

Keralites Are Industrious and Innovative, Says E. Ahamed

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Arab News

JEDDAH — India's Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed said his United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, chaired by Sonia Gandhi and led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was committed to actively engage the non-resident Indians "not only to tap into their expertise and wealth of ideas but also to address their contemporary concerns, expectations and aspirations."

Talking to Arab News from New Delhi yesterday, the popular federal minister from Kerala who played a key role in improving India's ties with the Arab world, said the UPA government was of the view that the Indian Diaspora was an important bridge between India and the country of their adoption or residence.

"We are actively working on several issues related to the non-resident Indians (NRIs)," he said, "such as improved air connectivity and cheaper airfares for flights operating between Kerala and Gulf countries; streamlining the system of job contracts in consultation with the host governments; simplification of the process of passport issuance and emigration clearance; providing timely consular assistance and free legal counsel to the Indian workers in the Gulf region; access to affordable and high-quality education facilities in India; and ensuring right to franchise to Indians residing in the Gulf countries."

Ahamed praised people from his home state of Kerala saying they were industrious, innovative and ever responsive to opportunities and challenges.

"The non-resident Keralite community in the Gulf region, especially in Saudi Arabia, has made a significant impact on the socio-economic development of Kerala," he said. "Foreign remittances by overseas Keralites has led to higher incomes and expenditures for the common man."



E. Ahamed

He said Keralites were among the most enterprising and successful people in the world. "Exploring the horizons of career opportunities, nearly 2.5 million Keralites have emigrated to various countries," said Ahamed. "They have contributed their expertise and innovative skills to the benefit of their states of domicile besides facilitating the economic development of their motherland."

Ahamed, a grassroots politician, is now the general secre-

tary of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), which was, until recently, part of the ruling alliance in Kerala.

He says Kerala is uniquely positioned.

"Kerala has been at the crossroads of diverse cultures and religions since time immemorial," he said. "Christianity came to our part of the country centuries before many of the European countries embraced it. Kerala received Saint Thomas at its ancient port in Kerala, the present day Kodungallur, in 52 AD. And even before the Europeans ventured into Indian seas, it was people of the Arab world who traded with us."

Arabs, Ahamed pointed out, have been trading with the coastal peninsula of India since fifth century and "the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) sent his message through the Arab traders; it was welcomed by the local rulers like Zamorin of Calicut."

Ahamed said followers of all other religions, such as Judaism and Buddhism, also received similar welcome from the people of Kerala.

"The state is a living example of the long-cherished secular traditions of India with people belonging to different faiths living in peace and harmony," he said.

Ahamed says he is passionate about India's relations with the Arab world. Ever since he became a federal minister he has worked meticulously to improve ties with this part of the world. He has succeeded in undoing the damage caused by the previous dispensations to India's traditional relationship with the Arabs.

"Our bilateral relations have received an impetus with the visits of the heads of states of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait to India in the recent past," he said. "Rulers and leaders from the Gulf countries with whom I have met have always praised the diligence, commitment and the law-abiding nature of Indians working in their respective countries. I am confident that people from Kerala, just as those from the other parts of the country, will continue to flourish with their hard work and sincerity."