

Brief on India-Israel Bilateral Relations

Overview of political relations

1. India and Israel are strategic partners. The bilateral political ties are warm and forward-looking. India announced its recognition of Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon after, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay (Mumbai), which was later converted into a Trade Office and, subsequently, a Consulate. Regular embassies opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. In 2022-23, the two countries jointly celebrated 30 years of the elevation of bilateral ties to full diplomatic relations.

2. The civilizational relations between the countries date back more than two millennia. India has welcomed Jews for several centuries, and their contribution, in turn, has enriched Indian culture. India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions and as an attractive tourist destination.

High-level visits and interactions in 2023

3. On January 11, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu to congratulate him on his election as Israel's PM for the sixth time. Prime Minister Modi and PM Netanyahu also spoke on February 8, 2023, to discuss bilateral issues. On August 24, 2023, PM Netanyahu called the Prime Minister to congratulate him on the successful landing of the *Chandrayaan 3* on the moon. On October 10, 2023, PM Netanyahu called the Prime Minister to provide an update on the situation in Israel after the October 7 attacks. Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Modi also spoke on December 19, 2023, about the situation in the region and safety of maritime traffic. On June 6, 2024, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Prime Minister Narendra Modi to congratulate him on his election as India's PM for the third consecutive term.

4. On December 1, on the sidelines of COP 28 in Dubai, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the President of the State of Israel, Isaac Herzog, during which the two leaders exchanged views on the conflict in the region and discussed global and bilateral issues.

5. A parliamentary delegation from Israel, led by the Speaker of Knesset, Amir Ohana, visited India on March 31-April 4, 2023, during which he also signed a *Memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Parliamentary Cooperation* with the Lok Sabha Speaker. This was Speaker Ohana's first foreign visit as the Knesset Speaker. It was also the first-ever visit by an Israeli Parliament Speaker to India. The Israeli Minister of Economy and Industry, Nir Barkat, visited India on April 16-April 20, 2023, along with a fifteen-member business delegation. On December 11, India's Minister of Education and Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship spoke to the Israeli Minister of Economy and Industry.

6. The then-Foreign Minister of Israel (FM) Eli Cohen made an official visit to India on May 9, 2023. He was accompanied by a high-level business delegation, apart from senior officials of the Israeli Government. This was his first visit to India as Foreign Minister. FM Cohen called on the Prime Minister and met the External Affairs Minister (EAM), Dr. S. Jaishankar. FM Cohen also co-chaired the India-Israel Business Forum with our Minister of Jal Shakti. Earlier, EAM and FM Cohen held a telephone conversation on January 5, in which EAM congratulated FM Cohen on the assumption of office. EAM and FM Cohen also spoke on November 4 and December 12 regarding the situation in Israel after the October 7 attacks.

7. The EAM spoke to the new Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz on January 29, 2024, congratulating him on his appointment as the new foreign minister of Israel. Further, on April 14, 2024, the EAM called Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz to discuss the prevailing situation in the region. On June 13, 2024, Foreign Minister Israel Katz called the EAM to congratulate him on assuming the role of India's External Affairs Minister for the second consecutive term.

8. On February 12-13, 2024, Israeli Minister of Transportation Miri Regev visited India (Mumbai and Mundra Port).

9. On March 11-12, 2024, the National Security Advisor, Shri Ajit Doval visited Israel and called on the Prime Minister of Israel and met his counterpart Mr Tzachi Hanegbi.

Earlier high-level visits and interactions

7. On November 2, 2021, our Prime Minister and Israel's then-Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met on the sidelines of the U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow, UK. The then Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Israel, Benjamin Gantz, visited India on June 1-3, 2022. Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare visited Israel on May 9-11, 2022.

8. EAM paid an official visit to Israel at the invitation of the then-Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, Yair Lapid, from October 17-21, 2021. This was his first visit to Israel as an EAM. During the visit, Israel signed the instrument of ratification of the International Solar Alliance.

9. The Prime Minister undertook a historic first-ever visit to Israel by an Indian Prime Minister on July 4-6, 2017, during which the relationship was upgraded to a strategic partnership. In January 2018, PM Netanyahu made a return visit to India from January 14-19. Joint statements were issued during both visits. President of India Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Israel in October 2015, while the then President of Israel Reuven Rivlin paid a state visit to India in November 2016.

10. Indian External Affairs Ministers Jaswant Singh, S.M. Krishna, and Sushma Swaraj also visited Israel in the years 2000, 2012, and 2016, respectively. From the Israeli side, the then-President Ezer Weizman visited India in December 1996, while Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited India in September 2003, during which the *Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation* was signed. Shimon Peres visited India as Foreign Minister in 1993 and Minister for Regional Cooperation in 2000.

