

India-Israel Bilateral Relations

Political Relations

India announced its recognition of Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon thereafter, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay. This was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently a Consulate. Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established.

Since the upgradation of relations in 1992, defence and agriculture formed the two main pillars of our bilateral engagement. In recent years, relations have seen rapid growth across a broad spectrum of areas and the future vision of the cooperation is of a strong hi-tech partnership as befits two knowledge economies.

Political ties between the two countries are friendly. Prime Minister Modi undertook an historic first ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel from 4-6 July 2017, during which the relationship was upgraded to a strategic level and seven Agreements/MoUs were signed in the fields of R&D innovation, water, agriculture and space. Prime Minister of Israel, H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, made a visit to India from 14-19 January 2018 during which four G2G agreements on cyber security, oil & gas cooperation, film co-production and air transport were signed, along with five other semi-government agreements. Before these visits, Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Israel in October, 2015, while the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited India in November 2016. Increased high-level exchanges and ministerial visits on both sides have expanded cooperation in different functional areas such as trade, agriculture, S&T, culture and security.

Economic and Commercial Relations

From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (*comprising primarily trade in diamonds*), bilateral merchandise trade stood at US\$ 5.65 billion (excluding defence) in 2018-19, with the balance of trade being in India's favour by US\$ 1.8 billion. Trade in diamonds constitutes close to 40% of bilateral trade. India is Israel's third largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally. In recent years, the bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security. Major exports from India to Israel include precious stones and metals, chemical products, textiles and

textile articles, etc. Major imports by India from Israel include precious stones and metals, chemicals and mineral products, base metals and machinery and transport equipment. Potash is a major item of Israel's exports to India, with India buying a significant percentage of its requirement from Israel. In recent years, Israel has taken a strategic decision to strengthen economic relations with India, China and Japan. Indian software companies, notably TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra and Wipro, are beginning to expand their presence in the Israeli market. During PM Modi's visit in July 2017, the first meeting of the newly established India-Israel CEOs Forum took place, while its second meeting took place during PM Netanyahu's visit to India.

Investment

Indian investments in Israel (April 2000-June 2017) totaled USD 122.4 million (Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, GoI). Indian companies are marking their presence in Israel through mergers and acquisitions and by opening branch offices. TCS started operations in Israel in 2005; State Bank of India opened a branch in Tel Aviv in 2007; Jain Irrigation fully acquired NaanDan, an Israeli irrigation equipment manufacturing company, in 2012 and Sun Pharma has a 66.7% stake in Israel's Taro Pharmaceutical Industries. Infosys, Tech Mahindra and Wipro Infrastructure Engineering are some other major Indian companies which have made notable acquisitions/investments in Israel during the period 2015-2016. In 2017, India-based Saisanket Enterprises Private Limited acquired Shtula, a leading Israeli manufacturer of metal parts and metal devices. In January 2019, India's Lohia Group acquired Israeli defense company Light & Strong. There are also representatives of Think Future Technologies and Cyient in Israel.

There are over 300 investments from Israel in India mainly in the high-tech domain and in agriculture. These investments are varied in nature - manufacturing plants; R&D centers; subsidiaries etc. There is a growing preference for Israeli companies in sectors such as water technologies, homeland security and real estate in addition to traditional areas such as agriculture, chemicals etc. Teva Pharmaceuticals, IDE, Netafim (invested more than USD 25 million in India, 2017), ADAMA (invested over USD 50 million in India, 2017), etc. are among the leading Israeli companies, which have notable investments in India.

Agriculture

Under a comprehensive Work Plan for cooperation in agriculture signed on 10 May 2006, bilateral projects are implemented through MASHAV (Center for International Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and CINADCO (Centre for International Agricultural Development Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). Agricultural cooperation between the two sides is formalized through 3-year Work plans wherein 3-year Action plans are developed. The two sides signed the fourth phase of the joint action plan (2018-20) in July 2017. Thus far, out of 29 Centres of Excellence expected to be fully active by 2020 in twelve Indian states (Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal), 25 have been commissioned.

India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra. Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. Some Israeli companies and experts are providing expertise to manage and improve dairy farming in India through their expertise in high milk yield.

