

**Embassy of India
Tel Aviv, Israel
India- Israel Bilateral Relations**

INDIA- ISRAEL BILATERAL RELATIONS

Political Relations

1. India and Israel are strategic partners. India announced its recognition of Israel on September 17, 1950. Soon after, the Jewish Agency established an immigration office in Bombay (Mumbai). It 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. India and Israel celebrated 30 years of the upgradation of bilateral ties to full diplomatic relations in 2022-23.

2. India and Israel's political ties are warm and forward-looking. On January 11, 2023, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a telephone conversation in which the PM conveyed his warm congratulations to H.E. Mr. Netanyahu for his election as the Prime Minister of Israel for a sixth time and wished him a successful tenure. India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), Dr. S. Jaishankar, and Israel's Foreign Minister, Mr. Eli Cohen, held a telephone conversation on January 5. EAM congratulated FM Cohen on the assumption of office. The ministers discussed the events to mark the 30th anniversary of relations between the two countries, which took place in 2022, and the cooperation between Israel and India, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2).

3. On November 2, 2021, Prime Minister Modi and Israel's then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met on the sidelines of the U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK. Deputy Prime Minister & Defence Minister of Israel Lt.Gen. (Ret) Benjamin Gantz visited India from June 1-3, 2022. EAM paid an official visit to Israel on October 17-21, 2021, at the invitation of the Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, Yair Lapid. Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar visited Israel on May 9-11, 2022.

4. Prime Minister Modi 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. PM Benjamin Netanyahu made a return visit to India on January 14-19, 2018. Joint statements were issued during both visits. Hon'ble President of India Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Israel in October 2015, while Hon'ble President of Israel Reuven Rivlin paid a state visit to India in November 2016.

5. Earlier, Indian External Affairs Ministers Jaswant Singh (2000), S.M. Krishna (2012), and Sushma Swaraj (2016) paid visits to Israel. From the Israeli side, Hon'ble 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. H.E. Mr. Shimon Peres visited India as Foreign Minister in 1993 and Minister for Regional Cooperation in 2000.

6. India and Israel have established bilateral consultation mechanisms in all sectors of collaboration, including water, agriculture, counter-terrorism, and defense. The 16th Foreign Office Consultations were held in December 2020. The first Policy Planning Dialogue was held in October 2020. The Joint Working Group on Defense was held in October 2021 in Israel. The annual India Israel Management Committee was held in New Delhi in November 2021. The 15th India-Israel Forum, a Track 2 dialogue, was held in New Delhi in December 2022.

Economic and Commercial Relations

7. From US\$ 200 million in 1992, bilateral merchandise trade increased to \$ 7.86 billion (excluding defense) in FY 2021–2022, with the balance of trade in India's favor. In FY 2022-23, as per data available for April to November 2022, bilateral trade stood at \$ 7.07 billion (excluding defense). India is Israel's second-largest trade partner in Asia and the ninth-largest globally. Though bilateral trade is dominated mainly by diamonds and chemicals, recent years have witnessed increased trade in areas such as electronic machinery and high-tech products, communications systems, medical equipment etc. As a result, India continues to be a 'focus' country for the Israeli Government's increased trade efforts. Major exports from India to Israel include pearls and precious stones, chemical and mineral products, machinery and electrical equipment, textile and textile articles, plastics, rubber, plants and vegetable products, mineral products, rubber and plastic products, base metals and transport equipment. Major exports from Israel to India include pearls and precious stones, chemical and mineral products, machinery and electrical equipment, base metals, defense, machinery and transport equipment.

8. Indian companies, notably Jain Irrigation, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, Tech Mahindra, State Bank of India, Larsen&Toubro, Infosys, and Cyient, are expanding their presence in Israel. Indian major companies are also making a mark in the Israeli innovation ecosystem. Indian companies are interested in the opportunities in the infrastructure sector of Israel. In July 2022, a consortium of India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) and Israel's Gadot Group won the tender for privatizing the Port of Haifa, the second largest port in Israel handling over half of Israel's container cargo. Through the winning bid of US\$ 1.18bn, the Adani-Gadot consortium has secured the rights to buy 100% shares of Haifa Port Company Ltd. Israeli companies have invested in India in renewable energy, real estate, and water technologies and are also setting up R&D centres and production units in India. Teva Pharmaceuticals, Ecoppia, Naa'n Dan Jain, Aqwise, Polemix, Eli Hajaj, Rivulis, Alumayer, Plasson, Huliote, Metzgerplas, Avgol, IDE, Netafim, ADAMA, Mellanox, Dan Hotels, Water- gen, Rivulis etc. are among the leading Israeli companies which have notable investments in India. During PM Modi's visit in July 2017, the first meeting of the newly established India-Israel CEO Forum took place, while its second meeting took place during PM Netanyahu's visit to India.

