years. The first ever 'Festival of India in Oman', organized by the Embassy with support of Ministry of Culture of India during November 2016-March 2017, was inaugurated by Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs of Oman. In a sign of growing cultural cooperation, chairman of National Records & Achieves of Oman led a delegation to India in June 2019. Director General of National Museum of Oman recently visited India under ICCR's Distinguished Visitor's program in August 2019.

Indian Community in Oman

There are about 7,70,000 Indians in Oman, of which about 6,55,000 are workers and professionals. There are Indian families living in Oman for more than 150-200 years. Thousands of Indians are working as doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, teachers, lecturers, nurses, managers, etc. There are 21 Indian schools offering CBSE curriculum, catering to the educational needs of more than 46,000 Indian students. Indian community in Oman is organized under Indian Social clubs in Muscat, Salalah and Sohar. These clubs have a number of sub-groups called Linguistic Wings which cater to cultural and social needs of their members.

The Basic Law of Oman recognizes the right to different forms of worship. The Hindu merchant community has two temples, including one over a century old, and their own cremation grounds. Churches have been permitted and a Gurudwara has been there since over two decades, along with at least two other temporary structures, which are used as Gurudwaras without being objected to by the local authorities. Indian Embassy receives good support from local authorities in delivery of services aimed at welfare of Indian community in Oman.

Useful Resources

Website: <https://www.indemb-oman.gov.in/>

Twitter: @Indemb_Muscat

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInOman/>

Instagram: indemb_muscat

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