

India-Israel Bilateral Relations

Political Relations

India announced its recognition of 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 a Consulate. Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established.

Since the upgradation of relations in 1992, defence and agriculture formed the two main pillars of our bilateral engagement. In recent years, relations have seen rapid growth across a broad spectrum of areas and the future vision of the cooperation is of a strong hi-tech partnership as befits two knowledge economies.

Political ties between the two countries are friendly. Prime Minister Modi undertook an historic first ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel from 4-6 July 2017, during which the relationship was upgraded to a strategic level, with focused cooperation in agriculture and water. Seven Agreements/MoUs were signed in the fields of R&D innovation, water, agriculture and space and a joint statement was also issued. Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Israel in October, 2015, while the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited India in November 2016. Increased high-level exchanges and ministerial visits on both sides have expanded cooperation in different functional areas such as trade, agriculture, S&T, culture and security.

Economic and Commercial Relations

From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (*comprising primarily trade in diamonds*), bilateral merchandise trade had diversified and reached US\$ 5.19 billion in 2011. However, the past few years have seen a decline and stagnation in total bilateral trade. In 2016, the bilateral trade stood at US\$ 4.16 billion (excluding defence) with the balance of trade in Israel's favour. Trade in diamonds constitutes more than 53% of bilateral trade. India is Israel's third largest trade partner in Asia after China and Hong Kong. In recent years, the bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security. Major exports from India to Israel include precious stones and metals, chemical products, textiles and textile articles, etc. Major imports by India from Israel include precious stones and metals, chemicals and mineral products, base metals and machinery and transport equipment. Potash is a major item of Israel's exports to India, with India buying a significant percentage of its requirement from Israel. In recent years, Israel has taken a strategic decision to strengthen economic relations with India, China and Japan. Indian software companies, notably TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra and Wipro, are beginning to expand their presence in the Israeli market. During PM Modi's visit in July 2017, the first meeting of the newly established India-Israel CEOs Forum took place.

Investment

Israeli companies have invested in India in renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies etc and are also setting up R&D centres or production units in India.

Reliable figures are not available as a large portion of these investments are routed through third countries like Singapore, USA etc.

While official data about India's investment in Israel is not available, significant investments from India in Israel include 100% acquisition of an Israeli drip-irrigation company, *Naandan*, by Jain Irrigation, Sun Pharma's 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 acquired an Israeli start up Panaya; Tech Mahindra acquired the R&D arm of Comverse and Leadcom. In 2016, Wipro invested an undisclosed amount in TLV partners, an Israeli VC and Wipro Infrastructure Engineering acquired an Israeli aero machining company, HR Givon.

Agriculture

India and Israel have a bilateral agreement for cooperation in agriculture. Under the bilateral Action Plan for 2012-2015, agricultural cooperation was expanded to nine States including Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu etc. Fifteen India-Israel Centres of Excellence for cooperation in agriculture have been inaugurated so far, of the 26 centres that are planned. The two sides signed the fourth phase of the joint action plan (2018-20) in July 2017.

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. The last major visit from the Indian side was that of the Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba in June 2017 in his capacity as Chairman of COSC. Prior to that, the then Chief of our Air Force, ACM Arup Raha, visited Israel in March 2016. The last round of Defence Secretary level talks in the JWG on Defence were held in Israel in April 2017. Three Indian naval ships from the Western Fleet made a port call in Haifa in May 2017 and the onboard naval band performed in Haifa.

There is cooperation on security issues, including a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. In February 2014, India and Israel signed three important agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Cooperation in Homeland Security, and Protection of Classified Material. The first meeting of the Joint Steering Committee set up under the agreement on Homeland Security was held in Israel in September 2014. 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 by the committee. Following this, there were working group meetings in India and Israel in March and July-August, 2015 respectively. Since 2015, IPS officer trainees have been visiting the Israel National Police Academy every year for a one-week long foreign exposure training at the end of their training in the National Police Academy, Hyderabad.

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. On May 7, 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. MATIMOP is discussing similar programmes with Gujarat and Rajasthan.

During the visit of PM Modi in July 2017, an 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 \$ 20 m from each side over 5 years, is expected to play an important role in enabling Indian and Israeli enterprises to undertake joint R&D projects.

Tata Industries and Ramot, Tel Aviv University (*the University's technology transfer company*) entered into an MoU to fund and generate commercialisation-ready technologies in a wide range of fields, including engineering, exact sciences, environment and clean technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Under the MoU signed in 2013, 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 a research collaboration with Technion for the development of oncology drugs in 2015. A similar agreement was signed with the Weizmann Institute for the development of drugs for brain diseases.

Culture and Education

India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions, and in popular Israeli perception, India is an attractive, alternative tourist destination. Israeli youth are particularly attracted to India. India is a destination of choice for over 35,000 Israelis who visit India every year for tourism and business. Almost 45,000 Indians visited Israel in 2016, the second largest number of tourists from an Asian country. They are mostly pilgrims who visit the holy sites.

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 coming for a semester. An MoU has also been signed between ICCR and the University of Haifa in 2017 for a short term Chair on Indian studies. Some private and public Indian universities have entered into academic agreements.

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. Each government will contribute USD 12.5 million each over four years. The programme will provide up to US\$ 300,000 for an experimental project and US\$180,000 for a theoretical project for up to three years. 21 projects were funded in the first year and 11 in the second year. The counterpart organisations are University Grants Commission and the Israel Science Foundation.

Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarships to students from India and China in all fields over a period of three years with triennial grants of NIS 100,000. More than 250 out of almost 350 students who availed this scholarship were Indians. The Government of Israel also offers 250 short term summer scholarships for eight courses for Indian and Chinese students in Israeli universities like. India offers five 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 in Israel set up a fund to finance study tours to India of meritorious Israeli students of Hindi.

Indian Community

There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel (with at least one Indian parent), who are all Israeli passport holders. The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the fifties and sixties. The majority is from Maharashtra (*Bene Israelis*) and 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.

Shri Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Chennamangalam, Cochin has distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist 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 the award.

In 2013, the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv facilitated the first-ever National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel that was held on September 23, 2013 in Ramla. The event brought together nearly 5,000 people from all the four major groups of Indian Jews. Three more annual Conventions have since been held in subsequent years in cities of Yeruham (2014), Ramla (2015) and Kiryat Gat (2016). The *Know India Programme* has been effective in binding the Indian origin youth to India.

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

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.

Useful Resources

Website : www.indembassy.co.il
Facebook : www.facebook.com/IndembTelaviv
Youtube : <https://www.youtube.com/user/Indianembassytelaviv>
Twitter : <https://twitter.com/indemtel>

Shalom Namaste: A video feature by MEA XP Division on India-Israel partnership- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owxKawrRcXg>

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