

**Remarks by Ambassador Pavan Kapoor
at
WION Global Summit - 4th Edition
Power play in a post-pandemic world
24 March 2021**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namaste, Salaam Alaikoum and now, post-August 2020, can I also say Boker Tov!

It is a great privilege and pleasure to join you all again at the WION Global Summit. And I commend the organizers for organizing this Summit again in UAE, albeit in a hybrid format this year. I recall addressing this 3rd Summit just exactly a year ago, and as it turned out, it was the last large event that I attended before the pandemic lock-down. As you heard, Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary say, who could have imagined what the year 2020 had in store for us? Well you have just heard the External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. Jaishankar, talk about the post-pandemic world and some themes about India. I will touch upon one or two aspects of that and then talk more about our bilateral relations through this pandemic and what India and UAE have been able to achieve.

We have been witnessing one of the most catastrophic global events since World War II. And one of its many consequences has been that countries perceive, as you heard, national security and global trade very differently from previously. In addition to the newly added complications, more countries have become relevant to desired outcomes, highlighting the importance of multi-polarity. The metrics of measuring power are now very different, not merely military and finance, but also trade, connectivity, data, technology. It is natural that disruptions caused by the pandemic have led to a greater distrust about the merits of globalization. At the same time, indivisible challenges like climate change and the pandemics have highlighted more clearly the need for multilateral solutions, or at least working arrangements between countries with converging interests. This in turn has brought in conversations about resilient supply chains, and this is where India has found another opportunity to play a positive role.

The world needs more trusted and capable players. As a pluralistic and open society with a market economy, India fits the role well. The choice for a nation to just focus on its own recovery is an easy one. However, the choice for a nation to build up its own capabilities, including for the benefit of others, is a difficult one. I would say that India has decided to take the latter path.

The pandemic raised unprecedented challenges that led to difficult decisions. For example, the decision by India to close its air space last March for two and a half months, even for its own citizens, was a very difficult one. And I can say that the kind of problems we had, trying to explain to our people here, who are present in very large numbers; it was a very difficult decision to explain to them. But this gave the Government of India breathing space to control the numbers and create an impressive health infrastructure to deal with the anticipated surge in cases, which proved very helpful subsequently. However, as I said, this led to considerable challenges for Indian Missions overseas, like in the UAE, where we had to answer and support the very large and diverse Indian diaspora.

After weeks of responding to their urgent needs of medical and psychological counselling, and providing food or temporary accommodation to hundreds of our people, we turned to the massive task of repatriation in early May, 2020. You may not be surprised to learn that within three days of our opening registration of repatriation on our website we had 250,000 people registered! The date of May 7 remains etched in my memory as the first flight to mark the Vande Bharat Mission, which you just heard the Minister speak about, took off from Abu Dhabi for Kochi. And in the first three months alone i.e. May, June, and July, we had repatriated over 300,000 Indian nationals from the the UAE to India alone!

The numbers have since crossed over a million and a half but a very large number of people who travelled to India have since also come back, especially after we entered into a bilateral 'Air Bubble Arrangement', which is still on-going and supporting the strong people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. Although it is a far cry from our normal connectivity of air services, we are operating over 300 flights a week between the two countries--the largest of the 27 air bubble arrangements that India has in place at present. This successful effort at repatriation and continuing exchange of people would not have been possible without the strong support of the UAE government and their departments, in particular of Health, Civil Aviation, Interior and of course, their Foreign Ministry. In fact, the India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership has truly emerged stronger since the start of the COVID pandemic. The constant, high-level, empathetic exchanges between our leadership have ensured this outcome.

Our External Affairs Minister, Dr. Jaishankar, and his counterpart, the UAE Foreign Minister HH Sheikh Abdullah met virtually in August last year for a comprehensive review of bilateral relations. Continuing in the virtual format, we had the high level Task Force on Investments (HLTFI) co-chaired by our Minister for Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal and from the UAE Side, HH Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, which happened in November 2020, which also gave an impetus to our

trade and investment relations. Our Ministers of Education had again a virtual exchange in December, discussing issues on education focussing on India's New National Education Policy.

We then had Dr. Jaishankar visit the UAE in late November 2020 -his first bilateral visit overseas since the pandemic. During the visit, he met with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the Ruler of Dubai and of course, his counterpart, the Foreign Minister of UAE. Our Minister of State, Shri Muraleedharan also came to UAE in January 2021, and more recently, we were pleased to have to receive the UAE Foreign Minister HH Sheikh Abdullah in Delhi just last month. The discussions during these visits have focused on pursuing cooperation in new areas in the post-pandemic world, in addition to enhancing existing areas of cooperation.

India and UAE have continued to strengthen defence exchanges during this period. Our Chief of Army Staff, for the first time ever, made a visit. Gen. M.M. Naravane visited the UAE in December, and an Indian military delegation with heads of our defence Public Sector Undertakings attended last month's International Defence Exhibition, IDEX & NAVDEX in Abu Dhabi, which is one of the first large post-pandemic events held in-person in Abu Dhabi. And a delegation from the Indian Air Force is also participating in the ongoing multi-national exercise 'Desert Flag', here in the UAE, as we speak.

So, as you can see, the pandemic has not been a barrier to our determined efforts to strengthen our bilateral cooperation.

In fact, I would like to suggest and highlight that even stronger bilateral cooperation has emerged in the areas of healthcare and food security during this period. And as you heard, our Minister say, these are new concepts being added on to the concept of National Security. Since the onset of the pandemic, we ensured that food supplies to the UAE remained uninterrupted, despite the lockdowns in India. As a natural progression, both sides are now exploring further opportunities in this area. India was pleased to supply adequate quantities of HCQ tablets to the UAE on a priority basis, and also facilitated the arrival of many more nurses and doctors from India to support the healthcare service providers in this country. India was itself grateful to receive medical supplies from UAE in the initial phase of the pandemic. Indian residents in the UAE, especially doctors and frontline health workers also provided their valuable services to UAE authorities, including through effective participation in the UAE vaccination trials. It is a great tribute to the UAE leadership that, starting last December, they have rolled out a free vaccination programme for all its residents, which includes more than 3 million Indians. More recently, as part of India's 'Vaccine Maitri' or vaccine friendship programme, we were pleased to enable the supply of

200,000 doses of Indian manufactured Covishield vaccine to UAE, in early February, and talks for ongoing cooperation on vaccines are continuing. We have always emphasized the strength of collective efforts in fighting this pandemic, and India and the UAE have shown how useful this can be in practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a resilient world in a post-Covid situation would need responsible countries to effectively manage domestic challenges as well as contribute more abroad. As you heard our External Affairs Minister just say, India has now supplied 'Made in India' Covid vaccines to almost 80 nations across geographies. This is, of course, calibrated against the requirements of our domestic vaccination programme and India's obligations under the GAVI's Covax facility for developing countries. But India's 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative is largely driven by our own long-standing belief in human-centric global cooperation.

While geopolitics will continue to influence the decision making of countries, events like the COVID-19 pandemic should reinforce the importance of countries working together to better respond to such global challenges. India-UAE cooperation during the pandemic is an example of how to find opportunities in a crisis, with a focus on the welfare of the people. It is the vision and quality of leadership of both countries that is responsible for such positive results. I hope that such people-centric policies, that have stood the test of time, would be emulated by others too in the post-pandemic world.

Thank you very much!