Investment

9. The cumulative ODI from India as of December 2022 was USD 135 million. In addition, India's APSEZ recently concluded its major investment plan of about USD 785 million for the acquisition of Haifa Port Company Ltd from the Government of Israel, through its JV partnership with Israel's Gadot Group. During April 2000 – September 2022, Israel's direct FDI into India was U.S. \$280million.

Agriculture

10. 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 three-year action plans. The two sides are currently implementing the fifth phase of the joint action plan (2021-23).

11. 30 CoEs' are fully active in twelve Indian states (Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal).

Defense & Security

12. As part of 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. India participated in the multilateral Airforce exercise Blue Flag-2021 was held in October 2021 in Israel. Regular talks amongst senior officers of the armed forces, Subject Matter Expertise Exchanges (SMEE) and training of officers in each other's countries (Including at the National Defence College, meant for senior officers) have served to enhance the military ties between the two nations. India's 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. Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Gantz visited India in June 2022 to mark 30 years of official diplomatic ties and defense cooperation.

Innovation and Science & Technology

13. Start-Up Nation Central and India's International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Technology (iCREATE) signed a bilateral program to accelerate innovation and tech cooperation in September 2020.

14. 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. During the visit of PM Modi to Israel in July 2017, an MoU for establishing the 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 US\$ 20 million from each side over five years, is playing an important role in enabling Indian and Israeli enterprises to undertake joint R&D projects. Nine rounds of call for proposals have been held until July 2022. I4F has approved funding for twenty-four R&D projects, including the Apollo-Zebra Medical Artificial Intelligence-based project for the early detection of tuberculosis.

Health

15. 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 continue to support and cooperate in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

People-to-people relations

16. The civilizational relations between the two peoples 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.

17. Tourism and people-to-people contacts have been given a significant boost with the commencement of the Air India flights in March 2018 between New Delhi and Tel Aviv, with five flights per week (reduced to three flights per week currently owing to Covid-19).

Students

18. There are about 18,000 Indian citizens in Israel, primarily caregivers employed by Israeli elders to take care of them, diamond traders, I.T. professionals and students. Approximately 900 Indian students are studying in Israel, mainly at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels. Several courses related to India are taught at Israeli universities.

Indian Community

19. 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 been immigrating to Israel. While the older generation still maintains its cultural links with India, the younger generation is increasingly assimilated into Israeli society.

Pravasi Bhartiya Samman

20. Shri Eliyau 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. Sheikh Munir Ansari, the trustee of the Indian Hospice in Jerusalem, which represents a unique Indian connection to the Holy City, was honored with the award in 2011. In 2017, Dr Lael A. Best, an Israeli cardio-thoracic surgeon of Indian origin, was conferred this award. In 2023, Smt. Reena Vinod Pushkarna, a prominent restaurateur in Israel, was awarded in recognition of her achievements in the field of business and community welfare.

National Convention of Indian-Origin Jews

21. Embassy facilitates the National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel. The annual event brings together around 5,000 people from all four groups of Indian-origin Jews of 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).

22. In addition, for the young Indian-origin Jews, Government of India's Know India Programme has effectively bound them to India.

23. There are about 18,000 Indian citizens in Israel, primarily caregivers employed by Israeli elders to take care of them, diamond traders, I.T. professionals and students.

24. 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. EAM Dr Jaishankar interacted with the Indian-origin community in Israel during his visit to Israel in October 2021.

Culture

25. India and Israel signed a 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. Details related to the classes, courses and events organized by the cultural center can be found on the website and social media handles of the Indian Embassy and Indian Cultural Center.

Source: Embassy of India, Israel Web site Feb 2023.