

INDIA-ISRAEL: A FRIENDSHIP FOR NEW TIMES, ALL TIMES

Twenty five years is a short time in international relations and in many ways India-Israel diplomatic relations are still new and evolving. But when one looks at the past couple of years, it would certainly seem that the relationship has matured—from the still unsure stage of adolescence to confident adulthood, shedding any doubts and artificial constraints. Like any other relationship, this one has also had its share of complications and needed time and nurturing to manage them. Together, we have travelled for some time on a difficult and narrow path but we have now hit the highway. The relationship is now moving steadily and at a more brisk pace, under the stewardship of our leaders, and developing a solid foundation for the future.

PM Netanyahu's warm embrace of PM Modi at Ben Gurion airport in July 2017 was a transcendent moment. Two proud nations, so different from each other in many ways, yet bound together in their quest to cooperate for the benefit of their peoples. While some said the relationship was coming out of the closet, others emphasized the confidence of the leadership on both sides that gave new strength to the relationship to stand on its own and walk proudly. The first ever visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Israel was but a fulsome fruition of years of cooperation in defense, security and agriculture, and was reflective of a certain meeting of minds and complementarity of strengths. It resulted in broadening of the relationship to include new and diverse areas of cooperation in water, space, innovation and education, while also building upon traditional areas like agriculture. The launch of a new CEOs Forum, comprising the most significant business persons and companies of both sides, was to instill a further dynamic to the trade and investment relations, while the two Prime Ministers witnessed the marvels of technologies by start ups on both sides that could provide creative solutions to pressing problems in the two countries. The iconic photograph of the two PMs discussing solutions while wading barefoot in the waters of the Mediterranean was reflective of the mood and desire to get things done especially when it came to dealing with problems of water. In another example of the keenness of the two leaders to work together and, perhaps, of our common love for mathematics, PM Netanyahu gave the relationship the form of an equation: **IT X IT = I²T²** or **Indian Talent X Israeli Technology = India Israel Ties (for) Tomorrow.**

In a memorable event, PM Modi addressed the Indian community in Israel—the walking-and-breathing links between our nations. Proudly wearing their Indian and Jewish identities, the 85000-strong community felt connected at once with

their heritage and good times in India, the only country, perhaps, which never knew what anti-Semitism means.

As a fitting culmination to the silver jubilee year of the formal relationship, India will host PM Netanyahu next week. He is not the first Israeli PM to come to India but his visit is coming at an opportune moment when the relationship is in a state of constant upswing. The visit will both deepen and broaden the relationship. While consolidating the engagements in the traditional areas, newer sectors are being identified for potential collaboration. Innovation and cooperation in development will continue to be pursued. Greater connectivity through tourism and exchanges at the cultural level would also be given a boost, as would efforts to increase bilateral trade and services, and investments in diverse areas. These initiatives and the ongoing cooperation should impact the lives of our citizens in a positive manner and will also bring our countries and peoples closer.

Most importantly, the visit will underline what is already written in bold letters-India and Israel are friends, a partnership made for the 21st century between two vibrant democracies and energetic peoples.
