FACE2FACE

Potent relations

Germany offers a number of unique business opportunities in diverse fields for Oman to capitalise upon, says **HE Angelika Storz-Chakarji**, **German Ambassador** to Oman, in a candid chat with Visvas Paul D Karra

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er Excellency Angelika Storz-Chakarji, German Ambassador to Oman has lived history. And she feels very elated about being a witness to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent unity of the German people, because rarely do people get an opportunity to be not only a part of a historic moment but also to be in the thick of action in an event of such a magnitude as the unification of a country.

As a young diplomat in the German foreign service, HE Angelika had just returned from a posting at the United Nations headquarters and had been assigned to the unit in the political department which dealt with questions of the unity of Berlin and of Germany as a whole. And so she was closely involved in the negotiation process in that important year. The whole team was heavily involved with the transition process dealing with border issues with all the Eastern Bloc countries.

**Dream come true**

“I think this is a diplomat’s dream come true. Very rarely you will get to live history. Sometimes when I look at it, even though it was more than 20 years ago, it still feels like yesterday,” says the ambassador.

Recalling that period, HE Angelika says everyone was taken by surprise by the turn of events as nobody had blueprints in the drawer for this transition process. Everything had to be decided at a fast pace. The government also realised that it was a window of opportunity and the changes, (the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unity of Germany) happened in a peaceful manner.

HE Angelika, who hails from that part of Germany which in those days was known as Western Germany, says that a united Germany has since then built itself up as a global economic powerhouse.

Today, when you talk of Germany, you will think efficiency, excellence, quality and innovation. Germany is a technological leader with big names in machinery, industry, engineering, solar energy, and automobiles. Those were always the strengths of the country but apart from that, there are other areas like education, culture, scientific research etc, which offer a diverse picture of Germany, HE Angelika points out.

**Enjoyable stint**

HE Angelika is quite pleased with her posting in Oman as it is her first foreign posting as an ambassador to a country and also her first posting to the Arab world as a diplomat. She came to Muscat in July 2009 moving from Berlin. “I was relatively a long time in Paris, then in Bonn and later in New York at the permanent mission to the United Nations and in Tokyo as well. I am really enjoying the stint as this region is an interesting and fascinating part of the world,” says HE Angelika.

The German ambassador has had her fair share of excitement and challenges in Oman and says it is difficult to highlight any single event or thing but there is a lot of potential to strengthen Oman-German relations. “For me, the important thing is that the relations between the two countries especially between the people should get more impetus. We had a German minister of health visiting Oman two months ago and it proved to be successful visit. The health sector is an area in which we can work together. Such visits are important for us,” HE Angelika says.

When pointed out that German precision has not percolated to Oman in terms of investments, HE Angelika says that the biggest German investment in the Arab peninsula is in Oman namely, the $800mn Oman Methanol Company. “We also have Siemens and Oiltanking Odfjell Terminals & Co etc. Besides this, there are also a number of joint partners and I would say a big number of hidden champions as well. Sometimes they are small but not in that sense because very often they are in the field for a long period of time however they are not known like the other big names,” she says.

**Growing trade**

Bilateral trade figures issued by the German Central Statistics Office show that German exports to Oman in 2010 was €546mn, an increase of €100mn over 2009 with the main exports being vehicles and machinery. The German imports from Oman was pegged at €18mn in 2010 as compared to €16mn in 2009, with the primary exports from Oman being agricultural products.

What is relatively important is bilateral agreement on promotion and protection of investments signed between the two countries. According to HE Angelika this is a big step for boosting the commerce as it will cover further activities.

Among other bilateral activities, a pilot project for training Omani teachers to become teachers of German language is in the early stages of being implemented. The embassy is proud of this seeing it as a big step forward in furthering the educational ties. On the educational front, GUTech University has been playing an important role showcasing German excellence in a number of fields. The university is concentrating on courses like architecture, urban planning, engineering and other courses, which fit the Omani educational curriculum.

**Health MoU**

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) on health is a landmark tie-up, says HE Angelika, as there is a vast area of cooperation for the two countries. Not only is the German medical field very competitive, the services are renowned and there are a number of Omanis who go to Germany for healthcare services.

The health minister was accompanied by a business delegation of medical suppliers and producers of medical surgical equipments. Germany has a number of clusters where medical equipments are manufactured by small and medium enterprises which produce highly technical medical surgical equipments.

**Outlook**

Talking about how the German and Oman bilateral ties would shape up in the future, the Embassy is keen to encourage the development of the SME sector in Oman, which is a major focus area for the Sultanate. Says HE Angelika, “Encouraging this vital sector is extremely important because, usually, people think of big name and companies but economies worldwide are run by SMEs. It is important for any society to strengthen and develop this area and we feel there is room for cooperation.”

The renewable energy sector is another focus area for German companies as Oman seeks various means to boost its power output to cater to the growing need for electricity. Within the last one year, there has been an increasing number of German firms related to renewable energy which have been visiting Oman in coordination with the embassy or in liaison with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. A number of seminars have also been organised and the embassy is closely involved in this by way of handholding.

HE Angelika also foresees potential in the higher education because of the success of Muscat-based GUTech University, which is unique in this region. Oman’s young population is a great asset to the country and this gives rise to a lot of scope for training and vocational education. The German side feels it is important for them to show that they can cooperate with Oman in this sector.

On the personal front, HE Angelika’s husband is Syrian-Lebanese and therefore she assumes the last name Chakarji, which means sugar. She has two grown up children living in Berlin while her husband runs a telecommunication business. She studied law and international relations and added two years of more studies in John Hopkins University. English was her first foreign language, apart from Latin, which she learnt in school. She also speaks French and a smattering of Italian.

**BILATERAL TRADE**

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2010 - €546mn

**Imports from Oman**

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2010 - €18mn