

## **India - Lebanon Relations**

India and Lebanon have had traditionally amicable relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1954. Shared commonalities include a democratic, parliamentary system of government based on a written constitution which guarantees the rule of law, certain basic freedoms and human rights such as freedom of expression, with a market economy which is moving towards greater liberalization, a large pool of educated people and a vibrant entrepreneurial class.

The fact that India kept its Embassy in Beirut open and functioning throughout the civil war (from 1975 to 1990, closing briefly from August 5 to October 16, 1989), in contrast to a large number of other foreign Embassies in Beirut, is appreciated by the Lebanese, together with India's traditionally strong linkages with the Arab world, solidarity for the Palestine cause, and most recently our balanced and calibrated approach on Arab Spring developments including Syria. Both countries have also cooperated closely on various issues of mutual interest during their overlap in 2010 as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Lebanese officials and political representatives have traditionally praised the professional excellence and commitment of the Indian contingent deployed in the UNIFIL forces in south Lebanon, and positive reports have appeared in the Lebanese media about the free medicines and medical care being provided by Indian doctors and veterinarians from the UNFIL contingent to villagers and live stocks in south Lebanon.

People-to-people ties have remained warm and cordial, with Bollywood playing an important role and with regular coverage in the Lebanese media on developments in India.

However, Lebanon has not been an important strategic partner for India, and the development of bilateral interaction has been further limited by the domestic and regional challenges faced by Lebanon over the years, beginning with the onset of the civil war in 1975. This scenario may be set to change with the possibility of Indian participation in the exploitation of Lebanon's offshore gas and oil reserves. With the increasing instability in the region, especially in Syria and Iraq, Lebanon itself also needs to find new markets and partners in economic cooperation. There is a window for India to establish a presence in this country by providing developmental aid as also by increasing our involvement in sectors such as infrastructure, power and alternative energy, information technology, education and agriculture.

### **Political interaction**

#### **Visits from Lebanon:**

After Foreign Minister FairzBoueiz's visit to India in 1997 for NAM Conference in New Delhi, the next high-level visit from Lebanon took place in February 2015, when Agriculture Minister AkramChehayeb visited Delhi at the invitation of his counterpart, and also inaugurated the Lebanese Pavilion at the SurajkundMela where Lebanon was the Partner Country.

**Visits from India:** Shri E. Ahmad, Minister of State (MOS) for External Affairs visited Lebanon from September 28 to October 1, 2005. Special Envoy to PM, Shri C.R. Gharekhan, visited Beirut in July 2006 in tandem with an IAF plane carrying relief supplies required by Lebanon in the aftermath of the July 2006 conflict with Israel. MOS for Defence, Shri MM Pallam Raju, along with a MOD delegation visited the INDBATT in UNIFIL, South Lebanon from 10-12

September 2008. MOS, Shri E. Ahmad, again visited Lebanon from 30<sup>th</sup> June to 2nd July 2013. Secretary (East), Mr. Anil Wadhwa, visited Lebanon from 27-30 March, 2014.

**Parliamentary Friendship Committee:** A Lebanon-India Parliamentary Friendship Committee was established in April 2006 with 12 members drawn from a cross section of political/religious groups. Lok Sabha Secretariat has been requested to establish its counterpart in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha.

**Peacekeeping – INDBATT in United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL):** An Indian battalion (INDBATT) has been deployed in UNIFIL since November 1998. At present, this battalion consists of 860 defence personnel including 4 doctors and 1 nursing staff officer, who are deployed in the eastern-most sector of Lebanon's southern border with Israel at the tri-junction with Syria. In addition, 16 Indian defence personnel (including the Deputy Force Commander) are based in UNIFIL Headquarters, Nacqura, together with a 21-member medical team.

**Bilateral Agreements/MOUs:** There is a Cultural Exchange Agreement (signed in April 1997, ratified in February 2000, which is automatically renewed every 5 years and therefore still valid) and a MOU for an Educational Exchange Programme (signed in June 2013, valid for 5 years, to be automatically renewed every 5 years).

