

India – Palestine Relations

India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was given voice during our freedom struggle by Mahatma Gandhi. Since then, empathy with the Palestinian cause and friendship with the people of Palestine have become an integral part of India's foreign policy. India was the first Non-Arab State to recognize PLO as sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974. India was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza, which later was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

India has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora. India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly and voted in favour of it. India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard. India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. At the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 2012 the status of Palestine was upgraded to a 'non-member state'. India co-sponsored this resolution and voted in favour of it. India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015. India supported installation of Palestinian flag at UN premises along with other observer states, like the flags of member states, in September 2015.

Bilateral Visits

There have been regular bilateral visits between India and Palestine. Late President Yasser Arafat visited India several times. President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in the years 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Special Envoy of President Mahmoud Abbas, Dr. Nabil Sa'ath visited India in November 2014. From the Indian side too, there have been several visits to Palestine, prominent among them being of ShriPranab Mukherjee, President of India on 12-13 October 2015, SmtSushmaSwaraj, External Affairs Minister in January 2016, Shri S.M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister in January 2012, Shri L.K. Advani, Union Home Minister and ShriJaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister in 2000, and Shri E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs in 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2013. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Mahmoud Abbas in September 2015 on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York and also in Paris on the sidelines of climate change summit in December 2015. In April 2015, Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and Foreign Minister RiadMalki met the EAM SmtSushmaSwaraj in Indonesia on the sidelines of Asia Africa Commemoration Conference. Mahmoud Habas, Religious Affairs Minister, visited India in May 2015 and during the visit, on behalf of President Abbas, conferred 'Star of Jerusalem' award on Mr Syed Vicarudin, Head of Indo-Arab League, for his work on promoting India Palestine relations. Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs visited Palestine on July 8-9, 2015 and met President Abbas, PM Rami Hamdallah, and senior officials from the Palestinian Foreign Ministry.

Foreign Office Consultations

The first ever Foreign Office Consultations were held in Ramallah on May 2-4, 2015. The Indian side was led by JS WANA whereas Assistant Minister for Asia, Africa and Australia led the Palestinian side.

Projects implemented

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international and bilateral levels, India has been contributing material and technical assistance to the Palestinian people. With the Government of India's aid, two projects were completed in the field of higher education i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip. India provided plot and constructed a chancery building for the Embassy of Palestine in New Delhi. Two schools were built in Palestine in 2015 through aid provided by India. Government of India has set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Al Quds University in 2015. Work on one another Government of India project for Equipping Vocational Training Centers in Palestine, would be completed in the year 2016. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, India announced five more projects (worth \$17.79 million) for Palestine. The projects include a Techno Park in Ramallah (\$12 million), Palestine Institute of Diplomacy (\$4.5 million), and India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT in Gaza (\$1 million).

India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund has also funded five projects in Palestine, out of which two are completed (Indoor Multipurpose Sports Complex, Ramallah and Phase I of Al Quds hospital, Gaza), two are nearing completion (Phase II of Al Quds hospital, Gaza and Rehabilitation Centre, Nablus) and the work has started on the fifth one (Atta Habib Medical Center, Gaza).

Memorandums of Understanding

In 1997, an MoU between India and Palestine was signed, which provides for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialized areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects. During the visit of President Abbas to India in 2012 three MoUs were signed in the field of setting up a Centre of Excellence in IT, Building of two schools in Palestine and providing equipment and training to Vocational Training Centers in Palestine. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, six MOUs were signed; one between the Palestinian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations and the remaining five MOUs were signed between Indian and Palestinian Universities.

Assistance to Palestine

Monetary Assistance

India provided a budgetary assistance to a tune of US\$ 30 million to Palestine in different stages. During the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support and this was transferred to Palestine in March 2009. During the visit of President Abbas to India in February 2010, India announced a budgetary support of US\$ 10 million and this was transferred in the month of March 2010. Again in 2012, during the visit of President Abbas India announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as

budgetary support to Palestine. During the year 2015, India provided a total of \$9 million as financial assistance to Palestine; \$4 million was provided as project assistance towards the reconstruction of Gaza (on 12 January 2015), and \$5million was provided as budgetary assistance (on 12 October 2015).

Project Assistance

India has announced project assistance to a tune of US\$ 30 million. In 2005, during the visit of President Abbas to India, India announced project assistance for US\$ 15 million. In the Paris Donors Conference in December 2007, India announced a fresh commitment of US\$ 5 million and during the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, India also announced project assistance to Palestine for US\$ 10 million.

Scholarships and ITEC training for Palestinian Nationals:

ICCR

India offers 25 scholarships for Palestinian Nationals under the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSC) of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for higher studies in India.

ITEC

100 slots are offered to the under the ITEC program to the Palestinian nationals for training courses in India. Around 800 Palestinians have availed training under the ITEC programme.

Indian Visas for Palestinian Nationals

On September 25, 2013 the Representative Office of India, Ramallah started issuance of Visa from its Office. Palestinian nationals can also obtain Indian visa through Tourist Visa on Arrival Facility launched in 2014.

Trade

Since, trade between India and Palestine is channelized through Israel, complete trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine bilateral trade stands at around US\$ 30 million. In terms of sectors, automotive spare parts, medical tourism, agro-products, textiles, fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather and leather products, agro-chemicals, plastic products, sanitary wares, marble and granites, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods have vast scope in Palestine. Apart from trade in goods, there is vast scope for trade in services. India's prowess in IT and IT enabled services; consultancy etc. is widely acknowledged in Palestine. In 2014, Indian engineering consulting firm, HOLTEC Consulting has won a tender to prepare a feasibility study for the first cement plant to be established in Palestine by the Palestinian Commercial Services Company. TCIL and Satyam Computers had undertaken two major telecom software projects in Nablus for Palestinian Telecommunications Company (PALTEL). M/s Goldstone Infotech Limited of Hyderabad had tied up with World Trade Centre of Gaza to establish the first Indo-Palestinian Joint Venture in the Karni Industrial Zone in the Gaza Strip in the field of Software Training and Consultancy.

Culture

Existence of cultural similarities and having a small Indian community in Palestine has made Indian arts and culture very popular in Palestine. Several cultural activities, including film shows and photo exhibitions have been organized by the Representative Office of India in various Palestinian cities in addition to screening of documentaries prepared by Public Diplomacy division in local TV channels, local schools and youth clubs. A performance by the Indian martial arts dance troupe Kalaripayattu was organized in October 2004 in Ramallah. In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of Nations and a Kathak performance was organized at Ramallah. On March 8, 2015 a concert of Santoor by DrVarshaAgarwal was organised in Ramallah as part of Jasmine World Music Festival. On June 21, 2016 International Day of Yoga was celebrated in Bethlehem. From July 1-9, 2015 an Indian Bazaar was organised in Ramallah. ROI has organized a Kathak performance by Prachee Shah, an exhibition of paintings of Islamic Monuments in India, and a food festival in the year 2015.

Useful Resources:

Representative Office of India, Ramallah, Palestine Website:

<http://roiramallah.org/>

Representative Office of India, Ramallah, Palestine Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInPalestine?ref=hl>

Representative Office of India, Ramallah, Palestine Youtube link:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/roiramallah>

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