

Exclusive

Account of first familiarization visit to India by IORA members' journalists

By Farzam Vanaki*

Part 2

At the invitation of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), a number of journalists and media personnel from member states of the Indian Rim Ocean Association (IORA) paid a one-week visit to India during November 11-18, 2017 as part of a familiarization program.

They were from Iran, Australia, Oman, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, the Union of Comoros, Mauritius, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Seychelles and Madagascar.

Established on March 7, 1997, IORA is a 21-member intergovernmental organization which seeks to expand regional economic cooperation and strengthen mutually beneficial collaboration through a consensus-based approach.

The vision for IORA originated in 1995 during a visit by the late South African president Nelson Mandela to India, where he said, "The natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean rim for socioeconomic cooperation."

This sentiment and rationale underpinned the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative in March 1995, and the creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (then known as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation) two years later, in March 1997.

The Indian Ocean Rim defines a distinctive area in international politics consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean. Home to nearly 2.7 billion people, in addition to Iran, other IORA member states are Australia, Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the UAE and Yemen.

The IORA region boasts nine percent of world GDP, 12 percent of global exports and 18 percent of global investment flows.

First FICCI



The portal of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry

The third day of the visit began with a morning meeting at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). According to FICCI's website, the federation was established in 1927. It is the largest and oldest apex business organization in India. Its history is closely interwoven with India's struggle for independence, its industrialization and its emergence as one of the most rapidly growing global economies.

A non-government, not-for-profit organization, FICCI is the voice of India's business and industry. From influencing policy to encouraging debate, engaging with policymakers and civil society, FICCI articulates the views and concerns of industry.

It serves its members from the Indian private and public corporate sectors and multinational companies, drawing its strength from diverse regional chambers of commerce and industry across states, reaching out to over 250,000 companies.

FICCI provides a platform for networking and consensus building within and across sectors and is the first port of call for Indian industry, policy makers and the international business community.

At FICCI, the interaction between the media group and the federation's members and experts was chaired by Amb Rajiv Bhatia, chair of the FICCI Task Force on Blue Economy and Former Indian ambassador and high commissioner to Kenya, Myanmar, Mexico and South Africa.

According to ficci.in, Bhatia welcomed the IORA media delegation to India and commended the wonderful initiative undertaken between IORA, Indian Authorities and FICCI.

He mentioned that FICCI will organize a Business Conference and Exhibition on Blue Economy in 2018.

Bhatia highlighted the importance of investing in and engaging young media active in IORA region.

In his opening remarks Anup Mudgal, the member of the FICCI Task Force on Blue Economy and former Indian high commissioner to Mauritius, said that private sector involvement is essential to realize the business potential of Blue Economy within IORA.

This should be done sustainably in keeping with the core philosophy of Blue Economy, he added.

A cross section of the representatives from industry and academia joined the interaction from India including S. K. Mohanty, member of the FICCI Taskforce on



The members of a media delegation from Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a familiarization program, attend a meeting with the country's representatives from industry and academia in New Delhi on November 14, 2017.

Blue Economy, Archana Garodia Gupta, former president of FICCI FLO and owner of Touchstone Gems & Jewellery (India) Pvt. Ltd., Sudhir Sharma the director for exploration affairs at ONGC Videsh Ltd., Vijay Sardana, the vice president and head of Food Security, Agribusinesses, Policies and Projects UPL Ltd., Saibal De, director and CEO of IL&FS Maritime Infrastructure Company Limited, Mohan Shukla, the chief of the external affairs at Bharti Enterprises Ltd. and Ajay Murtreja, the ex-CEO and member of the Board of Directors of Tecnova India.

Addressing the session, Sharma stressed how Indian Ocean with all its resources is yet to be explored.

De discussed how innovation will play a key role in improving business models within IORA region.



Secretary General of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry Sanjaya Baru

Mohanty stressed the need for deeper trade integration in IORA and reassessment of trade potential within the region.

Shukla said capacity building initiatives of IORA region countries is possible through technology transfer.

Sardana claimed that food and agriculture should be priority sectors for the IORA region.

In addition, all the Indian speakers welcomed the IORA delegation and highlighted the importance role played by media in creating an IORA identity within the minds of people by writing about shared history and goals for peace, prosperity and sustainable as well as inclusive development.

Speaking in the same meeting, FICCI's Secretary General Sanjaya Baru, who joined the convention in the middle of the session, stressed that IORA is one of the most dynamic regions that connects emerging countries of Asia, Africa as well as Australia.

He also expressed FICCI's full commitment to building on the Indian government's policy in the Indian Ocean.

Commenting on FICCI's Taskforce on Blue Economy which released a knowledge paper titled 'Blue Economy Vision 2025: Harnessing Business Potential for India Inc. and International Partners', Baru stressed the need to improve ship building capabilities within the country.

Having been the editor of a number of main newspapers in India including Financial Express, Times of India, Business Standard and Economic Times, he highlighted the importance of media to the IORA media delegation members.

