

Embassy of India

Baghdad

India-Iraq Bilateral Brief

India and Iraq have historical and civilizational ties. Iraqi port of Basra was not only the market par excellence of the Indian merchandise including textiles, spices, food-grains and other commodities for the Arab world but also of the famous pearl trade that flourished mainly through the Indian traders and jewellers. Indian soldiers and railway workers from British India had played major role in ensuring the security in this region during the colonial era and have left an imprint in the region. The breed of the southern Iraqi Jamus or the water buffalo had been brought by Harun Al Rashid from India. The Iraqi Philosophers and Sufi saints like Khwaja Hasan al Basri, Junaid Al Baghdadi and Sheikh Behlul had such an impact on the spiritual movements in India that Guru Dev Nanak Saheb came personally to Baghdad to deliberate on the ontological and the epistemological questions with Sheikh Behlul who hosted him for nearly three months. Iraqi spiritual leader Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Jeelani has enormous following in India where he is referred to either as Dastagir Saheb or Ghous-al-Azam. On the other hand, Indians were among the foremost to patronize the Shrines and Sarai Khanas of the heritage of Islam's primeval martyrdom at Karbala. Thousands of Indians visit the shrines of Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas in Karbala every year and also the shrine of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani in Baghdad.

2. Since the outbreak of war in Iraq, India has been supporting a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq. India responded to the urgent needs of Iraq for relief and economic reconstruction directly and as part of international efforts under the UN auspices. In response to UN Secretary General's urgent appeal, India committed US\$ 20 million for assistance to the Iraqi people in 2003. Activities under this pledge included supply of milk powder through World Food Programme, training of Iraqi Foreign Service officers in diplomacy, and other Iraqi officials in Information Technology. In cooperation with World Food Programme (WFP), India provided fortified biscuits to Iraqi school children and Iraqi refugees in Syria. In addition, India contributed US\$ 10 million in 2004 towards the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) for investments, reconstruction and development in Iraq. Shri M. J. Akbar Minister of State for External Affairs represented India at the Kuwait International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq in Kuwait in February 2018 and pronounced interests of India to the reconstruction of Iraq. India contributed US\$ 200,000/- to UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) in April 2022 to support the areas of UNITAD's investigations in development and use of chemical and biological weapons by ISIL and to establish a dedicated Cultural Heritage Crimes Unit and facilitate the prosecution of those responsible for attacks on places of religious and cultural significance in Iraq. India made the statement at UN Security Council Briefing on the situation in Iraq (UNAMI briefing) seven times in February, May, August, November 2021, February, May & October 2022 and four times at UNITAD in May 2021, December 2021, May 2022 & June 2022 and United Nations Compensation Committee (UNCC) in February 2022.

3. **High-level visits:** There have been several high-level political exchanges between the two countries in recent times which are summarized below:

- (i) Dr. Haval Abubaker, Governor of Sulaymaniyah Province, Kurdistan Region of Iraq visited India from 11-21 April, 2022 under the ICCR's Distinguished Visitors Programme 2022-23.
- (ii) Hon'ble EAM Dr. Jaishankar met President of Kurdistan Regional Government Mr. Nechirvan Barzani on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on 19 February in Germany.
- (iii) Hon'ble EAM Dr. Jaishankar met Foreign Minister of Iraq Fuad Hussein twice on the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly on 21 September 2021 in New York and later in October 2021 at the sidelines of Bani Yas Forum in Abu Dhabi.

