

India – Tunisia Relations

India has traditionally maintained cordial and friendly relations with Tunisia since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1958. The first resident Indian Mission at the level of Cd'A was established in Tunisia in 1963 and raised to the Ambassador level in 1976. The Tunisian Embassy in New Delhi was set up in 1981. Tunisian leaders have expressed admiration for India's democracy and its leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru; the state that India's freedom struggle has served as an inspiration for Tunisia.

Bilateral relations continued on an even keel. In the early 2000s, progress was made in bilateral cooperation in phosphates with the establishment in 2006 of the joint venture in this sector. In international fora including UN, cooperation between Indian and Tunisia was very good – the countries supported each other's candidatures to these bodies and had similar positions.

Several high-level visits took place in this period. Notable among them were that of Vice-President Zakir Hussain in July 1964, Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in April 1984, Vice-President M. Hidayatullah in May 1984 and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992. Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral paid a visit to Tunisia in 1999. From Tunisian side, First Lady of Tunisia, Wassila Bourguiba visited India in November 1982, followed by that of Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali in 1983, FM Habib Boulares in 1991 and FM Habib Ben Yahya in December 2000.

In the post-Revolution Tunisia, Shri E. Ahmed, MOS (EA) paid the first ministerial visit to Tunisia from November 5-7, 2012.

Shri Srikant K. Jena, MoC (I/C) for Chemicals & Fertilizers paid a 3-day visit to Tunisia from July 11-13, 2013 to mark the commencement of TIFERT plant, the India-Tunisia joint venture for manufacturing phosphoric acid. In addition to his working session with Minister of Industry Mehdi Jomaa, MoS called on President Moncef Marzouki.

External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid paid a 2-day official visit to the Republic of Tunisia on 2-3 February 2014 in a first ever bilateral visit at EAM level from India since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1958. EAM called on the President H.E. Dr. Moncef Marzouki, Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Mehdi Jomaa and met with Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Mongi Hamdi. He also met with Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, President, Ennahda party and Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, President, Nidaa Tounes party. EAM conveyed the felicitations of the government and the people of India to the Tunisian leadership on the historic achievement of the adoption of the Constitution by the democratically-elected National Constituent Assembly. He informed the Tunisian leadership of India's readiness to share its expertise in building durable institutions of democracy, particularly in connection with voting methods and the work of the Election Commission.

Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahda Party, visited India from 5-8 April 2015 as a guest of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. While in New Delhi, Sheikh Rached met with Mr. M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President and Ms. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister. He also met with H.E. Mr. Thambi Durai, Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha. He held interactions with the Indian student community at two universities at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and at the Aligarh Muslim University. He also delivered a lecture on Tunisia's Transition to Democracy at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi.

Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Hon'ble Minister for Textiles and Special Envoy of Prime Minister of India paid a 2-day visit to Tunisia on 9 and 10 July 2015. He called on

H.E. Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, President of the Republic of Tunisia and handed over to him the invitation letter from Prime Minister to the 3rd India-Africa Summit held in October 2015 in New Delhi.

Mr. Taieb Baccouche, Foreign Minister of Tunisia led the Tunisian delegation to India to attend the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit. He met with Hon'ble EAM Mrs. Sushma Swaraj on the margins of the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit, and had a tête-à-tête with Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi, during the Summit-2015 in New Delhi.

Mr. Mongi Marzouk, Tunisian Minister of Energy & Mines led the Tunisian delegation to India-Africa Hydrocarbons Conference on 20-21 January 2016 in New Delhi.

Mr. Khemais Jhenaoui, Tunisian Foreign Minister attended the first Ministerial Meeting of the India–Arab Cooperation Forum in Manama, Bahrain on 24 January 2016.

Tunisian Navy Chief attended the International Fleet Review held in Vishakapatnam from February 3-8, 2016.

Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahda Party, received the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award for spreading Gandhian values outside India on 7th November 2016 in Mumbai. The Award was conferred by the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation.

Hon'ble Vice President (HVP) of India, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari accompanied by Mrs. Ansari visited Tunisia on 02–03 June 2016. During the visit, HVP met with President of Tunisia, Prime Minister, President of the House of Representatives of People and President of Ennahda Party. Hon'ble VP also received Mufti of the Tunisia. Two agreements, i.e. Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Handicrafts and Agreement on Cooperation in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) were signed. HVP delivered a keynote address “India and the World” organized by the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies.

Shri M.J. Akbar, MOS (EA) paid an official visit to Tunisia from 26 February to 1 March 2017. He called on President Beji Caid Essebsi, and had discussions with Minister of Energy & Mining Mrs. Hela Cheikhrouhou, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Mr. Sabri Bachtobji, Minister of Trade & Industry Zied Laadhari and Ennahda party President Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi. He interacted with intellectuals, political experts, think tanks at Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies and addressed businessmen at UTICA. He also visited Mahindra assembly plant in Sousse and TIFERT plant in Skhira.

