

## India–Tunisia Relations

India has traditionally maintained cordial and friendly relations with Tunisia since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1958. The first resident Indian Mission at the level of Cd'A was established in Tunisia in 1963 and raised to the Ambassador level in 1976. The Tunisian Embassy in New Delhi was set up in 1981. Tunisian leaders have expressed admiration for India's democracy and its leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru; the state that India's freedom struggle has served as an inspiration for Tunisia.

Under the two regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the two countries also shared a respect for secularism, and moderation was a hallmark of Tunisian foreign policy. Bilateral relations continued on an even keel. In the early 2000s, progress was made in bilateral cooperation in phosphates with the establishment in 2006 of the joint venture in this sector. In international fora including UN for a, cooperation between Indian and Tunisia was very good – the countries supported each other's candidatures to these bodies and had similar positions.

Several high-level visits took place in this period. Notable among them were that of Vice-President Zakir Hussain in July 1964, Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in April 1984, Vice-President M. Hidayatullah in May 1984 and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992. Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral paid a visit to Tunisia in 1999. From Tunisian side, First Lady of Tunisia, Wassila Bourguiba visited India in November 1982, followed by that of Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali in 1983, FM Habib Boulares in 1991 and FM Habib Ben Yahya in December 2000.

In post-Revolution Tunisia, Shri E. Ahmed, MOS (EA) paid the first Ministerial visit to Tunisia from November 5-7, 2012 and called on H.E. Moncef M. Marzouki, President of the Republic, H.E. Hamadi Jebali, Prime Minister, H.E. Mustapha Ben Jafaar, NCA Speaker, H.E. Rafik Abdessalem, Foreign Minister, Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Americas and Asia) and Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahdah Movement.

Shri Srikant K. Jena, MoC (I/C) for Chemicals & Fertilizers paid a 3-day visit to Tunisia from July 11-13, 2013 to mark the commencement of TIFERT plant, the India-Tunisia joint venture for manufacturing phosphoric acid. In addition to his working session with Minister of Industry Mehdi Jomaa, MoS called on President Moncef Marzouki and held discussions on issues of bilateral interest with Abdellatif Makki, Minister of Health, Nouredine Bhiri, Minister in-charge of Political Affairs, Ridha Saidi, Minister in-charge of Economic Affairs and Riadh Betaieb, Minister for Vigilance against corruption.

External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid paid a 2-day official visit to the Republic of Tunisia on 2-3 February 2014 in a first ever bilateral visit at EAM level from India since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1958. Minister Khurshid called on the President H.E. Dr. Moncef Marzouki, Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Mehdi Jomaa and met with Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Mongi Hamdi. He also met with Sheikh Rashid Ghannouchi, President, Ennahda party and Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, President, Nida Tounes party. Minister Khurshid conveyed the felicitations of the government and the people of India to the Tunisian leadership on the historic achievement of the adoption of the Constitution by the democratically-elected National Constituent Assembly. He also conveyed India's wholehearted support for the people of

Tunisia in their struggle for democracy and India's admiration for the significant progress made by the government and leadership of Tunisia in the transition towards a durable democracy. He informed the Tunisian leadership of India's readiness to share its expertise in building durable institutions of democracy, particularly in connection with voting methods and the work of the Election Commission. In his discussions with his Tunisian counterpart, he reviewed bilateral relations where the Tunisian side suggested establishing a JBC for exploring possibilities of setting up joint projects in the pharmaceuticals and IT fields. They also had an exchange of views on regional and international issues.

An India-Tunisia Joint Commission has been established under the co-chairmanship of the respective Ministers of State; its 11<sup>th</sup> Session was held in New Delhi in April 2012. In addition, there are Joint Working Groups in (i) Information and Communications Technology, (ii) Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), (iii) Drugs and Pharmaceuticals, (iv) Hydrocarbon sector, and (v) Textiles, which have been meeting regularly.

