

India-Lebanon Relations

India and Lebanon enjoy cordial and friendly relations based on many complementarities such as political system based on parliamentary democracy, non-alignment, human rights, commitment to a just world order, regional and global peace, liberal market economy and a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit. In the light of such commonalities, there is good potential for strengthening ongoing bilateral ties.

Bilateral Relations – A review: India established diplomatic relations with Lebanon in 1954 and maintained its diplomatic representation in Beirut throughout the civil war except for a brief closure of about two months from August 5 to October 16, 1989 following the escalation of fighting in Beirut, as contrary to a large number of other foreign Embassies in Beirut which closed down during the period of the civil war (1975-1990). During this period, there was limited bilateral interaction between the two countries.

After the withdrawal of Syrian troops in April 2005, prospects for intensifying linkages brightened with Lebanon making renewed efforts to find its place in the international community as a sovereign republic, free of hegemonistic influences. This process received a setback with the sudden outbreak of war between the Hezbollah and Israel on July 12, 2006. The massive destruction of Lebanon's physical infrastructure in the 34-days of Israeli bombardment caused a severe setback to its recovery and growth as an economy and a nation. Pursuant to the attack, Government of India strongly condemned the bombing and called for immediate and unconditional ceasefire. In his suo-moto statement in the Parliament on Lebanon, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Manmohan Singh, announced Rs.10 crores for humanitarian aid and reconstruction. An Indian Air Force plane carrying relief material such as tents, blankets and sheets also landed in Beirut, besides the solidarity visit by Shri C.R. Gharekhan, as PM's Special Envoy.

In light of the above, despite our best efforts and good intentions, bilateral relations could not be strengthened in a tangible manner. However, people-to-people ties have been close and cordial, and both countries have a high degree of esteem and regard for each other. The rapid strides made by the Indian economy in recent years and its varied achievements in science and technology and other sectors and emergence as a major power in the comity of nations are well appreciated in Lebanon. Both countries during their overlap in 2010, also cooperated closely on various issues of mutual interest as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. There are also prospects of strengthening ongoing economic and commercial ties and intensifying ongoing interaction at the people-to-people and cultural level.

The government of PM Najib Mikati has been following a policy of disassociating itself from the Syrian uprisings. Lebanon is actively pursuing strengthening of bilateral relations with other countries in the Arab world, Turkey, France, Russia, EU, Australia, Latin America and the USA. While ties with these countries continue to dominate the local political agenda, with increasing focus on economic upgradation efforts, some possibilities have emerged for Indian companies to participate in ongoing initiatives e.g. the Lebanese Government is strenuously pursuing proposal (initiated during Saad Hariri's time) for augmenting its current power output from 1600 MW to 4000MW by 2014 and 5000MW by 2015. In 2012, PM Mikati's cabinet approved a plan valued at US\$ 4.3 billion for undertaking structural reforms in the power sector financed mainly from Arab donors and entities. Though intense competition by donor countries is anticipated, owing to India's strong credentials in successfully delivering major infrastructure, high quality projects at economical cost, there could be possibilities of our participating in future projects pertaining to ICT, agriculture, health care, renewable energy and other infrastructure-related sectors.

Bilateral Trade: Indo-Lebanon trade, which had come to a virtual halt during the civil war, has increased in recent years. The total trade between Lebanon and India was to the tune of US\$ 13.60 million in 1993. During the seven year period from 1993 to 1999, trade grew at a slow pace and could only reach US\$ 55 million in 1999. However, after 2000 there has been a marked difference, especially with increased awareness and recognition in Lebanon of India's economic, technological, political and strategic influence, its large manufacturing base, its strength in services, and its ability to remain relatively unscathed in the face of regional and international financial crises. The two-way bilateral trade till end-Dec 2012 is USD 370 million with the balance of trade predominantly in favour of India. Details are given below:-

(a) Volume of Trade:

Year	India's Export to Lebanon	India's Import from Lebanon	Total trade
2004	US\$114 m	US\$27 m	US\$141 m
2005	US\$139 m	US\$20 m	US\$159 m
2006	US\$118 m	US\$12 m	US\$130 m
2007	US\$176 m	US\$11 m	US\$187 m
2008	US\$ 229 m	US\$13 m	US\$ 242 m
2009	US\$ 327 m	US\$ 12 m	US\$ 339 m
2010	US\$ 320 m	US\$ 18 m	US\$ 338 m
2011	US\$ 354m	US\$ 19m	US\$ 373m
December 2012	US\$ 349m	US\$ 21m	US\$ 370m

Lebanon is in the process of initiating efforts to explore its offshore oil reserves [estimated at 32 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and valued at about USD 40 billion] on a commercial basis. In this connection the Lebanese Ministry of Energy & Water Resources is finalizing modalities for launching a formal bidding process and has also set up a Lebanese Petroleum Administration Committee, consisting of six members. As per a recent decision of the Lebanese Cabinet [27 Dec 2012] the date of 01 Feb 2013 has been set as a deadline for notifying Lebanon's first tender for oil and gas operations. 21 March, 2013 has been set as the date when Lebanon will publish a list of companies and firms qualified to participate in the bidding process, while the interested companies eligible to bid in the Licensing round for offshore natural gas operations are expected to do so by 2nd May 2013. Despite Lebanon's internal political difficulties and maritime disputes with Israel and Cyprus – over a section of waters in Mediterranean estimated at 854 sq.kms – the prospects of benefiting from lucrative natural gas exploration operations is expected to draw many foreign participants in Lebanon's offshore gas exploration projects.

