

India – Israel Relations

Political Relations

India formally recognised Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon thereafter, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay. This was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently into a Consulate. Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established.

Since the upgradation of relations in 1992, defence and agriculture have been the main pillars of bilateral engagement. In recent years, ties have expanded to areas such as S&T, education and homeland security. The future vision of the cooperation is of a strong hi-tech partnership as befits two leading knowledge economies.

Political ties between the two countries are friendly. President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel in October, 2015. From Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President Ezer Weizmann visited India in 2003 and 1997 respectively. There have been frequent Ministerial level exchanges in the recent past. While Home Minister, Shri. Rajnath Singh visited Israel in November, 2014, the Israeli Agriculture and Defence Ministers visited India in January and February, 2015 respectively.

Economic and Commercial Relations

From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (*comprising primarily trade in diamonds*), bilateral merchandise reached US\$ 5.19 billion in 2011. It has stagnated around US\$ 4.5 billion since then. Though trade in diamonds constitutes close to 50% of bilateral trade, trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security in recent years. Major exports from India to Israel include precious stones and metals, chemical products, textiles and textile articles, plants and vegetable products, and mineral products. Major imports by India from Israel include precious stones and metals, chemicals (mainly potash) and mineral products, base metals and machinery and transport equipment. The total bilateral trade in services was about US \$ 407 million in 2012. India's services exports to Israel were about US\$ 317 million, of which US\$ 162.6 million was in R&D services. In recent years, Israel has taken a strategic decision to strengthen economic relations with China, Japan and India.

Investment

During April 2000-November 2013, FDI from Israel into India was US\$ 73.7 million. The data does not capture FDI flows from Israel to India that flow through USA, Europe and Singapore. Israeli companies have invested in India in energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies, and are also setting up R&D centres or production units in India.

While official data about India's investment in Israel is not available, significant investments from India in Israel include 100% acquisition of Israeli

drip-irrigation company Naandan by Jain Irrigation, Sun acquired controlling stake in Taro Pharmaceuticals and Triveni Engineering Industries' investment in Israeli waste-water treatment company Aqwise. TCS started operations in Israel in 2005, and the State Bank of India opened a branch in Tel Aviv in 2007. In 2015, Infosys and Tech Mahindra made significant acquisitions.

Agriculture

India and Israel have a bilateral agreement for cooperation in agriculture. Bilateral action plan for 2015-18 is currently operational. It aims to expand cooperation into new sectors such as dairy and water. The previous plan for 2012-2015 expanded agricultural cooperation into different states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat etc. 15 Centers of Excellence in agriculture have already been commissioned in these states.

India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra. Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. Some Israeli companies and experts are providing expertise to manage and improve dairy farming in India through their expertise in high milk yield.

Defence & Security

India imports critical defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces and defence personnel. Chief of Army Staff General Bikram Singh and Defence Secretary visited Israel in 2014. Israeli Naval and Air Force Chiefs visited India in 2015. A Port of Call was made by INS Trikand at the Haifa port in August, 2015.

There is ongoing cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, including through a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism which held their last meeting in July, 2015. In February 2014, India and Israel signed three important agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Cooperation in Homeland and Public Security, and Protection of Classified Material. Under Cooperation in Homeland Security, four working groups in the areas of border management, internal security and public safety, police modernization and capacity building for combating crime, crime prevention and cyber crime were established. These groups regularly meet in India and Israel. IPS officer trainees of 2012 and 2013 batches visited Israel in 2015 for foreign exposure visit.

Cooperation in S&T

India-Israel cooperation in S&T has evolved on two tracks. There is joint research by S&T institutions under an S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993. Secondly, under an MOU on Industrial Research and Development Initiative signed in 2005, a joint industrial R&D fund i4RD was set up to promote bilateral industrial R&D and specific projects. Under i4RD, joint industrial projects are funded. In 2013 Karnataka State Council for

Science and Technology and the Karnataka Science and Technology Promotion Society signed an MoU with Israel's MATIMOP, the Israeli Industry Center for R&D, for industrial R&D partnership. Through the program, industries may seek financial support through partner matching and funding for joint bilateral R&D projects, involving at least one small/medium scale company of Karnataka and one Israeli company.