FOCs, Joint Commission and JWG:

A mechanism for Foreign Office Bilateral Consultation exists between the two countries. Three consultations at Secretary-level have already been held in December 2001 and October 2002, and the third one on 30 April 2015.

The 12th Session of the India-Tunisia Joint Commission was held 30 October 2017 in New Delhi. It was the first time that it was co-chaired at foreign ministerial level by EAM and Tunisian FM. During the JCM, two new bilateral JWGs were decided to be set up, and it was agreed to enhance cooperation in several fields including phosphates, IT, agriculture, renewable energy, textiles, automobiles, emerging new technologies. It was decided to enhance the bilateral trade to \$1 billion in next five years. An agreement was signed to set up a soil, water tissue testing laboratory with India also. Six agreements were also signed. On the margins of JCM, three separate business meetings and B2B for the Tunisian business delegation accompanying FM were organized by CII, FICCI and FIEO.

Several Joint Working Groups between the two countries have been set up to foster trade and commercial relations as under:

- a) JWG in the Oil and Natural Gas
- b) JWG on SMEs
- c) JWG on Drugs and Pharmaceuticals
- d) JWG on Textiles
- e) JWG on ICT
- f) JWG on S&T

Science & Technology Cooperation:

India-Tunisia Cooperation in Science & Technology is guided by the Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation signed between the two countries in October 1995 and the Programmes of Cooperation thereunder. The 4th session of the Joint Committee on S&T was held in New Delhi on 23-24 March 2017.

Cooperation under India-Africa Forum Summit:

Under this initiative, Institute Pasteur of Tunis (IPT) is among the 3 institutes selected by the African Union Commission for support by the Indian scientific community to work on specific problems of the African continent and to find practical scientific solutions for them. Accordingly, a close cooperation programme has been initiated between IPT and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) of New Delhi and a workshop on bio-informatics and health sciences was held between the two institutes in Tunis on 23rd May, 2013, in which many aspects of the control of infectious diseases, including development of vaccines and building technological know-how for capacity building for African countries, were discussed. It was decided that the Institute Pasteur would be twinned with several leading laboratories of India towards capacity building in vaccine research and production. As a follow up, since June 2014, Pastuer Institute of Tunisia and Indian Department of Science & Technology, and ICGEB are in touch for capacity building, research & training. Both sides also discussed further cooperation during 4th Session of India-Tunisia JWG on S&T in March 2017 in New Delhi. Tunisia avails of a number training programmes in different fields under IAFS. 18 scholarships are offered to Tunisia scientists under C.V. Raman Fellowship programme.

A 3 member composite delegation visited Tunis from 18-22 July for feasibility study to set up Soil, Water and Tissue Testing Lab in Tunis under IAFS.

ITEC/Other Scholarships:

This year, Government of India offered 100 ITEC slots and 10 ICCR scholarships for higher studies.

Bilateral Trade:

Tunisia has been a reliable source for phosphates. India accounts for around 50% of Tunisia's global phosphoric acid exports. India, on the other hand, exports a wide range of products. Significant among them are Knocked-Down Kits, Automobiles, Electrical Items, Cotton, Mechanical Engines, Organic Chemical Products, Rubber, Rice, Coffee/Spices etc. The annual bilateral trade during 2016 was **370.46** million.

A 12-member multi-sectoral FICCI trade delegation visited Tunisia on 27-30 July 2016. This was the first trade visit after a gap of several years. Four B2B meetings were held in the capital Tunis and Sfax, the second largest city. There was overwhelming response and eagerness from the Tunisian companies in all four B2Bs.

A 9-member business delegation launched by the Plastics Export Promotion Council visited Tunis from 9-11 November, 2016. A Buyer-Seller Meet was organized with the apex

chamber of commerce in Tunis, CONECT; and a business meeting with two other prominent chambers of commerce, UTICA and Tunisian Chamber of Commerce and Industry were held.

India Tunisia Joint Venture:

Tunisia-India Fertilizer SA (TIFERT) is a joint venture company, worth US\$450 million with a capacity to produce 360,000 tonnes of phosphoric acid per annum, which was made operational in 2013. Two Indian companies, Coromandel Fertilizers Ltd and the Gujarat State Fertilizers Ltd, own 30% equity in the company.

Other Indian companies:

Indian companies, M/s KEC International Ltd and Jyoti Structures Ltd, are in Tunisia since several years putting up electric transmission lines. An assembly plant of Mahindra pickup trucks is operational in Tunisia since October 2013 which is selling more than 1200 vehicles per year with a target to produce up to 2,500 per year. Mahindra and Mahindra provide the vehicles as knocked-down kits, which are assembled by the Tunisian company in Tunisia. A new passenger SUV model has been launched by Mahindra in 2017. M/s TATA Motors have commenced production of pick-up trucks with Tunisian companies 'Le Moteur' and 'Icar' in June 2015.