**Agreements/MOUs under consideration:** Drafts MoUs for cooperation in Agriculture & Allied sectors, for holding regular Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), and for expediting issue of Lebanese visas to Indian business men and tourists, as also draft agreements on Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection (BIPPA), Cooperation in the Tourism sector, Transfer of Sentenced Persons, Extradition, Mutual & Legal Assistance and Judicial Cooperation are under consideration.

### **Relief And Rehabilitation Assistance From India:**

Assistance of Rs.10 crores was announced in July 2006 as humanitarian aid for reconstruction after the 34-day Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, and against this commitment, blankets, tents and medicines worth around Rs. 45 lakhs were provided. In October 2007, US\$ 600,000 was committed for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Palestinian refugee camps in northern Lebanon, but no disbursements have been made against this commitment. Proposals for providing developmental assistance to Lebanon are currently under consideration of the Indian government, including a project for setting up a pilot solar or wind energy plant in Lebanon. In 2013, 2014 and 2015, India contributed half a million US dollars annually to Lebanon's Emergency Response Fund.

### **Economic Interaction**

**Development of trade ties:** Indo-Lebanon trade, which had come to a virtual halt during the civil war, has increased in recent years. From \$ 13.60 million in 1993, and \$ 55 million in 1999, the two-way bilateral trade during 2012 was to the tune of \$ 370 million and this increased further in 2014 to \$429.78 million. With Indian exports to Lebanon amounting to \$ 406.13 million in 2014, the balance of trade is predominantly in favour of India. Bilateral trade in the period January to October 2015 reached \$ 293.97 million with Indian exports to Lebanon being \$ 276.36 million

and Indian imports \$17.61 million. In addition, many products are being sourced in India by Lebanese companies for export to Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

Major items of exports from India are diamonds, motor cars, auto-parts, pharmaceuticals, rice, while Lebanon is exporting aluminum and copper waste & scrap, tanned or crust hides & skins to India. There is considerable potential for expanding Indian exports in pharmaceuticals, textiles, designer fashions and accessories, tourism, information technology, education, fertilizers and chemicals, agricultural and processed food products, auto spare parts, construction, mining and electrical equipment. From Lebanon, India can source olive oil and wine.

Investment links: There is considerable potential for Indian investment in Lebanon in the energy sector, and in the information technology and infrastructure sectors. A couple of Lebanese companies have set up operations in India in the service sector. There is also potential for joint ventures between Lebanese and Indian companies in Africa and in reconstruction activities in the region.

B2B interaction: In 2014, a 15-member delegation from the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO) visited Lebanon from 28-31 May 2014 and signed a Cooperation MoU with the Chamber of Commerce of Industry and Agriculture of Saida & South Lebanon (CCIAS). A business delegation led by the Lebanese Minister of Agriculture visited India from 5-6 February 2015. November 2015 saw the visit to Kerala of a group of Lebanese tour operators sponsored by GOIRTO.

Indian involvement in Lebanon's hydrocarbon sector has been initiated with two Indian companies – ONGC Videsh Ltd [OVL] and Cairn India – having pre-qualified as “non-operators” along with 34 other companies to participate in the first Offshore Natural Gas Round initiated by the Lebanese government. They have now to join a consortium, which has to include at least one company from the 12 companies that have pre-qualified as “operators”, in order to participate in the next stage i.e. the bidding for specific blocks. However, the project is stalled due to delays by the Lebanese government in passing necessary legislation.

### **Cultural Interaction:**

In October 2014, the CEP between Lebanon and India (ratified in 2000) was activated for the first time, with ICCR sending to Lebanon Sonam Kalra's “Sufi Gospel Project” under CEP terms. Separately, the Embassy organized a fusion Kathak and Bollywood show by Gurukul Dubai in Beirut, Saida and Tyre. Exhibitions of Indian saris and photographs of Islamic Architecture were also organized in Beirut and Tripoli. The Embassy also organized the presentation of Indian handicrafts in three local exhibitions over the year including the Ramdaniyat Beirutiya Exhibition, Dastkari Exhibition and Forum de Beirut's Art of Living Exhibition with presentation of Indian handicrafts and costume jewelry. The first Indian food festival was organized in June 2014 at the La Royal Hotel in Dbayeh, Beirut. The Embassy also participated in the Cultural Resistance International Festival by supporting the screening of “The Light of Asia” and the documentary film “Powerless” (Katiyabaaz) in October 2014.

