

India-Palestine Bilateral Relations

India's support for the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the nation's foreign policy. In 1974, India became the first Non-Arab State to recognize Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to Palestine in Gaza City, which was later shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

India has always played an active role in extending support for the Palestinian cause across various multilateral forums. India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" and voted in favor of it during the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). India also voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the Separation Wall by Israel. In 2011, India voted in favor of including Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. India co-sponsored and voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution on November 29, 2012 that admitted Palestine as a 'non-member Observer state' at the UN without voting rights. India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015 as well as supported the installation of the Palestinian flag at UN's premises in September 2015. India was one of the 128 countries that voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution on December 21, 2017 regarding the status of Jerusalem in the backdrop of American decisions to (i) recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and (ii) shift the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. India also voted in favour of the UNGA resolution – Protection of the Palestinian Civilian Population on June 13, 2018.

Bilateral Visits

There have been regular high level bilateral visits between India and Palestine. **Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a historic visit to Palestine on February 10, 2018, which was the first-ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Palestine.** Former President Shri Pranab Mukherjee paid a historic visit to Palestine in October 2015, which was the first ever visit by an Indian President to Palestine. There were also other high level visits from India to Palestine in recent years, namely – visit of External Affairs Minister (EAM) Smt Sushma Swaraj in January 2016 and visit of Minister of State for External Affairs Shri M.J. Akbar in November 2016. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had met President Mahmoud Abbas in September 2015 on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York and later in December 2015 in Paris on the sidelines of the climate change summit. President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in the years 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 and most recently in May 2017 on his third State Visit and overall, his fifth visit to India during his Presidency. Recently, in June 2019, during the 5th Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in EAM Shri S Jaishankar met very briefly with Dr. Malki on the sideline of the conference.

Joint Commission Meeting

The first ever Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between India and Palestine was held in Ramallah in November 2016. The JCM was co-chaired by Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs and Dr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister.

Foreign Office Consultations

The first ever Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) between India and Palestine were held in Ramallah in May, 2015. The second round of FOCs was held in New Delhi in April 2017. For the FOCs, the Joint Secretary (WANA), MEA leads the Indian side while Assistant Minister for Asia, Africa and Australia in Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads the Palestinian side.

Projects in Palestine with GOI's assistance

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at bilateral and international levels, India has been extending various forms of economic assistance to the Palestinian people. Government of India supported the construction of Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip. India provided a plot of land and constructed a chancery building for the Embassy of Palestine in New Delhi.

Two schools were built in Palestine in 2015 through aid provided by India. Government of India has set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Al Quds University, Abu Dis in 2015 and another ICT centre in Ramallah in 2016 and equipped Vocational Training Centers in Palestine with the supply and setting up of equipment at VTC (Vocational Training Centre), Yatta and PPU (Palestine Polytechnic University), Hebron. During the visit of President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee, to Palestine in October 2015, India announced five more projects (worth \$17.79 million) for Palestine. These projects include a Palestine India Techno Park in Ramallah and Palestine Institute of Diplomacy. During the visit of Minister of State(MOS) Shri M.J. Akbar in November 2016, he along with President of Palestine Mr. Mahmoud Abbas jointly laid the foundation stone for the construction of Palestine India Techno Park Project in Ramallah.

During the Historic first ever visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Palestine (February 10, 2018). Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi was bestowed upon the highest Palestinian award of the "Grand Collar of the State of Palestine", in recognition of India's enhanced support for Palestinian Cause. One time project assistance worth USD 42.1 million for **Palestinian Nation Building** in Education, Health, Women Empowerment and capacity building.

India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund has also funded five projects in Palestine, namely (Indoor Multipurpose Sports Complex in Ramallah, Phase I and Phase II of Setting Up of Cardio-Thoracic Unit of Palestinian Red Crescent Society's Al Quds hospital in Gaza, Atta Habib Medical Center in Gaza and Rehabilitation Centre for People with Mental Disabilities in Nablus.

