

## **India-Palestine Relations**

India's support for the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the nation's foreign policy. In 1974, India became the first Non-Arab State to recognize Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office in Gaza, which was later shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

India has played an active role in extending support for the Palestinian cause across various multilateral fora. India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and voted in favour of it. India also voted in favour of UNGA Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel. In 2011, India voted in favour of Palestine becoming a full member of the UNESCO. India co-sponsored and voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution on November 29, 2012 that enabled Palestine to become a 'non-member Observer state' at the UN without voting rights. India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at the Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015 as well as supported the installation of the Palestinian flag at UN's premises in September 2015.

### **Bilateral Visits**

There have been regular high level bilateral visits between India and Palestine. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a historic first-ever visit to Palestine on February 10, 2018. Former President Shri Pranab Mukherjee paid a historic first-ever visit to Palestine in October 2015. There were also other high level visits from India to Palestine in recent years, namely visits of Smt. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister in January 2016 and Shri M.J. Akbar Minister of State for External Affairs in November 2016. Prime Minister had met President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine in September 2015 on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York and later in December 2015 in Paris on the sidelines of the climate change summit. President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 and recently in May 2017 on his third State Visit. During his Visit in 2017, President Abbas had discussions with Rashtrapati and Prime Minister while Vice President and EAM called on him. In April

2015, Prime Minister of Palestine Dr. Rami Hamdallah and Foreign Minister Dr. Riad Malki met External Affairs Minister in Indonesia on the sidelines of the Asia Africa Commemoration Conference. Former President of Palestine Yasser Arafat visited India several times.

### **Joint Commission Meeting**

The first ever Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between India and Palestine was held in Ramallah in November 2016. The JCM was co-chaired by Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs and Dr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine.

### **Foreign Office Consultations**

The first ever Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between India and Palestine was held in Ramallah in May, 2015. The second round of FOC was held in New Delhi in April 2017. For the FOCs, Joint Secretary (WANA Division), MEA leads the Indian side while Assistant Minister for Asia, Africa and Australia Affairs in the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Expatriates leads the Palestinian side.

### **Projects in Palestine**

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at bilateral and international levels, India has extended various forms of economic assistance to the Palestinian people. Government of India supported the construction of 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 in Deir al-Balah, Gaza.

India also financed the construction of two schools in Palestine in 2015, namely, Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Boys in Abu Dees and Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Girls in Ashira Al-Shamaliya. Government of India also set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT (IPCEICT) at Al-Quds University, Abu Dees and a Digital Learning and Innovation Centre (DLIC) at Al Quds University's branch in Ramallah. India also supplied Technical & Vocational Education Training Equipment (TVET) to two Vocational Training Centres in Palestine – Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Yatta and Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) in Hebron.

India is also financing the setting up of Palestine India Technopark in Ramallah, Institute of Diplomacy in Ramallah and an ICCR Chair in Al Quds University, Abu Dees. Over the years, India has also provided US \$ 30 million as budgetary support for Palestine. During the recent visit of Prime Minister to Ramallah, India announced six new projects for Palestine, namely, (a) Construction of India-Palestine Super-Specialty Hospital at Beit Sahour in Bethlehem Governorate, (b) Construction of a School in Muthalath al Shuhada village in Jenin Governorate, (c) Construction of a School in Tamoon village in Tubas Governorate, (d) Construction of an additional Floor at Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Boys in Abu Dees, (e) Construction of an India Palestine Centre for Empowering Women "TURATHI" - a National Centre for Development and Marketing of Palestinian Heritage Projects and (f) Procurement of Equipment and Accessories for New National Printing Press in Ramallah.

### **IBSA Cooperation**

India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund has also financed five projects in Palestine, namely Indoor Multipurpose Sports Complex in Ramallah, Phase I and Phase II of Setting Up of Cardio-Thoracic Unit of Palestinian Red Crescent Society's Al Quds hospital in Gaza, Atta Habib Medical Center in Gaza and Rehabilitation Centre for People with Mental Disabilities in Nablus.

### **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)**

At the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference of the UNRWA held in Rome in March 2018, India announced the enhancement of annual contribution to the UNRWA from US\$ 1.25 million to US\$ 5 million from 2018-19.

