

India – Palestine Relations

India's support for the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the nation's foreign policy. In 1974, India became the first Non-Arab State to recognize Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. India was also one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the State of Palestine in Gaza, which was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

India has always played an active role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause across various multilateral fora. India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly and voted in favour of it. India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard. India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. On November 29, 2012, at the United Nations General Assembly, Palestine became a 'non-member state' and India had co-sponsored this resolution and voted in favour of it. India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015 as well as supported installation of Palestinian flag at UN premises in September 2015.

Bilateral Visits

There have been regular bilateral visits between India and Palestine. Late President Yasser Arafat visited India several times. President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas visited India in the years 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 and most recently in May 2017 on his third State Visit. During the recent State Visit, President Abbas had discussions with President and Prime Minister while Vice President and External Affairs Minister called on him. There have been several visits from India to Palestine in the recent past, prominent among them being of Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India in October 2015, Smt Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister (EAM) in January 2016 and Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State (MOS) for External Affairs in November 2016 for the historic first ever Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between both countries. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had met President Abbas in September 2015 on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York and also in Paris on the sidelines of climate change summit in December 2015. In April 2015, Prime Minister of Palestine Dr. Rami Hamdallah and Foreign Minister Dr. Riad Malki had met EAM in Indonesia on the sidelines of Asia Africa Commemoration Conference.

Joint Commission Meeting

The first ever Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between India and Palestine was held in Ramallah in November 2016. During the JCM, the Indian side was led by Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs and the Palestinian side was led by Dr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister.

Foreign Office Consultations

The first ever Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) between India and Palestine were held in Ramallah in May, 2015. The second round of FOCs was held in New Delhi in April 2017. For the FOCs, the Joint Secretary (WANA), MEA leads the Indian side while Assistant Minister for Asia, Africa and Australia in Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads the Palestinian side.

Projects implemented and under implementation

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at bilateral and international levels, India has been extending various forms of economic assistance to the Palestinian people. Government of India supported the construction of Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip. India provided a plot of land and constructed a chancery building for the Embassy of Palestine in New Delhi.

Two schools were built in Palestine in 2015 through aid provided by India. Government of India has set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Al Quds University, Abu Dis in 2015 and another ICT centre in Ramallah in 2016. Phase I of the work on the project for Equipping Vocational Training Centers in Palestine was completed in November 2016 with the supply and setting up of equipment at VTC (Vocational Training Centre), Yatta and PPU (Palestine Polytechnic University), Hebron. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, India announced five more projects (worth \$17.79 million) for Palestine. These projects include a Palestine India Techno Park in Ramallah (\$12 million), Palestine Institute of Diplomacy (\$4.5 million) in Ramallah, and India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT in Gaza (\$1 million). During the visit of MOS in November 2016, he along with President of Palestine jointly laid the foundation stone for the construction of Palestine India Techno Park Project in Ramallah. The construction of the Institute of Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ramallah is about to commence shortly.

India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund has also funded five projects in Palestine, out of which two are completed (Indoor Multipurpose Sports Complex, Ramallah and Phase I of Al Quds hospital, Gaza), two are nearing completion (Phase II of Al Quds hospital, Gaza and Rehabilitation Centre, Nablus) and the work has started on the fifth one (Atta Habib Medical Center, Gaza).

Memorandums of Understanding

In 1997, an MoU between India and Palestine was signed, which provides for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialized areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects. During the visit of President Abbas to India in 2012 three MoUs were signed in the field of setting up a Centre of Excellence in IT, Building of two schools in Palestine and providing equipment and training to Vocational Training Centers in Palestine. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, six MOUs were signed; one between

the Palestinian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations and the remaining five MOUs were signed between Indian and Palestinian Universities. During the State Visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in May 2017, six MOUs were signed in the fields of Agriculture, Health, Youth Affairs & Sports, Information Technology, Visa Exemption for Diplomatic & Official Passport Holders and an MOU between PTI and WAFA (Palestinian News Agency).

Financial Support

India has so far extended budgetary and project support of US\$ 60 million to Palestine. During the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support and this was transferred to Palestine in March 2009. During the visit of President Abbas to India in February 2010, India announced a budgetary support of US\$ 10 million and this was transferred in the month of March 2010. Again in 2012, during the visit of President Abbas India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to Palestine. During the year 2015, India provided a total of US\$ 9 million as financial assistance to Palestine; US\$ 4 million was provided as project assistance towards the reconstruction of Gaza (on 12 January 2015), and US\$ 5 million was provided as budgetary assistance (on 12 October 2015).

Scholarships and ITEC training for Palestinian Nationals

ICCR

India offers 50 scholarships for Palestinian Nationals under the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSC) of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for higher studies in India.

ITEC

150 slots are offered to Palestine under the ITEC programme for training courses in India aimed at capacity building and skill enhancement. Around 800 Palestinians have availed training under the ITEC programme.

Indian Visas for Palestinian Nationals

On September 25, 2013 the Representative Office of India, Ramallah started issuing Visas from its Office. Palestinian nationals can also obtain e-Visas to visit India as part of Visa on Arrival facility launched in 2014.

Trade

Since, trade between India and Palestine is channelized through Israel, complete trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine bilateral trade stands at around US\$ 40 million. In terms of sectors, automotive spare parts, medical tourism, agro-products, textiles, fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather and leather products, agro-chemicals, plastic products, sanitary wares, marble and granites, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods are areas of interest to Indian manufacturers and exporters. In 2014, Indian engineering consulting firm, HOLTEC Consulting won a tender to prepare a

feasibility study for the first cement plant to be established in Palestine by the Palestinian Commercial Services Company. In the past, TCIL and Satyam Computers had undertaken two major telecom software projects in Nablus for Palestinian Telecommunications Company (PALTEL) while M/s Goldstone Infotech Limited of Hyderabad had tied up with World Trade Centre of Gaza to establish the first Indo-Palestinian Joint Venture in the Karni Industrial Zone in the Gaza Strip in the field of Software Training and Consultancy.

Culture

Indian arts and culture, especially Indian movies are very popular in Palestine. Several cultural activities, including film shows and photo exhibitions have been organized by the Representative Office of India in various Palestinian cities in addition to screening of documentaries prepared by Public Diplomacy division, MEA in local TV channels, schools and youth clubs. A performance by the Indian martial arts dance troupe Kalaripayattu was organized in October 2004 in Ramallah. In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of Nations in Ramallah. In 2014, a Kathak performance was organized in Ramallah and in 2015 a Santoor concert by Dr Varsha Agarwal was organised in Ramallah as part of Jasmine World Music Festival. From July 1-9, 2015 an Indian Bazaar was organised in Ramallah. In 2015, an exhibition of paintings of Islamic Monuments in India, and a food festival was organized in Ramallah. In 2015, the first International Day of Yoga (IDY) was celebrated in Ramallah, in 2016 the second IDY was celebrated in Bethlehem and in 2017, the third IDY was celebrated in Ramallah and Beit Jala.

Useful Resources:

Website of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at <http://roiramallah.org/>

Facebook Page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInPalestine?ref=hl>

Youtube Channel of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<http://www.youtube.com/user/roiramallah>

Twitter handle of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<https://twitter.com/roiramallah>

Flickr page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<https://www.flickr.com/roiramallah>

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