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India-Oman Strategic Partnership Strengthens Through Defence, Energy and Economic Cooperation

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Recent Developments:

- Recently, the **External Affairs Minister of India** met his **Omani counterpart in Muscat** and discussed various dimensions of bilateral cooperation, including **strategic partnership, maritime security, energy cooperation and regional developments**.
- India and Oman have further expanded their economic engagement through the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, which aims to enhance trade, investment flows and market access between both countries.
- The relationship between both countries has completed decades of diplomatic engagement, with cooperation expanding from traditional areas like **energy and defence** to emerging sectors such as **green hydrogen, digital economy and technology cooperation**.

India-Oman Relations: Strategic Overview:

Geographical and Strategic Importance:

- The **Sultanate of Oman** is a strategically important partner of India and acts as an important interlocutor at the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** forums.
- Oman is located at the entrance of the **Persian Gulf** and overlooks the strategically significant **Strait of Hormuz**, making it crucial for India's **energy security, maritime trade and Indo-Pacific vision**.
- The geographical location of Oman provides India with a strategic gateway to **West Asia, Africa and the wider Indian Ocean region**.

Significance of Oman for India:

- **Energy Security:** Oman is an important partner for India due to its role as a reliable supplier of **crude oil, LNG and petrochemical resources**.
- **Maritime Security:** Oman's location supports India's objective of maintaining a secure maritime environment in the **Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean**.
- **Strategic Connectivity:** Oman strengthens India's connectivity with **West Asia, Africa and Europe through maritime routes**.
- **Indo-Pacific Vision:** Cooperation with Oman supports India's initiatives such as **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** and **MAHASAGAR maritime vision**.

Historical Evolution of India-Oman Relations:

Ancient and Colonial Linkages:

- India and Oman share centuries-old maritime connections through the **Arabian Sea trade network** involving commodities such as **spices, textiles, dates, copper and frankincense**.

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- Traders from **Gujarat and Kerala** established commercial communities in Muscat during the colonial period, strengthening people-to-people relations.

Post-Independence Development:

- India and Oman established formal **diplomatic relations in 1955**, which were strengthened after **Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970**.
- The relationship was upgraded to a **Strategic Partnership in 2008**, covering defence, maritime security, energy, trade and investment cooperation.

Contemporary Phase:

- Bilateral relations have expanded beyond traditional sectors into areas such as: **Technology cooperation, renewable energy, food security, digital economy, connectivity and innovation**.

Key Dimensions of India-Oman Relations:

Political Relations:

- India and Oman maintain regular high-level political engagement through:
- **Joint Commission Meeting (JCM),**
- **Foreign Office Consultations,**
- **Strategic Dialogue Mechanisms.**

Oman remains one of India's most dependable partners in the **Gulf region** due to mutual trust and stable diplomatic relations.

Defence and Security Cooperation:

Defence Partnership:

- Defence cooperation is one of the strongest pillars of the India-Oman strategic partnership.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all three branches of India's armed forces conduct joint military exercises.

Major Defence Exercises:

- **AL NAJAH Exercise:** Joint Army exercise between India and Oman.
- **Eastern Bridge Exercise:** Bilateral Air Force exercise.
- **Naseem Al Bahr Exercise:** Naval exercise focusing on maritime cooperation.

Security Cooperation Areas:

- Both countries cooperate in:
- **Maritime security, naval cooperation, hydrography, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy operations, white shipping information sharing and defence capacity building.**

Strategic Importance of Duqm Port:

- Oman provides India operational access to the **Port of Duqm**, which enhances India's naval presence in the western **Indian Ocean Region**.
- **Duqm Port** provides facilities related to: **Logistics support, ship maintenance, repair facilities and strategic connectivity with Africa and West Asia.**

Economic and Trade Relations:

Bilateral Trade:

- India-Oman trade has witnessed steady growth:
- **FY 2023-24:** Approximately **US\$ 8.947 billion**.
- **FY 2024-25:** Approximately **US\$ 10.613 billion**.
- The recent **CEPA agreement** is expected to further expand trade and investment cooperation.

