



**Academic Paper**

# **India-Israel**

## **From a Hush-Hush**

### **Relationship to Open Celebration**



**By**  
**Dr. Zafarul-Islam Khan**



**Academic Paper**

**India-Israel  
From a Hush-Hush Relationship  
to Open Celebration**

**Dr. Zafarul-Islam Khan**

**November 2017**

© All rights reserved to al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations.

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations.*

# **India-Israel**

## **From a Hush-Hush Relationship to Open Celebration**

**Dr. Zafarul-Islam Khan<sup>1</sup>**

Indian policy towards Israel has undergone a sea change over the last two decades, especially during the last three years. Gone are the days when Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian Nation, said that “Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs.”<sup>2</sup> India had opposed the 1947 United Nations (UN) plan to partition Palestine and had voted against Israel joining the UN in 1949. It did not recognise Israel as a *de jure* state until January 1992, when Prime Minister Narasimha Rao did it at the request of the Hindu rightist Rashtriya Swayam Sewak (RSS) leaders, who made only this request when they went to congratulate him after he became Prime Minister.

### ***Militant Hindus’ Admiration of Israel***

The traditionally anti-Muslim Hindu right always admired Israel, especially for its courage to crush the Palestinians and the Muslim states around it. The Hindu right has looked favourably to the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Father of the Hindu right, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (d. 1966), who coined the term *Hindutva* (militant Hindu nationalism), supported the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine way back in 1908 and again after the emergence of Israel when he asked India to emulate it.<sup>3</sup>

This is the reason why India so quickly and openly came closer than ever to Israel when the current Hindu rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)’s government, led by Narendra Modi, came to power at the Centre in May 2014. Modi was quick to meet the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September the same year. Next month, Pranab Mukherjee became the first Indian president to travel to Israel

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Zafarul-Islam Khan is a well renowned Indian scholar and an editor of *The Milli Gazette*, based in New Delhi. In July 2017, he was appointed as the chairperson of Delhi minorities commission. His publications include *Palestine Documents* (Pharos, New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, “A Non-Violent Look at Conflict & Violence,” *Harijan*, 26/10/1938, <http://www.kamat.com/mmgandhi/mideast.htm>

<sup>3</sup> See Jai Banu Quraiza, *Hindu Pro-Zionism And Philo-Semitism*, 2004, p. 11; and AG Noorani, “Modi & Zionism: The Hindu right wing’s admiration for Israel and the Zionist ideology is born out of its antipathy to Muslims,” *Frontline*, 4/8/2017, <http://www.frontline.in/the-nation/modi-zionism/article9774462.ece?homepage=true>

where he declared the state of the relationship to be “excellent.”<sup>4</sup> Next year, in July 2015, India abstained in a UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) vote on a report criticizing Israeli actions in the 2014 Gaza crisis.

Modi government policy has been officially explained as de-hyphenating its ties with Israel and Palestine, making both relationships more direct and visible, less linked to the other. It is clear that the Indian ties with Tel Aviv are real and substantial while the ties with Ramallah are symbolic and without substance.

Under Modi, India is no longer shy of flaunting and celebrating this relationship at home and abroad. While rabid Hindu nationalists say that they should emulate the little Israel, which has crushed mighty Arab countries around it, the more sober elements in their ranks say: Why should India refrain from having good relations with Israel while Arab countries themselves have open or secret relations with the Jewish state?

Modi is an old-time admirer of Israel. Earlier, as chief minister of the western state of Gujarat, he had expressed admiration for Israel’s “achievements,” including “how it has overcome various adversities to make the desert bloom.” Travelling there first in 2006, he also helped facilitate trips for politicians, business leaders, and farmers from his state to Israel. At that time Modi was not welcome in Western capitals because of his role in the Gujarat 2002 anti-Muslim riots, Israelis reciprocated. Israeli government and businesses engaged with him and Israeli ambassadors and consuls general from Mumbai met him long before European and American officials did so. Modi’s choice for the post of foreign minister was Sushma Swaraj, a former head of the India-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1990s, when world leaders visiting India shunned BJP leaders after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in December 1992, visiting Israeli leaders made it a point to meet them openly.