- (iv) Hon'ble EAM S. Jaishankar held bilateral meeting with Iraqi FM Mohammad Ali Al Hakim on the margins of 18th NAM Summit in Baku on 24 October, 2019.
- (v) Shri V. Muraleedharan, MoS for External Affairs visited Iraq on September 16-17, 2019. During the visit, he called on President & PM and met Foreign Minister of Iraq. He also visited Erbil and called on President & PM of Kurdistan Regional Government and met Foreign Minister. He unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi at Sami Abdulrahman Park and also addressed Indian community.
- (vi) Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq Dr. Abdul Razzaq Al-Issa attended DIDAC India-Asian Summit on Education and Skills & Exhibition in New Delhi on October 3-6, 2018. Dr. Fouad Qassim Mohamed, Deputy Minister of Education and Scientific Research of Iraq participated in 14th Higher Education Summit held on October 30 - November 1, 2018 in New Delhi.
- (vii) General (Dr.) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs visited Baghdad on April 1-2, 2018 in a Special Aircraft to bring back mortal remains of the 39 Indian nationals who were killed in Mosul. He thanked the Martyrs' Foundation Iraq for extending co-operation in locating the mass grave and in facilitating repatriation of mortal remains.
- (viii) Prior to this, General (Dr.) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS visited Iraq three times. His first visit to Iraq was immediately after the liberation of Mosul from ISIS on July 12-14, 2017. He also visited Erbil and had meetings with Kurdish leaders. Second visit of MoS to Iraq was on October 24-31, 2017 during which he also visited Mosul. In Baghdad, he met Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari; NSA Mr. Faleh Al Fayyadh; Chief of Staff of Iraqi Armed Forces Mr. Othman Al Ghanimi; and Secretary General of the Council of Ministers of Iraq Mr. Mahdi Al Alaq. His third visit to Baghdad was on January 21, 2018 during which he met Mr. Faleh Al Fayyadh, NSA.
- (ix) Dr. Adeelah Hamoud Hussein Saleem, Minister of Health of Iraq visited India from October 11-14, 2017. She met Ms. Anupriya Patel, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare and officials of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. She visited AIIMS, Medanta-The Medicity (Gurugram) and some other health-related institutions in Delhi. Pharmexil organized an interactive session with the Iraqi delegation in New Delhi. The visit covered wide gamut of health related issues.
- (x) Shri M. J. Akbar, MoS for External Affairs met Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq in New York on the margins of UN General Assembly on September 23, 2017.
- (xi) Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq visited India on July 24-26, 2017. He had delegation-level talks with EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. Dr. Jaafari called on Vice President Dr. Hamid Ansari and also had a meeting with Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of State (IC) for Petroleum & Natural Gas. He also visited Mumbai during the visit.
- (xii) Mr. Humam Al Hamoudi, Deputy Speaker of Iraqi Parliament visited India in April 2017 and had meetings with General (Retired) V. K. Singh, MoS in the Ministry of External Affairs and other leaders.
- (xiii) Dr. Hamed Younis Saleh, Deputy Oil Minister of Iraq led a delegation for the PETROTECH 2016 held in New Delhi on 5-7 December 2016.
- (xiv) Minister of State for External Affairs Shri M.J. Akbar visited Iraq on 21-23 August 2016. During the visit, the Minister called on President of Iraq Mr. Fuad Masum; Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament Dr. Salim Al Jabouri; and met Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, and the National Security Advisor Mr Faleh Al Fayyad. He also paid a visit to the Holy city of Karbala where he met the Chairman of the Provincial Council of Karbala, religious leaders and members of Indian Community.

4. Parliamentary Exchanges: Iraqi Parliament has an Iraq-India Parliamentary Friendship Group. Mr. Osama Al Nujaifi, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament had visited India in December 2012 and had meetings with Speakers of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Mr. Humam Al Hamoudi, Deputy Speaker of Iraqi Parliament visited India in April 2017.

i) Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab, Senior MP visited Iraq on September 03-06, 2019 to attend Asian Parliamentary Assembly Meeting in Baghdad. He also held meetings with Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament.

5. Messages and Greetings between India and Iraq: The President of India, the External Affairs Minister of India and the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas have sent congratulatory messages to their Iraqi counterparts on the occasion of formation of the new government in Iraq after October 13, 2022. EAM and MoPNG have also invited their newly appointed Iraqi counterparts to visit India.

Economic and Commercial relations

6. The economic and trade relations between India and Iraq slowed down after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the total bilateral trade has grown steadily since 2010, mainly due to increasing crude oil imports. The value of total trade increased from US\$ 5.7 billion in 2006-07 to US \$ 20.52 billion in 2012-2013. Trade in the subsequent years declined largely due to fall in the global oil prices, however bilateral trade has actually increased in quantity, both in exports and imports. In FY 2019-20, Bilateral Trade with Iraq was valued at US\$ 25.61 billion. Bilateral trade in FY 2020-21 amounted to US\$ 15.78 billion. The bilateral trade in FY 2021-22 amounted to US\$ 34.33 billion, accounting for about 3.32% of our total foreign trade, witnessed an increase due to enhanced economic activities. During the period April-September 2022, the bilateral trade amounted to US\$ 21.40 billion. This includes imports worth US\$ 20.36 billion and exports worth US\$ 1.03 billion. Iraq has now become the 7th largest trade partner of India. India opened its Consulate in Erbil, the Capital of Kurdistan region, in August 2016 to further strengthen economic and commercial relations with Iraq.

