

## **Embassy of India Baghdad**

**Political Relations:** India and Iraq have throughout enjoyed enduring political, economic and cultural ties. Basra was for the Arab world not only the market par excellence of the Indian merchandise including textiles, spices, food-grains and other commodities but also of the famous pearl trade that flourished mainly through the Indian traders and jewelers. 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 that many Iraqis still proudly claim their Indian ethnic descent. India and Iraq have even shared agricultural practices. 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 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 Abdul Qadir Jeelani.

The respect for each other's strength has been mutual between India and Iraq. There is hardly a university in Iraq of which some faculty has not studied in India. The academic personnel linkages in the medical and engineering fields have throughout been vibrant. 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 mn for assistance to the Iraqi people. 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 WFP, India provided fortified biscuits to Iraqi school children and Iraqi refugees in Syria. In addition, India contributed US\$ 10 mn towards the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) for investments, reconstruction and development in Iraq.

In terms of capacity building, India has annually been providing assistance to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to train Government of Iraq officials. For the year 2016-17, 100 slots have been allotted under ITEC programme. In addition, India has been offering opportunity to Iraqi students for higher studies in India under the 'Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme' (CEP) and the 'General Cultural Scholarship Scheme' (GCSS) organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR).

The Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC) has provided training in India to the Iraqi oil

officials in various subjects related to downstream oil sector. So far, over 220 officials from the Iraqi Ministry of Oil have benefited from IOC's 20 training programmes. The people to people and institutional contacts are so deep that today India has become the most preferred destination for Iraqis for seeking quality medical treatment. Hundreds of Iraqis prefer to send their children for higher education to India on self-financing basis. The Mission is currently issuing around 150-200 visas per day going up to 350 during the summer. Majority of the travelers visit India for Medical purposes, tourism, education, and for business. This calendar year more than 31500 visas of different categories have been issued.

There have been high level political exchanges between the two countries. Iraq's Minister of Science & Technology H.E Mr Samarraï visited Delhi and Bangalore in April 2011. Iraq's Minister of Municipalities and Public Works H.E. Adil Muheydar Razi Al-Maliki visited Delhi in November 2011. Deputy Prime Minister H.E Mr. Rowsch Shaways, accompanied by Minister of Trade H.E. Dr. Khairalla Hasan Babaker, National Investment Chairman Dr. Sami Arajï and senior Iraqi officials visited India in February 2012. Deputy PM also met CIM Shri Anand Sharma, MPNG Shri Jaipal Reddy and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia. Mr. Usama Al Nujaïfi, Chairman of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, accompanied by a 14 member delegation visited India from 15 - 19 December 2012 at the invitation of Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Smt. Meera Kumar. Mr. Falih Al-Fayyadh, National Security Advisor of Iraq visited India from 17-21 December 2013. During his visit, he held meetings with Union Home Minister, External Affairs Minister and National Security Adviser and discussed the matters concerning bilateral security co-operation between India and Iraq and measures needed to strengthen it. During the visit an MOU on Cooperation between the Institute for Defence Studies (New Delhi) and Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies (Baghdad) was also signed.

Hon'ble External Affairs Minister Shri Salman Khurshid paid a visit to Iraq on June 19-20, 2013. This was the first visit to Iraq by EAM from India since 1990. EAM met with Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Nouri al-Maliki, called on Dy. PM H.E. Mr. Hussain al-Shahristani, Chairman of the Council of Representative Mr. Usama al-Nujayfi, and held delegation level talks with Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Hoshyar Zebari. During the meetings, it was agreed to intensify the bilateral contacts at senior political level. It was also agreed to elevate the close relationship into one of strategic partnership and actively invest in each other's economy especially in the major projects such as refineries, petrochemical, fertilizers plants, etc. The Chairman of Council of Representative, Mr. Usama al-Nujayfi, also informed that Iraq-India Friendship Forum had been set-up in the Council of Representatives, representing all sections of the political spectrum, under the Chairmanship of Ms. Ala Talabani, Member of Council of Representatives.

Dr. Veerappa Moily, Hon'ble Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas led a 25 member delegation for the Joint Commission Meeting that was held in July 2013 in Baghdad. Dr. Moily also called on Prime Minister Maliki, Deputy PM Dr. Saleh al Mutlaq and had substantive discussions with Dr. Abdul Kareem Luaibi, Minister for Oil, Iraq.

A 12-member FICCI delegation comprising of Rice & Sugar Exporters' from India visited Iraq from 9-10 March 2014 for negotiations with the Ministry of Trade of Iraq and other organizations. Ministry of Trade placed an order for 120,000 mt Basmati Rice (US\$150 mn apprx) and 25000 mt of sugar (US\$15 mn apprx.) which was the first ever placement of order on the spot by the Ministry of Trade, Iraq with a visiting business delegation through direct negotiations.

