

India- Israel Bilateral Relations

Political Relations

1. India and Israel are strategic partners. India announced its recognition of Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon thereafter, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay (Mumbai). This was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently a Consulate. Regular Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. India and Israel will celebrate 30 years of upgradation of diplomatic relations in 2022.

2. The political ties between India and Israel are very warm and forward-looking. On June 14, 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on assuming office. Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a historic first-ever visit to Israel by an Indian Prime Minister on July 4-6, 2017 during which the relationship was upgraded to strategic partnership. The then Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu made a return visit to India on January 14-19, 2018. Joint statements were issued during both visits. Hon'ble President of India Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Israel in October 2015 while President of Israel Reuven Rivlin paid a state visit to India in November 2016. Previously, Indian External Affairs Ministers Jaswant Singh (2000), S.M. Krishna (2012), and Sushma Swaraj (2016) paid visits to Israel. From the Israeli side, earlier, President Ezer Weizman visited India in December 1996. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited India in September 2003, during which the Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation between India and Israel was signed.

3. India and Israel have established bilateral consultation mechanisms in all sectors of collaboration, including water, agriculture, counter-terrorism, and defence. The 16th Foreign Office Consultations were held on December 7, 2020. The first Policy Planning Dialogue was held on October 21, 2020.

Economic and Commercial Relations

(Further details: <https://www.indembassyisrael.gov.in/pages?id=nel5a&subid=7ax9b>)

4. From US\$ 200 million in 1992, bilateral merchandise trade stood at US\$ 4.14 billion (excluding defence) during the period April 2020 – February 2021 (DGCIS figures - provisional) with the balance of trade being in India's favour. Trade in diamonds constitutes about 50% of bilateral trade. India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally. In recent years, bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, water, IT and telecom. Major exports from India to Israel include precious stones and metals, chemical products and textiles and textile articles. Major imports by India from Israel include precious stones and metals, chemicals and mineral products, base metals and machinery and transport equipment.

5. Indian software companies, notably TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra and Wipro are expanding their presence in Israel. During PM Modi's visit in July 2017, the first meeting of the newly established India-Israel CEO Forum took place, while its second meeting took place during PM Netanyahu's visit to India. Israeli companies have invested in India in renewable energy, real estate, water technologies and are also setting up R&D centers and production units in India.

Investment

6. Cumulative FDI from India, as of September 2019, was about US\$ 118 million. During April 2000 – March 2021, Israel's direct FDI into India was reported at US\$ 224.76 million.

Agriculture

7. Under a comprehensive work plan for cooperation in agriculture signed on May 10, 2006, bilateral projects are implemented through MASHAV (Center for International Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and CINADCO (Centre for International Agricultural Development Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). Agricultural cooperation between the two sides is formalized through three-year action plans. The two sides are currently implementing the fifth phase of the joint action plan (2021-23).

8. Twenty- nine Centers of Excellence for Horticulture are fully active in twelve Indian states (Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra,

Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal).

Defence & Security

9. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces. As part of regular goodwill visits of Indian ships, three Indian naval ships from the Western Fleet made a port call in Haifa in May 2017. *INS Tarangini*, a naval training ship, made a port call in Haifa in September 2018.

Cooperation in S&T and Space

10. India-Israel cooperation in S&T is overseen by the Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.

11. During the visit of PM Modi in July 2017, a MoU for establishing India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (i4F) by the Department of Science and Technology, India and the National Authority for Technological Innovation, Israel was signed. This MoU, with a contribution of US\$ 20 million from each side over 5 years, is playing an important role in enabling Indian and Israeli enterprises to undertake joint R&D projects and is benefitting eleven projects that have been approved so far under i4F.

12. On December 21, 2020, India and Israel signed an Agreement on cooperation in the fields of health and medicine. The agreement envisages deepening of strategic partnership in the health sector, including in R&D in health, between the two countries.

Culture and Education

(Further details on India-Israel education cooperation: <https://www.indembassyisrael.gov.in/pages?id=mep2b>)

13. The relations between the two peoples go back to more than two millennia. India has welcomed Jews for several centuries and their contribution has enriched Indian culture. India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions and as an attractive tourist destination. India and Israel signed a Cultural Exchange Programme (for the period of 2020-23) in August 2020 to facilitate bilateral cultural exchanges spanning all fields of art and culture, including youth exchanges.

14. Tourism and people-to-people contacts have been given a major boost with the commencement of the Air India flights from March 2018 between New Delhi and Tel Aviv, with five flights per week. Israeli carrier, El Al, operates direct flights between Mumbai and Tel Aviv whereas Israeli Arkia Airlines operates flights to Goa (Panaji) and Kerala (Kochi).

15. Yoga and Ayurveda are popular in Israel and the International Day of Yoga is always well-attended and celebrated with great enthusiasm. The Indian Cultural Centre in Tel Aviv started functioning in January 2020 and regularly organises events to promote cultural ties.

16. There are approximately 1200 Indian students in Israel, mostly at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels. Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarships to students from India in all fields. The Government of Israel also offers short-term summer scholarships for Indian students. India offers ICCR scholarships to Israeli students every year for various courses in Indian institutions. Several courses related to India are taught at Israeli universities.

Indian Community

(Further details: <https://www.indembassyisrael.gov.in/pages?id=xboja>)

17. There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel, who are Israeli passport holders. The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority are from Maharashtra (*Bene Israelis*) and relatively smaller numbers from Kerala (*Cochini Jews*) and Kolkata (*Baghdadi Jews*). In recent years, some Indian Jews from the North-Eastern states of India (*Bnei Menashe*) have been immigrating to Israel. While the older generation still maintains its cultural links with India, the younger generation is increasingly assimilated into Israeli society.

18. Shri Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Chennamangalam, Kochi, has distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist in Israel and became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive *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. In 2017, Dr. Lael Best, an Israeli cardiothoracic surgeon of Indian origin, was also conferred this award.

19. In 2013, the Embassy facilitated the first-ever National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel that was held on September 23, 2013, in Ramla municipality. The event brought together nearly 5,000 people from all the four major groups of Indian Jews. Four more annual conventions have since been held in subsequent years in cities of Yeruham (2014), Ramla (2015), Kiryat Gat (2016) and Ashkelon (2017). The community plans to hold its next convention in 2022. The *Know India Programme* has been effective in binding the Indian origin youth to India.

20. There are about 14,000 Indian citizens in Israel, including caregivers employed by Israeli elders to take care of them, diamond traders, IT professionals and students.

21. PM Modi addressed a gathering of around 8000 PIOs and Indian nationals working in Israel at the Tel Aviv exhibition grounds during his visit in July 2017.

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