

THE GATEWAY

Rotary Club
of Bombay



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE THE COLOURS OF LIFE



Holi represents the arrival of Spring and the triumph of Good over Evil!

The Club celebrated our year of adding 'good' to the world on a wonderfully organized Holi Fellowship Zoom Party last Thursday.

Music by the ever-popular Sandeep Damania lit the evening up in a spectrum of colour for all the members in attendance.

Sandeep had us all swaying, clapping, foot tapping and dancing to Evergreen Hindi songs and Holi specials... an outpouring of requests and popular evergreen hits bound us all together in happiness and gratitude.

All-in-all the spirit of Holi seeped into us all and Rotarians and spouses sang along or hummed along with all the familiar numbers.

Of course, the evening would not have been complete had it not been for our ever-enthusiastic Malti and Nirav regaling us with their self-styled and energetic dance moves.

The traditional Holi fellowship was truly enjoyed by all and lifted our spirits and opened our eyes to the fact that life is still a joy, and the spirit of God's hues will always keep us smiling and hopeful.

Best wishes for a happy and safe Holi.

President Framroze Mehta

#tuesdaythoughts

"Be the celebrators, celebrate! Already there is too much—the flowers have bloomed, the birds are singing, the sun is there in the sky—celebrate it! You are breathing and you are alive and you have consciousness, celebrate it!"

— Osho

#caughtintheweb



DIWALI: NO CRACKERS
SANKRANTI: NO KITE-FLYING
HOLI: NO WATER OR COLOURS

IF THIS CONTINUES,
AMAZON WILL BE THE ONLY GREAT
INDIAN FESTIVAL LEFT



SENIOR DIPLOMAT AMBASSADOR NAVDEEP SURI ON SHIFTING SANDS IN THE MIDDLE-EAST, OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA

MY LAST ASSIGNMENT WAS ABU DHABI AND BEFORE THAT I WAS AN AMBASSADOR TO EGYPT. HAVING LEARNT ARABIC, THAT IS A REGION I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT. A LOT HAS HAPPENED THERE RECENTLY; I AM NOT GOING TO DO A LAUNDRY LIST AND THERE ARE SOME PARTS LIKE LIBYA AND SYRIA THAT I AM GOING TO LEAVE OUT CONSCIOUSLY. THERE ARE THREE AREAS THAT MATTER TO MUMBAI IN PARTICULAR, AND THAT IS WHY ONE SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN ONE'S BACKYARD.

First, the Abraham Accords:

the idea of normal relations between UAE and Israel followed, thereafter, by restoration of diplomatic ties between Bahrain, Israel and Morocco is a big deal. Now, because I served in Egypt, I saw the post-Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel and I can tell you that after 40 years of Camp David, what you see is a kind of a cold peace in Egypt and Israel.

It is hard to find any Egyptian commentator willing to stand up and speak positively in terms of that relationship. But if you look at UAE and the restoration of normal ties last year, in the span of less than six months, there

are direct flights, ambassadors are in place, technology and finance tie-ups are happening, there are delegations coming and going every week in spite of Covid protocols and a place like Burj Khalifa has like a kosher restaurant in Dubai. Dubai also boasts of the first Rabbi who can cater to the spiritual and religious needs of the Jewish community. That tells you, in a nutshell, the degree of change taking place there.

I would be the first to recognise that the Abraham Accords do not address Palestine-Indian aspiration. That issue still remains on the agenda to be addressed in some form

TODAY: LT. GENERAL SHOKIN CHAUHAN (RETD) ON INTEGRATING INDIA'S NORTH-EAST. ON ZOOM AT 12 NOON



President Framroze Mehta



PE Shernaz Vakil



PN Vineet Bhatnagar



Rtn. Dr. Rohini Chowgule



PP Vijay Jatia



IPP Preeti Mehta

or the other but the fact that a country like UAE, which is a strong supporter of the Palestine cause, has normalised so rapidly. What does it mean?