When the Hindutva ideology had earlier come to power in India in late 1990s and early 2000s, it was quick to show interest in Israel:

When the parties of political Hinduism took control of New Delhi in 1998, their main leaders turned to Tel Aviv for inspiration. The BJP, which is programmatically given over to Islamophobia, developed an understanding that the Israelis had found a magical solution to their own neighbourhood, and to their domestic Arab population, which could be emulated for South Asia and India. What

---

<sup>4</sup> The Brookings Institution, “Why India and Israel are bringing their relationship out from ‘under the carpet’”, 11/2/2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/02/11/why-india-and-israel-are-bringing-their-relationship-out-from-under-the-carpet/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



Israel had devised was an iron fist in the neighbourhood, including a wall around its territory, with the promise to its domestic Arabs of expulsion or a swift clobbering if they made any noises toward multi-culturalism or equality. The main admirer of the Israeli Road was the BJP's leader, L. K. Advani, who came to Tel Aviv to draw some of Netanyahu's strength. In 1995, Advani went to Israel, took notes from his visit to the Generals and Spooks, and returned to India filled with the vocabulary of hot pursuit and "terrorism." Five years later, Advani returned to Israel, this time as India's Home [Interior] Minister. At the Indian Embassy, Advani said,

In recent years we have been facing a growing internal security problem. We are concerned with cross-border terrorism launched by proxies of Pakistan. We share with Israel a common perception of terrorism as a menace, even more so when coupled with religious fundamentalism. Our mutual determination to combat terrorism is the basis for discussions with Israel, whose reputation in dealing with such problems is quite successful.

Advani earned Netanyahu's smile. Israel sent a slew of Mossad agents into India to give the party of political Hinduism a hand. Israel's former Ambassador to India, Yehoyada Haim, acknowledged that the Israelis helped India during the 1999 Kargil war with Pakistan, and other such moments, but hastily pointed out, "The less we said about these matters, the better for both our countries... Not only did the BJP import Mossad-type methods to deal with terrorism, but the political Hindu parties have also adopted Tel Aviv's geopolitical theory of terrorism."<sup>6</sup>

Keeping with the new bonhomie under Modi, India recognized Judaism as a religious minority although Jews in India now hardly number 500. At the time of the emergence of Israel in 1948, there were around 50 thousand Jews in India but most of them migrated to Israel within years, so much so that now the Jewish community is finding it difficult to run its synagogues in Indian cities.

Today, there are 80 thousand Jews of Indian origin in Israel in addition to around 10 thousand Indians living there. During his last July's visit, Prime Minister made it a point to meet them and told them that India will give them Person of Indian Origin (PIO) cards which will allow them free entry, long stays without visas and permission to do business and buy property although India does not give this facility to nationals of countries where military service is compulsory. While in Israel, Modi also announced the start of a new flight service connecting Delhi, Mumbai and Tel Aviv and that an Indian Cultural Centre would soon be opened in Israel. He also announced during this visit the

---

<sup>6</sup> Vijay Prashad, "Are You an Anti-Semite?: My Investment in Israel," *Counterpunch*, 21/4/2010, <http://www.counterpunch.org/prashad04212010.html>

setting up of the Israel-India Innovation Initiative Fund, or I4F, for joint research projects, with each country contributing \*\$4 million annually for five years.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Indian Indifference, Israeli Perseverance***

