

**Ministry of External Affairs**  
**WANA Division**

**India-LAS relations**

India has traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations with the Arab world. Which date back to the ancient times when traders, scholars and diplomats would often traverse the Arabian Sea and the land routes linking India to West Asia and the Arab peninsula, transferring knowledge and merchandise. A shared cultural heritage, through the linkages of language and religion continues to lend energy to these historic bonds.

Today, the Arab world is part of India's extended neighbourhood. India's staunch commitment to the Palestinian cause, shared views on major international developments and strong economic and commercial relations form the bedrock of India-Arab relations. Much of India's external trade passes along the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. There are vital Indian investments in countries stretching from Oman and Saudi Arabia to Egypt, Sudan and beyond. Moreover, India has a large expatriate community in the Arab world, who have, over many generations, contributed to the countries of their residence. India's total bilateral trade with the Arab world stands at over US\$ 162 billion, and covers a variety of goods and services, from oil to infrastructure and telecommunications to consumer goods. It is home to more than 7 million Indians and caters to 60% of our crude oil imports.

India and LAS signed an MoU institutionalizing the process of dialogue in March 2002. In December 2008, during Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa's visit to India, a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) was signed for the establishment of Arab-India Cooperation Forum. In December 2010, the Indian Ambassador in Cairo was designated as India's Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States with Observer Status. In April 2013, the League proposed a revised MoC which proposed replacing the High Level Joint Committee of the 2008 MoC with a format of biennial Ministerial and annual Senior Officials meetings involving all the member states and the Arab League Secretariat. The new MoC was attached to an Executive Programme (EP) of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum for 2014-15, which included specific cooperation in a number of fields.

Dr. Nabil El Araby, the then LAS Secretary General (SG) paid a visit to India on 17 December 2013 to sign the new documents. EAM Smt Sushma Swaraj met Dr. El Araby in August 2015 during her visit to Cairo and reviewed India-Arab relations as well as regional issues. EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj participated in the First Ministerial meeting of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum in Manama, Bahrain in January 2016. The Manama declaration and the Executive Program for 2016 and 2017 were adopted. This opened up a new chapter in India –Arab relations.

The Executive Program covers a broad range of subjects and envisages:

*Senior Officials Meetings:* These are to take place annually between all member-states of the League and India. The officials would be at the level of Secretary/ Vice-Ministers. The first Senior Officials Meeting (SoM) was held in New Delhi on 07 November 2014 and the second SoM on 23 January 2016 in Manama, on the eve of the first Ministerial meeting.

*Ministerial meetings:* These are to be held every two years either in India or in one of the LAS member states, and at the level of Foreign Ministers. Every Ministerial meeting would be preceded by a Senior Officials meeting. The First Ministerial Meeting was held in 2016 in Manama, Bahrain.

*India-LAS Partnership and Investment Summit:* This is the flagship event in the economic field, to be held every two years, with the participation of Ministers of Commerce and Industry. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Summit were held in New Delhi in April 2008, February 2010 and November 2014 respectively; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> session was held in Abu Dhabi in May 2012 and the 5<sup>th</sup> session was held in Muscat in December 2016. Indian side was led by MoS (MJA).

*The Arab India Cultural Festival:* As a means of promoting greater cultural interaction and people to people contact, the Arab Indian Cultural Festival is to be held every two years alternatively in India and in the Arab world. The 1<sup>st</sup> festival was held in New Delhi in December 2018 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> festival was held in Algiers from 20 to 27 November 2014.

*Media Cooperation:* Recognizing the value of the media's role in India and the Arab world and to promote interaction between media houses and journalists, regular interactions in the form of visits, and conferences are planned. The first Media Symposium bringing together senior journalists and editors from both sides was held in New Delhi in August 2014. The second Media symposium is proposed to be held in one of the Arab countries.

Till date 16 diplomats from LAS have attended the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats at Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi. Additionally, 16 diplomats from LAS attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Course for League of Arab States at FSI from 22-29 July 2019.

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