### **MOUs between India and Palestine**

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 of 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 for Cultural Relations and the remaining five MOUs were signed between Indian and Palestinian Universities. **During the State Visit of President Abbas to India in May 2017**, six MOUs were signed, namely (a) Agriculture, (b) Health, (c) Youth Affairs & Sports, (d) Information Technology, (e) Agreement for exemption of visas for Diplomatic & Official Passport Holders and (f) MOU between PTI and WAFA (Palestinian News Agency). **During the visit of Prime Minister in February 2018**, six MOUs were signed, namely (a) MoU for Construction of India-Palestine Super-Specialty Hospital at Beit Sahour in Bethlehem Governorate, (b) MoU for Construction of School in Muthalath al Shuhada village in Jenin Governorate, (c) MoU for Construction of School in Tamoon village in Tubas Governorate, (d) MoU for Construction of an additional floor at Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Boys in Abu Dees, (e) MoU for Construction of India Palestine Centre for Empowering Women "TURATHI" - a National Centre for Development and Marketing of Palestinian Heritage Projects and (f) MoU for Procurement of Equipment and Accessories for New National Printing Press in Ramallah.

### **Scholarships and ITEC training for Palestinian Nationals**

**ICCR:** India offers 50 ICCR scholarships for Palestinian students annually for higher studies in Graduate, Post-Graduate and Ph.D courses in India. During the visit of Prime Minister in February 2018, it was announced that ICCR Scholarships for Palestine would be enhanced from 50 to 100 from the next academic year.

**ITEC:** 150 slots are offered to Palestine annually under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) for training courses in India aimed at capacity building and skill enhancement. More than 1000 Palestinian nationals have availed ITEC training in India.

### **Indian Visas for Palestinian Nationals**

From 2013 onward, the Representative Office of India in Ramallah started issuing Visas.

Palestinian nationals can also avail e-Visas (for tourism, business and medical purposes) to visit India as part of Visa on Arrival facility launched in 2014.

## **Bilateral Trade**

Trade between India and Palestine is conducted through Israel and therefore, comprehensive trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine annual bilateral trade is worth about US\$ 40 million (Indian exports : US \$ 39 million and Indian Imports : US \$ 83,000, according to figures given by Palestinian Ministry of National Economy). Indian exports include marble, granite and other stones, Basmati Rice, raw material for making vaccines, coffee, cashew nuts, sugar, sweet biscuits, sacks and bags for the packing of goods, etc. Palestinian exports are mainly virgin olive oil and its fractions, dates, etc. In terms of sectors - automotive spare parts, medical tourism, agro-products, textiles, fabrics, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather and leather products, agro-chemicals, plastic products, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods could be the target sectors for Indian manufacturers and exporters.

In 2014, Indian engineering consulting firm, HOLTEC Consulting won a tender to prepare a feasibility study for the first cement plant to be established in Palestine by the Palestinian Commercial Services Company. In the past, TCIL and Satyam Computers have undertaken two major telecom software projects in Nablus for Palestinian Telecommunications Company (PALTEL) while 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 & People to People relations**

Indian arts and culture, especially Indian movies are 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, MEA in local TV channels, schools and youth clubs. A performance by the Indian martial arts troupe Kalaripayattu was organized in October 2004 in Ramallah. In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of

Nations in Ramallah. In 2014, Kathak performance by Marami Medhi was organized in Ramallah. In 2015, a Santoor concert by Dr Varsha Agarwal was organised in Ramallah as part of Jasmine World Music Festival. In 2015, an exhibition of paintings of Islamic Monuments in India, and a food festival was organized in Ramallah. The first Indian restaurant in Ramallah was opened in January 2018.

In 2015, the first International Day of Yoga (IDY) was celebrated in Ramallah and in 2016 the second IDY was celebrated in Bethlehem. In 2017, the third IDY was celebrated in Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Expatriates in Ramallah and at Arab Orthodox Sports Club in Beit Jala. In 2018, the fourth IDY was celebrated in the Cremisan Valley in Bethlehem, in partnership with Beit Ashams Yoga Institute.

India-Palestine Youth Exchange Programme was started in 2017. A 50-member Palestinian youth delegation visited India in May 2017 followed by a 29-member Indian youth delegation visiting Palestine from September 14 – 21, 2017. During the visit of Prime Minister in February 2018, it was announced that from 2018, 100-member youth delegations would visit New Delhi and Ramallah.

**Useful Web resources:**

Website of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at <http://roiramallah.gov.in/>

Facebook Page of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInPalestine?ref=hl>

Youtube Channel of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at <http://www.youtube.com/user/roiramallah>

Twitter handle of Representative Office of India in Ramallah at

India in Palestine @ROIRAMALLAH

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