

More Indian schools on the cards: Ahamed

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Times News Service

MUSCAT: India is currently on a path to further boost its ties with Oman and other GCC countries in the Arabian Gulf region, India's Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed has said.

Speaking at a gathering at the Indian embassy in Muscat on Saturday evening, where he was given a gala reception, the minister said that he was on a two-day visit to Oman as a part of a mission to bolster bilateral relations between the Sultanate and India, enhance co-operation in different economic areas, especially in energy, and hone up a traditional bonhomie that the two nations have always shared between them.

When *Times of Oman* asked him whether his visit was aimed at resetting ties with Oman and other Arab nations in the wake of the 'Arab Spring', the minister reiterated that his visit was aimed only at enhancing ties.

On whether or not India is apprehending any diplomatic logjam in the Middle East in the wake of the 'Arab Spring', he refused to comment.

Meanwhile, making a major announcement that enthused the Indians present at the reception, Ahamed said he was in negotiation with the Omani authorities to facilitate setting up more Indian schools in Oman. The Sultanate, he said, already has 18 Indian schools and there are still opportunities for a few more to cater to the growing demands from the Indian diaspora in this country.

Ahamed waxed eloquence in describing India's ties with Oman, saying India's relation with the Sultanate had always been a 'special one'.

Growing over the years on the basis of mutual trust and cooperation, the ties between the two nations have acquired well in the blossoming of bilateral trade and commerce. "Bilateral ties between India and Oman are time-tested and deep-rooted. We are set to take our diplomatic relations to greater heights," he said.

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Bilateral ties between India and Oman are time-tested and deep-rooted. We are set to take our diplomatic relations to greater heights... Indians have always enjoyed a special and privileged status in the Sultanate... Oman has never been found wanting in extending its cooperation...

E. Ahamed
India's Minister of State for External Affairs



Bilateral trade

"Our bilateral trade has soared from \$2 billion in 2008-2009 to \$4.5 billion in 2009-2010. The India-Oman Investment Fund was originally set up with a corpus of \$1 billion."

"We have recently decided to increase the corpus to \$1.5 billion with an objective of making investments in information technology, healthcare and other industries," the minister added.

Undeniably, trade between In-

dia and Oman has been on a roll. India, in fact, ranked fourth largest source of imports into Oman after the UAE, Japan and the United States in year 2009, and second as the destination of Omani non-oil exports after UAE.

"Indians have always enjoyed a special and privileged status in the Sultanate," Ahamed said.

Ahamed cited several instances of how the Indians enjoyed exclusive and sympathetic treatment

from the Omani authorities, like when 34,000 Indians illegally overstaying in Oman were allowed to return home following the amnesty provided by the Sultanate in 2008-2007.

Once again, in 2009-2010, it was due to the unique amnesty granted by the Omani government that at least 30,000 more Indians could finally go back home, even after they were found to be overstaying illegally in Oman.

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