

## India - Israel Relations

### Political Relations

India formally recognised Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon thereafter, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay. This was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently into a Consulate. Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established.

Since the upgradation of relations in 1992, defence and agriculture have been the main pillars of bilateral engagement. In recent years, ties have expanded to areas such as S&T, education and homeland security. The future vision of the cooperation is of a strong hi-tech partnership as befits two leading knowledge economies.

Political relations between the two countries are very good and the frequency of high level visits have gone up considerably in the recent past. President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel in October 2015 becoming the first Indian President to do so. The visit by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to India in November 2016 took place after 20 years since the first ever Israeli Presidential visit to India by Ezer Weizmann in 1996. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also visited India in 2003. There have been several Ministerial level visits as well - EAM Sushma Swaraj visited Israel in January 2016; Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh in September 2016; and HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar represented India in the funeral ceremony of former Israeli President Shimon Peres in September 2016. From the Israeli side, Israeli Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel visited India in April 2016 and later in January 2017 while Minister for Science, Technology and Space, Ofir Akunis visited India in December 2016. The first official multi-party Indian Parliamentary delegation of 10 MPs of both houses of Parliament, led by MOS for Parliamentary Affairs and Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, S.S Ahluwalia visited Israel in June 2017.

### Economic and Commercial Relations

From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (*comprising primarily trade in diamonds*), bilateral merchandise reached US\$ 5.19 billion in 2011. Since then, it has, however, stagnated around US\$ 4 - 4.5 billion with bilateral trade (excluding defence) for 2016 being US\$ 4.16 billion. Though trade in diamonds constitutes more than half of bilateral trade, trade has diversified in recent years to include sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT etc. Major exports from India to Israel include diamonds and metals, chemical products and textiles. Major imports by India from Israel also include diamonds and metals, chemicals (mainly potash) and machinery and transport equipment. Though reliable figures of services are unavailable, it is estimated that almost 75% of bilateral trade in services flow from India to Israel.

### Investment

In addition to direct investments, FDI from Israel to India also flows through USA, Europe and Singapore. Israeli companies have invested in India in pharmaceuticals, energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies, and are also setting up R&D centres and production units in India.

While official data about India's investments in Israel is not available, significant investments from India in Israel include 100% acquisition of Israeli drip-irrigation company Naandan by Jain Irrigation, controlling stake in Taro

Pharmaceuticals by Sun Pharma and Triveni Engineering Industries' investment in Israeli waste-water treatment company Aqwise. TCS started operations in Israel in 2005, and the State Bank of India opened a branch in Tel Aviv in 2007. During the last two years, Indian IT majors such as Infosys, Wipro and Tech Mahindra have also made notable investments in Israel. Other investments include Sun Pharma's investment on Moeibus Medicals for commercialization its new drug of osteo-arthritis and Wirpo Infrastructure Engineering's acquisition of Israeli aero-machining company HR Givon.

### Agriculture

India and Israel have a bilateral agreement for cooperation in agriculture. The bilateral action plan for 2015-18 is currently operational. 15 out of the proposed 26 Centers of Excellence in agriculture being developed in India with Israeli help are active in different states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat etc.

India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management. Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. The two countries signed an MoU on Cooperation in Water Resources Management, as well as a Declaration of Intent to further cooperation in agriculture during the visit of President Rivlin to India in November 2016.

### **Defence & Security**

India imports important defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces and defence personnel. Air Chief Marshal, Arup Raha, visited Israel in March, 2016. Admiral Sunil Lanba, in his capacity as Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, is scheduled to visit Israel in June 2017. Israeli Naval and Air Force Chiefs visited India in 2015. Three Indian ships namely destroyer INS Mumbai, frigate INS Trishul and tanker INS Aditya made a goodwill visit at the Haifa port in May 2017 to mark 25 years of full diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In February 2014, India and Israel signed three important agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Cooperation in Homeland and Public Security, and Protection of Classified Material. Under Cooperation in Homeland Security, four working groups in the areas of border management, internal security and public safety, police modernization and capacity building for combating crime, crime prevention and cyber crime were established. IPS officer trainees visited Israel in 2015 and 2016 for foreign exposure visit as well.

There is ongoing cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, including through a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism which held its last meeting in Jerusalem in July, 2015.

