



HOME | LOCAL | WORLD | BUSINESS | SPORTS | COMMENT | LETTERS | WHAT'S ON | LATEST ISSUE | CHANGE ISSUE

Local News

Unique partnership

By SOMAN BABY, Posted on » 22 December 2008



BAHRAIN will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with India in the fight against terrorism, it declared last night. Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa condemned last month's terror attacks in Mumbai, as he officially launched the Bahrain-India Society, in a ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton Bahrain Hotel and Spa.

He said Bahrain was ready to give India any help it needed to bring those responsible to justice.

Bahrain's ties with India are based on friendship, honesty, trust and partnership, said Shaikh Khalid.

"We consider India a close partner and we look forward to consolidating these long-standing ties further," he said.

"The frequent exchange of visits between leaders and senior officials underlines the closeness of the continued co-ordination between the

countries."

More than 200 people, including top government officials and business leaders from both Bahrain and India, attended the launch.



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Telecom technocrat and India's National Knowledge Commission chairman Dr Sam Pitroda was the chief guest.

Dr Pitroda is based in Chicago, US, and is considered to have been responsible for India's communication revolution.

He is the chairman and chief executive officer of World-Tel, an International Telecommunication Union initiative.

Society chairman Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala and Indian Ambassador and society patron Balkrishna Shetty also spoke.

A farewell memento was presented to Mr Shetty, who is leaving Bahrain at the end of his three-year tenure later this month.

The new society will play a key role in helping to celebrate the unique story between the peoples of Bahrain and India, realising the vast potential that exists between the two friendly countries, said Shaikh Khalid.

He conveyed greetings from His Majesty King Hamad, Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

They wished the society success "in further fostering friendship, understanding and goodwill between our two peoples".

"The society is proud to celebrate the deep rooted and multi-faceted ties between our two nations and peoples - relations that date back to the Dilmun and Indus Valley Civilisations 5,000 years ago and which have evolved over the years to close co-operation in wide ranging fields.

"In fact, our modern history has enjoyed 200 years of thriving free trade without an agreement.

"Many Bahrainis have crossed the seas in search of education and opportunity and have made India their second home."

The converse is resoundingly true on a far more amplified scale, Shaikh Khalid noted.

"In fact, the Indian community is the largest expatriate community in Bahrain, and it continues to play an instrumental role in the development of this country," he added.

Shaikh Khalid said Bahrain looked forward to finalising a memorandum of understanding on the labour mobility and manpower development between the two countries.

"This landmark comprehensive agreement will reap tremendous benefits for both countries by providing an institutional framework to make labour mobility simple, transparent and efficient," he said.

Shaikh Khalid also paid tribute to Mr Shetty "for his abiding efforts to enhance bilateral relations between the countries".

"We all sincerely appreciate his friendship and the important contribution he has rendered to strengthen the bonds between Bahrain and India. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours," he added.

BIS is a non-profit organisation by a group of leading Bahraini and Indian businessmen and community leaders, said Mr Al Sho'ala.

"Indians constitute the single largest expatriate community in Bahrain, and their current number is estimated at around 300,000," he added.

The society currently has 61 members, including the board of directors. There is an increasing demand for new membership, said Mr Al Sho'ala.

Mr Shetty said the society would take the relationship between the two countries to new heights, at all levels.

"Both India and Bahrain are natural partners and we hope the society will become an effective channel in creating even greater understanding between the two nations," he added.

Mr Al Sho'ala said the two countries had witnessed an increase in the flow of investments and bilateral trade during the last few years.

The two countries share the belief that there still exists even wider areas of co-operation.

"That's why we, in Bahrain India Society, believe that we will be able to contribute in this endeavour, particularly due to the support that we already received through the speedy registration of the society by the Social Development Ministry," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

"The support by the government to our society couldn't be better expressed than with the presence of the Foreign Minister."

The society's plans for next year include cultural activities, exhibitions, youth exchange and business delegation visits.

"The next item in our programme is to organise the visit of a business delegation to India, to focus on reciprocal banking and investments opportunities," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

Dr Pitroda shared his views on India's initiatives and plans to build up a knowledge-based economy, the challenges and opportunities which will be generated, including the development of the right capabilities, infrastructure and human skills required to build and steer such an economy through the 21st century.

He urged Bahrainis to make use of the investment opportunities available in India which is now the fourth largest economy in the world and is poised to become the second largest by 2045.

Dr Pitroda said the National Knowledge Commission has recommended several projects to meet the shortage of skilled manpower in India where 550 million people are below the age of 25.

"At the commission's recommendation, India has decided to invest \$67 billion in education over the next five years. These will include the establishment of 30 new national universities and 6,000 colleges."

Dr Pitroda said the number of telephone connections in India currently stood at 400m. "We are adding 10m new phones every month and the number will reach 600m in two-and-a-half years."

He said the US model of consumption is no longer workable in the world.

BBK, the only Bahraini bank with full commercial banking presence in India and a very active NRI Division in Bahrain, was the main sponsor of the event. soman@gdn.com.bh