Pursuant to Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology signed between the two countries in 2006 which envisages encouragement of scientific conduct through exchange visits, participation in scientific activities such as workshops, seminars and participation in technological exhibitions, etc., the 3<sup>rd</sup> India-Tunisia Joint Committee on S&T also met in Tunis in May 2013.

Under India Africa Forum Summit, a twinning programme between Pasteur Institute of Tunisia and ICGEB has been agreed upon for cooperation in specific training programmes in the areas of biochemical sciences; and building infrastructure/facilities in research. A joint workshop was held in Tunis on May 23-24, 2013.

A 4-member IIFT experts' team visited Tunis, 22-28 September 2013, and conducted a week-long Executive Development Programme on International Business (EDPIB) for Tunisian officials in close cooperation with the Diplomatic Training Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia. Young career diplomats of the Foreign Ministry and officials of the Commerce and Investment & International Cooperation Ministries from various parts of the country participated in the business specific short-term training courses, specially designed for Tunisian participants, on the themes of finance, trade, investment, services & general issues. The IIFT training programme in Tunisia succeeded in attracting a good number of participants and was widely covered by both Arabic & French language print media.

As a follow up to the recommendations made by the 11<sup>th</sup> session of India-Tunisia Joint Commission held in New Delhi in April 2012, the 5<sup>th</sup> session of Joint Working Group on Drugs and Pharmaceuticals was held in New Delhi on November 5, 2013. Issues of bilateral interest such as commercial exchange in the field of medicines, vaccines and medical equipments; means to realize joint investments in pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, vaccines and serums; scientific research cooperation in development of new medicines; fast-track registration of medicines etc. were discussed. The 7-member Tunisian team also visited several units of Indian Pharma industry situated around Delhi.

Third meeting of Joint Working Group on SME's was held at New Delhi on 02<sup>nd</sup> April, 2014 in which the two sides discussed possible activities of bilateral cooperation and agreed to facilitate collaboration among SME's of both countries in select verticals like technical textiles, agro and food processing, light engineering, auto components,

information technology and pharmaceuticals; to exchange information relating to best practices in promoting SME's access to finance; to collaborate in the field of entrepreneurship and skill development by undertaking activities relating to capacity building, development of curricula, training of trainers etc.; and to promote innovation by twinning of select institutions of excellence in India and Tunisia, engaged in development of new services and processes for SME's.

### **Bilateral Agreements/MOUs**

Several Agreements and MOUs have been signed between India and Tunisia. These include an Indo-Tunisian Trade Agreement (1960), Agreement on Friendship and Technical, Economic and Scientific Cooperation (1965), Cultural Agreement (1969), Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation (1994), Agreement on Scientific and Technology Cooperation (1995), Extradition Treaty (2000), Protocol of Cooperation between Diplomatic Institutes of the two countries (2002), Agreement in the field of Small and Medium Enterprises (2007), Air Services Agreement (2007) and Cooperation Agreement between Tunisia Radio and All India Radio (2012). The MOUs include those on utilization of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes (1997), on Agriculture (2000), on Tourism (2000) and on Cooperation in Communication & Information Technology (2004).

### **Bilateral Trade**

Tunisia has been a reliable source for phosphates (a primary input for our fertilizer industry) since 1950s. Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Phosphoric Acid are the two major products being imported from Tunisia. India accounts for over 50% of Tunisia's global phosphoric acid exports.

India, on the other hand, exports a wide range of products. Significant among them are mobile telephones, earth moving equipment, machinery, articles of iron and steel, marine products, sugar, tea, pulses, raw tobacco, finished leather, fine chemicals, polyethylene and yarn, etc.

Bilateral trade which touched US\$ 562.65 million in 2012 was in India's favour with exports to Tunisia at US\$ 381 million and imports at US\$ 181.7 million. However, the political instability and continued sit-ins and strikes in mining sector, have negatively affected trade with Tunisia in 2013.

