

India-Israel Relations

Political Relations

On 17 September 1950, India announced recognition of Israel. Soon after, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay. This was converted into a Trade Office and later a Consulate. Following the decision to establish diplomatic relations, Israel opened its Embassy in Delhi in February 1992 and India opened its Embassy in Tel Aviv on 15 May 1992. 2012 marked the 20th anniversary of establishment of full diplomatic relations, which have seen rapid growth across a broad spectrum.

The relationship has thrived on the common bedrock of parliamentary democracy; Common Law structures; liberal system of education; knowledge of English language; similar strengths in the knowledge industry and a highly qualified scientific and technical manpower in both countries. A long and peaceful Jewish presence in India, in which the Jewish Community co-existed with other communities with no instance of persecution, has also contributed positively to the friendly relationship between the countries.

Bilateral Visits

The 20th anniversary was marked by several important high level recent visits, which include the following:

From Israel:

- ❖ Minister of Energy & Water Resources, Uzi Landau (February 2012);

From India:

- ❖ External Affairs Minister Shri S.M. Krishna (January 2012)
- ❖ Minister of Urban Development Shri Kamalnath (February 2012)
- ❖ Minister of Communications, Information Technology and Human Resource Development, Mr. Kapil Sibal (April 2012)
- ❖ Minister of Tourism, Mr. Subodh Kant Sahai (June 2012)

Commercial and Economic Relations

Since establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel, bilateral trade has not only increased rapidly from US\$ 200 million in 1992 (comprising primarily of diamonds) to US\$ 5.153 billion in 2011, but has also diversified.

Major exports from India to Israel include precious stones and metals, chemical products, textile and textile articles, plants and vegetable products, mineral products, rubber and plastic products, base metals and machinery.

Major exports from Israel to India include precious stones and metals, chemical and mineral products, base metals, machinery, and transport equipment

Bilateral trade during January-October 2012

Total trade	US\$ 4.44 billion (US\$ 5.19 bn in Jan-October 2011)
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Balance of trade	US\$ 573 million (in Israel's favor)
Trade in diamonds	US\$ 2.29 billion (51.58% of the total bilateral trade)
India's rank	6 th largest export destination of Israel
India's share in Israel's global trade	3.28% (3.57% in Jan-October 2011)

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel

Free Trade Agreement

A Free Trade Agreement is currently under negotiations between the two countries.

Investment

FDI inflows from Israel to India from April 2000 to April 2011 were US\$ 53.24 million, at 39th rank and 0.04% of total FDI inflows. While the traditional business thrust in diamonds, agriculture, chemicals, information & communication technology and pharmaceuticals remains, in recent times, Israeli companies have invested in India in energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, and water technologies. Israeli companies are also setting up Research and Development (R&D) centres or production units in India.

Indian companies are marking their presence in Israel through mergers and acquisitions and opening offices. Such leading Indian companies are:

- ❖ **TCS** (started operations in Israel in 2005)
- ❖ **State Bank of India** (opened a branch in Tel Aviv in 2007)
- ❖ **Jain Irrigation** (has acquired 100% stake in Naan-Dan, an Israeli irrigation equipment manufacturing company)
- ❖ **Sun Pharma** (has 65.2% stake in Israel's Taro Pharmaceutical Industries)

Agriculture

Under a comprehensive Work Plan for cooperation in agriculture signed on 10 May 2006, bilateral projects are implemented through MASHAV (Center for International Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and CINADCO (Centre for International Agricultural Development Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development).

The Action Plan for 2012-2015 has been expanded to seven States i.e. Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Punjab (originally 4 states - Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat . were covered under the earlier action plan). Under this umbrella, several Centers of excellence are being established in various states in India:

- ❖ Karnal, Haryana (Vegetables)
- ❖ Ratnagiri, Maharashtra (Mango)
- ❖ Akola, Maharashtra (Citrus)
- ❖ Rahuri, Maharashtra (Pomegranate)

India also benefits from Israeli technologies in horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery

management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management through visits of Israeli experts and capacity building programs.

Indian official and business delegations regularly attend Israel's triennial international agricultural exhibition event AGRITECH, which showcases Israel's achievements in agriculture. In AGRITECH 2012 (May 15-17) exhibition, India's participation included the Ministers of Agriculture of Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra as well as business delegations from India.

