

# On India's Independence Day, we are reminded of a partnership for all seasons



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India and the UAE, along with other countries, continue to fight the Covid-19 pandemic for a safer and healthier world. In these difficult times, the peoples of both countries have many reasons to cheer for the future. While India has begun celebrations for its 75th anniversary of independence, the UAE too has set plans in motion to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its foundation. In the coming year, India and the UAE will also celebrate 50 years of their diplomatic relations. While it was not planned this way, it is only fitting that Expo 2020 Dubai is being held during this momentous period. While the milestones fall within the span of a year, the foundation was laid much before the formation of the UAE on December 2, 1971, and India's independence on August 15, 1947.

The centuries-old ties between the peoples of India and the UAE are rooted in trade and commerce. They began around the time of the Indus Valley Civilisation between 3300 BCE and 1300 BCE, when the two regions had a flourishing maritime trade, to the early 20th century, when Bombay (now Mumbai) used to be the biggest hub for pearl trade in the region. The currency of the two countries remained the same until 1973, when the Dirham replaced the Gulf Rupee in the UAE. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the UAE, in 1972, before opening its mission the following year.

This shared journey of the peoples of both countries has flourished ever since. Although Indians have lived in the UAE from even before the era of the British Empire, their numbers increased after the UAE's formation. The real impetus came in the 1990s, at a time when Dubai was becoming a global hub for trade. The infrastructure boom in the emirate attracted talent from India. More

than 3 million Indians have made the UAE a second home.

The deep-rooted relationship has received new momentum under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. During the past six years, the Indian Prime Minister has visited the UAE three times, most recently in August 2019. During the same period, Sheikh Mohamed visited India twice, including in January 2017, when bilateral relations were formally upgraded to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". While our peoples remain the backbone of this relationship, trade and commerce have been the engines of growth. Bilateral trade, which was limited to spices, dates, pearls and fisheries until the 1960s, has undergone a sea change. It has grown to \$59 billion in 2019-20 from around \$180 million in the 1970s. Trade is well diversified and includes petroleum products, precious metals, stones, minerals for jewellery, food items, textiles, engineering and machinery products, and chemicals. While trade has taken a hit during the past year due to pandemic-related lockdowns, bilateral co-operation has deepened in sectors as diverse as health care, agriculture products and investments.

As Dubai is gearing up to host the Expo from October this year, the India Pavilion is all set to dazzle the world. The pavilion will present an emerging India that is committed to the philosophy of "Together, We Prosper". The tag line for our pavilion - "Openness, Growth, Opportunity" - is reflective of our country's vision. The Indian Prime Minister has said: "The world's economic revival is invariably linked to the growth of India. The country is ready to do whatever it takes to further global good and prosperity. This is an India that is reforming, performing and transforming." The pavilion will present to the world India's diverse cultural heritage, rich history, technological prowess,

space achievements and the strong India-UAE ties. It will also showcase our achievements over the past 75 years. With fast-paced reforms across sectors such as mining, space, banking and atomic energy, India has proved to be an agile nation, even in the midst of the pandemic. And the people of India, at home or abroad, are the true sources of strength and help to guide India towards becoming a stronger and more prosperous country in the post-pandemic era.

The shared vision and complementary strengths of India and the UAE present an opportunity to contribute to the progress of not only our two countries, but also for the region and world. The UAE needs the right pool of manpower support to diversify its economy in fields such as agriculture, manufacturing and technology. India has the technical know-how and the required human resources. Above all, its interests align with those of the UAE. When the pandemic hit the world by surprise, our relationship was tested, but India, the UAE and the peoples of both countries stood side by side in their fight against the crisis. India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar, said last year: "India and the UAE share a fast-growing relationship. The UAE is central to India's extended neighbourhood. We see the UAE on the crossroads of international trade. As Singapore is in the East, the UAE is in the West. It is a relationship where the highest leadership of both countries have invested goodwill and energy. As a result, you can see the transformation during the last five years."

The best bilateral relations are those that rest on the three pillars of trust, shared interests and long-term commitments. The India-UAE relationship has every ingredient to become an ideal bilateral relationship and has proved its worth on every occasion. I am sure the best is yet to come.

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