

Bahrain-India ties set to enter 'new era'

Community concerns raised in virtual interaction session hosted by Indian Embassy, attended by Indian Minister of External Affairs

● Indian Minister's visit to the Kingdom will bolster ties between the two countries: Dadabhai

● Bahrain praised for strong tradition of religious tolerance, as redevelopment project for Gulf's first Hindu temple underway

● Indian community steps up to assist countrymen amidst challenges brought about by Covid-19



Minister H.E. Jayashankar along with Indian Ambassador HE Piyush Srivastava in the virtual community interaction session

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TDT | Manama

Bahrain and India are headed towards a "new era" of ties thanks to official visits by high-ranking leaders between the two countries, according to a leading Bahraini businessman Mohammed Dadabhai.

The Dadabhai Group chairman and managing director said this yesterday during a virtual community interaction session hosted by the Indian Embassy and attended by Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr S Jayashankar, who is on an official visit to the Kingdom.

The online conference discussed various issues raised by Indian community members representing various sectors of society.

Dadabhai highlighted that Bahrain has always been welcoming to Indian expatriates and has "stood with the Republic of India in testing times".

"We are at home here even if we are away from home," Dadabhai said, expressing his thanks to Dr Jayashankar for coming to Bahrain.

He added that such continued visits will enhance the relationship between the two friendly nations. "Honourable Minister, your visit will bolster the ties between the two countries and will strengthen our resolve for greater cooperation," Dadabhai stressed.

"Today when India has

strengthened their position among the world nations, we are looking forward to a new era in the relationship of the Republic of India and the Kingdom of Bahrain."

Others taking part in the community interaction were Thattai Hindu Merchant Community (THMC) president Bob C Thaker, Indian Club president Stalin Joseph, Indian School Bahrain (ISB) chairman Prince Natarajan, Bahrain India Society chairman R K Damani, Bahrain Keralaeya Samajam president Radhakrishna Pillai, and Indian Community Relief Fund (ICRF) chairman Aruldas, among others.

Strong tradition of religious tolerance

Thaker praised Bahrain's long tradition of extending hospitality and tolerance towards peoples of all faiths and backgrounds who have arrived on its shores from the time of the Dilmun civilisation in 3,000 BC.

"This tradition of tolerance has created a culture of plurality and exchange whereby Bahrain's diverse community, given individual rights of worship,

were also given the opportunity to actively engage in the country's development," he said.

Thaker noted that THMC is currently undertaking a redevelopment project on the Krishna Temple located in the heart of the Manama souq. Built nearly 200 years ago, it is known to be the first Hindu temple in the Gulf Region, and its establishment was seen as a shining example of the secularism practised in Bahrain. It is where the majority of the Hindu community celebrates their many festivals all around the year.

"This temple is a standing testament to the strong ties that the Hindu community has with Bahrain," Thaker explained. "THMC, which owns the property, has ambitious plans to completely redevelop the complex."

Thaker noted that last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the project, which costs nearly Rs 35 crores. It will be fully funded by the Bhatia community, which will have 45,000sq feet of built-up area, prayer area, five state-of-the-art auditoriums, two kitchens, a museum that will trace the his-

tory of the Bhatia community, and a knowledge center.

"We believe this iconic project will showcase the deep relations between the two countries and will stand as a testament of the impact of the Indian community in Bahrain," Thaker added.

Covid-19 challenges

Also during the community interaction, the challenges faced by the Kingdom's Indian community as a result of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic were raised.

Joseph spoke about the plight of many workers and their families, and how the Indian Club was able to charter more than 20 repatriation flights for over 3,000 countrymen over the last few months.

The club was also able to support members of the Indian community with thousands of food grain kits and free medical aid, especially for those who were most in need. Natarajan talked about ISB's implementation of the new education policy of India. He said that ISB is the largest community school, with around 12,000 students and 700 staff members, and added that ISB supports more than 1,000 students every year in providing fee concession and other support. But due to the Covid-19 crisis, many more students' families are in need of some help.

Natarajan appealed to Dr Jayashankar for the Indian

government to support such community schools with a very low fee structure, and requested that the minister provide concessions to Indian students for air travel.

