

# **India and Oman: Programme of Cooperation**

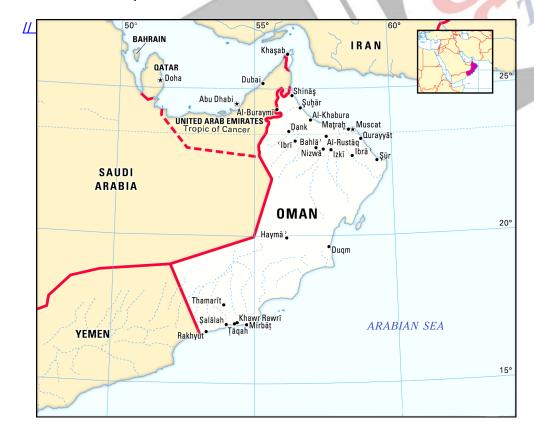
**For Prelims:** Location of Oman and the Neighbourhood, Gulf Cooperation Council, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Defence Exercises, Port of Dugm, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium

**For mains:** Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, India- Oman Relations, Oman's significance for India.

# Why in News?

Recently, India and Oman signed a **Programme of Cooperation (POC)** in the fields of Science and Technology for the period 2022 – 2025.

 The POC for Cooperation in the fields of Science and Technology was signed in pursuance of the Agreement for Cooperation in Science and Technology(S&T) concluded on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1996 between Oman and India.



What are the Areas of POC?

- Medicinal Plants and processing.
- Real-time <u>Air Quality Monitoring.</u>
- Development of an electronic platform for knowledge sharing in the field of Genetic Resources.
- Technical expertise for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)in the field of sustainability (Eco-Innovate) Accelerator.
- Plastic Bio-fuel, and Bio-diesel Research (Example: Low-temperature Bio-diesel production.
- Extraction of high-value products from produced water with oil).
- Software development for Graduate Programs Linking Industry with Academia.
- Blockchain and FinTech solutions.
- Training programmes Big-data, coding & testing, STEM teaching and other areas of S&T.

### What does the POC Document Seek?

- Both countries will support joint scientific projects based on mutual interest, developed jointly by the Indian and Omani institutions.
- They will **encourage exchange** of scientists, researchers, experts, and specialists for the implementation of selected joint projects aimed at developing applicable technology.
- This will lead to the dissemination of research results and establishing contacts with industry for the follow-up of research and development work.
  - The countries will also **hold at least one workshop each year** alternatively in India and in Oman during 2022 2025 period in mutually acceptable areas.

# What are the Key Points of India-Oman Relationship?

### Background:

- The two countries across the <u>Arabian Sea</u> are <u>linked by geography</u>, <u>history and culture and enjoy warm and cordial relations</u>, which are attributed to historical maritime trade linkages.
- The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner of India in the Gulf and an important interlocutor at the <u>Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)</u>, <u>Arab League and Indian Ocean</u> Rim Association (IORA) fora.
- Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 was conferred on Late HM Sultan Qaboos in recognition of his leadership in strengthening the ties between India & Oman and his efforts to promote peace in the Gulf region.

### Defence Relations:

- Joint Military Cooperation Committee:
  - The JMCC is the **highest forum of engagement between India and Oman** in the field of defence.
  - The JMCC is **expected to meet annually, but could not be organised since 2018** when the meeting of the 9th JMCC was held in Oman.
- Military Exercises:
  - Army exercise: Al Najah
  - Air Force exercise: Eastern Bridge
  - Naval Exercise: Naseem Al Bahr

#### Economic & Commercial Relations:

- Institutional mechanisms like Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and Joint Business Council (JBC) oversee economic cooperation between India and Oman.
- India is among Oman's top trading partners.
  - For Oman, India was the 3rd largest (after UAE and China) source for its imports and 3<sup>rd</sup> largest market (after UAE and Saudi Arabia) for its non-oil exports in 2019.
- Major **Indian financial institutions have a presence in Oman.** Indian companies have invested in Oman in sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilisers, textile etc.
- India-Oman Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), a JV between State Bank of India and State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman, a special purpose vehicle to invest in India, has been operational.

### Indian Community in Oman:

- There are about 6.2 lakh Indians in Oman, of which about 4.8 lakh are workers and professionals. There are Indian families living in Oman for more than 150-200 years.
- There are many Indian schools offering CBSE syllabus catering to the educational needs of

# What is Oman's Strategic Significance for India?

- Oman is at the gateway of <u>Strait of Hormuz</u> through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
- Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar for the robust India-Oman strategic partnership.
   Defence exchanges are guided by a <u>Framework MOU which was recently renewed in 2021.</u>
- Oman is the **only country in the Gulf region with which all three services of the Indian armed forces conduct regular bilateral exercises** and staff talks, enabling close cooperation and trust at the professional level.
- Oman also actively participates in the <u>Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)</u>.
- In a strategic move to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region, India has secured access
  to the key Port of <u>Duqm</u> in Oman for military use and logistical support. This is part of India's
  maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.
  - The Port of Duqm is **situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman**, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.
  - It is strategically located, in close proximity to the <u>Chabahar port</u> in Iran. With the <u>Assumption Island</u> being developed in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.

# **Way Forward**

- India does not have enough energy resources to serve its current or future energy requirements.
  The rapidly growing energy demand has contributed to the need for long term energy partnerships with countries like Oman.
- Oman's Duqm Port is situated in the middle of international shipping lanes connecting East with West Asia.
- India needs to engage with Oman and take initiatives to utilise opportunities arising out
  of the Duqm Port industrial city.
- India should also work closely with Oman to enhance strategic depth in the region and add heft to
  its Indo-Pacific vision in the Western and Southern Part of Indian Ocean.

# **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

Q.Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? (2016)

- (a) Iran
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (c) Oman
- (d) Kuwait

Ans: (a)

**Source: PIB**