

India-Qatar Bilateral Relations

India-Qatar cooperation in diverse sectors has been steadily growing in an excellent framework provided by historically close ties and regular and substantive engagement, including at the highest levels of the two Governments. The large, diverse, accomplished and highly regarded Indian community is making an important contribution to Qatar's progress and in nurturing the bonds of deep-rooted friendship and multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries.

Political Relations

There has been regular exchange of high-level bilateral visits in the recent past. The Emir of Qatar H.H. Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani had paid a State Visit to India in March 2015. Previously, the then Emir H.H. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani [now the Father Emir] had visited India in 1999, 2005 and 2012. The then Qatari PM Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani visited India in December 2016.

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Doha from 4-5 June, 2016 at the invitation of H.H. Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar. PM's visit provided an excellent opportunity to both sides to engage at the highest level, and imparted fresh momentum to our bilateral ties. This was the highest-level visit from India to Qatar since the visit of former PM Dr. Manmohan Singh in November 2008.

During his visit to Doha in June 2016, PM held extensive talks with H.H. the Emir and exchanged views on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of mutual concern. During the wideranging discussions, the two sides agreed, *inter alia*, to constitute an inter-ministerial High Level Joint Committee to regularly review all bilateral matters, as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest. Recognizing the existing goodwill, the two leaders agreed to further broaden and deepen bilateral engagement in diverse fields of mutual interest. They agreed to further enhance high-level political exchanges, defence and security cooperation, trade and economic relations and people-to-people linkages. They stressed upon the need for building a strong partnership for the 21st century between the two countries in keeping with their responsibility for promoting peace, stability and security in the region and the world.

Seven MoUs/ Agreements between the two sides were signed during PM's visit, which includes (1) MoU for investment in National Investment and Infrastructure Fund of India; (2) MoU between Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND) and the Qatar Financial Information Unit (QFIU); (3) MoU for Cooperation in Skill Development and Recognition of Qualifications; (4) MoU for Cooperation in the field of Health; (5) Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Custom Matters; (6) MoU on Tourism Cooperation; and (7) First Executive Program for MoU in the field of Youth and Sports.

Most recently, Prime Minister met with H.H. the Emir of Qatar on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on 23 September 2019 in New York. They discussed bilateral relations and regional and international issues of mutual interest.

During H.H. the Emir's visit to India in March, 2015, the two sides discussed ways and means to build a forward-looking partnership by further broadening and deepening the bilateral engagement and by better leveraging the existing complementarities between the two countries in key areas of mutual interest including inter alia, energy, power, petrochemicals, investments, infrastructure development, project exports, education, culture, health, human resource, media and information technology. Six Agreements / MOUs were signed during the visit, in the following areas: (i) Transfer of sentenced Persons; (ii) Mutual Cooperation between Foreign Service Institute, MEA and Diplomatic Institute, MFA; (iii) Cooperation in Information and Communication Technology; (iv) Cooperation in Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences; (v) Cooperation in Radio and Television; and (vi) Mutual Cooperation and Exchange of News between Qatar News Agency and United News Agency.

There have been several high-level visits between the two countries in the recent past:

- Qatar's MOS for Energy Affairs Saad Sherida Al Kaabi visited New Delhi on 27 January 2020 and met with Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Shri Dharmendra Pradhan. The two leaders discussed bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.
- Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas of India Shri Dharmendra Pradhan visited Qatar from 11-12 September 2019 and met with MOS for Energy Affairs and Qatar Petroleum CEO & President Saad Sherida Al Kaabi in Doha and reviewed bilateral energy ties. He also called on the then Qatari PM and Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani and discussed bilateral relations and issues of mutual concern.
- Gen. (Dr.) V. K. Singh (Retd), the then MOS for External Affairs of India, visited Doha from 01-02 May 2019 to attend the 16th Ministerial Meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). On the sidelines of the event, he held meetings with his Qatari counterpart Soltan bin Saad Al Muraikhi and discussed bilateral relations.
- A high-level delegation from Qatar led by Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim Saif Ahmed al-Sulaiti visited Mumbai from 14-16 January 2019 to participate in the Global Aviation Summit. On the sidelines, Qatari delegation held meeting with India's Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha. The two sides discussed aspects of co-operation in the fields of transport and aviation services, and potential investment opportunities in these areas.
- Smt. Sushma Swaraj, the then EAM visited Doha on 28-30 October 2018 which was the first-ever visit by any Indian External Affairs Minister to Doha. During the visit, EAM called on H.H. the Emir and discussed issues of common concern. She also called on the then Qatari PM Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, and discussed of bilateral relations. EAM held delegation level talks with the Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin

Abdulrahman Al Thani and reviewed the whole gamut of bilateral relations. During the visit the two sides also signed a Joint Declaration to establish Joint Commission.