In January 2015, for the first time in many years, the Embassy distributed a special supplement on the occasion of Republic Day in two major Arabic newspapers in Lebanon - An-Nahar and As-Safir.

Lebanon participated as the Partner Country in SurajkundMela 2015 from 1 February to 15 February. Ms. Narbada Devi & Group visited Lebanon (1-5 April) to give Manipuri dance performances in Beirut, Saida and Tyre. A group from the Nori Art and Puppetry Centre visited Lebanon from 22-26 April and gave five performances, including shows at Saadneyal Syrian refugee camp, the SOS Children's Village in Bhersaf and the Oriental School in Zahle. The group also held three workshops for teachers and social workers. A gala Indian night was organized at the Le Royal Hotel in June 2015.

On 21<sup>st</sup> June, the Embassy marked the United Nations International Day of Yoga with events being organized all over the country. The Embassy organized two of these events, the first being a series of workshops and lectures in collaboration with the American University of Beirut. The second event held at the Station, a cultural hub in Beirut, which presented a holistic program of activities, including a photo exhibition and yoga sessions, and a food and handicrafts bazar.

The Embassy participated in Ramdaniyat Beirutiya, held from 1-4 July 2015, for the second time with a stall displaying Indian textiles, costume jewelry and handicrafts and with a fashion show, in the La Salle Exhibition at Sidon from 2-6 September and in the Art of Living Exhibition at Forum de Beirut (25-29 November 2015) with an Indian Pavilion, displaying the Bajaj Pulsar motorbikes and Bajaj auto-rickshaws, Kirloskar generators and water pumps as also machine tools from India.

The Embassy also organized the screening of the Bollywood film "Kahani" at Grand Cinema ABC Dbayeh on 22 September 2015 and supported the Festival of Cultural Resistance with the visit of filmmaker Anurag Kashyap to Lebanon for the screening of his film "Gangs of Wasseypur" at the Festival on 9 November 2015.

Two Indian chefs visited Lebanon to participate in the second edition of the Indian Food Festival at the Casino Du Liban from 27 September to 1 October 2015.

To mark Gandhi Jayanti, the Embassy organized in association with Lebanese American University (LAU), Beirut, a panel discussion at LAU on 2 October 2015 and in association with Indian Battalion, organized a five-km run "Run for Peace" in South Lebanon.

In 2015, a MoU was signed between the Lebanese American University and the Embassy of India on 12 October establishing the first ICCR Chair in Lebanon. For the first time in 2015, an ICCR Senior Fellowship has been awarded to a Lebanese national Mr. Bassam Mikhael Lahoud for financial year 2016-17. Mr. Ziad Mikati became the first Lebanese participant in the Asian Forum on Global Governance 2015 organized by ORF from 25 October-3 November 2015 in New Delhi.

**Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme:** For 2015, India offered 25 civilian slots and 10 slots for defence personnel of which 27 slots (18 in civilian and 9 for defence personnel respectively) were utilized. IT and English language courses are the most popular subjects, followed by Public Administration.

### **Indian Community in Lebanon**

There are only a handful of persons of Indian origin in Lebanon, mainly women married to Lebanese citizens. The non-resident Indian community is also small, comprising around 8000 to

10,000 workers, mainly employed in construction, sanitation, agriculture and factories. There are a few professionals holding managerial positions in companies such as Al Maaza and the Landmark Group, a few holding civilian positions in UNIFIL and other UN agencies, and a couple of professors teaching in the American University of Beirut and Haigazian University.

**Useful Resources:**

Embassy of India Beirut website:

<http://indianembassybeirut.org/>

Embassy of India Beirut Facebook link:

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

Embassy of India Beirut Twitter:

[Twitter link: India@Lebanon \(@IndiainLebanon\)](https://twitter.com/India@Lebanon)

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