

India-Syria Bilateral Relations

India and Syria enjoy friendly relations based on historic and civilizational ties. India's traditional support for the just Arab cause, notably on the Palestinian issue and for the return of the occupied Golan Heights to Syria, has been appreciated by the Syrians.

2. India's friendly relations with Syria stood the test of time when the Syrian crisis broke out in 2011. India took its principled stand in resolving the conflict in a non-military way and through an inclusive Syrian-led political process, which has been appreciated by the Syrian Government and people alike. India has continued to maintain its Embassy in Damascus even during the peak of the crisis.

3. India continues to stress on a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with UNSC Resolution 2254, with a firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

4. Bilateral Visits

i) **Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee** paid a visit to Syria in **November 2003**, during which 9 agreements in diverse fields were signed. Establishment of Biotechnology Centre in Damascus with Indian technical assistance and a grant of US\$ 1 million and LoC of US\$ 25 million were announced during the visit.

ii) **President Bashar Al-Assad** paid a state visit to India in June 2008. He was accompanied several Ministers. A Work Plan on Cooperation in Agriculture was also signed during the visit. India's offers to set up an IT Center of Excellence and to carry out a feasibility study on utilisation of phosphate resources of Syria were accepted by Syria.

iii) **President Smt. Pratibha Patil**, accompanied by a large business delegation, paid a State visit to Syria in Nov 2010. During the visit, LoC of US\$ 100 million was offered to Syria. A contribution of 2 million Syrian pounds was made to a Syrian NGO- AAMAL and over 1 million Syrian pounds to Missionaries of Charity, Aleppo. MoU for cooperation in the field of media and a Cultural Exchange Programme were signed during the visit.

iv) **Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh** met **Syrian Prime Minister Wael Al Halki** on the side-lines of the NAM summit in Tehran in August 2012. PM expressed concern over the continued violence in Syria and conveyed support for a Syrian-led political process to resolve the crisis.

v) **Syrian Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs & Expatriates Mr. Walid Al Mouallem** paid an official visit to India on January 11-14, 2016 and met then EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj and NSA Shri Ajit Doval. They discussed cooperation in combating terrorism, situation in Syria and the political solution of the crisis.

vi) **MoS for External Affairs Shri M. J. Akbar** visited Syria in August 2016. During the visit, he called on President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other dignitaries. The talks were focused on India-Syria bilateral relations, developmental assistance and issues of common interest like terrorism, ISIS etc.

vii) **Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs & Expatriates Dr. Fayssal Mekdad** paid an official visit to India from 17-21 November 2022. During the visit, he held talks with EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. The two sides touched upon extending humanitarian & developmental support to Syria, capacity building of Syrian youth and collaboration in sectors like fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, IT, etc. During the visit, Dr. Mekdad called on Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, interacted with the Indian business community at CII and addressed a gathering at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. The Syrian delegation also visited the Centre of Excellence of NASSCOM in Gurugram.

viii) **MoS for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs Shri V. Muraleedharan** paid an official visit to Syria from 12-13 July 2023. During the visit, MoS called on the Syrian President and the Prime Minister and discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral ties, including development partnership assistance, education and capacity building. He also met Foreign Minister, Health Minister and Higher Education Minister. Both sides emphasized on their strong, historical and deep-rooted ties, reiterating continuity of mutual support in all fields and at international fora.

5. Recent Bilateral Exchanges

i) On September 3, 2020, MoS (VM) had a wide ranging discussion with the Syrian FM Dr. Fayssal Mekdad virtually.

ii) EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar met with Syrian FM Dr. Fayssal Mekdad on 26 September 2021 on the sidelines of UNGA in New York and again on 24 September 2022 at the same venue.

iii) Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs & Expatriates Dr. Fayssal Mekdad visited India from 17-21 November 2022 for strengthening political & economic relations between our two countries.

iv) On 13 January 2023, H.E. Mr. Bassam Radwan Tohme, Minister of Oil & Mineral Resources of Syria participated in the 1st Voice of Global South Summit in the session of Energy Ministers, chaired by H.E. Shri Hardeep S. Puri, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

v) On 17 November 2023, H.E. Dr. Fayssal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Syria participated virtually in the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit in the Foreign Ministers' Session chaired by H.E. Dr S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister.

vi) H.E. Ms. Rania Ahmad, Deputy Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, Syrian Arab Republic participated in the inaugural edition of the CII-India Mediterranean Business Conclave that was organised by CII in partnership with Ministry of External Affairs of India on 6 September 2024 in New Delhi.