- The Ministry of External Affairs of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Qatar held third round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) on 23 September 2018 in Doha. The Qatari side was chaired by Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi, while the Indian side was led by Secretary (ER) Shri T. S. Tirumurti. Bilateral relations, in addition to a number of issues of mutual interest, were discussed during the meeting.
- Secretary General of Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi, visited India for political dialogue on April 20, 2018. During the visit he met Secretary (ER) and called on Gen. (Dr.) V. K. Singh (Retd.), the then MOS to brief Indian leadership about the ongoing Gulf crisis.
- The then Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, Shri. M. J. Akbar visited Qatar to represent India at the formal inauguration of the Qatar National Library on 16 April, 2018. MoS called upon the then Prime Minister and Interior Minister of Qatar Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani during the visit and discussed bilateral relations and regional and international issues of mutual interests. MoS also met the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi during his visit to Qatar and reviewed bilateral relations and other regional issues of mutual interest. MoS also met with the CEO of the Qatar Foundation, Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani to discuss bilateral cooperation in the field of culture and education.
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani visited India on 25-26 August, 2017 and held delegation-level talks with EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj on 26 August during which matters of mutual interest were discussed. The two sides reviewed progress on the follow-up of key decisions taken during the high-level bilateral visits which have been contributing to building a mutually beneficial partnership between the two countries. The visiting Qatari Minister called on PM Modi to hand over a letter from H.H. the Emir of Qatar. During the meeting, the Qatari side welcomed participation of the Indian companies through project exports in Qatar's infrastructure development, including for the ongoing FIFA 2022 related infrastructure. Sheikh Mohammed briefed his Indian interlocutors about the situation in the Gulf region.

In the wake of the decision by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries to break diplomatic relations with the State of Qatar in June 2017, the Government of India has called on all parties to resolve their differences through a process of constructive dialogue and peaceful negotiations based on well-established international principles of mutual respect, sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. India believes that peace and security in the Gulf are of paramount importance for the continued progress and prosperity of the countries in the region.

Defence

Defence cooperation is an important pillar of our bilateral agenda. India offers training slots in its defence institutions to a number of partner countries, including Qatar. India regularly participates in the biennial Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (DIMDEX) in Qatar. Indian Naval and Coast Guard ships regularly visit Qatar as part of our bilateral cooperation and interaction. India-Qatar Defence Cooperation Agreement, signed during the former PM's visit to Qatar in November 2008, was extended for a further period of five years in 2013, and further extended for a period of five years in November 2018. The agreement is implemented through the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC), which held its fifth meeting in Doha on 27-28 November 2019.

Major visits by defence delegations and ship visits:

- The Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. (Pilot) Ghanim bin Shaheen Al Ghanim, visited in India from 19-22 June 2018 and called on all the three service chiefs and Defence Secretary. An agreement on white shipping information sharing was signed during the visit.
- The Commander of the Qatar Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) visited in India from 02-05 April 2019 and called on Chairman of Chief of Staff Committee (COSC), Defence Secretary and Vice Chief of Air Staff.
- The maiden five-day bilateral maritime exercise between the Indian Navy and the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) named 'Za'ir Al-Bahr' was held at Hamad Port with the participation of Indian Naval Ship (INS) Trikanth and Patrol Aircraft P8I and Qatari Navy's anti-ship missile-equipped Barzan Class fast attack craft along with Rafale multi-task fighter aircraft, from 17-21 November 2019.
- Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Samudra Paharedar visited Qatar from 23 to 27 January 2020 on a goodwill visit to Gulf region.
- Indian Navy's first Sail Training Ship (STS) INS Tarangini visited Doha Port from December 08-09, 2019. A six-member team from the Qatari Navy visited the ship on December 09 for a familiarization event and interacted with the Indian Navy officials.
- Indian Navy's warship *INS Mumbai*, commanded by Captain Amit Srivastava, was on a three day visit to Hamad Port from September 18-20, 2018.
- The Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition (DIMDEX) organized by the Ministry of Defence, Qatar under the theme "Building Capabilities in Challenging Environments through Visionary International Military Cooperation and Defence Equipment" was held at Qatar National Convention Center from 12-14 March, 2018. Indian Navy's warship, *INS Kolkata*, led by Flag Officer Commanding of the Western Naval Command, Vice Admiral Girish Luthra and Additional Director General of the Indian Coast Guard VSR Murthy participated in the event. Vice Admiral Girish Luthra called on the then Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani on 13 March, 2018 and

