

'Russia to aid Bahrain's space programmes'

Bahrain-Russia bilateral ties are scaling new heights, says Russian envoy to the Kingdom

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TDT | Manama

From space to investments and agriculture to education, Russia and Bahrain have been building relationships encompassing many spheres. In an exclusive interview with The Daily Tribune, Russian Ambassador Alexey Skosyrev says based on the MoU signed between the National Space Studies Agency of Bahrain and Roskosmos, bilateral ties in the field are set to soar higher via expertise exchanges, capacity building and training of specialists.

Excerpts:

1) Your Excellency, how does Russia see the visit of Pope Francis to the Kingdom of Bahrain?

The Bahrain Dialogue Forum and the visit of His Holiness the Pope are truly historic events. We hope they will contribute positively to building confidence between the people of the region and all over the world. And of course, it underscores the status of the Kingdom as a promoter of peaceful co-existence and communication between civilizations. Like Bahrain, Russia is a staunch advocate of cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. Our leadership spares no effort in promoting the values of religious tolerance both domestically and internationally. Russia fully supports the initiatives in this regard.

This position was confirmed by the wide participation of the delegations from the Russian Federation to include especially those from the Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Muslim organisations in the event.

2) One of the core milestones in the bilateral



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah Al Zayani during the joint press conference in Manama



His Majesty with President Putin

ties between Russia and Bahrain has been the partnership between the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Mumtalakat. Will the sanctions on Russia by the West affect the progress of this partnership?

I don't believe it has. Prior to my arrival in Bahrain, I had a meeting with key executives of RDIF in Moscow focused on the Mumtalakat-RDIF co-investment agreement. They reassured me that there are no palpable sanction risks for the investments made by the Bahraini sovereign wealth fund. More than that, I believe that it's the right time to concentrate our efforts on direct investments instead of portfolio ones. This is the case, by the way, reflected in the RDIF-Mumtalakat Memorandum concerning the possibility of building a Russian pharmaceutical factory in Bahrain. In fact, the illegitimate Western sanctions imposed on our country provide a lot of new opportunities for Russian-Bahraini cooperation.

The current geopolitical situation gives us reasons to expect that the investors from Russia will be more active in the GCC region soon, as its market is becoming a much more attractive

destination for their assets and funds than the jurisdictions that proved to be unreliable like the EU, UK and US.

It also enables our partners from abroad, including Bahraini private sector operators, to acquire the lucrative businesses left by Western companies despite their profitability under favourable conditions. Subsequently, their shares in the Russian market are now open for direct suppliers and mediators from other parts of the world, too. For sure, these items will be on the agenda of my future meeting with Mumtalakat.

3) Your Excellency, could you speak on the cooperation in the education sector between Russia and Bahrain? What advantages does Russia have compared to the educational institutions in the West?

It's been a long and successful tradition in my country to provide technical assistance and transfer of knowledge to many countries, including Bahrain. Our approach is different from the Western one where universities are more engaged in indoctrinating students instead of informing them. Yet, some 150 young people from Bahrain to date study in Russia to get higher education in engineering, medicine, chemistry, petrochemicals, oil and gas and beyond, which is not surprising if we take into account that our universities combine high-quality tuition with reasonable fees.

The number of Bahraini students receiving education free of charge, as part of our federal government scholarship programme, and the number of seats allocated to Bahrainis has increased recently. We also intend to rejuvenate the agreement signed between the Uni-



Russian Ambassador Alexey Skosyrev

versity of Bahrain (UoB) and the Russian University of Peoples Friendship, a major educational vehicle and think-tank in Russia that has a very high rating in medicine, law, linguistics and more. We also will be reaching out to UoB and other major faculties in Bahrain to train our young professionals in Islamic banking, as Bahrain is an internationally acclaimed leader in this field.

4) Is there any ongoing cooperation in the space sector between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Bahrain?

