

QT

## Indian Experience



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# 'Earlier, Qataris used to go abroad for higher studies, now expats come to Doha for courses'

**Veteran Indian expatriate P. N. Baburajan, known for his able stewardship of several apex bodies in the past, shares his sojourn with Qatar Tribune**

P. N. Baburajan is the quintessential expatriate business honcho-social worker for you. One of the most recognizable faces from the Indian community in Qatar, a first look at his countenance and you probably begin wondering about a striking similarity with 'The Common Man' – a character created by legendary Indian author-cartoonist R. K. Laxman.

Laxman's Common Man, as we know, represented the hopes, aspirations, troubles, and perhaps even the foibles of the average Indian. Baburajan, in his own way, has stood tall, performing yeoman service for Indian expatriates in Qatar – trying to be with them through thick and thin. However, it's his profound association with – and deft stewardship of – Indian community organisations that he's so very well known for.

"During the last 35 years, I have been fortunate to have worked with several cultural and charity organisations in Qatar which play a vital role in the cultural integration and community welfare of the Indian expatriates in Qatar," says Baburajan, who started his official career in Qatar with the Qatar Armed Forces in 1986, as an administrative staff.

#### Those Early Years

Recalling his experience of starting his career in Qatar with the Qatar Armed Forces, he says, "From day one, I experienced the best treatment from my Qatari officers. They [Qatari officers] never shout unnecessarily at their expatriate colleagues. They gave excellent value to our work and contribution."

After eight years with the Qatar Armed Forces, Baburajan joined a private firm, M/S Apollo Enterprises, one of the oldest British establishments in the State of Qatar, as a divisional manager.

Recognising his stellar contribution, the company handed him additional responsibility as the property manager of its Real Estate division where he continued until 2018, and thereafter, took voluntary retirement.

"I have since been devoting my en-

tire time to community service under various roles," he informs.

It was his sincerity and passion for community service that saw him tasked with responsibilities – one after the other – and he accepted each one of these without ever batting an eyelid. These roles have included: president of the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), an apex body of the Indian embassy in Qatar; Advisory Board member of Kerala Business Forum; founder member of Sanskriti Qatar – a renowned socio-cultural body functioning in the region; Managing Committee member of Indian Cultural Centre; advisor and patron of 'Hope Qatar', a charity body that works for children with disabilities like autism; and currently the president of Bhavans Public School, Doha – one of the leading Indian schools operating in the region, to name a few.

#### Cultural Exchange

"I also helped establish the Skills Development Centre, an institute that nurtures the culture of India by promoting its traditional and performing art forms, operating from four different locations in Qatar. The Centre is now a favourite gathering place of the Indian community known for hosting a variety of sociocultural events and activities."

Baburajan's contributions to the community have been recognised by the Embassy of India in Qatar. He's stayed a pivot of the Indian Community Benevolent Forum, one of the nodal agencies of the Indian Embassy for coordinating community welfare, and charitable and philanthropic activities for the most underprivileged Indians working in Qatar.

"I coordinated the collection of Rs20 million (Rs2 crore) from various organisations for Kerala Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund, which I truly cherish as a lifetime achievement," he says with a glint of accomplishment.

#### Covid Times

Baburajan was the president of ICBF during the 2019-2020 period when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. "Substantial contributions were raised to fight the pandemic. We took this adversity as a challenge; we coordinated all disaster-management activities along with the Indian Embassy, the apex bodies and other socio-cultural organisations."

"We were able to arrange repatriation flights from Doha

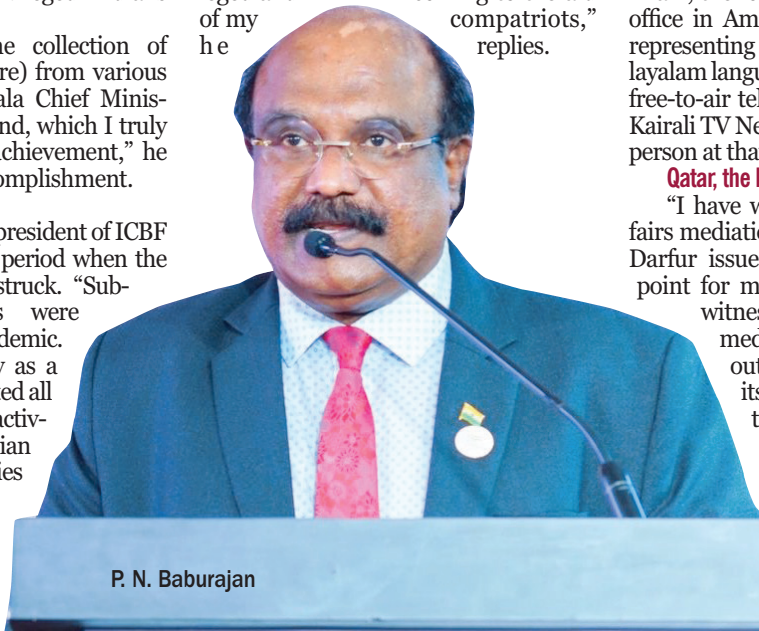


to Indian destinations; regular supply of food kits, essential groceries and medicines, and also financial aid for the neediest during the pandemic era. That still continues."

Baburajan, though, admits that the fight against COVID-19 was "the toughest ever with my team fighting well and we are happy we emerged successful".

After four years of service at the ICBF he was elected president of the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), one of the apex bodies of the Indian Embassy in Qatar. The ICC is the cultural hub of India in Qatar exhibiting the rich Indian culture and heritage and facilitating cultural exchange between the two countries.