discussed bilateral defence cooperation. An official reception to celebrate the high-level participation of India at DIMDEX 2018 was hosted by the Ambassador of India to Qatar on board the ship on 13 March, 2018. Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Dr. Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attiyah visited the ship on 14 March, 2018 and was received by the Commanding Officer of the Ship.

Commercial & Investment Relations

India's bilateral trade with Qatar in 2018-19 was US\$ 12.33 billion. India's export to Qatar during 2018-19 was US\$ 1.61 billion and India's import from Qatar was US\$ 10.72 billion. The bilateral trade during 2019-20 (till November 2019) stood at US\$ 6.8 billion with US\$ 785.6 million worth of exports and US\$ 6.05 billion of imports. Qatar's key exports to India include LNG, LPG, chemicals and petrochemicals, plastics, and aluminium articles, while India's key exports to Qatar include cereals, copper articles, iron and steel articles, vegetables, fruits, spices, and processed food products, electrical and other machinery, plastic products, construction material, textiles & garments, chemicals, precious stones and rubber. India is among the top three largest export destinations for Qatar (Japan and South Korea being the other two) and is also among the top three sources of Qatar's imports, along with China and Japan.

With an import of nearly 10 million metric tonnes (MMT) of LNG, both through a long-term contract between Petronet of India and RasGas of Qatar and spot purchases by Indian companies, Qatar is the largest supplier of LNG to India, accounting for over 50% of India's global LNG imports. On 31 December, 2015, Petronet LNG, India's largest natural gas importer, and Qatar's RasGas Co. Ltd had signed an agreement for an additional supply of 1 million tonnes of LNG annually from the RasGas through the remainder of the 25-year contract, ending in 2028.

Besides LNG, India also imports ethylene, propylene, ammonia, urea and polyethylene from Qatar. Therefore, the balance of trade continues to be heavily in Qatar's favour. However, there has been a substantial growth in India's exports to Qatar in the last few years mainly owing to the blockade of Qatar by its neighbouring countries.

According to the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI), there are over 6000 big and small Indian companies operating in Qatar. Indian companies are today pursuing collaborations in various sectors like infrastructure, communications and information technology, energy and other areas in Qatar. The extensive infrastructure development in Qatar as it prepares to host the prestigious FIFA World Cup in 2022 and attain its National Vision 2030 objective, and the acknowledged competences of India's corporate sector, offer attractive opportunities for cooperation. Indian companies have invested about US\$450 million in Qatar, according to a statement by Qatar Financial Centre (QFC). Indian companies from across sectors have been present in Qatar for over several years and among them are Larsen & Toubro, Voltas, Shapoorji Pallonji, Wipro, TCS, Tech Mahindra and ICICI Bank.

On the banking side, ICICI and other Indian banks have limited operations under Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) or private exchange houses in Qatar. Both sides have been taking active steps to further expand the economic and commercial partnership. In August 2016, Qatar National Bank (QNB) which is Qatar's largest bank received RBI approval for retail operations and opened a branch in India in order to provide comprehensive banking services. Mumbai-based Centrum Group has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Doha Bank to leverage each other's network and scale up operations in India in the areas of banking, wealth management and foreign exchange. Doha Bank also took over operations of the former's branches at Mumbai and Kochi, and its third branch opened in Chennai in April, 2018. It is planning at least 12 branches and with an exposure of US\$ 5 billion in India. Doha Bank is the first Qatari Bank to have full-scale banking operations in India.

