

## Envoy calls for more UAE-India flights

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New Delhi: Dr. Abdulnasser Alshaali, UAE Ambassador to India, has a clear message after traveling across 14 Indian states in the past two years and interacting with students, business leaders, and everyday citizens: “We need more flights” between the two nations.

The UAE-India relationship has flourished under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with non-oil trade projected to hit \$100 billion by 2030. However, Dr. Alshaali highlighted a significant challenge in enhancing people-to-people and business-to-business ties: limited aviation capacity.

“The main challenge I face is aviation,” Dr. Alshaali shared in an interview during the inaugural UAE-India Founders’ Retreat at the Dubai International Financial Centre. “It’s not just about adding more flights; it’s about addressing rising ticket prices, which have doubled compared to a decade ago. Demand is far outpacing supply, and this

trend will continue as more cities across India seek connectivity with the UAE.”

The envoy emphasized that expanding flight options is essential to supporting the growing demand and ensuring robust bilateral ties.

“Everything else in this relationship, in one way or another, is already being taken care of,” Dr Alshaali said and noted that aviation has developed up to a certain point but has now “stagnated”.

“Mine and my team’s challenge today is finding new avenues for cooperation, ideas and things to explore in this bilateral relationship. But no one would look at aviation and think that we are stuck here.”

There are hundreds of weekly flights connecting Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah to major Indian cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and states such as Kerala.

Dr Alshaali said that more flights would strengthen the people-to-people connection and ensure ease of travel for investors, business communities, and students.

“For all of this to work, everything that we’re doing, we need to have the flight. So, that people can get on the flight, travel to the UAE or India, attend their meetings and return without worrying about getting a seat, regardless of the price.”

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