7. Details of India's bilateral trade with Iraq in the last ten years are summarized below:

(In US\$ million)

Year	India's Exports to Iraq	India's imports from Iraq	Total
2013-14	918.03	18,520.86	19,438.89
2014-15	829.32	14,247.66	15,076.98
2015-16	1,004.39	10,837.58	11,841.97
2016-17	1,115.45	11,707.94	12,823.39
2017-18	1,462.23	17,615.81	19,078.04
2018-19	1,788.66	22,372.47	24,161.14
2019-20	1,878.17	23,740.18	25,618.35
2020-21	1498.99	14,287.10	15,786.09

2021-22	2403.27	31927.05	34,330.33
2022-23 (April- September)	1035.48	20365.93	21,401.41

(Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India)

8. Iraq has consistently been among the top suppliers of crude oil to India for the last several years. After becoming the largest supplier of crude oil to India during FY 2017-18, Iraq has been maintaining the position with supplying 51.6 MMT crude oil in FY 2019-20 and 43.0 MMT in the FY 2020-21. Iraq supplied 56.5 MMT crude oil to India during the financial year 2021-22 which accounts for 25.7% of India's total oil imports in value. During April-September FY 2022-23 India imported 27.30 MMT from Iraq. India's public sector oil companies, including IOCL, HPCL and BPCL, are the major importers of oil from Iraq. Major exportable crude oil grades are Basrah Heavy (API: 24), Basrah Medium (API 29). Indian oil companies have deep interests in the Iraqi oil sector. A delegation of ONGC- Videsh Limited (ONGC-VL) visited Baghdad and Basra in March 2018 and had discussions with Iraqi Ministry of Oil and Basra Oil Company. A delegation of IOCL visited Baghdad on April 17-18, 2019 and had meeting with State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO). In addition, SOMO had virtual business meetings from Dubai with IOCL, OVL and BPCL on 18th and 29th August 2022. They also met in Milan on the sidelines of GASTECH Conference in 5-8 September, 2022.

9. In addition to import of crude in bulk oil, India also imports commodities like raw wool and sulphur from Iraq. Indian exports to Iraq consist of cereals, iron and steel, meat and meat products, pharmaceutical products, agro chemicals, cosmetics, rubber manufactured products, paints, gems and jewellery, ceramics, manufactures of metals, machine tools, electrical machinery and instruments, transport equipment, electronic goods, handicrafts, sugar, tea, garments. A significant volume of exports takes place through Dubai and other destinations.

10. M/S Mokul-Shriram JV has been reallocated US\$235 Million project to build Al Qibla sewerage system in Basra. Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) won an order for compressor package for Baiji Refinery in Iraq, placed by Northern Refineries Company (NRC), a National Oil refinery company owned by the Ministry of Oil, Iraq. BHEL has also executed a turnkey order for the construction of the 4x125 MW gas turbine-based Sulaymaniyah Power Project in Iraq.

11. A 22-member business delegation led by Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) visited Baghdad and Erbil on December 16-20, 2018 and had meetings with several senior Ministers, Officials and businessmen of Iraq. An India Pavilion was set up at the Baghdad International Trade Fair by the Federation of Indian Export Organization (FIEO) on November 10-19, 2018 with participation of about 40 Indian companies. A 25-member business delegation led by Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) visited Iraq on November 26-30, 2018. About 20 prominent Iraqi businessmen from Food and Beverages sector attended the 2nd edition of 'IndusFood' in Greater Noida in January 2019. About 12 Iraqi Businessmen participated in the Indus Food-2021 Exhibition from 20-21 March 2021 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh organized by Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI). Embassy participated in IT Fair ITEX-2022, (15-18 February 2022) where it exhibited catalogues, brochures and pamphlets of various leading IT companies from India. Video clips espousing the 3Ts (Trade, Technology and Tourism) were screened at the stall. Embassy participated in the 13th Agricultural Week, an exhibition on agriculture equipment and good products, organized by Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture during 19-25 March 2022 in Baghdad International Fairgrounds. A nine-member CII business delegation visited Baghdad and Erbil from 25 to 30 June, 2022 and had meaningful BSM, B2G and I2I interactions with various Iraqi and Kurdistan Region authorities, business associations, meeting with Electricity, Agriculture and Trade Ministers, Cabinet Secretary and senior officials of Government of Iraq in Baghdad and with Importers/Exporters Union of Kurdistan, Minister & Head of Department of Foreign Relation, Investor's Union, Minister of Electricity, Minister of Trade & Industry, Erbil Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of Board of Investment in Erbil.

50 Indian companies under the umbrella of Federation of Indian Exports Organization (FIEO) participated in 46th edition of Baghdad International Fair (BIF) on November 1, 2022. The sectors represented by the Indian companies were electricity and power, hardware and tools, construction and equipment, healthcare and medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, automobile and automotive parts, agriculture and food processing, electrical and electronic components, marble, granite and ceramics, food and beverages, tea, rice, submersible pumps, household appliances, etc.