There has been a substantial increase in Qatar's imports from India past 2-3 years, facilitated by the opening of direct shipping lines linking Indian ports with Qatar. The increase has been in the area of food products, vegetables, pharmaceuticals, steel products and construction materials. Qatar Petroleum's decision to expand LNG output from the North Field to 126 million tonnes by 2027, liberalisation of visa regulations, changes introduced to Company Law, the new Free Zone regulations and the proposed Permanent Residency scheme for longstanding foreign residents, are developments that offer new opportunities.

While the current volume of Qatar's FDI in India is modest, Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Fund - Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and other state-owned entities, as well as private investors in Qatar are keenly looking at attractive investment options in various sectors in India. The Mission has been actively engaged with QIA and other state-owned and private entities in Qatar, highlighting the new initiatives and policies of the government, such as 'Make in India' and the distinctive advantages of India as an investment destination, particularly on sectors like real estate/construction, roads/highways, airports/airlines, ports, railways; LNG, petrochemicals and fertilizers; tourism/hospitality; and agriculture infrastructure, cold storage, warehousing and dedicated agro-ports.

Major Qatari investments in India during 2019:

- In January 2019, QIA invested US\$ 200 million through a primary equity issuance in Bharti Airtel's arm Airtel Africa Ltd.
- In July 2019, BYJU'S announced that it has received an investment of US\$150 million led by Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the sovereign wealth fund of the State of Qatar.
- Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) is investing about US\$450 million for a 25.1% stake in a unit of Adani Transmission Ltd. The deal includes a subordinated debt investment by QIA, according to the filing, which said the two sides have signed a definitive agreement. The transaction is expected to be completed in early 2020 after obtaining regulatory approvals.

Tourism

India is a popular tourist destination amongst Qatari nationals, given the cultural compatibility and historical contacts between the two countries. Key historical sites such as Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur; leisure destination such as Goa; hill stations in the Himalayas; in addition to medical and wellness destination in metropolitan cities and in Kerala, are popular destinations for the Qatari nationals. The Government of India has also extended e-Visa (tourist, business and medical) facility to the Qatari nationals in August 2018. 299 Qatari citizens availed of this facility 2018 and approximately 7000 regular visas were issued to Qatari nationals during 2018.

A delegation from India Tourism Dubai office participated in the first edition of the Qatar Travel and Holidays Expo held from 3-4 September 2019 in Doha. A tourism 'Know India' seminar was organized by the Embassy on its margins, which was attended by senior business executives, travel agencies and tour operators in Qatar.

More than 4 lacs tourists visited Qatar from India during the year 2018 registering a 20% growth over 2017. India was also the largest source of tourists for Qatar in 2018. The growth is largely attributed to liberalized visa regime of Qatar. Qatar granted citizens of more than 80 countries, including India, tourist visa on arrival facility in August 2017 with the aim to promote inbound tourism. Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC) has opened a representative office in Mumbai, India—the 11th in a network of offices around the globe. QNTC's representative office in India oversees a wide range of promotional initiatives, including workshops, sales visits, travel agent destination training through QNTC's online Tawash programme.

In December 2018, Qatar's National Tourism Council (QNTC), in collaboration with Cox & Kings group, launched a marketing and promotion campaign to promote Qatar as the group's new preferred destination among Indians. As part of the campaign, 260 travel agents came to Qatar to attend Cox & King's 5-day Travel Agent Training Camp, where the agents had an opportunity to experience first-hand unique experiences offered by Qatar.

Further, Qatar is emerging as an attractive wedding destination. Several luxurious Indian destination weddings have taken place in Doha in the recent past.

Cultural Relations

Cultural ties between India and Qatar are deep-rooted and actively nurtured by both sides. There are regular cultural exchanges between the two sides, under the provisions of the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation signed between the two sides in 2012. Qataris admire India's cultural diversity. The year 2019 was being celebrated as India-Qatar Year of Culture, as envisaged in the Joint Statement issued during the visit of PM Modi to Qatar. Over 45 cultural events including exhibitions, fashion shows, art displays, dance performances, musical concerts, etc. were organized in Qatar by the Embassy during the year with the cooperation of Ministry of Culture & Sports of Qatar, Qatar Museums, Katara Cultural Village, Qatar Posts, and Qatar Foundation.

The Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), an umbrella community organisation of Indian socio-cultural associations in Qatar, functioning under the aegis of Embassy of India,

Doha, undertakes a number of cultural and other activities with Mission's guidance, support and cooperation. Mission also has a regular and active engagement with several Qatari organizations, like Katara, Qatar National Tourism Council and Qatar Museums in the areas of arts, culture, education, etc. and has organized major events in partnership with them. There is no cultural centre financed by ICCR in Doha.

Yoga: India deeply appreciates Qatar's support, as a co-sponsor, to its Resolution at the UNGA, adopted unanimously with a record 177 co-sponsors, declaring 21 June as the International Day of Yoga (IDY), and for various activities to celebrate the first IDY in Qatar. A commemorative stamp to mark the occasion was also released by Qatar Post in June 2015.

Embassy has been celebrating International Day of Yoga (IDY) every year, which is attended by large number of yoga enthusiasts. The Embassy organized yoga session at the iconic National Museum of Qatar as part of the 5th IDY celebrations on June 22, 2019. Around 2000 yoga enthusiasts attended the event. Another session was held at Qatar Sports Club.

Ayurveda: Qatar has allowed the practice of complementary medicine, including Ayurveda, in Qatar. A 2-member delegation from the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, visited Doha from 09-10 September 2019 and held discussions with the officials at Qatar's Ministry of Public Health on establishment of legal framework in Qatar for practice of Ayurveda. On the margins of the visit, a business event was organized by the Embassy to spread awareness about the prospects of cooperation in the field of complementary medicine.

Indian Community

Indian nationals totalling about 7,56,000 as of June 2019, comprise the largest expatriate community in Qatar and are engaged in a wide spectrum of professions including medicine; engineering; education, finance; banking; business; and media apart from a large number of blue-collared workers. They are highly regarded for their honesty, hard work, qualifications and contribution to the development and progress of Qatar. The welfare and well-being of the Indian community in Qatar is a matter of priority for the Embassy. There is a dedicated Labour and Community Welfare Wing that systematically registers and follow-up grievances brought to its notice. The Embassy has adopted a pro-active approach to ensure that the grievances of Indian workers are addressed satisfactorily by the concerned authorities in Qatar.

The Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), functioning under the aegis of Embassy of India, Doha - ICBF was awarded Pravasi Bharatiya Samman in January, 2011. ICBF operates a help-desk beyond working hours and also organizes medical camps for low-income workers from time to time in different cities of Qatar, in collaboration with the Indian Doctors Club and medical centers who are willing to partner with the Embassy in this initiative. The Embassy also regularly organizes consular camps in cities outside Doha for the benefit of Indian nationals living there. A monthly 'Open House' is organised on the last Thursday of every month, where any Indian national having a grievance can meet the Ambassador and other officers.

The Indian Sports Centre (ISC) is a community based organization working under the aegis of the Embassy of India, formed exclusively to focus on all aspects relating to the promotion of various sports and games, not only amongst the Indian community, but also amongst other expatriate communities. ISC also aims to support Qatar in hosting various national and international sporting events in a sustained manner.

Both countries have a Joint Working Group on Labour and Manpower Development, which held its 5th meeting in Doha in January 2019. The Embassy remains in close contact with the concerned authorities in Qatar to ensure the well-being of our workers and other Indian expatriates. Recent reforms introduced to labour laws in Qatar like abolition of the sponsorship system (Kafala System) through Law No. 21 of 2015, removal of the requirement to obtain's employer's consent to change jobs if the expatriate has completed his fixed term contract and imposition of penalty upon illegal confiscation of passports by employers are of interest to India. Qatar has also abolished requirement of Exit Permit for 95% of the work force in private sector. Other reforms include the setting up of the Exit Permit Grievances Committee in the Ministry of Interior, streamlining the recruitment process through setting up of Labour Dispute Settlement Committees, bringing domestic-sector workers under a legal framework similar to other workers, creation of a Support Fund to settle the salary dues of workers of financially-distressed companies, setting up of International Labor Organization Office in Doha and also the proposal to institute a system of minimum wages for various categories of workers. These initiatives indicate Qatar's willingness to address labour issues in a constructive manner. We look forward to their early implementation so that our workers can fully benefit from them.

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