India's Major Exports to Oman:

- India exports:
- **Engineering goods, food products, rice, pharmaceuticals, machinery, textiles and chemicals.**

India's Major Imports from Oman:

- India imports:
- **Crude oil, LNG, fertilisers, petrochemicals and minerals.**

Investment Cooperation:

- Indian investments in Oman are spread across:
- **Manufacturing, steel, cement, healthcare, education, hospitality, renewable energy and Information Technology.**
- Omani investments in India are increasing through: **Sovereign wealth funds, private enterprises and strategic investments.**

Energy Cooperation:

Traditional Energy Partnership:

- Energy cooperation remains a major component of bilateral relations due to Oman's importance in India's energy security framework.
- Key areas include:
- **Long-term crude oil supplies, LNG imports, petrochemicals and strategic petroleum cooperation.**

Future Energy Cooperation:

- India and Oman are exploring collaboration in:
- **Green hydrogen, green ammonia, renewable energy, clean fuels and energy transition technologies.**

Oman's renewable energy potential provides opportunities for cooperation in India's clean energy transition goals.

Diaspora and Cultural Relations:

Indian Diaspora in Oman:

- Oman hosts more than **6 lakh Indians**, making Indians the largest expatriate community in the country.
- Indian professionals contribute significantly to:
- **Healthcare, education, engineering, banking, construction, services and Information Technology.**

Cultural Cooperation:

- India and Oman share strong civilisational and cultural connections through:
- **Historical maritime links, festivals, education exchanges and traditional medicine cooperation.**

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- Indian schools and cultural institutions operate across Oman, strengthening people-to-people relations.

Challenges in India-Oman Relations:

Economic Challenges:

- Bilateral trade remains below its full potential despite strong political relations.
- Economic diversification beyond **hydrocarbon-based trade** remains limited.

Geopolitical Challenges:

- Regional instability in **West Asia** creates challenges for economic and security cooperation.
- Issues such as:
- **Iran-Gulf tensions, maritime insecurity and regional conflicts** affect strategic stability.

Increasing External Competition:

- Growing engagement of:
- **China, United States and European countries** in Oman's infrastructure and strategic sectors requires India to enhance its engagement.

Labour Related Issues:

- The **Omanisation policy** may reduce employment opportunities for foreign workers.
- Continuous skill development of Indian workers is required to maintain competitiveness.

Connectivity and Investment Issues:

Limited logistics integration and regulatory barriers restrict greater private-sector participation.

Way Forward: Strengthening India-Oman Partnership:

Political and Diplomatic Cooperation:

- Institutionalise regular **annual strategic dialogue mechanisms**.
- Expand cooperation through:
- **Parliamentary exchanges, state-level partnerships and institutional interactions**.

Defence and Maritime Cooperation:

- Enhance:
- **Naval interoperability, joint military exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness and utilisation of Duqm Port**.
- Strengthen cooperation for maintaining security in the **Indian Ocean Region**.

Trade and Investment Cooperation:

- Expand the trade basket beyond hydrocarbons by promoting:
- **MSME cooperation, manufacturing partnerships, logistics connectivity and industrial corridors**.

Energy Transition Partnership:

- Develop cooperation in:
- **Green hydrogen, green ammonia, renewable energy, critical minerals and carbon capture technologies**.

Technology Cooperation:

- Promote collaboration in:
- **Artificial Intelligence, digital public infrastructure, cyber security, FinTech, semiconductors and start-up ecosystems.**

Blue Economy Cooperation:

- Increase cooperation in:
- **Fisheries, marine biotechnology, port-led development and ocean governance.**

People-Centric Cooperation:

- Ensure welfare and skill development of the Indian diaspora.
- Promote:

Educational exchanges, tourism, cultural diplomacy and traditional knowledge sharing.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts:

- **Capital:** Muscat
- **Currency:** Omani Rial
- **Region:** West Asia / Arabian Peninsula
- **Strategic Water Body:** Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz
- **Key Port:** Duqm Port
- **Strategic Partnership:** Established in **2008**
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- **Regional Organisations:** GCC, Arab League, IORA
- **Recent Developments:**
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