

India-Iraq Relations

Political Relations: India and Iraq have throughout enjoyed enduring political, economic and cultural ties. Basra was for the Arab world not only the market par excellence of the Indian merchandise including textiles, spices, food-grains and other commodities but also of the famous pearl trade that flourished mainly through the Indian traders and jewelers. Indian soldiers and railway workers from British India had played major role in ensuring the security in this region during the colonial era and have left an imprint in the region that many Iraqis still proudly claim their Indian ethnic descent. India and Iraq have even shared agricultural practices. The breed of the southern Iraqi jamus or the water buffalo had been brought by Harun Al-Rashid from India. The Iraqi philosophers and sufi saints like Hasan al Basri, Junaid Al Baghdadi and Sheikh Behlul had such an impact on the spiritual movements in India that Guru Dev Nanak Saheb came personally to Baghdad to deliberate on the ontological and the epistemological questions with Sheikh Behlul who hosted him for nearly three months. Iraqi spiritual leader Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Jeelani has enormous following in India where he is referred to either as Dastagir Saheb or Ghous-al-Azam. On the other hand, Indians were among the foremost to patronize the shrines and saraikhanas of the heritage of Islam's primeval martyrdom at Karbala. Thousands of Indians visit the shrines of Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas in Karbala every year and also the shrine of Abdul Qadir Jeelani.

The respect for each other's strength has been mutual between India and Iraq. There is hardly a university in Iraq of which some faculty has not studied in India. The academic personnel linkages in the medical and engineering fields have throughout been vibrant. Since the outbreak of war in Iraq, India has been supporting a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq. India responded to the urgent needs of Iraq for relief and economic reconstruction directly and as part of international efforts under the UN auspices. In response to UN Secretary General's urgent appeal, India committed US\$ 20 million for assistance to the Iraqi people. Activities under this pledge included supply of milk powder through World Food Programme, training of Iraqi Foreign Service officers in diplomacy, and other Iraqi officials in Information Technology. In cooperation with WFP, India provided fortified biscuits to Iraqi school children and Iraqi refugees in Syria. In addition, India contributed US\$ 10 million towards the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) for investments, reconstruction and development in Iraq.

In terms of capacity building, India has annually been providing 80 slots to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to train Government of Iraq officials. For the current year, 70 slots have been allotted under ITEC programme. India has been offering 55 slots every year to Iraqi students for higher studies in India under the 'Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme' (CEP) and the 'General Cultural Scholarship Scheme' (GCSS) organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR).

The Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC) has provided training in India to the Iraqi oil

officials in various subjects related to downstream oil sector. So far, over 220 officials from the Iraqi Ministry of Oil have benefited from IOC's 20 training programmes. The people to people and institutional contacts are so deep that today that India has become the most favourite destination for Iraqis for seeking quality medical treatment. At least 75 Iraqi patients travel to India on a daily basis for medical treatment. Hundreds of Iraqis prefer to send their children for higher education to India on self-financing basis.

The Mission is currently issuing around 150-200 visas per day going up to 350 during the summer. Majority of the travelers visit India for Medical purposes, education and for business. Last year around 2800 student visas were issued and it is estimated that there are over 10000 Iraqi students in India. In the calendar year 2014, Mission issued 43474 visas.

There have been high level political exchanges between the two countries. Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq for Energy Affairs H.E. Hussein Al Sharistani visited India in May 2007 in his then capacity as Oil Minister to Chair the meeting of the Joint Commission. A 7-member delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Trade visited India in February 2009. Iraqi Minister of Industry and Minerals H.E. Mr. Fauzi Franso Hariri visited India in February 2010 as the head of a 21-member delegation of officials, businessmen and entrepreneurs. Minister of Science & Technology Mr. Samarrai visited Delhi and Bangalore in April 2011. Iraq's Minister of Municipalities and Public Works Adil Muheydar Razi Al-Maliki visited Delhi in November 2011 for an interaction organized by the CII with Indian industry. Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Rowsch Shaways, accompanied by Minister of Trade Dr. Khairalla Hasan Babaker, National Investment Chairman Dr. Sami Araji and senior Iraqi officials visited India in February 2012 at the invitation of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to promote trade and economic relations between the two countries. Deputy PM also met CIM Shri Anand Sharma, MPNG Shri Jaipal Reddy and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia. In Delhi while the delegation interacted with over 300 Indian companies, in Mumbai and Chennai another 200 companies each were present at the interaction. Mr. Usama Al Nujaiifi, Chairman of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, accompanied by a 14 member delegation visited India from 15 - 19 December 2012 at the invitation of Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Smt. Meera Kumar. The delegation also called on Hon'ble Vice President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha Hamid Ansari and met EAM Shri Salman Kurshid. Formal delegation level talks were held with Smt Meera Kumar, Speaker Lok Sabha. Mr. Falih Al-Fayyadh, National Security Advisor of Iraq visited India from 17-21 December 2013. During his visit, he held meetings with Union Home Minister, External Affairs Minister and National Security Adviser and discussed the matters concerning bilateral security co-operation between India and Iraq and measures needed to strengthen it. During the visit an MOU on Cooperation between the Institute for Defence Studies (New Delhi) and Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies (Baghdad) was also signed. Earlier, a 16-member delegation sponsored by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) comprising representatives of diverse Indian industry visited Iraq in October 2011. The National Investment Commission of Government of Iraq hosted the delegation. The delegation met with the two Iraq Deputy

Prime Ministers, Minister of Municipality as well as heads of Government undertakings in the Oil industry. The successful visit showcased Indian industry's capability to develop and contribute to Iraq's economy as well as Iraq's eagerness in welcoming Indian investment and expertise in Iraq.