On his part, Damani requested the minister to look into the possibilities of the signing of a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTA) with Bahrain. He stressed that such an agreement would motivate businessmen in the Kingdom to invest in India.

Meanwhile, Pillai revealed that thousands of Indian workers have had to leave the Gulf in recent months without getting paid their full salaries and terminal benefits. "A mechanism should be put in place to help such workers get their dues," Pillai suggested, and added that an interim relief of at least Rs one lakh should be paid to the families of Indian workers who have died in the Gulf due to Covid-19.

Furthermore, the scope of the funds used from the Indian Community Welfare Fund was raised during the session, including increasing the number of embassy staff, and the possibilities of establishing Indian Higher Education Institutions in Bahrain.

Aruldas highlighted that the ICRF has provided over 20 streams of urgent support to the community. These include the distribution of over 40 tonnes of food, the activation of health awareness campaigns, and the

financial backing over the years of over 500 families, which has come to about Rs five crores.

Committed

In closing the community interaction session, Dr Jayashankar thanked all those who took part and said that he looks forward to coming back and visiting Bahrain again in the future.

He addressed some of the issues raised by the conference's participants, saying that their concerns will be looked into by the government. Among these is the implementation of a DTA between Bahrain and India, air travel concessions for Indian students in the Kingdom who are most in need, and the Indian government's commitment to globalisation by "strengthening at home to do better in the world".

Dr Jayashankar expressed his appreciation to all those in the community who took up worthwhile initiatives to assist their fellow-Indians in light of the Covid-19 crisis. He also encouraged the Indian community to maintain their high level of education, saying that it is something Indians are known for across the globe.

Yesterday's community interaction was also attended by prominent businessmen Varghese Kurian and V Rajasekaran Pillai, LuLu Hypermarket Director Juzer Rupawala, and many other Indian community leaders.

ISB celebrates Urdu Day with flying colours

● Students take part in online programmes

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The Indian School Bahrain (ISB) celebrated Urdu Day (Yaum-E-Urdu) 2020 in vibrant colours online last Saturday.

The programme, which was organised by the ISB Urdu Department, started with the school prayer followed by the national anthems of Bahrain and India.

The Holy Qur'aan was recited by Haifa Humanun of grade 10-A and translated by Arfa Khan of grade 10-B. Urdu teacher Mahanaz Khan introduced the details of the celebrations.

This was the Grand Finale of



Students participate in online activities

a week-long celebration which had many competitions for the students of classes VI to X.

Poem recitation, storytelling, speech and quiz competitions in Urdu were conducted as part of the celebrations.

Apart from the competitions there were a variety of pro-

grammes such as patriotic song, national song and the most attractive event 'Mushaira' or Kavi sammelan which students enjoyed a lot.

HoD Baboo Khan announced the winners and appreciated the participants for their unique performance.

At the end of the programme, vote of thanks was proposed by Aleen Sayed of 10-B. The winners were awarded trophies and certificates.

ISB Hon Chairman Prince S Natarajan in a message said that Urdu is enriched with history, culture, and religious influences.

Call for Muslim youth to tackle intolerance and discrimination

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International Peace Institute, Middle East & North Africa (IPI MENA) Director Nejb Friji has called for greater preventive approaches and measures to build community resilience to intolerance, religious discrimination and hate speech.

During a webinar hosted by the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), an international organisation affiliated to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and moderated by ICYF Amel Ouchenene, Friji stressed the importance of engaging in intergenerational dialogue with the youth on such issues as the key stakeholders of our collective future.

More than 100 youth from 52 countries took part at the

ICYF's Youth Council of Foreign Ministers 2020 Virtual Summit's fourth session, entitled "Islamic Committee for Economic, Cultural & Social Affairs: Islamophobia, Minorities Rights, Social Advocacy".

"Instead of reactive strategies, it is our responsibility to support proactive preventive measures for a future that encompasses tolerance, sustainability and peace," Friji stressed.

He emphasised the role of education in equipping the youth with the skills and values needed to foster a sense of global citizenship, universal principles of responsibility, accountability and cultural understanding to counter negative misconceptions and combat prejudices and hate speech.