

BAHRAIN



1. Country Brief with reference to its people

Bahrain's small size and central location among Persian Gulf countries require it to play a delicate balancing act in foreign affairs among its larger neighbors. Facing declining oil reserves, Bahrain has turned to petroleum processing and refining and has transformed itself into an international banking center. Sheikh HAMAD bin Isa Al Khalifa, who came to power in 1999, has pushed economic and political reforms and has worked to improve relations with the Shi'a community. In February 2001, Bahraini voters approved a referendum on the National Action Charter - the centerpiece of Sheikh HAMAD's political liberalization program. In February 2002, Sheikh HAMAD pronounced Bahrain a constitutional monarchy and changed his status from *Amir* to *king*. In October 2002, Bahrainis elected members of the lower house of Bahrain's reconstituted bicameral legislature, the National Assembly.

General

Bahrain with a total population of 6,88,345¹ (includes 2,35,108 non-nationals) and an area of 700 Sq. kms, is the smallest and relatively less endowed of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. However, the proximity of Bahrain to other GCC countries and its location midway in the Gulf gives it a strategic importance.

As the table below shows, Islam is the state religion, and it represents 84% of the total population. Even though the leadership of Bahrain is comprised of **Sunnis**, the majority (60%) of the population is comprised of **Shi'is**. Sunnis dominate Bahrain politically and economically. The Sunnis are living in the cities, where they often make up the majority.

Religion	Numbers	Percentage
Islam	60,00,000	84
Christianity	60,000	8.4
Hinduism	50,000	7
Baha'i	1,000	0.1

Bahrain's very early exposure to foreigners, introduction to education in the 1920s and coexistence with Christianity (St.Mary's Church was established in 1938), conditioned the average Bahraini's favourable attitude towards expatriates. The trade and commercial activity generated by the discovery of oil in 1932, especially the oil boom years of the early 70s, and later faced with declining oil reserves, Bahrain turned to petroleum processing and refining and has transformed itself into an international banking center. The growing economy requirements led to the increased need to accommodate and make room for a large expatriate community. Today, the expatriates form a little more than 40% of the total population, in which Indians, Iranians, Pakistanis, as well as Europeans and Americans, all make up considerable groups. The ethnic composition of the Bahrain's society is given below –

¹ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ba.html>

Ethnic group	Numbers	Percentage
Bahraini Arabs	4,20,000	63
Other Arabs	70,000	10
Iranians	50,000	7
Asians	1,30,000	19

The net migration rate in Bahrain is 1.04 migrant(s)/1,000 Population (2005 est.), which means that around one person per every thousand population is an immigrant or a non-national.

2. Nature and Demographic Profile of Indian Diaspora

Historical Background of Indians

Indians are known to have come to Bahrain as early as 3000 BC when ships plied between Harappan settlements, Oman and Bahrain *en route* to Mesopotamia in pursuit of trade. It is said that it was a group of Indians from Saurashtra that built the Anzac Temple in Dilmun (a cuneiform reference to Bahrain at the time). Indian scholar Romila Thapar interprets Dilmun as the 'sacred land'.

Recent Contacts: In more recent times, Indian merchants had established themselves in Bahrain towards the last quarter of the Nineteenth century. Others moved to Bahrain from Baghdad and Basra regions in today's Iraq. At the initial stages they traded dates but gradually shifted attention to the purchase and exports of the famous Bahraini pearls. These merchant families came from the province of Sindh and Kathiawad region of Gujarat. By around 1925, around 2500 Indian families had settled in Bahrain. Most of them were involved in small time retailing.

The discovery of oil in 1934-45, led to immigrant manpower gravitating towards the oil industry and its off shoot development activities. With the

subsequent expansion of the Bahraini economy, Indians started emigrating to Bahrain to start business or take up jobs as Managers, Salesman, Assistants, Workers etc.

Of the 2,70,000 expatriates, nearly 1,35,000 Indian nationals form the largest expatriate community in Bahrain along with Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Philippine nationals, and Arabs of different nationalities. Of the total workforce in Bahrain of approx. 2,82,908 the expatriate workforce is approx. 1,75,403. At approx. 90,000 the Indian workforce is the largest of the expatriate workforce. In addition to our predominant blue-collar labour force, we have a sizable number of doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, bankers, managers and other professionals who play a vital role in Bahrain's socio-economic development. The largest number of expatriates are from South India, particularly, Kerala. They constitute approx. 65% of the Indian expatriate community. The other major groups are from Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa and Punjab. Today 65-70% of the Indian expatriate workforce is employed in the construction, contracting & maintenance and service sectors. The retail and other business activities include provisions, hardwares, jewellery, electronics, etc. Some others have taken up jobs as storekeepers, Chemists, Carpenters, Barbers, etc. The economic boom of the early 70s and subsequent industrial growth, opened up increasing avenues for job opportunities to expatriate workers and professionals such as Professors, Engineers, Accountants, Doctors, Bank executives, Architects, etc.

On the other hand, there is also a relatively small number of housemaids. This is estimated at around 8000-10000. They come from various states such as Kerala, Goa and Andhra Pradesh.