Hon'ble External Affairs Minister Shri Salman Khurshid paid a visit to Iraq on June 19-20, 2013. This was the first visit to Iraq by EAM from India since 1990. EAM met with Prime Minister Mr. Nouri al-Maliki, called on Dy. PM Mr. Hussain al-Shahristani, Chairman of the Council of Representative Mr. Usama al-Nujayfi, and held delegation level talks with Foreign Minister Mr. Hoshyar Zebari. During the meetings, it was agreed to intensify the bilateral contacts at senior political level. It was also agreed to elevate the close relationship into one of strategic partnership and actively invest in each other's economy especially in the major projects such as refineries, petrochemical, fertilizers plants, etc. The Chairman of Council of Representative, Mr. Usama al-Nujayfi, also informed that Iraq-India Friendship Forum had been set-up in the Council of Representatives, representing all sections of the political spectrum, under the Chairmanship of Ms. Ala Talabani, Member of Council of Representatives.

Dr. Veerappa Moily, Hon'ble Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas led a 25 member delegation for the Joint Commission Meeting that was held in July 2013 in Baghdad. Dr. Moily also called on Prime Minister Maliki, Deputy PM Dr. Saleh al Mutlaq and had substantive discussions with Dr. Abdul Kareem Luaibi, Minister for Oil, Iraq. A 12-member FICCI delegation comprising of Rice & Sugar Exporters' from India visited Iraq from 9-10 March 2014 for negotiations with the Ministry of Trade of Iraq and other organizations. Ministry of Trade placed an order for 120,000 mt Basmati Rice (US\$150 million approx) and 25000 mt of sugar (US\$15 million approx.) which was the first ever placement of order on the spot by the Ministry of Trade, Iraq with a visiting business delegation through direct negotiations.

Prime Minister of Iraq H.E. Mr. Nouri Al Maliki paid a State visit to India in August 2013. In addition to delegation level talks and discussions with PM, he also called on Hon'ble President, Hon'ble Vice President and also visited Agra and Mumbai. He also attended a joint business event by FICCI, CII & ASSOCHAM. During the visit of Prime Minister, 4 MOUs were also signed – including one on Cooperation in Energy Sector, on cooperation between the MEA and the MFA, On Cooperation between the FSI of the two Ministries and on Cooperation in the field of water resources management. He was accompanied by a large delegation including Minister for Oil, Minister for Agriculture and leading businessmen from Iraq.

Commercial relations: The economic and trade relations between India and Iraq slowed down after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Iraq is the second largest supplier of crude to India after Saudi Arabia, and ahead of Iran. Indian Oil Corporation is the single largest purchaser of crude from Iraqi crude procuring around 250,000 BPD. In year 2013-14, India was estimated to have imported crude from Iraq worth more than US\$ 18 billion. HPCL and BPCL are the other two major Indian crude importers from Iraq. In addition to import of crude in bulk, India also imports small quantities of

commodities like raw wool and sulphur from Iraq. Trade between India and Iraq in 2014-15 was US \$ 15 bn of which Indian exports to Iraq were to the tune of US \$ 829.32 mn and Indian imports from Iraq were of the order of US \$ 14.24 bn. Indian exports to Iraq consist of cereals, iron and steel, meat and meat products, pharmaceutical products, agro chemicals, cosmetics, rubber manufactured products, paints, gems and jewellery, ceramics, manufactures of metals, machine tools, electrical machinery and instruments, transport equipment, electronic goods, handicrafts, sugar, tea, garments. A significant volume of exports also takes place through Dubai. Mineral fuels forms the bulk of India's imports from Iraq while edible fruits and nuts, raw hide and skins, and wool are also imported in smaller quantities.

Iraq which used to be the largest project export destination for Indian companies has again seen Indian companies' presence albeit in a small way. M/s. ShapoorjiPollonji had won a US\$ 85 Million contract to rebuild a Hotel in Basrah and M/s. Lanconfratech had won a US 81 Million EPC contract to build the Akaaz power project. Tata Steel has announced a multi-million pound order with Korean Gas Corporation (Kogas) for supplying of 110 KM pipeline coatings for their Baiji Dry Gas Project in Iraq.

Indian community: There are a few families of Indian origin living mainly in the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, Basra and Baghdad. With the lifting of the Government of India advisory against travel of Indians to Iraq which was in vogue from 2004 till 03.05.2010, the number of Indian workers had steadily increased in the more developed and peaceful Kurdistan region comprising Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk governorates, with better salaries and working conditions in steel mills, oil companies and construction projects. The number of Indians in KRG was estimated to be around 15,000. For the same reason, Indian companies such as Reliance, Jindal, Ajanta, Electrotherm etc. have also chosen to locate their businesses in KRG. However, in the wake of security issues related to terrorist attacks on Iraq and fall of certain areas of northern Iraq to the fighters, the Indians working in Iraq had concerns over their security. Embassy repatriated over 7000 people with repatriation expenditure being fully borne by government of India. Embassy also assisted over 1000 Indian workers who were being repatriated by their respective companies, with required travel documents. Presently, the number of Indians in various parts of Iraq is approximately as follows: Kurdistan: 7000-8000; Basra: 2500-3000; Baghdad: 500; Najaf/Karbala/Hilla: 1000-1500

Useful Resources

Embassy of India, Baghdad Website:
<http://indianembassybaghdad.in>

Embassy of India, Baghdad Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/IndiainIraq>

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