### **Cooperation in S&T**

Both countries signed a S&T Cooperation Agreement in 1993. In addition, under an MOU on Industrial Research and Development Initiative signed in 2005, a joint industrial R&D fund i4RD was set up to promote joint industrial R&D and specific projects. Currently, both countries are working towards replacing I4RD with an industrial R&D and technological innovation fund. In 2013, Karnataka State

Government signed an MoU with Israel's MATIMOP, the Israeli Industry Center for R&D, for industrial R&D partnership. Under the program, industries may seek financial support for funding joint bilateral R&D projects, involving at least one small/medium scale company of Karnataka and one Israeli company.

Tata Industries and Ramot, Tel Aviv University (*the University's technology transfer company*) entered into an MoU to fund and generate commercial technologies in a wide range of fields, including engineering, exact sciences, environment and clean technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Under the MoU, Tata Industries, with an investment of US\$ 5 million, is the lead investor in Ramot's US\$20 million Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. Tata has also invested in a dedicated fund established by Tel Aviv University for Internet of Things technologies. Sun Pharma signed research collaborations with Technion University and the Weizmann Institute for developing drugs for oncology and brain diseases respectively.

Cyber has emerged as another area in which both countries have started to collaborate including through an annual cyber roundtable involving academics and businessmen from both sides. Both governments are also exploring ways to collaborate with each other in the field of cyber. ISRO and the Israel Space Agency revived contacts in 2014 and the two sides are currently mapping out areas of collaboration.

## **Culture and Education**

India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions. Young Israelis perceive India as an attractive tourist destination, with approximately 35,000 Israelis visiting India each year for tourism, business and other purposes. Approximately 40,000 Indians also visit Israel every year. The Embassy of India organizes several cultural events each year. A culinary week of Indian food featuring celebrity Chef Sanjeev Kapoor and a retrospective of films of Satyajit Ray, inaugurated by Shyam Benegal, were among events of significance organized by the Embassy in 2016. The second International Yoga Day on 21 June 2016 was attended by almost 2000 people in Tel Aviv.

Several courses related to India are taught at Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Haifa University. Indian Professors have been visiting Tel Aviv University under a MoU for a Chair for Indian studies. Israeli academicians of repute have visited Indian institutes like IITs and JNU under the GIAN scheme. Indian and Israeli Universities collaborate on various subjects and have signed several agreements. During the visit of President Rivlin to India in November 2016, 21 MoUs between Indian and Israeli academic institutions were also concluded.

Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarships to students from India and China. Since then, 300 out of almost 400 fellowships have been awarded to Indian students. The Government of Israel also offers 250 summer scholarships for Indian and Chinese students in chosen courses across Israeli Universities. India offers five ICCR scholarships to Israelis every year and an equal number of scholarships are offered by Israel for 10-month programs in specialized fields of study.

In 2014, the Indian diamond community set up a fund to finance study tours to India of meritorious Israeli students of Hindi. 18 Hindi students have benefitted from these scholarships so far.

## **Indian Community**

Major waves of immigration of Jews from India to Israel took place in the 1950s and 1960s. There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel. The majority is from Maharashtra (*Bene Israelis*) with relatively smaller numbers from Kerala (*Cochini Jews*) and Kolkata (*Baghdadi Jews*). In recent years, some Indian Jews from North Eastern states of India (*Bnei Menashe*) have been immigrating to Israel. While the older generation still maintains an Indian lifestyle and strong cultural links with India, the younger generation is more fully integrated into Israeli society. However, the Know India Programme, which provides Indian origin persons opportunities to visit India, have been received well by the younger generation of Indian Jews. From 2013 onwards, the community has been organizing annual National Conventions, which bring the entire community together.

Three Israelis have won the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. Shri Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Chennamangalam, Cochin has distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist and became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive the *Bhartiya Pravasi Samman* in 2005. Sheikh Ansari, who manages the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem, a unique Indian connection to the Holy City, was also honoured with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* in 2011. In 2017, Dr. Lael Anson Best, an accomplished cardiothoracic surgeon, was conferred the Award for achievements in Medical Sciences.

There are about 12,500 Indian citizens in Israel, of whom around 11,500 are care-givers. Others are diamond traders, some IT professionals, and students.

## **Useful Resources:**

Embassy of India, Israel website: <http://www.indembassy.co.il/>

Embassy of India, Israel Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInIsrael/>

Embassy of India, Israel Twitter: <https://twitter.com/indemtel>

Embassy of India, Israel Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Indianembassytelaviv>

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