Cooperation in Science & Technology

India-Israel cooperation in science and technology has evolved on two tracks:

- ❖ Joint research by S&T Institutions under S & T Cooperation Agreement (signed in 1993) and
- ❖ Industrial R&D under an MOU on Industrial Research and Development Initiative (signed on May 30, 2005)

Under this MOU India and Israel set up a joint industrial R & D fund, i⁴RD to encourage investment and joint ventures. Under i⁴RD, industry may seek funds for joint bilateral R & D projects, involving at least one Indian and one Israeli company. The framework is jointly implemented by Global Innovation and Technology Alliance (GITA), under Department of Science & Technology and Confederation of Indian Industry; and MATIMOP, Israeli Industry Centre for R&D.

Cultural Relations

In Israel, India is seen as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions and an attractive, alternative tourist destination. Around 40,000 (mostly young) Israelis visit India every year. There is an abiding interest in Indian culture and several Israelis avail ICCR scholarships (seven every year) to study Hindi, dance, music and yoga in India.

Courses related to India are taught at the Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University and Haifa University. Hindi is taught at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University. ICCR has a MoU with Tel Aviv University (signed in 2009) to set up a Rotating Chair for contemporary Indian studies in their East and South East Asian Studies Department.

An annual festival of India in Israel 'Celebrating India in Israel' is organised by the Embassy along with Teamwork Productions, which brings to Israel the best artists in contemporary and classical Indian culture. Held in April-May, the festival showcases India's theatre, music, cuisine, yoga, film, contemporary art and literature to Israeli audience.

Cultural Exchange Program

Both countries are negotiating a new cultural exchange program, following the expiry of the agreement signed in 2003.

Indian Community

There are approximately 70,000 Jews of Indian origin in Israel, most of whom are Israeli nationals. The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the fifties and sixties. The majority is from Maharashtra (Bene Israelis) and smaller numbers are from Kerala (Cochini Jews) and Kolkata (Baghdadi Jews). The older generation maintains an Indian lifestyle and their cultural links with India remain intact, while the younger generation is increasingly assimilated into Israeli society, engaged in agriculture or work in new development towns outside traditional urban centers. Second and third generation descendants from the Indian Jewish Community visit India under the Know India Scholarships offered by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs every year.

The community is playing an important role in the development of Israel. They are considered hard-working, skilful, reliable and responsible contributing not only to agriculture but also as an effective workforce in many of Israel's industries. Many members of the community are active in social fields. Some are successful restaurateurs, mainly serving Indian food. A few Indians have made a mark in medicine and agricultural science. Jews from Cochin have contributed immensely to desert farming in Israel by adopting modern technology. Mr. Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Cochin distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist and became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive the Bharatiya Pravasi Samman for 2005. There is a Central Organization of Indian Jews, which brings together a large section of Indian Jews.

The resident Indian community includes diamond traders, some IT professionals, students and around 6,000 unskilled workers, who are mainly employed as care-givers.

Highlights of 2012

- ❖ External Affairs Minister Shri S.M. Krishna visited Israel on January 9-10, 2012 and held meetings with President Peres, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance. An Extradition Treaty and an Agreement for Transfer of Sentenced Persons were signed during this visit. EAM made the following important announcements:
 - Approval of Government of India for opening a Consulate General of Israel in Bengaluru
 - A special grant of US\$ 25,000 for setting up a Baba Farid Heritage Centre at the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem

- ❖ During the visit of Shri Kamal Nath, Minister of Urban Development from February 12-14, a Joint Declaration for long-term collaboration in technologies related to water, waste-water and sewage management was signed.

- ❖ The following key initiatives were taken during the visit of Shri Kapil Sibal, Minister of Communication, IT and HRD (April 3-8, 2012):
 - Setting up a Joint Working Group for collaboration in telecom and information technology
 - Cooperating in the Akash Tablet project

- Launching a program to enable joint research in renewable and sustainable energies, bio-medical sciences, cyber-security, humanities and social sciences etc (scope of the program to reach US\$ 5 million from each side annually in steady state over a three year period)
- ❖ Shri Subodh Kant Sahai, Minister of Tourism, who visited Israel in the backdrop of growing tourism ties between the countries, inaugurated the statue of Rabindranath Tagore at Hebrew University in Jerusalem to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore. The first meeting of the JWG on Tourism also took place during the Minister's visit.
- ❖ A set of two postal stamps were jointly issued by the Departments of Posts of India and Israel. The stamps, depicting festivals of lights - Deepavali in India and Hanukkah in Israel . were launched in November 2012.
- ❖ Israel's Finance Minister Yuval Steintiz and Education Minister Gideon Saar announced post-doctoral grants for up to 100 students from India and China last year.

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