How does he stay motivated with his advancing years? "Time flies by but age is only a number and it can't stop me from working for the underprivileged and coming to the aid of my compatriots," he replies.



P. N. Baburajan

#### 2006 Asian Games

Baburajan, who at the time was representing an Indian media group, has very fond – rather unforgettable – memories of the 2006 Asian Games, officially known as the XV Asiad, held in Qatar. Doha became the first city in the region and only the second in West Asia to host the Games.

"Until the last day before the event kicked off, there was much criticism or undervaluation of the tournament. But immediately after the inauguration day, all criticism dissipated. That is Qatar," he asserts, in praise of the Gulf country that went on to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, arguably the biggest event on planet Earth.

The veteran Indian expatriate considers himself lucky to have got several opportunities to meet HH the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the former Amir of Qatar, at his office in Amiri Diwan. Baburajan was representing Kairali TV (an Indian Malayalam language general entertainment free-to-air television channel owned by Kairali TV Network) as a licensed media person at that time.

#### Qatar, the Peacemaker

"I have witnessed international affairs mediation efforts including on the Darfur issue. Qatar became the focal point for mediation. Recently, we all witnessed the Afghan Taliban mediation by Qatar," he points out while praising Qatar and its leadership for the efforts towards peace in the region and elsewhere.

Citing a key change he's witnessed Qatar undergoing these years, he says, "Ear-

lier, Qatari students used to go abroad for higher or professional studies. Now, expatriate students come to Doha to pursue their professional courses."

#### Hub of Higher Education

Baburajan considers the establishment of the Qatar Foundation and Education City as the key milestones in turning Qatar into the hub of higher education in the region. "Qatar now has international campuses of top universities. What else do you want?"

"The experiment that Qatar started in 1995 – when Qatar Foundation was established – had the aim of revolutionizing the landscape of education in Qatar. Over the past 25 years, this idea has grown into a unique ecosystem of learning and knowledge," he avers.

Baburajan says he has learned a lot from senior community leaders like Hassan Choughele, M. I. Farid, Nilangshu Dey, Dr Mohan Thomas, and David John among others.

Change is the fundamental law of nature and Baburajan has himself presided over some of these shifts in the functioning and scope of apex Indian social organisations in Qatar. Recently, elections to these apex bodies were completed and new office-bearers were tasked with future responsibilities. "I wish that they all work together to get more benefits to our community," he says in his message to the new teams at the helm.

#### ICC as Community Hub

"During our tenure at ICC, we coordinated as many as 256 events related to Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Gandhi Jayanti, and Indian Republic Day celebration. It's our community organisations that choose their cultural programmes related to their regions. We have made ICC into a community hub. Now, you can see all communities working together for our nation and our host country. We had this coordination in the 2022 FIFA World Cup also," he says.

"I would request the new team to learn from senior leaders who have spent their time establishing these apex bodies. They should choose the best from the previous committees and accommodate everyone," he quips when asked for his advice to the new team.

#### Future Plans

As for his future plans, he says he has never vied for any award or recognition in lieu of his social work. "I have always liked to work with people. As a social activist, I have had an excellent experience with Qatari authorities. They always accommodate us. They listen to us. They support us."



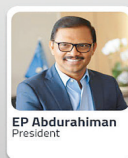
P. N. Baburajan (2nd R) at ICBF office during food kit supply from Qatar Charity through the Ministry of Labour in the Covid period, and (right) being feted at Pravasi Bhartiya Divas 2023 event.



**Indian Sports Centre**  
UNDER THE AEGIS OF EMBASSY OF INDIA

#### Managing Committee for 2023-24 tenure

Indian Sports Centre (ISC) an entity under the aegis of Indian Embassy in Qatar, recently formed the new Managing Committee for the tenure of year 2023 to 2024. President, Mr EP Abdul Rahman will lead the team of elected and nominated office bearers whose names and portfolios are as below:



## Task cut out for new team of apex body, seniors say, 'Give them time'

THE task is cut out for the recently-elected Managing Committee of the Indian Sports Centre (ISC), which functions under the aegis of the Indian Embassy in Qatar. The expectations are high but the team is all geared up to meet the same.

The new committee, with Abdurrahman EP as president, was installed in office in the presence of Dr Mohan Thomas, the outgoing president of ISC, earlier this year.

Besides Abdurrahman, the other members elected to the ISC Managing Committee included Nihad Mohamed Ali, Pradeep Pillai, John De Sa, Deepesh Govindan Kutty and Shalini Tiwari.

P. N. Baburajan, the former president of ICC, said the team has the full

support and blessings of the seniors. "Let the new team work with full dedication. Give them time. They are an elected team. It's their duty to give back to the community with good work."

Giving a detailed account of ISC activities in the past two-year period, Dr Mohan Thomas noted: "We conducted 75 sporting activities throughout our tenure and the highlight was the Guinness Book of Record for a yoga class, which saw the participation of people from 114 countries."

Elaborating further on the yoga World Record activities, which were held prior to the FIFA World Cup, at Aspire Park last year, Dr Thomas said, "We showed to the world that many nationalities stay and work in Qatar. The

programme was a window for the world to know more about Qatar ahead of the FIFA World Cup."

Abdurrahman, meanwhile, has stressed the need to look at sports as a way of life while iterating that ISC would keep working to facilitate the participation of different segments of the Indian community in sporting activities.

While the new office-bearers were being installed in office, the two veterans of ISC, Hassan Choughele and Nilangshu Dey, in addition to ICC President AP Mani Kandan, ICBF President Shanawas Bawa, Indian Sports Center Advisory Council Chairman Dr Mohan Thomas, and ICBF's former president Vinod Nair, were present on the occasion.