

## **INDIA-OMAN BILATERAL RELATIONS**

India and Oman, maritime neighbors linked by geography, history and culture, enjoy close and friendly relations. Inspired by civilisational and historical links spanning over 5000 years, India and Oman have expanded their bilateral cooperation and exchanges since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955, forging a mutually beneficial Strategic Partnership. India-Oman bilateral relations are anchored in their shared interests, mutual understanding and respect for each other's priorities, concerns and sensitivities. Regular high-level visits and exchanges have been a key feature of this relationship.

### **POLITICAL RELATIONS**

Visits at the highest level have been exchanged frequently between India and Oman. From Indian side, President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma (1996) and Vice-President Shri Krishna Kant (1999) visited Oman. Five Prime Ministers of India have visited Oman: Shri Rajiv Gandhi (1985), Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao (1993), Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998), Dr. Manmohan Singh (2008) and Shri Narendra Modi (2018). During the state visit of PM Shri Narendra Modi to Oman on 11-12 February 2018, he met with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said ; and received calls on him by H.H. Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers and H.H. Sayyid Asa'd bin Tariq Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan. Eight Agreements/MoUs were signed during the visit, covering bilateral cooperation in various areas. From Oman, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos visited India in 1997. H.H. Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said also visited India in December 2007.

Ministerial level visits have taken place regularly between the two countries. Smt. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister (EAM), paid an official visit to Oman from 17-18 February 2015. Shri M J Akbar, Minister of State (MOS) for External Affairs, visited Oman to attend the 5th India-Arab Partnership Conference, in December 2016. Raksha Mantri visited Oman from 20-22 May 2016, during which four MOUs/Protocol for bilateral cooperation were signed. Dr. Mahesh Sharma, 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 Suresh Prabhu, 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.

From Oman, 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 Government after general elections. He 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. Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs visited India on 25-27 September 2018. Mohammed Salim al-Toobi, Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs, visited New Delhi on 2-4 October 2018 for attending the 2nd IORA Ministerial meeting and 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of International Solar Alliance.

## **Agreements and Bilateral Cooperation mechanisms:**

Key bilateral agreements/MoUs between India and Oman cover cooperation in Health; Tourism; Defence; peaceful uses of Outer Space; Visa Exemption for holders of diplomatic/official/special passports; 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 are also Institution-to-Institution cooperation between the two countries..

## **DEFENCE COOPERATION**

India-Oman Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar of the strategic partnership between the two countries. There has been regular high level visits between the Ministries of Defence. India's Defence Minister visited Oman in May 2016 and Oman's Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs visited India in September 2018. Over the past few years, there have been visits of Defence Secretary, CNS and CAS to Oman with reciprocal visits to Indian by all three Omani Service Commanders, Secretary General of Defence, etc. Constant and continuous senior leadership engagements have facilitated greater bonds of friendship. The Ministries of Defence of both countries review their relations annually under the aegis of Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) meeting. The last JMCC meeting took place in November 2018 in Muscat. Both Air Force and Navy undertake staff talks on a regular basis which has been the catalyst for new areas of cooperation. The two Armies are also scheduled to commence Staff Talks in the near future.

India and Oman conduct regular biennial bilateral exercises between all three services. The 3rd Army exercise 'Al Najah' is scheduled in March 2019 in Jabel Akdhar, Oman. The Air Force exercise 'Eastern Bridge' culminated in Jan 2017 and will see the next edition in the second half of 2019 in Oman. The bilateral naval exercise 'Naseem al Bahr' is scheduled in December 2019. Since 2008, Oman has been extending its support to Indian Navy's anti-piracy missions and Indian Naval Ships are regularly welcomed by Oman for Over Seas Deployments. A sailing vessel 'Zeenat al Bihaar' from the Royal Yachts participated with INS Tarangini and INS Sudarshini in the joint sailing voyage from Kochi to Muscat in November 2019. The joint sailing formed part of the celebrations commemorating the 10th anniversary of IONS. The Ships retraced the ancient maritime trade routes from the Malabar Coast to the Gulf. Indian Air Force and Indian Navy aircraft regularly utilize Omani Airports and Air bases for refueling and operational turnaround.

