

**Embassy of India
Tunis**

India – Tunisia Bilateral 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.

Under the two regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the two countries also shared a respect for secularism, and moderation was a hallmark of Tunisian foreign policy. 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 and called on H.E. Moncef M. Marzouki, President of the Republic, H.E. Hamadi Jebali, Prime Minister, H.E. Mustapha Ben Jafaar, NCA Speaker, H.E. Rafik Abdessalem, Foreign Minister, Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Americas and Asia) and Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahda Movement.

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 and held discussions on issues of bilateral interest with Abdellatif Makki, Minister of Health, Nouredine Bhiri, Minister in-charge of Political Affairs, Ridha Saidi, Minister in-charge of Economic Affairs and Riadh Betaieb, Minister for Vigilance against corruption.

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 Rashid Ghannouchi, President, Ennahda party and Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, President, Nida 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. Minister Gangwar also met H.E. Mr. Taieb Baccouche, Foreign Minister to whom he handed over the invitation letter from EAM.

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. Monzi 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.

Mr. 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.

Vice President's visit:

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.

FOCs, Joint Commission and JWGs:

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. All three FOCs have been held in Tunis. Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs headed the Indian delegation for the third round of FOC. The two sides signed an Agreement on Exemption of Visas for Diplomatic and Official Passports. Secretary (East) also called on HE Mr. Taieb Baccouche, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia. Shri Wadhwa held discussions with HE Mr. Ridha Lahwel, Minister for Commerce & Handicrafts, HE Mr. Ridha Ben Mosbah,

Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, HE Mr. Nooman Fehri, Minister for Information and Communication Technology and HE Ms. Amel Azouz, Secretary of State for Investment and International Cooperation.

There is a Joint Commission at the Minister of State for External Affairs level which has now been upgraded at the level of EAM. The 11th session was held in New Delhi on April 23, 2012. The next session is likely to be held during 2017.

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: During the 10th India-Tunisia Joint Commission Meeting, a JWG in the Oil and Natural Gas Sector was established and its first meeting was held in New Delhi in August 2007.
- b) JWG on SMEs: The third meeting of Joint Working Group on SME's was held at New Delhi on 02nd April, 2014.
- c) JWG on Drugs and Pharmaceuticals: The fourth meeting of this JWG was held in October 2008 in Tunis. The fifth meeting is likely to be held in January 2016 in Tunis.
- d) JWG on Textiles: The first meeting of the Joint Expert Committee on Textiles (JECT) between India and Tunisia was held in Tunis on 16-17 March, 2009.
- e) JWG on ICT: The 2nd Session was held on June 29, 2015 in New Delhi. The Tunisian delegation was led by Tunisian Minister of IT Mr. Noomane Fehri.
- f) JWG on IT: The first session is due to be held in Tunis.

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 (PoC) there under. The 3rd meeting of Joint Committee on S&T was held in Tunis on 24th May 2013, in which the two sides discussed joint funding for joint research proposals submitted by Indian and Tunisian scientists in diverse fields, welcomed the high Tunisian participation in the CV Raman Fellowship Programme (CVRFP) and looked forward to the cooperation between Pasteur Institute of Tunis and ICGEB, New Delhi in the field of vaccines and drug development. The 4th meeting of joint committee is scheduled to be held in New Delhi on 14-15 December 2016.

Biotechnology Cooperation:

A Programme of Cooperation in the field of Biotechnology was signed during the first India Tunisia Joint Committee Meeting on Biotechnology held in Tunis in September 2006.

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, Pasture Institute of Tunisia and Indian Department of Science & Technology, and CGEB are in touch for capacity building, research & training.

Under IAFS, The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) conducted a week-long Executive Development Programme on International Business in Tunis in September 2013. 35 government officials from various ministries of the government of Tunisia participated in the training programme.

ITEC/Other Scholarships: Every year, Government of India offers 70 ITEC slots and 10-15 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 2015 was US\$ 340.25 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 2500 per year. Mahindra and Mahindra provide the vehicles as knocked-down kits, which are assembled by the Tunisian company in Tunisia. M/s TATA Motors have commenced production of pick-up trucks with Tunisian companies 'Le Moteur' and 'Icar' in June 2015. Dabur has a toothpaste manufacturing project worth around US\$ 7 million.

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

Culture: Under Cultural Exchange Programme between the two countries, cultural troupes from both sides visit each other country regularly.

Three cultural troupes from India visited in 2016.

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, the Mission had organised a Hindi Week to teach basic Hindi to Tunisians. This was the first time Hindi promotion activities were conducted for the Tunisian nationals.

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.

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

International Day of Yoga: A large group session of Yoga was held for the second time in Tunis on 21st June 2016, the second International Day of Yoga. More than 300 Tunisians, performed the *asanas* of the Common Yoga Protocol Organized jointly by the Embassy of India in Tunis and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Tunisia.

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, Embassy has facilitated evacuation of more than 3500 Indians working in Libya 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>
