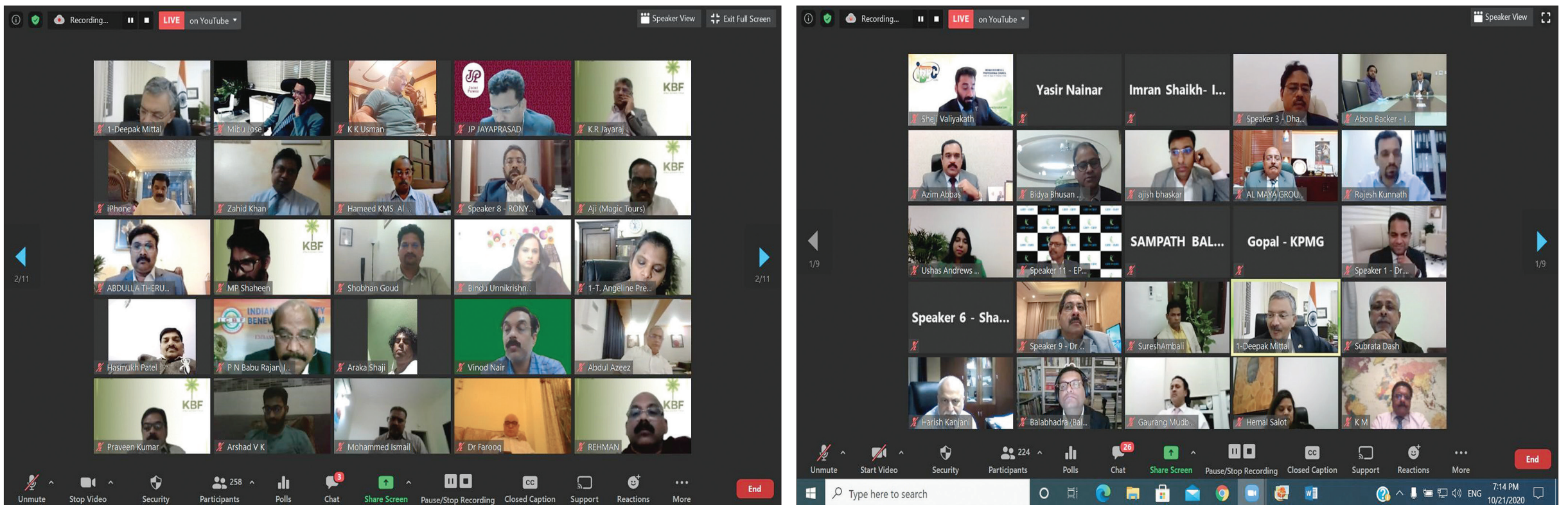




Report by **Mehre Alam**
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BUSINESS NETWORKING



Participants at the Virtual Business Networking event hosted by the Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC), on October 21.

‘NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW TO BOOST INDIA-QATAR TRADE TIES’

Taking part in the Virtual Business Networking event, some 13 prominent industry captains representing different sectors of Indian businesses in Qatar shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in the sectors they operate in

THE most destabilizing pandemic in the history of mankind may have brought the globe to a virtual standstill this year, with falling GDPs, vanishing jobs and livelihoods, and a general sense of gloom. However, this is also the right time for Indian companies to reboot and look to give a big push to the India-Qatar trade ties. This was a common refrain of speakers at a Virtual Business Networking event held on October 21.

The virtual event was hosted by the Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC), which works under the aegis of the Embassy of India in Doha.

The event, which was held as part of the IBPC initiative to promote India-Qatar trade, was addressed, among others, by Indian Ambassador to Qatar HE Dr Deepak Mittal, who urged the IBPC “to take the lead”, while expressing his full faith in the body to “serve as a repository of information to assist businesses and companies in Qatar seeking to learn more about the Indian economy and its investment climate”.

This, he noted, would go a long way in helping the Indian business community to present opportunities to Qatari companies with a view to further shoring up the trade and investment ties between Qatar and India.

The ambassador promised to do his best to address the genuine concerns raised by business leaders from different sectors, while applauding the efforts of Indian businessmen, professionals and the Indian community at large, for “contributing to the growth of this wonderful country Qatar”.

The Indian ambassador also referred to the words of praise from the Amir of the State of Qatar His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani for the Indian community and their contributions in the progress and development of Qatar.

BIG DRAW

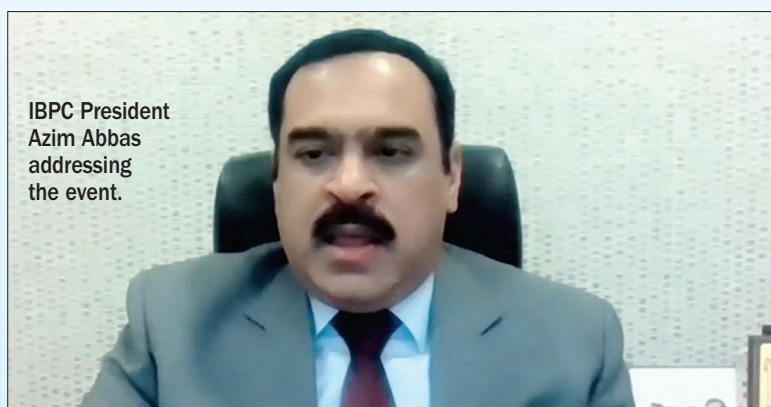
Taking part in the webinar, some 13 prominent industry captains representing different sectors of the Indian businesses in Qatar shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in the sectors they operate in. They were almost unanimous in seeking support from the Embassy of India and a forum like IBPC to address their concerns and enhance their business footprints in Qatar.