## **ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL RELATIONS**

India accords a high priority to expanding its economic and commercial ties with Oman. Institutional mechanisms like Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and Joint Business Council (JBC) oversee economic cooperation between India and Oman. The 8th session of the JCM and the 9th JBC were held in Muscat on 16-17 July 2018 co-chaired by Shri Suresh Prabhu,

Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, and Dr. Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce & Industry.

Bilateral trade and investment between India and Oman remain robust and buoyant. Bilateral trade rose by 67 per cent to reach US\$ 6.7 billion in 2017-18 from US\$ 4 billion in 2016-17. Major items of India's exports to Oman include mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances; articles of iron or steel; electrical machinery and equipment, textiles and garments, chemicals, tea, coffee, spices, cereals and meat products and seafood. Main items of India's imports from Oman are include fertilizers; mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes; aluminum and articles thereof; organic chemicals; salt; sulphur; earths and stone; plastering materials, lime and cement.

**India-Oman Bilateral Trade in US\$ Millions** (Source: <http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/>)

Financial Year	India's Export to Oman	India's Import from Oman	Total Trade
2013-14	2,812.27	2,951.18	5,763.45
2014-15	2,379.44	1,752.24	4,131.69
2015-16	2,190.89	1,673.00	3,863.86
2016-17	2,731.48	1,275.11	4,006.59
2017-18	2,439.46	4,264.29	6,703.76

**Bilateral Investment:**

Investment flows, both ways, 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. 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 in 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\$ 1.2 billion 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 on completion, has been signed. In addition, L&T, Jindal, EPIL, Shapoorji Pallonji, Shriram, Aditya Birla Group, Nagarjuna Construction Company, KEC International, etc. 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, LIC, New India Assurance Co., TCIL, EIL, EPIL and NBCC have presence in Oman.

Indian business delegations regularly visit Oman to participate in important trade exhibitions in Oman. To facilitate business matchmaking with Omani companies for the Indian delegations, the Embassy regularly organizes Business-to-business meetings in sectors like healthcare, infrastructure, construction, IT, minerals & mining, food & hospitality, ceramics, fire & safety etc.

ITEC: Oman has been optimally availing the allocated slots under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. For 2018-19, 125 slots have been allotted for Officials from Oman for training under ITEC.

### **Cultural Cooperation and People-to-People Exchange**

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. 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. Yoga is becoming increasingly 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 4000 in 2017 and 5000 in 2018. Embassy receives good support from Omani Government in organizing various cultural programmes and celebration of important occasions.

There are about 8,00,000 Indians in Oman, of which about 6,66,000 are workers and professionals. Thousands of Indians are working as doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, teachers, lecturers, nurses, managers, etc. There are 20 Indian schools offering CBSE syllabus catering to the educational needs of over 46,000 Indian children. Indian community in Oman is organized under Indian Social Club Oman with branches in Muscat, Salalah, Sur and Sohar. These clubs have a number of sub-groups called linguistic Wings which cater to cultural and social needs of their members.

Outstanding contributions of Indians and People of Indian Origin in Oman to the strengthening of our bilateral relations have been recognized by the Government of India through Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees from Oman are: Shri Kanaksi Khimji (2003), Dr. P. Mohamed Ali (2004), P.N.C. Menon (2009), S.K. Virmani (2010), Kiran Asher (2012) R.M Parakh (2015).

Connectivity: There are a total of around 260 direct flights per week between Oman (Muscat and Salalah) and 11 destinations in India. Air India, Air India Express, Indigo, Spice Jet and Jet Airways, along with Oman Air, are operating flights between India and Oman.

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Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Muscat website: <http://www.indemb-oman.gov.in/>

Embassy's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInOman/>

Embassy's Twitter Account: Indemb\_Muscat

Embassy's YouTube Channel: Indian Embassy Muscat