3. Known distinguished Diaspora

Today there is hardly any established Bahraini business organization that does not have a senior or middle level Indian employee playing an important role in its operations. The top Bahraini business houses such as Zayanis, AlMoayyads,

Fakhroo, Kanoo, Ahmed Mansour Al Ali, Abdullah Nass, Mohammed Jalal, as well as companies like Bahrain Almunium, Banks, Petro-chemical and ship repairing industries, etc. all have Indians in their senior or middle management cadres.

4. Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora

With the largest expatriate community in this country, there are always ongoing consular problems, which are constantly attended to by the Embassy. These mainly revolve around a variety of problems with local sponsors, issue of Emergency certificates, premature cancellation of contracts, illegal stay, change of contractual obligations etc. A generally recurring problem relates to those who abandon their sponsors and work illegally or are staying illegally due to various compulsions and circumstances.

The Embassy has constituted two Committees (Welfare & Relief) consisting of Indian community members to assist the Embassy Consular staff in the respective areas. Visits to workers camps, detention centers and jails are periodically arranged for welfare purposes by the Embassy.

5. Major Diaspora Associations: *Indian Cultural and Religious Bodies*

The Bahraini authorities have shown a flexible and liberal attitude towards the expatriate community in contrast to others regionally. This is reflected in the fact that the Indian community has 30 registered and 15 unregistered socio-cultural organizations in addition to 5 schools. There are 5 churches, a number of Hindu religious centres including a 60-year-old Hindu temple. In addition there are 6 Gurudwaras. The Indian Club was set up in 1915 and the Bahrain Keraleeya Samajam was set up in 1947. Most of the associations have been brought under the umbrella of the Co-ordination Committee of Indian Associations (CCIA) with a view to centralizing efforts on key occasions such as Independence/Republic day etc. It is notable that Bahrain permits religious freedom, which is not generally the case elsewhere in the region.

Given below is the list of all the associations/clubs/religious bodies and educational institutions -

S.No	Name of Registered Associations/Clubs
1.	The Bahrain Keraleeya Samajam, P.O. Box: 757, Tel : 17251878
2.	The Indian Club, P.O. Box: 356, Bahrain, Fax: 1755490
3.	The Indian Fine Arts Society, P.O. Box: 1209, Bahrain, Tele/fax: 17535844
4	Indian Ladies Association (ILA), P.O. Box: 1108, Bahrain, Tele: 17531468
5.	Karnataka Social Club, P.O. Box: 20566, Bahrain, Tele: 17254257
6.	Konkan Singers Club, P.O. Box: 26520, Bahrain, Tel: 17243511, 17275358
7.	Maharashtra Cultural Society, P.O. Box: 10527, Bahrain, Tele: 17272050
8.	Kerala Arts & Cultural Association, P.O.Box: 1064, Bahrain.
9.	The Institution of Engineers (India) Bahrain Chapter, P.O. Box: 1724, Bahrain.
10.	Young Goan's Sports Club, P.O. Box: 20390, Bahrain, Tele:/Fax: 17710602
11.	Kerala Catholic Association, P.O. Box: 20651, Bahrain, Tele: 17232109
12.	The Mar Thoma Parish, P.O. Box: 1037, Bahrain
13.	St. Mary's Orthodox Church, P.O. Box: 834, Bahrain.
14.	St. Peter's Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, P.O. Box: 20417, Bahrain.
15.	The Bahrain Malayalee CSI Parish, P.O. Box: 20272, Bahrain, Tel : 17234095
16.	Thattai Hindu Community, P.O. Box: 1498, Bahrain, Tele: 17256131
17.	Bhatia Mitra Mandal, P.O. Box: 1954, Bahrain, Tel : 17229945, Fax:

	17228277
18.	Bohra Association, P.O. Box: 967, Bahrain, Tele: 17232821, Fax: 17231341
19.	Bahrain Kannada Sangha, P.O.Box: 1184, Bahrain, Tele: 7271257/F:17276808
20.	Kerala Muslim Jama'ath, P.O. Box; 1064, Bahrain.
21	Shri Gujarati Samaj, P.O. Box: 10361, Bahrain, Fax: 17274048
22	Chinmaya Society, P.O. Box: 20046, Bahrain
23	Telugu Kala Samithi, P.O. Box: 22707, Bahrain.
24.	The Sree Narayana Cultural Society, P.O. Box: 21350 Bahrain, Tele:17255517
26.	Bongiyo Samaj Social & Cultural Association, P.O. Box: 15285, Bahrain.
27.	Kerala Social & Cultural Assocation, P.O. Box: 21889, Fax: 17251822, Tele:1751941
28.	Indian Association, P.O. Box: 327, Bahrain.

6. Bilateral Relation/Agreements between India and Bahrain

India and Bahrain have always maintained friendly and cordial relations. The two countries understand and appreciate each other's view points on regional and international issues. There has never been any political problem or dispute between India and Bahrain.

Bilateral Agreements

The two countries had signed the following agreements:

1. Air Services Agreement: Signed in New Delhi by the Bahraini Minister of Transportation and the Indian Civil Minister Shri Sharad Yadav on April 5, 2000.
2. Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP)

During the Bahraini Prime Minister's State Visit to India in January 2004, the following bilateral agreements/treaties were signed:

- Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between Ministries of Foreign Affairs;
- Agreement on Juridical and Judicial Cooperation in Civil and Commercial Matters;
- Extradition Treaty;
- Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters;
- Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Bilateral Investment