The second major development that took place only a couple of months back is, that after being at loggerheads for two and a half years, Qatar and its neighbours have made up. This was the famous Al-Ula agreement in Saudi Arabia and as a result of that, the Arab Quartet which was UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have decided to normalise ties between their countries.

While the details haven't been spelled out, one of the principal concerns that the Quartet had against Qatar was the manner in which Qatar was supporting Islamist movements be it in Syria, Libya, Muslim brotherhood in Egypt itself or, in particular, the manner in which Qatar was using the Arabic version of Al-Jazeera as a platform for some of the more radical groups. So, hopefully, we will see some changes in that.

The third major development is the advent of the Biden administration in Washington. The moves that seem to be underway and to resuscitate the Nuclear deal of the JCPOA [The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action]. There is a bit of a situation of who goes first, the Iranians expect the Americans to roll back the sanctions and then they will return to their commitments under the agreement.

The Americans want the Iranians to halt their nuclear programme and thereafter pave the way for more sanctions. The last time I was in a conversation with them, they had a logical point that Trump broke the agreement, imposed sanctions, so, all the Americans have to do is

restore the status quo and we will be back to doing business.

These three developments are important from India's perspective. The Abraham Accords, because UAE and Israel are generally India's two closest partners in the Middle-East. The kind of sensitive discussion we have with the Emiratis and the kind of strategic support that we have received from the Israelis; so, when two of our close allies start talking to each other and normalise relations, it is a no-brainer that good things will come out of it. In a more substantive way, I was speaking a couple of weeks back at a webinar that the American Jewish committee had organised, with me and Dr. Ron Malka, the Israeli ambassador to Delhi and a couple of other folks. The topic was: 'Opportunities for trilateral cooperation between Israel, India and the Gulf'. Now that the relations are normalising, how does Israeli technology marry Gulf capital and India's market and the scale that India offers.

I am also pleased about the Al-Ula agreement because the discord between the Qataris and their neighbours had become a nuisance for us, also. They first froze ties about three years back, I was ambassador in Abu Dhabi at that time and I got a frantic call from our Minister of Civil Aviation to meet our Emirati friends and tell them their flight bans mean that Air India flights from Kerala to Qatar will have to do an extra 45-minute detour. I was asked to intervene because these were small planes, the 737s or A-320s and if they had to do an extra 45-minutes or an hour, then they have to forgo their cargo capacity. I did intervene and the Emirates are very responsible and the status was restored. But it now means that we can comfortably reach out not only to the Emiratis

of the South East but also Qataris, to invest in India. We have such a significant Indian community in Qatar.

Finally, the Iran situation: India will be one of the major beneficiaries if the JCPOA gets restored. If the sanctions are lifted, several of our refineries are used to Iranian Oil and so, the substitute is costly but beyond that, our exports to Iran which were growing have suffered.

I think we have forgotten that for much of the first half of the 20th Century, until India became independent, it was the Bombay Presidency that used to determine and pursue British interest in the Gulf. It was Bombay that was really the capital not London in terms of the British agents based in Dubai or other places. The Port of Aden in Yemen was actually the part of Bombay presidency. It is part of our natural backyard; I have heard stories from my Arab friends that before the oil boom of 1970s, before they became really wealthy, if there was one city they knew for tourism, healthcare and trade, it was Bombay. Partly, I am keen that we pick up the threads and try and restore the primacy that Bombay had and it is one of the things that I am trying to do with my current work at the Observer Research Foundation. We have been working very closely with the ORF office in Mumbai to make it happen.

In the 1980s, the oil construction boom happened and there was a mass migration of workers from South-Asia into the Gulf, so the economic relationship between India and the Gulf grew but as diplomats, we tended to see the relationships largely through the prism of labour. We saw that we had a large labour force there and we catered to their needs and there was some trade and investment but not a lot. We largely saw countries

like UAE, places like Dubai, from the prism of our relations with Pakistan. These were seen as pro-Pakistan countries.