Defence & Security

India imports critical defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces. The last major visit from the Indian side was that of the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal B.S.Dhanao, who visited Israel from 22-24 May 2018 to attend the multilateral conference of Air Chiefs & Commanders. Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba visited Israel in June 2017 in his capacity as Chairman of COSC. The last round of Defence Secretary level talks in the JWG on Defence were held in New Delhi in July 2018. As part of the regular goodwill visits of Indian ships, three Indian naval ships from the Western Fleet made a port call in Haifa in May 2017. INS Tarangini, a naval training ship, made a port call in Haifa in September 2018.

There is cooperation on security issues, including a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. In February 2014, India and Israel signed three important agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Cooperation in Homeland Security, and Protection of Classified Material. There is a Joint Steering Committee under the agreement on Homeland Security, aided by thematic Joint Working Groups. Since 2015, IPS officer trainees have been visiting the Israel National Police Academy every year for a one-week long

foreign exposure training at the end of their training in the National Police Academy, Hyderabad.

Cooperation in S&T and Space

India-Israel cooperation in S&T is overseen by the Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993. Its last meeting took place in March 2019 in Israel.

During the visit of PM Modi in July 2017, an MoU for establishing India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F) by the Department of Science and Technology, India and the National Authority for Technological Innovation, Israel was signed. This MoU, with a contribution of \$ 20 m from each side over 5 years, is expected to play an important role in enabling Indian and Israeli enterprises to undertake joint R&D projects.

During the visit of PM in July 2017, space agencies-ISRO & Israel Space Agency- signed three agreements on space cooperation.

Culture and Education

India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions, and in popular Israeli perception, India is an attractive, alternative tourist destination. Israeli youth are particularly attracted to India. More than 50000 Israelis visited India in 2018, whereas more than 70000 Indian tourists visited Israel during the year. Air India started direct flights between New Delhi and Tel Aviv in March 2018, with 5 flights per week currently. Israeli carrier, El Al, operates direct flights between Mumbai and Tel Aviv.

Several courses related to India are taught at Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University and Haifa University. Several private and public Indian universities have entered into academic agreement with their Israeli counterparts. In May 2013, India and Israel launched a new funding programme of joint academic research with the University Grants Commission and the Israel Science Foundation as nodal organizations.

There are approximately 550 Indian students in Israel, mostly at doctoral and post-doctoral level. Since 2012, Israel has been offering post-doctoral scholarship to students from India and China in all fields. The Government of Israel also offers short term summer scholarships for Indian students. India

offers ICCR scholarships to Israelis every year for various courses in Indian institutions.

Indian Community

There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel (with at least one Indian parent), who are all Israeli passport holders. The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the fifties and sixties. The majority is from Maharashtra (*Bene Israelis*) and relatively smaller numbers from Kerala (*Cochini Jews*) and Kolkata (*Baghdadi Jews*). In recent years some Indian Jews from North Eastern states of India (*Bnei Menashe*) have been immigrating to Israel. While the older generation still maintains an Indian lifestyle and their cultural links with India, the younger generation is increasingly assimilated into Israeli society.

Shri Eliyahu Bezalel hailing from Chennamangalam, Cochin has distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist and became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive *Bhartiya Pravasi Samman* in 2005. Sheikh Ansari, who manages the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem, a unique Indian connection to the Holy City, was honoured with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* in 2011. In 2017, Dr. Lael Best, an Israeli cardiothoracic surgeon of Indian origin, was also conferred the award.

In 2013, the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv facilitated the first-ever National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel that was held on September 23, 2013 in Ramla. The event brought together nearly 5,000 people from all the four major groups of Indian Jews. Four more annual Conventions have since been held in subsequent years in cities of Yeruham (2014), Ramla (2015), Kiryat Gat (2016) and Ashkelon (2017). The *Know India Programme* has been effective in binding the Indian origin youth to India.

There are about 14,000 Indian citizens in Israel, of whom around 13,200 are care-givers employed by Israeli elders to take care of them. Others include diamond traders, some IT professionals and students.

PM Modi addressed a gathering of around 8000 PIOs and Indian nationals working in Israel at the Tel Aviv Exhibition grounds during his visit in July 2017.

Useful Resources

Website : <https://www.indembassyisrael.gov.in/>
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