Export potential:

Pharmaceuticals, commercial/farm vehicles and spare parts, machinery, renewable energy, software exports and the services sector (tourism and hospitality) are the main areas where we can enhance our exports.

A five-member composite delegation from Ministry of Ayush and its ancillary offices and a private Ayurveda products company took part in the first International Congress of Phytotherapy 2017 in Monastir, Tunisia from 29 April-1 May 2017. This was part of the follow-up of the JWG meeting on Drugs and Pharmaceuticals that was held in January 2017 when the Indian participant from Ministry of Ayush had evinced interest in the Tunisian research entity in traditional medicine.

A business meeting and tourism promotion event was organized on 25 April 2017 for marketing Ayurveda and holistic well-being packages offered by Ayurveda spas in Kerala. It was attended by 70 prominent Tunisian businessmen, tour operators and leading journalists. The opportunity was also utilized to showcase a complete ensemble of cultural and tourism opportunities in Kerala.

Culture:

Under Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two countries, cultural troupes from both sides visit each other country regularly. Five Indian cultural troupes have visited Tunisia since January-August 2017 under CEP. In addition, two Indian cultural troupes, one at prestigious Carthage International festival and another at Rouhanyet festival organized by Rostom Foundation visited Tunisia. Tunisian artisans participated in Surajkund Mela 2016 and 2017.

To celebrate 'Hindi Diwas' in Tunisia on 14 September 2016, Hindi poetry recitation, essay writing, painting and drawing competitions and Hindi classes were organised. A large number of Tunisian Hindi enthusiasts and Indian community members participated in Hindi Diwas activities. Earlier, a Hindi Week was organised to teach basic Hindi to Tunisians. This was the first time Hindi promotion activities were conducted for the Tunisian nationals. The International Hindi Diwas was held on 10 January 2017 by organising various Hindi competitions and basic Hindi classes.

On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti celebrations, Mahatma Gandhi's statue was unveiled by the Governor of Manouba Governorate at the campus of Manouba University in Tunis on 4 October 2016. This was the first-ever statue of any Indian personality to have been installed in Tunisia. Coinciding with the unveiling ceremony, a Gandhi Memorial lecture entitled "Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi today and say no to violence" was delivered by an ICCR-sponsored eminent Gandhian scholar, Mrs. Shobhana Radhakrishna. A photo exhibition of Mahatma Gandhi was also inaugurated at the university. The second Gandhi memorial lecture series on "Contemporary Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of Non-Violence in the 21st Century" was held in January 2017 under the sponsorship of ICCR.

Diwali celebrations, attended by 300 people, were held on 30 October 2016. The visiting ICCR Kathak group staged its performance.

The festival of colour, Holi was celebrated on 12 March 2017 with the members of the Indian community in Tunisia, the India-Tunisia Association and prominent Tunisian friends of India.

The first-ever ICCR chair on Indian civilisation was established for one month at the University of Manouba in Tunis in February-March 2017. Prof Srivastava, former Director, National Archives of India taught Indian civilisation, evolution of ancient, medieval and modern Indian history to post graduate students of literature, languages and history in the Faculty of Humanities and Languages.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, two seminars were organized on 7-8 March 2017 in collaboration with ICCR. A prominent academic Dr. Rupa Vasudevan, Vice Chancellor of Rai Tech University, Bengaluru was deputed by ICCR. Another Indian scholar, Dr. Arun Kumar Srivastava, who was teaching at the University of Manouba, where the first-ever ICCR Chair was set up, addressed the seminar on the historical perspective of the women's movement.

IDY 2017

The International Day of Yoga 2017 was celebrated on 21st June 2017 in Tunis in coordination with Tunisian Federation for Sports & Labour under the Ministry of Youth & Sports. In all, 4000 yoga enthusiast took part in 12 yoga sessions, 7 in the capital Tunis, 3 in the city of Tabarka (200 km), one each in Bizerte (85 km) and Nabeul (70 km).

Indian Community:

The permanent Indian community consists of a couple of families who have been here since several decades. There are some Indian professionals working in different projects; the community numbers are about 120.

Evacuation of Indian nationals from Libya through Tunisia:

Following collapse of law & order in Libya, evacuation of more than 3500 Indians working in Libya was facilitated through Djerba port of Tunisia and Tunis since July 2014.

Useful Resources:

<http://www.embassyofindiatunis.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/IndiainTunisia>
<https://twitter.com/IndiainTunisia>

November 2017