

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 relations between the two countries are good. Two Israeli Presidents have visited India - Ezer Weizmann in 1996 and Reuven Rivlin in 2016. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited India in 2003. From India, President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel in October 2015. There have been frequent Ministerial level visits in the recent past - EAM Sushma Swaraj visited Israel in January 2016; Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh in September 2016; and HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar represented India in the funeral ceremony of former Israeli President Shimon Peres in September 2016. Israeli Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel visited India in April 2016, while the previous Agriculture Minister Shamir and previous Defence Minister Ya'alon visited in January and February 2015, respectively. Israeli S&T Minister Ofir Akunis visited India in December 2016.

Economic and Commercial Relations

From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (*comprising primarily trade in diamonds*), bilateral merchandise reached US\$ 5.19 billion in 2011. Since then, it has, however, stagnated around US\$ 4 - 4.5 billion with bilateral trade (excluding defence) for 2015 being US\$ 4.14 billion. Though trade in diamonds constitutes more than half of bilateral trade, trade has diversified in recent years to include sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT etc. Major exports from India to Israel include diamonds and metals, chemical products and textiles. Major imports by India from Israel also include diamonds and metals, chemicals (mainly potash) and machinery and transport equipment. Though reliable figures of services are unavailable, it is estimated that almost 75% of bilateral trade in services flow from India to Israel.

Investment

In addition to direct investments, FDI from Israel to India also flows 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 and production units in India.

While official data about India's investments in Israel is not available, significant investments from India in Israel include 100% acquisition of Israeli drip-irrigation company Naandan by Jain Irrigation, controlling stake in Taro Pharmaceuticals by Sun Pharma 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. During the last two years, Indian IT majors such as Infosys, Wipro and Tech Mahindra have also made notable investments in Israel.

Agriculture

India and Israel have a bilateral agreement for cooperation in agriculture. The bilateral action plan for 2015-18 is currently operational. 10 out of the proposed 26 Centers of Excellence in agriculture being developed in India with Israeli help have already been commissioned across different states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat etc.

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. Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. The two countries signed an MoU on Cooperation in Water Resources Management, as well as a Declaration of Intent to further cooperation in agriculture during the visit of President Rivlin to India in November 2016.

Defence & Security

India imports important defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces and defence personnel. Air Chief Marshal, Arup Raha, visited Israel in March, 2016 while Israeli Naval and Air Force Chiefs visited India in 2015. INS Trikand made a port call at the Haifa port in August, 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. IPS officer trainees visited Israel in 2015 and 2016 for foreign exposure visit.

There is ongoing cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, including through a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism which held its last meeting in July, 2015.

Cooperation in S&T

Both countries signed a S&T Cooperation Agreement in 1993. In addition, under an MOU on Industrial Research and Development Initiative

signed in 2005, a joint industrial R&D fund i4RD was set up to promote joint industrial R&D and specific projects. In 2013, the 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. Under the program, industries may seek financial support for funding joint bilateral R&D projects, involving at least one small/medium scale company of Karnataka and one Israeli company.

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, is the lead investor in Ramot's US\$20 million Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. Tata has also invested in a dedicated fund established by Tel Aviv University for Internet of Things technologies. Sun Pharma signed research collaborations with Technion University and the Weizmann Institute for developing drugs for oncology and brain diseases respectively.

ISRO and the Israel Space Agency revived their contacts and held bilateral meetings during the last three years. Both sides are mapping out specific areas of cooperation. Cyber has emerged as another area in which both countries have started to collaborate including through an annual cyber roundtable involving academics and businessmen from both sides.

Culture and Education

India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions. Young Israelis perceive India as an attractive tourist destination, with approximately 35,000 Israelis visiting India each year for tourism, business and other purposes. Approximately 40,000 Indians also visit Israel every year. The Embassy of India organizes several cultural events each year. A culinary week of Indian food featuring celebrity Chef Sanjeev Kapoor and a retrospective of films of Satyajit Ray, inaugurated by Shyam Benegal, were among events of significance organized by the Embassy in 2016. The second International Yoga Day on 21 June 2016 was attended by almost 2000 people in Tel Aviv.

Several courses related to India are taught at Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Haifa University. Indian Professors have been visiting Tel Aviv University under a MoU for a Chair for Indian studies. Israeli academicians of repute have visited Indian institutes like IITs and JNU under the GIAN scheme. Indian and Israeli Universities collaborate on various subjects and have signed several agreements. During the visit of President Rivlin to India in November 2016, 21 MoUs between Indian and Israeli academic institutions were also concluded.

Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarships to students from India and China. Since then, 300 out of almost 400 fellowships

have been awarded to Indian students. The Government of Israel also offers 250 summer scholarships for Indian and Chinese students in chosen courses across Israeli Universities. India offers seven ICCR scholarships to Israelis every year and an equal number of scholarships are offered by Israel for 10-month programs in specialized fields of study.

In 2014, the Indian diamond community set up a fund to finance study tours to India of meritorious Israeli students of Hindi. 18 Hindi students have benefitted from these scholarships so far.

Indian Community

Major waves of immigration of Jews from India to Israel took place in the 1950s and 1960s. There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel. 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 strong cultural links with India, the younger generation is more fully integrated into Israeli society. However, the Know India Programme, which provide Indian origin persons opportunities to visit India, have been received well by the younger generation of Indian Jews. From 2013 onwards, the community has been organizing annual National Conventions, which bring the entire community together.

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 also honoured with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* in 2011.

There are about 12,500 Indian citizens in Israel, of whom around 11,500 are care-givers. Others are diamond traders, some IT professionals, and students.

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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