The two-and-a-half-hour session saw a record attendance of 340 participants.

The event also marked the first interaction of a large section of Indian businessmen and professionals with the new Indian ambas-



Indian Ambassador to Qatar HE Dr Deepak Mittal addresses the event.



IBPC President Azim Abbas addressing the event.

sador, and the Counsellor at the Embassy of India, Mrs Angeline Premalatha, who is also the coordinating officer (CO) of the IBPC.

Addressing the event, IBPC President Azim Abbas said, “I urge the ambassador to improve the presence of the IBPC in Qatar Chamber and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, so that we could interact better and create awareness of Indian products and Indian companies in Qatar.”

According to Abbas, who is the

managing director of Al Sulaiman Jewellery & Watches, the Qatar-India trade “exceeded \$12.33bn” in 2018-2019.

“As Qatar’s total import in 2019 stood at \$30bn, we believe there is a great potential in Qatar’s consumer market and the import figures from India could also improve,” Abbas said.

India, he noted, “imported goods worth \$10.72bn from Qatar, while Qatar imported goods worth \$1.5bn from India”.



“The IBPC should take the lead to serve as a repository of information to assist businesses and companies in Qatar seeking to learn more about the Indian economy and its investment climate. This would go a long way in helping the Indian business community to present opportunities to Qatari companies with a view to further boosting the trade and investment ties between Qatar and India.”

— HE Dr Deepak Mittal

Great potential

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● Mohammed Althaf, director, Lulu Hypermarkets and Vashu Mulchandani, GM of Al Maya Group, agreed that India should be looking to export branded and high-end FMCG products to Qatar with focus on proper market assessment, quality of products, packaging, and tying up with the right partners. The mantra that they both said would work in the FMCG sector was, “Think local, act global”.

FMCG

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CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Dhanpal Anthony, country head, Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Qatar, one of the leading Indian infrastructure companies, and Subrato Mukerjee, executive manager of Qatar Design Consortium, highlighted the plethora of opportunities available in sectors like oil and gas, infrastructure, power, sports etc. for construction companies from India.

They, however, drew attention to issues like cash flows, limitations on bank financing, and recognition to engineering degrees from more Indian universities by the Government of Qatar.

IT

Deepak David, VP and region head, Tech Mahindra, and Shafeek Kabeer, founder and CEO of Azym Technologies, pointed out that there was tremendous potential for Indian IT companies to continue to flourish in Qatar.

The challenges, according to them, include price war among Indian IT companies and visa availability for Indians as well as for Arab nationals. They, however, noted that the remote working system in vogue during the pandemic has opened up new avenues by accelerating digital transformation.

OIL AND GAS

Suresh Ramanujan, regional director, Emerson, and Rony Paul, CEO of Petro Q, highlighted the advantageous position of Qatar in the hydrocarbon sector and the opportunities available for Indian companies across upstream, mid-stream and downstream in the Oil and Gas sector.

Suresh referred to how digitalization and the transformation of processes is offering more opportunities in this sector. He, however, pointed out that Indian companies should be mindful of quality, user experience, and displaying differentiation. He also referred to the opportunities available for offshoring of engineering services.

HEALTHCARE

Dr Mohan Thomas, chairman, Thomas Health Centre and Dr Munir Ali, GM, Naseem Al Rabeeh Medical Centre Doha, dwelt at length on India’s strength as a medical tourism destination and how this huge potential could be further tapped by enhancing awareness of India’s world-class healthcare facilities and its wellness centres for Ayurveda and Yoga.

Dr Thomas also stressed the importance of public-private partnerships to boost India’s position as a top medical tourism destination.

EDUCATION

Speaking on the occasion, veteran Indian community leader Hassan Chougule, who is one of the founders of DPS Modern Indian School, highlighted India’s contribution to the education sector in Qatar with more than 30,000 students currently enrolled in Indian schools in the country.

PHARMA COMPANIES

EP Abdulrahman, MD of Care n Cure, talked about the challenges faced by Indian pharma companies in making inroads into the Qatari market and taking advantage of the opportunities available here. The Indian pharma companies, he noted, need to take care of the regulatory compliance issues.

Representing the other sectors, Hemal Salot, GM of Vijay Arabia Security Systems, deliberated on how to boost recognised Indian-manufactured industrial products in Qatar. This, she suggested, could be achieved by taking teams of Qatari leaders to Indian manufacturing facilities.

The address by the business leaders was followed by a brief Q and A session, which was moderated by IBPC’s new Vice President Sheji Valiyakath and General Secretary Yasir Nainar.

The session concluded with a Vote of Thanks delivered by Sheji Valiyakath.