

Indian community acts like a strong bridge between India and Qatar, says Ambassador

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Doha

As India celebrates its 76th Republic Day, Indian Ambassador to Qatar H E Vipul spoke to *News Trail*, in an exclusive interview, about ever-strengthening India-Qatar relations, contributions of Indian community in Qatar, improvement in delivery of consular services and the role of community organisations.

As India celebrates its 76th Republic Day on January 26, what's your message to Indian community in Qatar?

This 26 January is a momentous occasion as India completes 75 years as Republic. Over the last seven-and-a-half decades,

India has had many successes and achievements which all Indians should be proud of. A major success for India has been the strong democracy that we have become based on our Constitution that came into force on 26 January 1950. We should all also be incredibly grateful to the leaders of our freedom struggle and those who gave us our Constitution, in particular Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. I would invite the entire Indian community to rejoice in the celebrations of this special Republic Day. I would also like to thank them for acting like a strong bridge between India and Qatar in strengthening the historic connections between the two countries in various spheres. I am confident that the members of Indian community would continue to distinguish themselves



in their respective areas of work and contribute to future growth of the India-Qatar partnership.

Republic Day is an occasion to reflect on India's journey until now. As a senior diplomat, what are your thoughts on the great strides India has made globally?

Over the past 75 years, we have had remarkable achievements in various spheres. I consider strengthening and deepening of democratic processes across the length and breadth of India among the most significant. In the last elections in May-June 2024, more than 968 million people elected their representatives.

This was the biggest ever democratic exercise in the history of the world. Indian economy has seen consistent growth to become the fifth largest economy of the world. We are counted among the leading nations in critical technologies like space and nuclear as also in other areas like IT and Pharma. As member of G-20 and various other international forums, we have championed the cause of Global South while deepening our engagement across the world in pursuit of peace, security and cooperation. India is thus reckoned as a prominent country in global affairs today which we all should be happy about.

Looking at future, where is India headed? What are the areas our country will make a difference and impact?

India is among the fastest growing major economies of the world and is on track to become the third largest economy before the end of this decade. I feel that with our demographic dividend, focus on developing critical technologies, growing manufacturing capacities and increasing financial inclusion India should continue to register impressive economic growth. We recently crossed the mark of \$1 trillion FDI into India. Also, as home to a large and young population, India will play significant role in the forthcoming AI driven world. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that the fruits of development reach to all sections of Indian society and make India *Viksit Bharat* by 2047 as envisioned by Prime Minister Modi.

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We want to ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity: Ambassador

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This is also an occasion to take a look at the India-Qatar relations. What are the new prospects for India-Qatar relations?

India and Qatar share deep historical connections driven by the people-to-people connections, trade and energy. Our trade ties are robust with bilateral trade of about \$14bn annually. The investment relationship has continued to expand. Qatar Investment Authority has made some big investments in India. The Indian community in Qatar is also very active in small and medium enterprises. Qatar as a large source of energy will continue to be an important partner for India.

This partnership was renewed last year in February with the signing of a contract for supply of 7.5 million tonnes of LNG per year from Qatar to India for 20 years starting 2028. We envisage even more dynamism in India-Qatar partnership in the years to come with deepening of cooperation in existing areas and expanding it to newer areas such as innovation, sustainabil-

ity, startups and AI. The bonds of culture and people-to-people contacts will continue to provide the strong foundation to our relationship.

During your stint as ambassador so far, what aspects of India-Qatar bonds and Indians' contributions to Qatar have impressed you most?

India and Qatar share strong bonds of friendship from centuries. In old times both countries had maritime trade on dhows made of Indian wood with Qatari pearls and dates going to India and spices and other goods coming from India to Qatar. In modern times we can see the expansion of trade to the area of energy and a strengthening of bilateral investment relationship. Indians have been a fellow traveler to the Qatari counterparts. They have been together in moments of joy and sadness whether it's the production of oil and gas, large infrastructure projects, FIFA 2022 organization or facing the Covid pandemic. This is a remarkable feat by the community. I feel happy to see that our workers have contributed immensely to the develop-

ment of Qatar and our professionals are present in virtually in all fields in Qatar such as engineers, doctors, pharmacists, bankers, accountants and teachers.

Above all it gives me great satisfaction and pride that their contribution is



tion is recognized by the Qatari society.

In terms of consular services, are there any plans to introduce new services or improve existing services, especially to address the delay in getting renewed passports?

It is our constant endeavour to serve the Indian community at our best, we have taken measures to ensure time-bound delivery of passports and other consular services so that people have clarity and their time is valued. We are delivering most passports within 5-7 days of submission while attestation services are provided within 1-2 days. We also organize consular camps on weekends in different areas in coordination with Indian community organizations to benefit our workers. I and other Embassy officers and community volunteers also address consular grievances in the afternoon of last Thursday of every month in an Open House. We are exploring the possibility of further streamlining the delivery of our consular services including by outsourcing them to a professional agency.

Apex body elections are happening soon. There is a concern that these elections aren't representative enough because only members are allowed to vote and membership involves a fee which many Indians can't afford. What are your plans for the apex bodies?

The Indian community organizations in Qatar play a significant role in strengthening community bonds, preserving traditions as well as providing valuable services to Indians in Qatar. These organizations have evolved over the last several decades by the community itself. The Embassy works closely with these organizations in ensuring the well-being of all Indians in Qatar. The periodic elections to these bodies are important to ensure that the leadership has confidence of the community. We want to ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity. My expectation from all our community organizations is that they will work for the progress and development of both India and Qatar as well as our bilateral relationship. This Republic Day is an auspicious occasion to recommit to doing so. Jai Hind.