vi) In September 2024, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar met the Syrian FM Bassam Sabbagh on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

viii) On 05-06 February 2025, two professors from Syria namely Prof. Ahed Khezam, President of Al-Wataniya Private University, Hama and Prof. Nasser Thallaj, President of Al-Rachid Private University for Science & Technology, Rural Damascus participated in the 1st India-Arab Universities' Presidents' Conference held in New Delhi.

ix) In July 2025, Joint Secretary, WANA, MEA visited Damascus, Syria.

x) In November 2025, Director of Afro-Asia and Oceania Affairs, Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited India and met Secretary (South) and Joint Secretary (WANA) in Ministry of External Affairs.

xi) In January 2026, a delegation led by Mr. Mohammad Zakaria Lababidi, Director of the Afro-Asian and Oceania Affairs Department, Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Senior Officials' Meeting in New Delhi on 30-31 January 2026. On the sidelines, the head of the Syrian delegation met with Hon'ble PM and EAM.

6. Bilateral Institutional mechanisms

(i) Joint Commission Meeting (JCM): 2 sessions of JCM have been held so far: 1st JCM in January 2008 (New Delhi) and 2nd JCM in June 2010 (Damascus). The 3rd JCM which was supposed to be held in Delhi could not take place due to COVID-19 pandemic.

(ii) Foreign Office Consultations (FOC): 6 rounds of FOCs have taken place so far. The 1st FOC was held in 1986, 2nd in 1990, 3rd in 1998 (Damascus), 4th in 2006 (New Delhi) and 5th in 2015 (Damascus) at the level Joint Secretary (WANA) from Indian side and Deputy Minister from the Syrian side. The 6th round of India-Syria Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) took place in New Delhi on November 29, 2024.

(iii) India-Syria Joint Business Council (JBC): JBC was inaugurated in November 2010 during the visit of then President Pratibha Patil to Syria. However, it has never met and remained inactive due to the economic and security situation in Syria.

7. Cooperation at UN and other international organisations: There has been excellent cooperation with Syria in multilateral forums with Syria continuing to support Indian candidatures at international platforms.

8. Development and Humanitarian Assistance

i) India has been extending development and humanitarian assistance to Syria in different forms over the years. In July 2025, India sent a consignment of humanitarian assistance consisting of 5 Metric Tonnes of essential life-saving medicines, including anti-cancer, antibiotics and anti-hypertensives, to Syria.

ii) At Brussels conferences on Syria, India pledged USD 2.5 million in 2013, USD 2.5 million in 2014, USD 2 million in 2015 for developmental assistance. The funding was routed to Syria through UN offices. In 2016, India chose to extend assistance of USD 6 million bilaterally in the form of food items and medicines.

iii) In response to a request from the Syrian Government for emergency humanitarian assistance, GoI provided humanitarian assistance of 2,000 MT of rice to Syria in Feb-Mar 2021.

v) **Assistance during COVID pandemic:** On July 2, 2020, India sent a 10 MT consignment of medicines to Syria to assist the country in the fight against COVID pandemic. This was the largest ever medical assistance from any country to Syria in the pandemic time and also the first humanitarian assistance since the imposition of US sanctions Act on Syrian government on June 17, 2020. Earlier in March 2018, India had delivered humanitarian aid worth USD 6 million in the form of pharmaceuticals and food stuff (tea, sugar, palm oil).

vi) **Limb Camps:** Under 'India for Humanity' initiative launched by MEA as a part of the Gandhi@150 celebrations, an Artificial Limb Fitment Camp was organized in Damascus in Dec 2019 – Jan 2020. During the 38-days camp, a total of 515 limbs were fixed to 483 beneficiaries from different parts of Syria. The 2nd Artificial Limb Fitment Camp in Damascus was inaugurated by Secretary (CPV & OIA) Dr. Ausaf Sayeed on October 2, 2022 on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti. 531 Syrian nationals benefited from the services of the camp. India also offered training to Syrian nationals for fitment of limbs in India under ITEC.

vii) **Next-Gen Center for Information Technology (NexGen IS-CEIT):** The Centre was set up in Damascus with the assistance of C-DAC in Dec. 2010. A MoU was signed between GoI and Government of Syria in October 2019 for upgrading it into a Next-Gen Center at an estimated cost of Rs 4 crore. The project has been completed and handed over to the Government of Syria on 20 October 2021. MoS Shri V Muraleedharan graced the handing over ceremony virtually from India.

viii) **Anti-cancer Medicines:** In wake of the devastating earthquake in Syria on 6th February, 2023, Government of India had sent **two special flights containing 30 tonnes of relief material**. The consignment also contained specialized anti-cancer medicines which were handed over to the Ministry of Health, Syria on March 09, 2023. On the request of the Syrian Government, Government of India sent another consignment of anti-cancer medicines weighing around 1400 kgs as humanitarian assistance to the Government and people of Syria.