12. Iraqi pharmaceuticals companies have been actively participating in various trade promotion events organized in India. A number of Indian hospitals are on the panel of Iraqi Health Ministry where the latter sends eligible Iraqi patients. A number of Indian Doctors have been coming to Iraq for short duration medical camps. During the year of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a Jaipur Foot Camp was organized in Karbala from November 24, 2018 to January 4, 2019. There is a new proposal for a similar camp to be held in Iraq this year.

13. **People to people contacts:** The people to people and institutional contacts has resulted in India becoming one of the most preferred destination for Iraqis seeking quality medical treatment. More than 10,000 Iraqi students obtained their PhD, Masters and undergraduate studies in India. Government of India has revised Travel Advisory for Iraq in February 2019 allowing Indian nationals to selectively travel to safer areas of Iraq.

14. In 2021, a total of 15,507 visas of different categories were issued by the Mission for medical treatment, tourism, education and business. In 2022, more than 20,000 visas mostly for medical treatment in India have been issued for the period Jan-Oct 2022. India remained a preferred destination for Iraqis to undergo medical treatment and pursue higher education in India. More than 90% of the total visas were medical visas. Iraqi Airways is currently operating three flights per week on Delhi-Baghdad-Delhi route. There are flights on Najaf-Mumbai, Najaf-Ahmedabad and Najaf-Hyderabad routes. Air India started its operation to Iraq after more than 25 years with the first flight landing at Najaf International Airport on February 14, 2019. However, Air India service was suspended in November 2019.

15. Iraq Post unveiled a special commemorative postage stamp in Baghdad on 15 February 2022 which was brought out on the special occasion to celebrate the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between India and Iraq (The Friendship Treaty signed between India and Iraq in 1952), 75 years of India's Independence (Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav) and 100 years of establishing Iraqi state.

16. A bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled in the largest public park, Hawary Shar of Sulaymaniyah on 09 April 2022.

17. **Capacity building:** India has annually been providing assistance to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to train officials of the Government of Iraq. Iraqi officials participated in the online e-ITEC programmes especially on COVID 19 pandemic management, Cyber Technologies, AI and Emergent Technologies. India has also been offering opportunity to Iraqi students for higher studies in India under 'General Scholarship Scheme' (GSS) organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). A batch of 25 young Iraqi Diplomats attended a Special Training Course organized by Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS) in New Delhi in January 2018. Two another batches comprise (i) 29 Iraqi Diplomats & (ii) 13 Iraqi Diplomats underwent training at SSIFS in Aug-Sept, 2019 and Feb-March 2020 respectively. A special e-ITEC webinar for training on basic Covid-19 management conducted by PGI-MER, Chandigarh was also attended by Iraqi Health officials in April, 2020. 20 officials of Iraqi Forensics Department underwent training at the Gujarat Forensic Science University, Gandhinagar in 2019. A group of 18 Iraqi officials from different Ministries/Departments underwent a training programme for English proficiency at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad in March-April, 2019. A 20-member Iraqi IT team from the Prime Minister's office has undergone a cyber security training programme conducted by C-DAC Mohali from 17 October to 11 November 2022.

18. **Indian community:** Before the Gulf war in 1991, there were more than 80,000 Indian nationals in Iraq. Most of them left Iraq before the war started. After the 2003 invasion, thousands of Indian workers were recruited by contractors to provide various services to foreign military bases in Iraq. Many of them left with the deteriorating security situation in the country. With the lifting of the Government of India advisory against travel of Indians to Iraq which was in vogue from 2004 till May 2010, the number of Indian workers had steadily increased in the more stable Kurdistan region comprising Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk governorates, with better salaries and working conditions in steel mills, oil companies and construction projects. When the ISIS took over large parts of Iraq in 2014, Government of India evacuated thousands of Indian nationals from Iraq. There has been influx of Indian workers to Iraq after the revision of travel advisory in February 2019. Presently, there are more than 8,000 Indian workers deployed in Karbala Refinery Project. The total number of Indians in Iraq is now estimated to be around 15,000-17,000, mostly in Kurdistan region, Basra, Najaf and Karbala. About 30,000-40,000 Indians visit Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf and Samarra in Iraq for pilgrimage annually.

19. **Religious pilgrimage:** A large number of Indian pilgrimages numbering approx. 30,000-40,000 visit the Holy shrines in Baghdad, Najaf and Karbala every year.

November, 2022