### **Trade Data**

*(In Million US\$)*

<b>Year</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Imports	162.46	216.79	222.25	280.16	351.62	380.94	313.11
Exports	141.02	574.62	236.17	304.07	143.96	181.70	85.77

(Source: National Institute of statistics)

### **Joint Venture**

There is one Indian joint venture in Tunisia – “Tunisia-India Fertilizer SA” (TIFERT) launched in 2006 for manufacturing Phosphoric Acid. This US\$450 million project has 30% shares distributed equally between Coromandel Fertilizers Ltd and the Gujarat State Fertilizers Ltd, while the remaining 70% are held equally by two Tunisian state enterprises. The installed capacity of the plant is 360,000 tons of phosphoric acid

and the entire production is to be shared equally by the two Indian partners. The plant has become operational in May 2013 and shiploads of phosphoric acid have started reaching India since July 2013.

## **Projects**

Indian companies M/s KEC International Ltd and Jyoti Structures Ltd have a presence in Tunisia. M/s Jyoti Structures is presently engaged in supply and erection of electric transmission lines worth US\$ 73 million. M/s. KEC International Ltd. of the RPG Group of industries has completed execution of a similar project worth US\$115 million and is now executing another contract amounting to US\$ 93 million.

A new assembly plant of Mahindra pickup trucks, the first ever in Africa, was established in Tunisia. The plant is located in Sousse on the east coast of Tunisia and targets to produce up to 2500 trucks per year. Indian auto company, Mahindra and Mahindra, provides the vehicles as knocked-down kits, to be assembled in the factory at Sousse by the Tunisian company, M/s. MEDICARS, with full technical support from the Indian company. The Tunisian partner company will also import other Mahindra products, including tractors, SUVs and 4X4s into Tunisia. The assembly plant was jointly inaugurated by H.E. Mr. Ridha Saidi, Minister for Economic Affairs in the Prime Minister's office and Ambassador of India Mrs. Nagma M. Mallick on October 30, 2013 in the presence of the Governor of Sousse H.E. Mr. Moukhles Jamal.

## **ITEC/ Other Scholarships**

In recent years, Tunisia has been evincing greater interest in the ITEC Programmes of GOI and the number of trainees has gone up to 35 during 2011-12, 32 in 2012-13 and 37 in 2013-14. Under India-Africa S&T Cooperation initiative, 9 Tunisian researchers and scientists participated in CV Raman Fellowship Programme during 2013-14. A good number of Tunisians attended various training programmes in India under India – Africa Forum Summit (IAFS).

## **Culture**

Under cultural exchange programme, exchange of cultural troupes of two countries takes place on regular basis. A 12-member Indian dance and music troupe, sponsored by ICCR, performed in Tunis on January 25, 2013.

A 9-member Tunisian Sufi music troupe "De Chant Soufi Mechket Group" visited India to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Sufi Festival in Kolkata from February 1-3, 2013. The troupe also performed at Delhi and Surajkund International Crafts Mela from February 5-15.

A 17-member Indian Junior men Volleyball team participated in the 12<sup>th</sup> International Tournament of Kelibia, organized by the Tunisian Federation of Volleyball from July 23-26, 2013.

A 22-member Indian Classical dance troupe led by Pt. Rajendra Gangani visited Tunisia from July 25 to August 1, 2013 to perform in the most prestigious Carthage festival of Tunisia. They also performed at Kasserine, Zahra and Kelibia.

## **Indian Community**

The resident Indian community in Tunisia is miniscule and estimated at about 100 presently, most of whom work for Indian/foreign companies operating in Tunisia. There are also some Indian nationals on the staff of the African Development Bank currently located in Tunis.

## **Useful Resources**

For more information and latest updates please visit  
Embassy of India, Tunis website:  
<http://www.embassyofindiatunis.com/>

\*\*\*\*\*

**July 2014**