

India-Syria Relations

A. Political:

India and Syria enjoy friendly political relations based on historic and civilizational ties, experience of imperialism and of being colonized, a secular, nationalist and developmental orientation and similar perceptions on many international and regional issues and membership of NAM. India's traditional support for just Arab causes notably the Palestinian cause and for the return of the occupied Golan Heights to Syria is appreciated by Syrians. Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru and Indira Gandhi are remembered with great respect. The relationship at the political level has always been good. Details of exchange of VIP visits are given in the following charts :

From Syria to India

Sl. No	Dignitary	Date / Period
01.	President Dr. Bashar Al-Assad	June 2008
02.	President Hafez Al Assad	1978 & 1983
03.	President Shukri Al Quwatli	1957
04.	Vice President, Mr. Zuhier Masharqa	1991
05.	Deputy PM Dr. Khalid Raad	July 2000
06.	Deputy PM & Foreign Minister Mr. Farouk Al-Shara	August 2002
07.	Deputy PM Dr. Abdullah Dardari	January 2008
08.	Foreign Minister Mr. Farouk Al-Shara	1988
09.	Foreign Minister Mr. Walid Al-Mouallem	August 2007
10.	Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Farukh Taha	April 2006
11.	Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Fayssal Mekdad	July-August 2011
12.	Political and Media Adviser to President Bashar Al Assad, Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban	March 2013
13.	Mr. Walid Al-Mouallem, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates	January 11-14, 2016

From India to Syria

Sl. No	Dignitary	Date / Period
01.	President H.E. Prathibha Singh Patil	November 2010
02.	Prime Minister Shri A.B. Vajpayee	November 2003
03.	Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi	1988

04.	Prime Minister Pt. J.L. Nehru	1957 & 1960
05.	External Affairs Minister Shri A.B. Vajpayee	1979
06.	External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee	1995
07.	External Affairs Minister Shri Jaswant Singh	Jan/Feb 2001
08.	External Affairs Minister Shri Yashwant Sinha	August 2003
09.	Minister of Commerce & Industry Shri Anand Sharma	June 2010
10.	Minister of State for External Affairs	1992
11.	Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed	September 2005
12.	Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed	March 2008
13.	Minister of State for External Affairs Shri M.J. Akbar	August 2016

Hon'able Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Syria in November 2003. 9 agreements in diverse fields were signed during the visit. Establishment of Centre for Biotechnology in Damascus with Indian technical assistance and a grant of US \$ 1 million, and the announcement of a Line of Credit of US\$25 million were the two most significant developments in the field of bilateral cooperation. **President Bashar Al-Assad paid a state visit to India on 17-21 June 2008.** He was accompanied by Mrs. Assad and several ministers including FM. Bilateral BIPPA and DTAA were signed during the visit and came into force in 2009. A Work Plan on Cooperation in Agriculture was also signed during the visit. India's offers to set up an IT Center of Excellence and to carry out a feasibility study on utilisation of phosphate resources of Syria were accepted by Syria.

President HE Prathibha Singh Patil paid a state visit to Syria from 26-29 November 2010. She was accompanied by Union Minister of State for Power Shri Bharatsinh Solanki, two Members of Parliament, senior officials and a large business delegation. This was the first Presidential visit from India to Syria and was a highly successful one. During the visit, an offer of credit line of \$100 million was made by India to Syria. A contribution of 2 million Syrian Pounds was made to a Syrian NGO- AAMAL and over 1 million Syrian Pounds to Missionaries of Charity, Aleppo. The number of training slots offered to Syria under the ITEC Programme was increased from 45 to 90. Two MOU's for cooperation in the field of Media and a Cultural Exchange Programme were signed during the visit. The India-Syria Joint Business Council was launched. Syria reiterated its support for India's permanent membership of UNSC.

Bilateral Relations during the current unrest:

Syria has deeply appreciated the support received from India and others members of BRICS at the UNSC.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met the Syrian Prime Minister Wael Al Halki on the side-lines of the NAM Summit in Tehran in August 2012. During the meeting, PM Halki

briefed PM Singh on the situation in Syria and PM Singh, on his part expressed concern over the continued violence in Syria and conveyed India's support for a Syrian led political process to address the crisis.

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Fayssal Mekdad visited India in July-August, 2011 to thank India for its support to Syria during the ongoing unrest in the county. As part of the IBSA initiative, an IBSA delegation visited Syria in August 2011 and held meetings with President Assad and FM Mouallem. The delegation was briefed on the measures announced and initiated by the govt. to address the current unrest.

Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, Syria's Presidential Media and Political Advisor visited India in March, 2013 and thanked India for its stand on the Syrian conflict.

Joint Secretary (West Asia and North Africa Division – Indian Ministry of External Affairs) Sandeep Kumar paid two visits to Damascus on December 2013 for talks on Syria-India bilateral relations and February 2015 for the Syria-India Foreign Office consultations.

The Syrian Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Walid Al Mouallem paid an official visit to India on January 11-14, 2016 during which he met the Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. The talks were about ways for boosting bilateral relation and other issues like the political solution for the crisis in Syria and combating terrorism.

Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs, visited Syria on 19-20 August, 2016. During the visit, he called on President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other dignitaries. The visit was to further India-Syria bilateral relations.

Shri Amar Sinha, Secretary (ER), accompanied Dr. B. Bala Bhaskar, Joint Secretary (WANA) visited Damascus from June 2-4, 2017. The delegation attended high level meetings with Syrian leadership.

B. Economic & Commercial:

The First Meeting of the **India Syria Joint Commission** was held in New Delhi in January 2008. The Second Session of the Joint Commission was held in Damascus in June 2010 under the co-chairmanship of the Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry and the Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade.