Cultural relations: A Cultural Agreement was signed in April 1997 during the visit of Lebanese Foreign Minister, Mr. Fares Boueiz for the Non-Aligned Ministerial Conference in New Delhi. The agreement came into force with the exchange of the instruments of ratification in February 2000. The Embassy of India in Beirut has organized several cultural events in Lebanon such as Indian Film Week (January & April, 1998 & March 2007), Photographic Exhibition "Glimpses of India" (June – July, 1998) and "Gandhi: His Life and His Message" (May, 2007), Lectures on India, India Night in Zahle (May 2000) and Visits of Bharatnatyam dance troupe (December, 2007) and Rajasthani music group (October, 2008).

Besides the above events, a large number of Indian artists have visited Lebanon, for performing in international cultural festivals/events organized in Lebanon. Late Pt. Ravi Shanker, accompanied by Anushka Shanker performed at the opening night of the Beiteddine Festival in July 2005. Percussionist and Vocalist Trilok Guru performed at Liban Jazz festival in September 2005. In previous years, Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Pt. Zakir Hussain have performed in Lebanon.

A 'Visions of India' (VOI) mega event was held in Beirut and Tripoli between 11 and 16 October, 2011. The VOI activities included screening of Indian films, ICCR sponsored 14 member Matrix Bollywood fusion dance performances, Food Festival at the Movenpick Hotel & Resort, Beirut organized by three ITDC Chefs, and a Chef Training Class on Indian cuisine for elite members of the local community. Two interactive India Business Conferences between the visiting CII-FICCI Indian business delegation i.e. with the Young President's Organisation on 13 October, 2011 [Beirut Chapter] and with about 150 Lebanese members of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon and 30 Turkish businessmen on 14 October, 2011 were also organized during the VOI. On 14 October, 2011, the visiting Indian business delegation also met with H.E. Nicolas Nahas, Minister of Trade and Economy and attended an exclusive presentation on the Tripoli Economic Zone made by the Lebanese Trade Ministry officials.

The Association for the Development of Lebanese Indian Relations (ADLIR) in collaboration with this Embassy, invited Dr. Ramanuja Raju, an Ayurveda expert from India during 26 April – 02 May, 2012. Dr. Raju gave a presentation on Ayurveda at the UNESCO Palace on 27 April, 2012 and gave consultations to around 300 persons during his one-week stay in Lebanon. Later, ADLIR also sponsored the visit of reputed Indian yoga exponent Shri Venkatesetti Sheshadri and his son Harish Sheshadri to Lebanon from 15-30 June, 2012. Besides giving workshops for a cross-section of the Lebanese society, Shri Sheshadri also gave a live yoga demonstration on 30 June which was widely aired by leading Lebanese TV, LBC.

The screening of the famous bollywood film 'Jodhaa Akbar' was done at Chancery premises on 16 July 2012 where prominent personalities from Beirut including Director General of Tourism, Government of Lebanon, senior representatives of the Lebanese Ministries of Information & culture and Ambassadors of other countries in Beirut were present. Around 60 persons attended the event which was widely covered and reported in the leading French daily *L'Orient Le jour* and other sections of the Lebanese media.

Another bollywood film 'Munna Bhai MBBS' was screened at the Chancery on 6 September, 2012. Around 50 persons attended the show including Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Advisor of the Lebanese Minister of Culture and representatives of various diplomatic Missions in Lebanon.

Technical Assistance: India offers training facilities to Lebanese nationals under the ITEC programme covering different sectors such as cooperative banking, journalism, diplomacy, legislative drafting, computers, auditing etc. 54 Lebanese candidates have availed of training under ITEC programme till date. Out of 15 ITEC civilian slots allotted to Lebanon, 13 were utilized in 2012. Similarly out of 11 slots for Defence Training courses under ITEC, 9 were utilized by Lebanese Armed Forces personnel. 25 ITEC civilian slots have been allocated for the year 2012-13. In addition 14, slots have been allotted for personnel of Lebanese Armed Forces under ITEC-II scheme by Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL): An Indian battalion joined the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in South Lebanon in November 1998, replacing the Norwegian battalion which had served for two decades. It assists in maintaining peace and security within its area of operations. At present, the Indian battalion has 863 Indian troops and 14 doctors

serving in the UNIFIL. Besides performing UNIFIL duties, the Indian battalion also offers services to the local Lebanese population by providing informal medical advice and assistance, veterinary aid and technical support to schools. It has also provided the Jaipur Foot to mine victims in the villages in South Lebanon. In addition, 21 Indian armed forces personnel are deployed at the UNIFIL Hqs at Naqoura.

Parliamentary Friendship Committee: Recognizing the need for India to build up support groups within the Lebanese system, the Mission worked on setting up a Parliamentary Friendship Group by cultivating influential MPs. With the support of House Speaker Nabih Berri, a Lebanon-India Parliamentary Friendship Committee has been established in April 2006 with 12 members drawn from a cross section of political / religious groups. It has been conveyed by Lok Sabha authorities that such a Friendship Group is also being re-constituted in India and will be fully established once nominations have been approved by Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha.

India's support for Nahar al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp: In response to an appeal by then Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, India agreed to provide assistance to the tune of US\$ 600,000 for rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Nahr-al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon for projects in the telecom sector. The Lebanese army's three-month long (May-August, 2007) battle with militant group Fatah al-Islam holed up in the Nahar al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp, had resulted in the displacement of about 31,000 refugees and the destruction of the camp.

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