In the 90s, various governments instituted a Look East Policy in terms of reinstating our relations with ASEAN countries. Diplomats interested in the Arab world were found asking when do we see a Look West Policy? While PM Manmohan Singh made an effort – he invited the King of Saudi Arabia as a Chief Guest for the Republic Day Parade in 2006 and later in 2014, he also visited Riyadh – but then they lost power and not a lot happened in strategic terms.

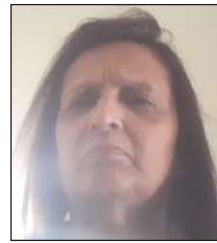
The breakthrough came when PM Modi visited Abu Dhabi in August 2015. For a country that is next door and with which we have such a long relationship, this was the first visit by any Indian Prime Minister after Mrs Gandhi in 1981. So, 34 years, no Indian PM visited Abu Dhabi and obviously that neglect rankled with the leadership of those countries because these are monarchical societies with long memories of relationships. But since Modi came back twice during my term, and we did this extraordinary gesture of breaking protocol to host the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed as the Chief Guest on the Republic Day 2017, and I say broken protocol because that is usually an honour meant for Head of Government or the Head of State but he was neither. We took the pragmatic view that given the fact that Sheikh Khalifa has suffered a stroke and is incapacitated, the real power is with the Crown Prince and we should work with him. The response that we received through this outreach to UAE and later on to Saudi Arabia has been extraordinary. We now have a strategic partnership agreement with both of them. When I look



PP Dr. Mukesh Batra



Rtn. Akhil Sanghi



Rtn. Anar Shah



Rtn. Ateeq Agboatwalla



Rtn. Hariprasad Nevatia



Rtn. Vivek Gupta

back to the last four years, a couple of things stand out on the political side.

1. The manner in which the UAE leadership invited Mrs Sushma Swaraj to be the Guest of Honour at an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's Foreign Ministers conference that they were hosting in Abu Dhabi. They coordinated very closely with us to make sure nothing leaked out. It was interesting to see that five days before the conference, when the announcement was made simultaneously in New Delhi and Abu Dhabi, that Sushma Swaraj would be the Guest of Honour, for the Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to say in their National Assembly that he had just learnt about it from the Twitter! This is how deep the coordination was with us and for the next five days, despite Qureshi's call and tantrums, the Emiratis said there was no way they could dis-invite their Honoured Guest. The Pakistanis, as the founding members of the OIC [The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation] threatened to walk out and boycott but the Emiratis were firm. On March 1st, 2019, I got goose bumps to see that the Indian Foreign Minister was on the dais with the Emirati Foreign Minister and the OIC Secretary General and the Pakistani desk was vacant. They chose to boycott the session. Those who are interested to look at history, please look at what happened in the Rabat in Morocco when the OIC was established and India was invited at that time to join and Fakhruddin Ahmed Ali had led a delegation to Rabat but thanks to General Yahya Khan's tantrums in Rabat, we were kept on hold. Eventually, the meeting happened without Indian participation. So, really for me, it was a wheel coming to a full circle in 2019. But also look at a few

months later in August when we revoked Article 370, the one Arab country that stood up and made a comment that 'This is India's internal business', was UAE. After that, over the last months, you have all seen Imran Khan's desperate efforts to somehow get OIC to do an emergency meeting on Jammu and Kashmir. The Saudis have held firm and the Emiratis have held firm and the Pakistanis are traumatised at the developments that have taken place. They have always treated this as an extension of their country because of the religious factor because they are all about the Ummah. I just want to say that on the political side we have been repaid for the initiatives with quite exceptional responses.

2. The UAE has committed to invest up to US\$ 75 billion into the economy and I had the privilege of working very closely with the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority which is their Sovereign Fund and is the world's second largest with assets worth US\$ 900 billion. They became the anchor investors in India's National Infrastructure Investment Fund and have, since then, been making major investments in our highways and renewable energy sectors. The instruction that has gone to their people, very strongly, is that India matters and relationships matters and please do more in terms of looking at investment opportunities in India. A friend of mine who works at the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority says that conservatively, they have around Rs 100,000 crore invested in the Indian stock market. You probably cannot pick up any major company which does not have some investment from ADIA's portfolio managers.