Bilateral cooperation projects that have been implemented or are being implemented in the last few years are:

- i) A US \$ **25 million Line of Credit (LOC)** was extended by India for the rehabilitation and modernization of the Hama Iron & Steel Plant. **Apollo International** won the contract for the project through an international tender. The project has now been successfully completed.
- ii) India has extended another **Line of Credit (LOC) of US\$ 100 million** (first tranche

of US\$ 240 m credit) to part finance the extension of the Tishreen Power Plant. Indian public sector company, **BHEL** has signed the contract in October 2009 for installing 2X200 MW power plants. BHEL has temporarily suspended work due to the on-going crisis. The work is expected to be resumed in near future. A delegation from BHEL visited Syria and held discussion with authorities to resume the work at Tishreen Thermal Power Plant Extension Project. iii) **India-Syria Centre of Excellence in IT** has been set up at Damascus with the assistance from Government of India. The Centre was inaugurated in December 2010 by the PM of Syria, which is running successfully.

iv) India assisted Syria in carrying out a **feasibility study on augmentation of its phosphate production**. A consortium of Indian companies, comprising of PDIL, RITES and MECON has carried out the study (*further progress suspended on account of the on-going crisis*).

v) India has extended **US\$ 1 million assistance for the setting up of Biotechnology Centre** in Syria; the Centre was inaugurated during PM Vajpayee's visit in 2003.

vi) An **MOU on Cooperation in Fertilizer sector** was concluded in October 2010. The MOU will facilitate Indian involvement in the development of phosphatic fertilizer sector in Syria.

vii) India has two significant investments in Syria in the **oil sector**. Firstly, an agreement signed in January 2004 between ONGC and IPR International for exploration of oil/natural gas in Block 24 near Deir-ez-Zour in northern Syria. Secondly, investment by ONGC India and CNPC China to jointly acquire the 37% stake of PetroCanada in the Syrian Al Furat Petroleum Company. OVL is currently facing difficulties in its operations due to the sanctions imposed by US & EU on the Syrian oil sector. (*Further progress suspended on account of the on-going crisis*). A team of ONGC-Videsh visited Syria from 30 July – 01 August, 2017 to assess the feasibility of projects under consideration.

viii) **Himalaya Herbals** has a joint venture providing technical know-how and materials for manufacture and marketing of herbal drugs and cosmetics in Syria.. (*further progress suspended on account of the on-going crisis*)

ix) **Mahindra & Mahindra** has signed a 10 year contract with M/s Al Furat Tractor Company for supply of tractors with a provision for joint venture assembly in the future that could amount to over Euro 30 million (*further progress suspended on account of the on-going crisis*).

Bilateral Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and the Bilateral Investment Promotion &

Protection Agreement has been signed in June 2008 during the visit of President Bashar Al Assad to India. Presently, both sides are working on amendments to India-Syria Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).

An **MOU for cooperation in agriculture and allied sectors** has been signed. The MOU provides for a Work Plan and a Working Group. The Work Plan is in place and has been renewed up to November 2011.

Syria-India Joint Business Council (JBC) was inaugurated in November, 2010 during the Presidential visit. The JBC is headed by Mr. V.R.S. Natarajan, CMD, BEML from the Indian side and Mr. Ali Mehran Khwanda of Khwanda Group from the Syrian side.

Bilateral Trade Exchange between Syria & India for the period from 2010-2016

Index/Year	Exports from India (in million Euros)	Exports from Syria (in million Euros)
2010	319	8
2011	404	11
2012	381	6
2013	257	6
2014	255	6
2015	221	14
2016	167	17

* Source – Directorate of Foreign Trade of Syria

Major commodities of Export to Syria

Before 2011: Textiles and yarn, petroleum products, transport equipment, machinery & instruments, drugs, pharmaceuticals & fine chemicals.

After 2011: Rice, Pharmaceutical raw materials and pharmaceuticals , Yarns and Textiles, Blankets, chemical raw materials and frozen buffalo meat.

Major commodities of Import from Syria

Before 2011: Petroleum, crude & products and minerals, machinery except electric & electronic, leather, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones.

After 2011: Almonds, wool, leather, cumin, black sesame.

Participation in 59th Damascus International Fair (Aug. 17-26, 2017)

Embassy of India, Damascus in coordination with Syrian authorities and local organising companies along with Indian companies participated in the event. The participating Indian companies exhibited in the fields of cement, rice, yarn & textile, pharmacy, solar, power transformer etc. The participation Indian companies generated an interest of business among their Syrian counterparts.

C. Cultural Relations:

India features as an influence in Syrian Arab culture historically through the Silk Route and in particular through the adaptation of the Panchatantra into the Arabic 'Kalila wa Dumna'. More recent influences have been Tagore and the eminent Syrian poet and Ambassador to India, Omar Abu Rishesh. The **Cultural Exchange Programme**, in effect since 1975, provides the framework for bilateral cooperation. A number of cultural delegations from India have visited Syria and vice versa, under the programme. The Executive Programme for Cultural Cooperation was last renewed in November 2010 for the year 2010-13. **Literary exchanges** between the Arab Writers Union of Syria and the Sahitya Akademi, through an MOU signed in 2003, has led to translations of works of Syrian and Indian writers and regular exchange of delegations between Sahitya Akademi and Arab Writers Union.

Indian cultural week (April 8-14, 2017) was observed in Damascus and Latakia in April, 2017, with screening of Bollywood films and display of Indian publicity material & books. Significantly, a 6-member Odissi Dance troupe, led by Ms. Janhabi Behera, under the ICCR's sponsorship, visited Syria on 8-9 April, 2017. Their performances at Damascus and Latakia were widely applauded with full attendance.

D. Indian Community:

The size of the Indian community in Syria shrunk significantly due to the on-going crisis. Number of Indians in Syria is under 100.

November 2017