Despite denial of recognition for over three decades, Israel had continued to work hard to win over India. Hence, it helped India during the conflict with China in 1963 and with Pakistan in 1965. India reciprocated during the six-day war in 1967 by providing Israel with spare parts for French-made Mystère and Ouragan aircraft as well as AX-13 tanks (also French-made).<sup>8</sup> At the time, India was a great friend of the Arabs, particularly of Egypt, and the 1967 Israeli aggression was basically against Egypt which, with India and Yugoslavia, formed the backbone of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Again in 1971, over East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Israel rushed both arms and military officers to help the Indian war effort. The then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir diverted to India an Israeli arms shipment destined to Iran.<sup>9</sup> Israeli arms supplied to India “played a decisive role to win the war” according to the Indian Jewish commander, Maj. Gen. J.F.R.Jacob, who led the offensive in East Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> In his book *The Blood Telegram*, Gary Bass says that Israel secretly provided arms and trainers to India during its 1971 conflict with

---

<sup>7</sup> During Modi’s Israel visit, the following Agreements were signed:

- i. MoU between the Department of Science & Technology, India and National Technological Innovation Authority, Israel for setting up of India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F);
- ii. MoU between the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation of the Republic of India and the Ministry of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water Resources of the State of Israel on National Campaign for Water Conservation in India;
- iii. MoU between U.P. Jal Nigam, Government of Uttar Pradesh, of the Republic of India and the Ministry of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water Resources of the State of Israel on State Water Utility Reform in India;
- iv. India-Israel Development Cooperation – Three Year Work Program in Agriculture 2018-2020;
- v. Plan of Cooperation Between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Israel Space Agency (ISA) regarding cooperation in Atomic Clocks;
- vi. MoU between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Israel Space Agency (ISA) regarding cooperation in GEO-LEO Optical Link;
- vii MoU between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Israel Space Agency (ISA) regarding cooperation in Electric Propulsion for Small Satellites (South Asia Analysis Group, “Israel-India Strategic Partnership 2017: ‘Seizing The Future’,” 10/7/2017, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2183>

\* The term \$ used throughout this paper is the US\$.

<sup>8</sup> "5 reasons why Israel matters to India," *Economic Times*, New Delhi, 4/7/2017, [http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/5-reasons-why-israel-matters-to-india/articleshow/59438739.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/5-reasons-why-israel-matters-to-india/articleshow/59438739.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>9</sup> Iftikhar Geelani, “Israel, Bharat gath-jod awr Kashmir,” *‘Alami Tarjumanul Qur’an*, Lahore, August 2017, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> Moshe Dayan, the then defence minister of Israel, visited India secretly during this period.

Israel found a “God-sent” opportunity to strengthen relations with India when the Maoist and Kashmiri anti-government activities broke out in late 1960s and late 1980s, respectively. Israel has been providing India with improvised “anti-terror” gadgets as well as advice and training till this day to fight the Maoist and Kashmiri insurgencies. India and Israel also worked closely to frustrate the Pakistani nuclear project but these efforts could not succeed.

Despite robust leftist and Indian Muslim opposition, Israel has been able to continuously strengthen its relations with India. After the end of the first BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 2004, Congress party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government too maintained good ties with Israel between 2004 and 2014 but without fanfare. The then Israeli President Shimon Peres said during the visit of an Indian minister to Israel in February 2010, “India’s security is as important to Israel as its own.”<sup>12</sup> The then Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz said in 2012 that “Israel views its ties with India as its second most important relationship after the United States.”<sup>13</sup> An Israeli opinion poll conducted in various countries and published in April 2009 had found that India is “the most pro-Israel country.”<sup>14</sup>

Until recently, India has been reluctant to advertise its relationship with Israel. News about the Israeli-Indian relations usually came from Israel. An Israeli ambassador in India talked about the relationship being “held under the carpet.” In private, Israeli officials and commentators have said that India has treated Israel like a “mistress”—happy to engage intimately in private, but hesitant to acknowledge the relationship in public. The explanations for this have ranged from Indian domestic political sensitivities to its relations with the Arab countries.<sup>15</sup> India imports 68% of its oil and gas needs from the Gulf countries where around seven million Indians work, remitting to India a huge chunk of its foreign exchange earnings. There are some differences also between the two countries, mainly over Iran which is seen by India as an ally and an important source of energy. India is developing Chabahar Port in Iran as a gateway to