11. India and Israel have established bilateral consultation mechanisms in all sectors of collaboration, including water, agriculture, counter-terrorism, and defence. The second Policy Planning Dialogue was held in Israel on May 29, 2023. The 15th India-Israel Forum, a Track 2 dialogue, was held in New Delhi in December 2022. The second round of consultations on U.N. and multilateral issues was held on May 23, 2022, in Israel. The 16th Foreign Office Consultations were held in December 2020.

I2U2

12. On July 14, 2022, the Prime Minister participated (virtually) in the first leaders' summit of I2U2 along with the then-Prime Minister of Israel, Mr Yair Lapid, President of the UAE H.E. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and President of the US H.E. Joseph R. Biden.

Economic and commercial relations

13. Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1992, India-Israel bilateral trade and economic ties have progressed rapidly. From around USD 200 million in 1992 (comprising primarily of diamonds), merchandise trade diversified and reached around USD 10.77 billion (excluding defence) in FY 2022-23, with Indian exports at around USD 8.45 billion. In FY 2023-24 (April-March), the bilateral trade was USD 6.53 billion (excluding defense) with India's exports at USD 4.52 billion and Israel's exports at USD 2.0 billion.

14. India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia. Though, the bilateral merchandise trade is dominated mainly by diamonds, petroleum products, and chemicals, recent years have witnessed an increase in trade in areas such as electronic machinery and high-tech products, communications systems, medical equipment, etc.

15. *Major exports from India* to Israel include pearls and precious stones, automotive diesel, chemical and mineral products, machinery and electrical equipment, plastics, textiles, apparel, base metals and transport equipment, and agricultural products. *Major exports from Israel* to India include pearls and precious stones, chemical and mineral/fertilizer products, machinery and electrical equipment, petroleum oils, defence, machinery, and transport equipment.

16. Cumulative Overseas Direct Investment (ODI) from India to Israel from April 2000 to April 2024, was around USD 396 million. Indian companies are marking their presence in Israel through mergers and acquisitions and the opening of branch offices. Indian companies are also making a mark in the Israeli innovation ecosystem. In the period from April 2000 to March 2024, the direct FDI from Israel to India was around USD 314.87 million. In 2022, a consortium led by India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) acquired the Haifa Port Company Ltd from the Government of Israel with an investment of USD 1.18 billion.

Agriculture

17. Under a comprehensive work plan for cooperation in agriculture signed on May 10, 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 5th 3-Year Work Plans (2021-2023) was signed on May 24, 2021. 31 Agriculture Centers of Excellence have been established in 13 Indian states.

Water

18. Ongoing cooperation between the two countries in this sector was formalized through an MOU on Water Resources Management and Development Cooperation signed in November 2016. During the visit of the Prime Minister to Israel in July 2017, both sides signed MoUs on (i) the National Campaign for Water Conservation in India and (ii) the Reforms of UP Jal Nigam. During the visit of the then Chief Minister of Punjab to Israel in October 2018, the State Government of Punjab and Mekorot (Israel National Water Company) signed an MoU, wherein Mekorot will formulate a Water Conservation and Management Plan for Punjab. In November 2019, India-Israel water cooperation got a boost with the first-ever visit by Minister of Jal Shakti to Israel. During the visit, Minister of Jal Shakti participated in the India-Israel Strategic Partnership on Water along with his Israeli counterpart Dr. Yuval Steinitz, the then-Minister of Energy, and was also a keynote speaker at the WATEC 2019.

19. In May 2023, both countries signed a Letter of Intent to establish Centres of Excellence in Indian Institute of Technology Madras and Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee respectively. The key objective is the implementation of Israel's water technologies, tailor-made to Indian requirements, on sustainable management solutions for the Indian water sector.

Innovation and science & technology (S&T)

20. The Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993, oversees India-Israel cooperation in S&T. The JCM promotes joint research programs in select areas of mutual importance through a bilateral mechanism by extending financial support for undertaking joint research activities by Indian and Israeli researchers through various modes, viz., i) joint R&D projects; ii) exchange visits of scientists and researchers; and iii) bilateral symposiums and workshops. The tenth JCM on Science and Technology was held on July 25, 2022, under which the India-Israel Joint Research Programme (IIJRC) 2023 was launched, seeking proposals in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) application in climate change and agriculture for food security.

21. During the visit of the Prime Minister of India to Israel in July 2017, an MoU was signed between the Department of Science and Technology, India, and the National Authority for Technological Innovation, Israel, for establishing the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F). This MoU, with a contribution of USD 20 million from each side over five years (2018-2022), enables Indian and Israeli enterprises to undertake joint industrial R&D projects in priority technology sectors such as agriculture, water, energy, healthcare, and ICT. Both sides have renewed the I4F program for a further period of 5 years (2023–27) by making the fund available for joint projects across various fields under four separate tracks (feasibility studies; R&D projects; pilot projects; and strategic projects). Ten rounds of calls for proposals have been held between 2018 and 2023. The eleventh call for proposals under I4F is open for submissions until July 2024. So far, I4F has funded thirty R&D projects, including joint projects on low-cost, high-efficiency solar water pumping solutions, drone detection and neutralisation systems, and an AI-based project for the early detection of tuberculosis.