Prime Minister of Iraq H.E. Mr. Nouri Al Maliki paid a State visit to India in August 2013. In addition to delegation level talks and discussions with PM, he also called on Hon'ble President, Hon'ble Vice President and also visited Agra and Mumbai. He also attended a joint business event by FICCI, CII & ASSOCHAM. During the visit of Prime Minister, 4 MOUs were also signed – including one on Cooperation in Energy Sector, on cooperation between the MEA and the MFA, on Cooperation between the FSI of the two Ministries and on Cooperation in the field of water resources management. He was accompanied by a large delegation including Minister for Oil, Minister for Agriculture and leading businessmen from Iraq.

The first Foreign Office Consultations were held on 16 November 2015. The Iraqi side was led by Mr. Nazar Al-Khairalla, Deputy Foreign Minister and the Indian side by Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (West).

Minister of State for External Affairs Shri M.J. Akbar visited Iraq on 21-23 August 2016. During the visit, the Minister met the President of Iraq Mr. Fuad Masum, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament Dr. Salim al-Jabouri, Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and the National Security Advisor of Iraq Mr Faleh al-Fayyad. The Minister also paid a visit to the Holy city of Karbala where he had met the Chairman of the Provincial Council of Karbala Mr. Nassif Jaseim Mohammed al-Khattabi, religious leaders, and members of the Indian Community.

The Deputy Oil Minister of Iraq is leading delegation for the PETROTECH 2016 scheduled to be held in New Delhi on 5-7 December 2016. The Foreign Minister of Iraq Dr. Ibrahim al-Jaafari has accepted the invitation of External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj to visit India. He is expected to pay a visit to India in the last quarter of the current Financial Year.

**Commercial relations:** The economic and trade relations between India and Iraq slowed down after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Iraq is the second largest supplier of crude to India after Saudi Arabia, and ahead of Iran. Indian Oil Corporation is the single largest purchaser of crude from Iraqi crude procuring around 250,000 BPD. HPCL and BPCL are the other two major Indian crude importers from Iraq. In addition to import of crude in bulk, India also imports small quantities of commodities like raw wool and sulphur from Iraq. India's bilateral trade with Iraq during 2015-16 was USD 11,841 Mn of which Exports accounted for USD 1004 Mn and Imports for 10,837 Mn. During the current year, bilateral trade till August 2016 was USD 5077 Mn of which India's Exports accounted for USD 425 Mn and Imports for 4652 Mn. 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. Mineral fuels forms the bulk of India's imports from Iraq while edible fruits and nuts, raw hide and skins, and wool are also imported in smaller quantities.

India organized the first Najaf-India Trade Show at the International Trade Fair ground in Najaf on 02-03 September 2016 in which 34 Indian companies exhibited their products. The Trade Show was inaugurated by the Deputy Trade Minister of Iraq. The Fair was followed B2B meetings between the businessmen of both countries at Najaf and in Baghdad.

**Cultural Relations:** The second UN International Day of Yoga was celebrated with lot of enthusiasm in Baghdad on 18 June 2016. As part of the celebrations of the 2nd International Day of Yoga, free Yoga classes were conducted for three months from 19th June 2016 by two experts from AYUSH New Delhi. Further, a workshop on Yoga, Ayurveda and Siddha (Indian Traditional Medicines) was organized on 25 June 2016 in the presence of an invited gathering of about 60 people including officials of Iraqi Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and University of Baghdad.

**Indian community:** There are a few families of Indian origin living mainly in the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, Basra and Baghdad. With the lifting of the Government of India advisory against travel of Indians to Iraq which was in vogue from 2004 till 03.05.2010, the number of Indian workers had steadily increased in the more developed and peaceful Kurdistan region comprising Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk governorates, with better salaries and working conditions in steel mills, oil companies and construction projects. The number of Indians in KRG was estimated to be around 15,000. However, in the wake of security issues related to terrorist attacks on Iraq and fall of certain areas of northern Iraq to the ISIS, the Indians working in Iraq had concerns over their security. Embassy repatriated over 6000 people with repatriation expenditure being fully borne by government of India. Embassy also assisted over 1000 Indian workers who were being repatriated by their respective companies, with required travel documents. Presently, the number of Indians in various parts of Iraq is approximately as follows: Kurdistan: 7000-8000; Basra: 2500-3000; Baghdad: 500; Najaf/Karbala/Hilla: 1000-1500

## **Useful Resources**

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