9. Capacity Building

i) India has been actively involved in capacity building of the Syrian youth in different ways. Under the “Study in India” programme, a total of 1500 seats have been offered to Syrian students for UG, PG and Ph.D. programmes in four phases since 2017-18 with emphasis on technical and managerial capacity building of Syrian youth.

ii) GoI is offering 25 ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) scholarships to pursue various bachelors, masters and doctorate programmes in reputed Universities in India. Also, some seats are offered to Syrian nationals to pursue courses in Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy under the AYUSH Scholarship Scheme of ICCR.

iii) Under ITEC, 90 training slots are offered to Syria annually. India made a tailor-made training programme, under ITEC, for 13 Syrian Officers from Supreme Audit Institution, in Arabic language in September 2024 at International Centre for Information Systems and Audit (iCISA), which is the International Training Centre of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). GoI is also providing training to Syrian doctors under the Observership Programme at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals in Delhi in July 2026.

iv) The Foreign Service Institutes of the both countries signed an MoU of cooperation in January 2018. 4 batches of Syrian diplomats have since availed special trainings in India with 26 in 2018, 40 in 2019, 19 in 2020 and 6 in 2026. 2nd Global South Young Diplomats Forum was held at Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS) from 09-20 September 2024 in which a Syrian diplomat also participated.

10. Bilateral Trade

Year	Exports from India (Million USD)	Imports from Syria (Million USD)	Total Trade (Million USD)
2021-22	105.46	15.61	121.07
2022-23	103.43	9.22	112.65
2023-24	63.2	18.33	81.53
2024-25	63.71	16.18	79.89
2025-26	125.42	21.37	104.4

**Source – Ministry of Commerce, GoI*

i) Major commodities of Export to Syria include Cereals (especially rice), Pharmaceutical products, Man-made filaments, Cotton yarns and textiles, organic chemicals, etc. Major commodities of Import from Syria are Almonds, wool, leather, cumin, black sesame, minerals (phosphate), olive oil, tobacco, dry fruits, etc.

11. Cultural Relations

i) India features as an influence in Syrian culture historically through the Silk Route and in particular through the adaptation of the Panchatantra into the Arabic '*Kalila wa Dimna*'. More recent influences have been Tagore and the eminent Syrian poet and Ambassador to India Omar Abu Rishah (1954-59). The Cultural Exchange Programme, in effect since 1975, provides a framework for bilateral cooperation. A number of cultural delegations from India have visited Syria and vice versa, under the programme.

ii) Syrian people are fond of Indian culture. Bollywood movies are very popular among them. An Indian cultural week was observed in Damascus and Latakia in April 2017, with screening of Bollywood films in both cities and performances by a 6-member Odissi Dance troupe, sponsored by ICCR. In January 2018, a Rajasthani Folk troupe rendered four performances in different cities. More recently, a 15 member Bhagra Group "Bhola Panchhi" visited Syria from 30 January - February 03, 2022 sponsored by ICCR.

iii) Yoga is also very popular in Syria. Syria is a leader in the Arab world for Yoga. Yoga has been officially included as a sport under the Sports Federation of Syria, and International Day of Yoga is celebrated with great enthusiasm. Kabaddi is also being practised by many in Syria.

iv) Literary exchanges between the Arab Writers Union of Syria and the Sahitya Akademi, through an MoU signed in 2003 has led to translations of works of Syrian and Indian writers into Arabic and Indian languages and regular exchange of delegations between Sahitya Akademi and Arab Writers Union.

v) Under the Distinguished Visitors' Programme (DVP) of ICCR, the then Head of the Higher Education Bureau Dr. Mohsen Bilal visited India in November 2019, prior to that in 2017, the Grand Mufti of Syria visited India.

vi) Since 2016, Syria has been a regular participant in the Surajkund International Crafts Mela held annually in Faridabad. In 2019, Syrian artist Iskandar Istrefan Alhalaby won the Kala Ratna award for Mosaic craft.

12. Indian Community

The size of the Indian community in Syria has shrunk significantly due to the prolonged civil war in Syria. Presently, the number of Indian nationals in Syria is approx. 60, mostly blue collar workers with some Indian nationals working in UN agencies and NGOs in Syria.

Useful Resources

Mission's website: <https://www.eoidamascus.gov.in/>

Twitter: <https://x.com/eoidamascus?lang=en>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/indiainsyria/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/indaiindamascus/>

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