Memorandums of Understanding

In 1997, an MoU between India and Palestine was signed, which provides for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialized areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects. During the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in 2012 three MoUs were signed in the field of setting up a Centre of Excellence in IT, Building of two schools in Palestine and providing equipment and training to Vocational Training Centers in Palestine. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, six MOUs were signed; one between the Palestinian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations and the remaining five MOUs were signed between Indian and Palestinian Universities. During the State Visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in May 2017, six MOUs were signed, namely (a) Agriculture, (b) Health, (c) Youth Affairs & Sports, (d) Information Technology, (e) Agreement for exemption of visas for Diplomatic & Official Passport Holders and (f) MOU between PTI and WAFA (Palestinian News Agency). During the visit of Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi in February 2018, six MOUs were signed, namely (a) MoU for Construction of India-Palestine Super-Specialty Hospital at Beit Sahour in Bethlehem Governorate, (b) MoU for Construction of School in Muthalath al Shuhada village in Jenin Governorate, (c) MoU for Construction of School in Tamoon village in Tubas Governorate, (d) MoU for Construction of Additional Floor to Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Boys in Abu Dees, (e) MoU for Construction of India Palestine Centre for Empowering Women "TURATHI" - a National Centre for Development and Marketing of Palestinian Heritage Projects and (f) MoU for Procurement of Equipment and Machinery for New National Printing Press.

Financial Support

So far, India has extended budgetary support of US\$ 30 million to Palestine. During the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support and this was transferred to Palestine in March 2009. During the visit of President Abbas to India in February 2010, India announced a budgetary support of US\$ 10 million and this was transferred in the month of March 2010. Again in 2012, during the visit of President Abbas, Government of India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to Palestine. During the year 2015, India provided a total of US\$ 10 million as financial assistance to Palestine; US\$ 5 million was provided as project assistance towards the reconstruction of Gaza (on 12 January 2015), and US\$ 5 million was provided as budgetary assistance (on 12 October 2015).

India enhanced its annual contribution towards **UN Relief and Works Agency in the Near East (UNRWA)** from USD 1.25 Million to USD 5 Million in the back drop of financial crisis being faced by UNRWA.

Scholarships and ITEC training for Palestinian Nationals

ICCR: During the visit of Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi on February 10, 2018 it was announced that ICCR Scholarships enhanced from 50 to 100 from Academic

year 2019-20.

ITEC: Annually, 150 slots are offered to Palestine under the ITEC programme for training courses in India aimed at capacity building and skill enhancement. More than 1200 Palestinian Nationals have availed training under this programme.

Indian Visas for Palestinian Nationals

On September 25, 2013 the Representative Office of India, Ramallah started issuing Visas from its Office. From 2014, Palestinian nationals can also obtain e-Visas (tourist, business, conference and medical visas) to visit India.

Trade

Since, trade between India and Palestine is channelized through Israel, complete trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine annual bilateral trade is worth around US\$ 46.2 million (Indian exports : US \$ 46 million and Indian Imports : US \$ 153,000 according to figures given by Palestinian Ministry of National Economy). Indian exports include marble, granite and other stones, Basmati Rice, raw material for making vaccines, coffee, cashew nuts, sugar, sweet biscuits, sacks and bags for the packing of goods etc. Palestinian exports are mainly virgin olive oil and its fractions, dates etc.

Culture & People to People relations

Indian arts and culture, especially Indian movies are very popular in Palestine. Several cultural activities, including film shows and photo exhibitions, have been organized by the Representative Office of India in various Palestinian cities in addition to the screening of documentaries prepared by Public Diplomacy Division, MEA in local TV channels, schools, and youth clubs. On 20 May 2019, the Representative Office of India in Ramallah hosted an Iftar at the Children's SOS village in Bethlehem. Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, senior Government officials, and representatives of the Palestinian civil society attended the function. Before breaking the fast, the Representative Office of India organized several educational and recreational activities for the children. The Representative of India also presented customized gifts to all the children housed at the Village. As part of the ongoing 150th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, The Representative Office of India in Ramallah in association with The High Council of Youth and Sports and Jericho Municipality organized a Cycling event on June 14, 2019, in Jericho City. The 5th International Day of Yoga was celebrated at the iconic Umayyad Palace of Hisham in Jericho City. Prior to the IDY, the Representative Office of India had organized a series of flash yoga demonstrations, based on the Common Yoga Protocol, in various iconic and monumental Palestinian sites.

The Palestinian Government has instituted a special committee constituted of MoFA and

Ministries of Education, Culture, and Tourism to organize Gandhi Jayanti celebrations in 2019.

Useful Resources:

Website of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<http://roiramallah.gov.in>

Facebook Page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

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

Youtube Channel of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<http://www.youtube.com/user/roiramallah>

Twitter handle of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<https://twitter.com/roiramallah>

Instagram page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

https://instagram.com/india_in_palestine

Flickr page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

<https://www.flickr.com/roiramallah>

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