In January 2014, India and Israel held extensive discussions to establish an India-Israel Cooperation Fund aimed at promoting innovations through joint scientific and technological collaborations. The Fund is envisaged to have a total corpus of US\$ 40 million over a period of five years, with each side contributing US\$ 20 million. On the Indian side, the Department of Science and Technology is the nodal Department.

Tata Industries and Ramot, Tel Aviv University (*the University's technology transfer company*) have entered into an MoU to fund and generate commercial technologies in a wide range of fields, including engineering, exact sciences, environment and clean technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Under the MoU, Tata Industries, with an investment of US\$ 5 million, will be the lead investor in Ramot's US\$20 million Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. Sun Pharma signed research collaborations with Technion and Weizmann for developing drugs for oncology and brain diseases respectively.

ISRO and the Israel Space Agency revived their contacts and held a bilateral meetings in 2014 and 2015. Cyber has emerged as one of the areas in which both countries have started to collaborate.

Culture and Education

India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions. Young Israelis perceives India as an attractive, alternative tourist destination. Every year 30-35 thousand Israelis visit India for tourism business and other purposes. Over 40,000 Indians visit Israel every year. They are mostly pilgrims who visit holy sites. The Embassy organizes several cultural events including lecture demonstrations, workshops, culinary events, photography competitions etc. in Israel. The first International Yoga Day in Israel was attended by more than 1,500 people.

Several courses related to India are taught at Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University and Haifa University. India has signed an MoU with Tel Aviv University for a Chair for Indian studies in the Department of East and South East Asian Studies under which Indian Professors have been visiting for a semester. Some private and public Indian universities have entered into agreements with Israeli universities for faculty exchange under which Israeli professors spend a semester teaching in India. Indian and Israeli Universities collaborate on various subjects and have signed several agreements. During the visit of Hon'ble President in October, 2015, eight academic agreements were concluded between Indian and Israeli Universities.

In May 2013, India and Israel launched a new funding programme of joint academic research, the first round of which will focus on both exact sciences and humanities. Both governments have committed an amount of US\$ 12.5 million each over a period of four years. Under the fund, experimental projects are provided up to US\$ 300,000 and theoretical projects receive up to US\$ 180,000. The counterpart organizations are University Grants Commission and the Israel Science Foundation. 21 joint research projects were funded under the fund in the first year.

Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarships to students from India and China. Since then, more than 250 out of almost 350 fellowships were awarded to Indian students. The Government of Israel has also approved 250 summer scholarships for eight courses for Indian and Chinese students in prestigious Israeli universities like Technion (IIT Haifa), Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University and Ben Gurion University. India offers seven ICCR scholarships Israelis every year.

In 2013, the Naan Dan Jain Irrigation Company instituted two annual scholarships for Israeli exponents of Indian art and culture to continue studies in India. Four Israelis have been awarded the scholarship so far. In 2014, the Indian diamond community set up a fund to finance study tours to India of meritorious Israeli students of Hindi. Twelve students have benefitted from these scholarships so far.

Indian Community

There are approximately 80,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel. Waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the fifties and sixties. The majority is from Maharashtra (*Bene Israelis*) with relatively smaller numbers from Kerala (*Cochini Jews*) and Kolkata (*Baghdadi Jews*). In recent years some Indian Jews from North Eastern states of India (*Bnei Menashe*) have been immigrating to Israel. While the older generation still maintains an Indian lifestyle and their cultural links with India, the younger generation is increasingly assimilated into Israeli society. However, Know India Programme and Study India Programmes have been received well by the younger generation.

Shri Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Chennamangalam, Cochin has distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist and became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive the *Bhartiya Pravasi Samman* in 2005. Sheikh Ansari, who manages the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem, a unique Indian connection to the Holy City, was honoured with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* in 2011.

The Indian Embassy facilitated the Third National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel that was held in August, 2015 in Ramle. The event was attended by almost 4000 people.

There are about 10,000 Indian citizens in Israel, of whom around 9,000 are care-givers. Others are diamond traders, some IT professionals, students and unskilled workers.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Israel website:

<http://www.indembassy.co.il/>

Embassy of India, Israel Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInIsrael/>

Embassy of India, Israel Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/indemtel/>

Embassy of India, Israel Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Indianembassytelaviv>

Embassy of India, Israel Flickr:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/indemtelaviv/sets>

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