3. ONGC Videsh used to prospect for oil from the Vladimir Coast to Venezuela and yet we never got a toehold in the Gulf, which was

extraordinary. Finally, we made a breakthrough in 2018 when we got our first oil concession in the producing field in what is called the Lower Zakum basin and a second concession for a very prospective on-shore block as well. Along with that, the Emiratis worked with us to establish our first strategic Petroleum Reserve in Mangalore and, in a sense, we converged to create a template for the previous reserve so that in the event of war or catastrophe, we have enough reserves to keep our economy going for a while, at least. The big one, of course, which was a US\$ 50 billion investment plan was ARAMCO and ADNOC II combined for the major Ratnagiri Oil Refinery. But thanks to Maharashtra politics that hasn't yet seen the light of the day and is becoming a bit embarrassing because the party now in power was once stridently opposing the land acquisition programme by Delhi government.

I just wanted to give you a sense of how things have changed. Yes, PM Modi made an outreach, yes, guys like us on the ground did what we could, but the Arabs have also changed. That is the notion that has to sink in, that countries like UAE which were deeply conservative, have decided to take a hard line against radical Islam. They see themselves at the frontline in fighting extremism and terrorism. Not only have they taken a stance, but they see India as an ally in this. And, in a sense, they are going out of their way to promote this notion of tolerance. Three years back, they created a high-profile position for Minister of Tolerance and a member of the Royal Family, Sheikh Ayaan, was appointed as the Minister. His job is to undertake activities which get communities to work together and not be complacent of the fact that we are tolerant but to proactively reach out and give that message.

One other thing that has happened because of this change is that Pakistan has suddenly found that its religion card is no longer valid.

Let me just conclude with a couple of remarks. The Middle East, certainly the Gulf, is an area in transition. They are trying to move from an oil-dependent economy into knowledge- and services-driven economies. This has meant a deepening of our defence and economic ties. At the people-to-people level, we have nine million Indians in the Gulf and, as per 2019 data, US\$ 80 billion remittances globally of which US\$ 56 billion came from the Gulf, US\$ 19 billion came just from UAE.

Bombay is a business destination – how many of us know that the UAE is the third-largest trading partner after the US and China, larger than Japan? Our bilateral trade last year was US\$ 60 billion and our exports were US\$ 32 billion which means that after the US, little UAE was our second largest destination of exports. These are relationships that matter.

I strongly believe that the business community in Mumbai has a stake in these relations and should look far more closely than perhaps it currently does. It used to bother me immensely that there were 23 Indian banks at the Dubai International Financial Centre which means that every major Indian bank has a presence in Dubai and yet they transact no business with the Emiratis. They seemed to be content living in an Indian bubble. It is of the Indian, by the Indian and for the Indian. They are happy to tap the NRI community and I feel it is exceptionally lazy to look at it in those terms. There is a lot of opportunity in the area and these opportunities are going to grow.



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Apr 6th Club Meeting

Rotary
Club of Bombay



Sudha Malhotra

Indian Playback Singer



Topic Goes Here

Recipient Of The Shyam Munshi Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts.

Venue : Online at zoom.us

Time : 7:00pm

ROTARIAN BIRTHDAYS



MARCH 30

Rtn. Devendra Kothari



MARCH 30

Rtn. Nandan Maluste



APRIL 2

Rtn. Ravi Sheth



APRIL 3

Hon. Rtn. Adi Godrej

ROTARIAN PARTNER BIRTHDAYS

MARCH 30: Rtn. Ptn. Sudha Gokal

MARCH 31: Rtn. Ptn. Radhika Kaji

APRIL 2: Rtn. Ptn. Amita Malkani

APRIL 4: Rtn. Ptn. Urvashi Minawal

APRIL 5: Rtn. Ptn. Vrishali Pispati

RCB FITNESS CHALLENGE RESULTS



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