In May 2021, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the National Space Studies Agency of Bahrain and a state corporation of the Russian Federation responsible for space flights, cosmonautics programmes, and aerospace research known as Roskosmos. This document contains the provisions concerning bilateral cooperation in the field of space exploration via expertise exchanges, capacity building and training of specialists.

Russia retains leadership in space technologies, and as Bahrain embarks on the opportunity to co-develop relevant joint projects we expect that the practical implementation of this MoU would give a major boost to the space programme of the Kingdom.

5) Your Excellency, has the war in Ukraine affected Russia's image in the Middle East including countries like Bahrain? If at all that has happened how could damage control be done?

We have witnessed un-

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● The current geopolitical situation gives us reasons to expect that the investors from Russia will be more active in the GCC region in the near future, as its market is becoming a much more attractive destination.

● We will look for increased incentives and opportunities to promote Bahrain in Russia, including tourism and doing-business-in-Bahrain conferences, seminars, special events and the like.

tarnish the relations between Russia and the Middle East nations by certain Western states through their loyal media networks. Thankfully, people in the region do not live in "the information bubble": Arab news agencies and papers and especially Bahraini media tend to give substantially more objective coverage of the events in Ukraine based on the sources

from both sides in comparison with their Euro-Atlantic partners.

Russian-based channels and newsfeeds broadcasting in Arabic (like RT Arabic and Sputnik) are also available here. As a result, the general public in the Middle East, and Bahrain in particular, understands the true complexity of the situation, it sees clearly that in reality Ukraine is being used by the manipulators from abroad as a weapon against our country. More than that, quite regularly we actually receive letters and messages of solidarity from Bahraini citizens and residents.

6) Your Excellency, could you speak on Russian firms operating in the Kingdom?

As of now, Russian firms generally supply goods and services to the Bahraini market without active branches here. At the same time, the expansion of our businesses to the Kingdom is being studied by several Russian companies from various fields, including IT, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and banking. Still, although Bahrain provides one of the best business environments in GCC, which is certainly on par or excels that of other neighbouring countries, there is much room for improvement with incentives so that big Russian corporations could expand investment in Bahrain as a country of their destination and business development.

We will look for increased incentives and opportunities to promote Bahrain in Russia, including tourism and doing-business-in-Bahrain conferences, seminars, special events and the like. Such a promotion is a must for mid-size companies who are seeking relocation to GCC countries. The goal is to make Bahrain a centrepiece in the GCC of doing business for Russians. We have to visualize this as soon as possible.

7) Your Excellency, when can we expect Vladimir Putin's visit to the Kingdom?

HE President Putin maintains constant communication with HM King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, with whom he has cordial ties of friendship. They conducted a phone conversation quite recently, on September 30. Our leaders are eager to meet in person in the near future, as in 2014 and 2016, while the precise modalities of their possible meeting - its timing and whereabouts will most likely be discussed in their upcoming contacts.

Man gets five years in jail for laundering BD 2 million

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The High Criminal Court jailed a 40-year-old man for five years on charges of laundering BD2 million and conning a GCC businessman out of BD3m by playing as an investor.

The court also slapped him with a fine of BD100,000 and

ordered to seize from him BD2,517,709 as money or properties.

The man, court files say, lured victims by selling the idea of investing in real estate and introducing several others claiming to be investment partners.

Following the meetings, the

victim made six transfers totalling BD3 million for investing in Bahrain and other Gulf Countries, where the suspect promised a 12% to 15% interest.

Starting in 2011 and up to 2015, the victim was handed over profits of up to BD85,000 but stopped afterwards.

The developments led to the victim investigating the investor, only to find he had several money laundering cases against his name and that the Central Bank of Bahrain had cancelled the registrations of institutions under his name, making it illegal for him to collect funds.

According to the General Di-

rectorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security, the defendant worked in an international bank and owned several contracting establishments, all of which were cancelled by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce several years ago.

Further investigations re-

vealed that the defendant had defrauded several with the promise of investment.

Police also found him as a fugitive sentenced to prison in other cases and had illegally fled to Europe.

The names he used in investment contracts are fictitious ones to deceive victims.