22. In September 2020, Israel's Startup Nation Central and India's International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Technology (iCREATE) signed a bilateral programme to accelerate innovation and tech cooperation. In May 2023, India and Israel signed an MoU on Industrial Research and Development Cooperation with a focus on key areas under the ambit of Israel's Directorate of Defense Research and Development and India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Defense

23. As part of regular goodwill visits by Indian Navy 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. Apart from the naval exercises, Indian Air Force participated in a multilateral Air Force exercise, *Blue Flag-2021*, held in October 2021 in Israel.

24. On March 3, 2023, India's Minister of Defence spoke with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. It was the first talk between the two Defence ministers. Further, Benjamin Gantz, the then Israeli Defence Minister also visited India in June 2022. India's then Chief of Army Staff, Gen. M.M. Naravane, visited Israel in November 2021. India's Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria, visited Israel in August 2021. The Joint Working Group meeting on Defense was last held in October, 2021 in Israel.

Health

25. On December 21, 2020, India and Israel signed an agreement on cooperation in health and medicine. The agreement envisages the deepening of bilateral strategic partnerships in the health sector, including in R&D in health, between the two countries. India and Israel cooperated in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed to mutually recognize COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

Operation Ajay

26. Sensing the urgency and ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of Indian nationals in Israel after the October 7 terror attacks, a 24-hour control room was set up at the Embassy to monitor the situation and provide information and assistance to Indian nationals. In addition, 24-hour emergency helplines were also set up at the Embassy for the assistance of all Indians in Israel. On October 12, the Government of India launched Operation Ajay to facilitate the return of those Indians who wished to go back from Israel to India. Over 1,300 Indian nationals returned to India in six special flights operated under Operation Ajay between October 12 and October 22.

27. People-to-people relations

(a) There are around 26,000 Indian citizens in Israel, primarily caregivers, employed by Israeli elders to take care of them; diamond traders, workers employed in construction and agriculture sectors, IT professionals, and students. During his visit to Israel in July 2017, the Prime Minister addressed a gathering of around 8,000 PIOs and Indian nationals working in Israel at the Tel Aviv exhibition grounds. EAM interacted with the Indian-origin community in Israel during his visit to Israel in October 2021.

(b) Tourism and people-to-people contacts have been significantly boosted with the commencement of the Air India flights in March 2018 between New Delhi and Tel Aviv, with 5 flights per week.

(c) **Students:** There are approximately 900 Indian students studying in Israel, mainly at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels. Several courses related to India are taught at Israeli universities.

(d) **Indian Community:** There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian origin in Israel who are Israeli passport holders. The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took

place in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority are from Maharashtra (Bene Israelis), and relatively smaller numbers are from Kerala (Cochini Jews) and Kolkata (Baghdadi Jews). In recent years, some Indian Jews from the North Eastern states of India (Bnei Menashe) have also been immigrating to Israel.

(e) ***Pravasi Bhartiya Samman***: Eliyahu Bezalel, hailing from Chennamangalam, Kochi, who distinguished himself as an eminent agriculturalist in Israel, became the first Israeli of Indian origin to receive *Pravasi Bhartiya Samman* in 2005. Late Sheikh Muhammad Munir Nazir Hassan Ansari, the director and trustee of the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem, which represents a unique Indian connection to the Holy City, was honoured with the award in 2011. In 2017, the late Dr Lael A. Best, an Israeli cardio-thoracic surgeon of Indian origin, was conferred this award. In 2023, Reena Vinod Pushkarna, a prominent restaurateur in Israel, was awarded in recognition of her achievements in the fields of business and community welfare.

(f) **National Convention of Indian-Origin Jews**: The Embassy facilitates the National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel. The annual event brings together around 5,000 Indian-origin Jews in Israel. Annual conventions have been held in the cities of Ramla (2013), Yeruham (2014), Ramla (2015), Kiryat Gat (2016), Ashkelon (2017) and Petach Tikvah (2022).

(g) The Government of India's *Know India Programme* serves to promote ties between young Indian-origin Jews and India.

Culture

28. India and Israel renewed its *Cultural Exchange Programme* (for 2020-23) in August 2020, to facilitate bilateral cultural exchanges spanning all fields of art and culture, including youth exchanges. Yoga and Ayurveda are popular in Israel, and the International Day of Yoga is always well-attended and celebrated with great enthusiasm. The Indian Cultural Centre in Tel Aviv started functioning in January 2020 and regularly organizes events to promote cultural ties.

July, 2024