In order to create knowledge and goodwill in the region, the role of media is important, Baru said.

Giant GAIL



Members of a media delegation from Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a familiarization program, attend a presentation session at the Gas Authority of India Limited in New Delhi on November 14, 2017.

The next stop was the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL). According to gailonline.com, GAIL was incorporated in August 1984 as a Central Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The company was initially given the responsibility of construction, operation and maintenance of the Hazira-Vijaypur-Jagdishpur (HVJ) pipeline project. It was one of the largest cross-country natural gas pipeline projects in the world.

Originally this 1800-kilometer long pipeline was built at a cost of \$265.54 million and it laid the foundation for development of market for natural gas in India.

During the year 1997-98, the Government of India acknowledged GAIL's 'Excellent' track record and potential to become a global giant, by granting the Navratna status, thereby entrusting greater autonomy to the Company.

GAIL is also the largest state-owned natural gas processing and distribution company in India. It is headquartered in New Delhi. It has the following business segments: Natural gas, liquid hydrocarbon, liquefied petroleum gas transmission, petrochemical, city gas distribution, exploration and production, GAILTEL and electricity generation.

GAIL was conferred with the Maharatna status on February 1, 2013, by the Indian government. Only six other Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) enjoy this coveted status amongst all central CPSEs.

At GAIL, the experts and staff of the company presented the firm's activities, operations and goals to the members of the media group.

Calling on colleagues

Back in Tehran, I had seen many foreign journalists and reporters coming to visit

Iran Press and Cultural Institute and Iran Daily's editorial office where I work as a journalist. However, I have never had the experience of visiting the editorial office of a foreign newspaper. Given this brief acknowledgement, I guess my excitement at having the opportunity to visit The Times of India (TOI) is now more understandable.

The TOI is an Indian English-language daily newspaper owned by The Times Group. It is the fourth-largest newspaper in India by circulation, about five million, and the largest selling English-language daily in the world according to Audit Bureau of Circulations (India).

It is the oldest English-language newspaper in India still in circulation, with its first edition published in 1838. TOI is the second oldest Indian newspaper still in circulation after the Bombay Samachar. Lord Curzon the then viceroy of India called The Times of India "the leading paper in Asia". In 1991, the BBC ranked The Times of India among the world's six best newspapers.

Entering the newspaper's editorial office, I was amazed at its enormous size. A big white hall is where the staff produce the newspaper every day.

A few seconds later, we were sitting around a table in a room with some of the staff of the newspaper, mainly editors, standing in front of us to answer our questions.

Journalists asking questions from journalists, it was an interesting scene. As expected the session was a noisy one: Journalists vs. journalists, who could expect anything less excited?

In the meeting, we learned that the building in which we were attending the session was a temporary home for the newspaper as a fire had broken out in the main one, which was located at central Delhi's Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, in late February 2016, forcing everybody to evacuate and making the building unusable.

We, however, were told that despite the tragic incident, the printing of the newspaper did not stop that day or after that.

The staff of the paper said the readership of the newspaper has been estimated to be about 3.5 readers per each issue.



Members of a media delegation from Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a familiarization program, interact with a number of the editors of The Times of India (all standing in the background) at the editorial office of the newspaper in New Delhi on November 14, 2017.

They added the newspaper has an average of 10 million online readers and 600 reporters across the country.

The editors of the newspaper said The Times Group has a school of journalism, adding the daily paper consists of 50 to 60 pages on a regular basis.

"Editorials constitute 40 percent of the contents of the newspaper and the rest are advertisements."

FCC, final forum

The last stop, was the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia (FCC). A group of more than 500 journalists and photographers covering India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Afghanistan and Tibet, the FCC is a member of the International Association of Press Clubs, according to fccsouthasia.com. Pictures of famous people, including the Dalai Lama, Leader of Pakistani People's Party Benazir Bhutto and India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, adorned the walls of the club.

The media team was welcomed by FCC President S. Venkat Narayan. Speaking to Iran Daily, Narayan said no country in the world can replace Iran for India in terms of trade as the two countries are linked by Chabahar Port in south Iran. India and its people are grateful to Iran for giving the country the opportunity to use Chabahar Port and develop a portion of it as the port will be of great assistance in the speedy development of India's economic sector and increased exports, he added. FCC president pointed out that once Chabahar Port is fully developed, trade between India and Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian states will become greatly facilitated.



President of Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia S. Venkat Narayan

Shifting to mutual ties, Narayan said Iran is a very great country with which India has always had close civilizational links and very good relations.

"The two countries' leaders have paid frequent official visits to each other's countries. I had the good fortune of visiting Iran along with the ninth prime minister of India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, in the mid-90s. Driving through the streets of Tehran I was reminded so much of India and Old Delhi — a walled city of Delhi, India, founded as Shahjahanabad in 1638, when Shah Jahan, the Mughal emperor at the time, decided to shift the Mughal capital from Agra."

Next part will appear on Monday