



### **Dubai, Diaspora, and Dialogue: A Bridge between Nations**

"Dubai is the best (Indian) city to live in," a friend quipped at Dubai airport, a sentiment that resonated as I encountered numerous Delhi/Mumbai elites now calling the UAE their home. The sheer volume of traffic—over 250 daily flights between India and the UAE—underscores the deep connection.

My recent trip to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, beyond the thrill of the India-Pakistan cricket match courtesy of DP World, was driven by the Indiaspora's "Forum for Good." This gathering, a nexus of 700+ global Indians from over 30 countries, highlighted the power of the 32-million-strong global Indians. Indiaspora, founded by M.R. Rangaswami, positions itself as a global platform akin to Davos or TED, fostering connections and leveraging the diaspora's unique influence across developed and developing nations. Having attended numerous international forums, I was particularly drawn to Indiaspora's focus on uniting the Indian diaspora. The diverse agenda, spanning meditation to AI, culminated in a standout global AI summit at the Dubai's Museum of the Future.

The UAE's strategic location and business-friendly environment have cemented its status as a global economic powerhouse. The Indian expatriates now numbering 4 million is the largest anywhere in the world. They have been instrumental in this transformation, significantly contributing to education, finance, AI, technology, and beyond. With 90,000+ Indian-owned

companies in Dubai alone, and Indian contributions spanning education and healthcare, the impact is undeniable. In 2023, over 2.2 million Indian tourists visited the UAE, the Baps Hindu temple being the latest attraction. Indian-owned companies also operate 95% of private schools in the UAE, and Indian medical professionals and entrepreneurs have helped establish world-class healthcare infrastructure.

A joint Indiaspora-BCG report, released at the global forum, underscored the diaspora's pivotal role in shaping the UAE's landscape. India and the UAE are poised for deeper engagement, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and economic diversification. Indian STEM professionals and businesses are driving UAE's technology and financial sectors, while strategic agreements in clean energy, healthcare, and infrastructure promise sustained collaboration. Projects such as the proposed Dubai-Mumbai undersea tunnel could further enhance trade and connectivity.

The Indian diaspora in the UAE exemplifies how deeply our lives are intertwined, bridging geographical divides and enriching the cultural and economic landscape says the joint report. Their contributions echo through the bustling markets and towering skyscrapers, reinforcing a sense of belonging and community that has transcended borders from a very long time ago. This vibrant intermingling underscores the emotional resonance of cross-cultural ties, fostering a powerful sense of unity and collective ambition.

As India's Ambassador to the UAE, Sunjay Sudhir, emphasized, the UAE is India's strongest strategic partner in the Middle East. The 2022 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), pushing bilateral trade to \$85 billion, exemplifies this robust relationship. The UAE is a top FDI source for India, and Prime Minister Modi's multiple visits highlight the enduring partnership.

The UAE, hosting the largest Indian diaspora globally, was a fitting venue for Indiaspora's inaugural global event. The focus on deepening India-UAE engagement in innovation, sustainability, and economic diversification underscores the diaspora's crucial role. Sheikh Nahayan, UAE Minister of Tolerance, affirmed the shared values and commitment to mutual growth. I understand Indiaspora is now being pursued to hold their next year's edition by several countries & cities to replicate the success of its first edition.

The allure of the UAE—safety, connectivity, and a welcoming environment—has drawn many Indians. The pervasive Indian presence, from airport staff to Taxi drivers to health workers to bankers to restaurants & hotel chains to business leaders, creates a sense of home. This omnipresence was off course vividly displayed at the Dubai cricket stadium.

While the global Indian diaspora flourishes, the question remains: Can India replicate Dubai's meticulous planning and development within its own borders? Develop at least one city like Dubai in India!

By Ajay Khanna, Co-Founder, Public affairs Forum of India.

Views are personal