---

<sup>11</sup> “Israel secretly provided arms to India in 1971: Book,” *Times of India*, 1/11/2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Israel-secretly-provided-arms-to-India-in-1971-Book/articleshow/25068719.cms>; and “Israel helped India in 1971 war,” Bangladesh Independent News Network, 1/11/2013, <http://bdinn.com/articles/israel-helped-india-in-1971-war/>

<sup>12</sup> “India, Israel vow to enhance cooperation in combating terror,” *The Hindu*, 19/2/2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article109349.ece>

<sup>13</sup> Aimee Ginzberg, “Israel, India Present: Economic Love Affair,” *Ynet*, 8/1/2012, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4172487,00.html>

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Pipes, “India, the Most Pro-Israel Country,” 3/4/2009, <http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2009/04/india-the-most-pro-israel-country.html>; and <http://www.ynetnews.com:80/articles/0,7340,L-3696887,00.html>

<sup>15</sup> The Brookings Institution, “Why India and Israel are bringing their relationship out from ‘under the carpet’”, 11/2/2016.

Afghanistan and Central Asia and to rival Gwadar Port in Pakistan, which has been developed by China.

### ***Indian and Israeli Perceptions***

India looks at its relations with Israel from a security point of view, while Israel believes that the Indian cooperation allows it to find a space in the Indian Ocean and break the Arab-European blockade it faces in the Mediterranean area. Israel believes that its security relations with India mitigate its isolation east of Sinai, *i.e.*, in Asia.<sup>16</sup>

New Delhi also believes that a strong relationship with Israel will facilitate better access to the echelons of power in Washington.<sup>17</sup> Close Indian relationship with Israel also allows New Delhi to buy American arms via Tel Aviv which India cannot buy directly from the US due to the sanctions slapped in the wake of the Indian nuclear tests of 1979 and 1998.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Import of Arms***

India is now number one importer of Israeli military equipment. This secret trade is now open under Prime Minister Modi, who was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel last July.

Shortly before the visit, India agreed to buy about \$2 billion worth of Israeli missiles and air defence systems, the largest order in Israel's history. Soon Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) received an additional \$630 million contract to supply long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) defence systems for four ships of the Indian navy. The average Indian purchases of Israeli arms are said to be over one billion dollars a year. India keeps this part of the bilateral relations with Israel under wraps.

While Israel is the second largest exporter of arms to India after Russia, New Delhi is the top importer of Israeli arms. Today India is the main customer of the Israeli weapon's industry, another subsidy provided from afar for the occupation of the moth-eaten Palestinian territory.<sup>19</sup>

Modi has broken rules to give contracts to the largest Israeli armaments company (Israeli Military Industries), which was black-listed by the previous

---

<sup>16</sup> M K Bhadrakumar, "How far can India go with Israel," *Rediff*, 11/1/2012, <http://blogs.rediff.com/mkbhadrakumar/2012/01/11/how-far-can-india-go-with-israel/>

<sup>17</sup> Vijay Prahlad, "Through Tel Aviv: India's Reckless Road to Washington," *CounterPunch*, 23/12/2008, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/12/23/india-s-reckless-road-to-washington/>

<sup>18</sup> M K Bhadrakumar, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Vijay Prashad, *op. cit.*



UPA government for indulging in illegal activities (paying kickbacks to Indian officials and arms agents).

Another significant point is that Modi was the first top Indian official who visited Israel but shunned the Palestinian Authority. Until now, Indian officials had taken care to visit both sides. Days after his visit, the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was overheard by journalists, perhaps deliberately, saying that Modi had told him “India needs clean water, where will I get it? Ramallah? No!”<sup>20</sup> In a well-crafted flattery, Netanyahu had told Modi in his welcoming remarks at the airport, “We’ve been waiting for you a long time. We’ve been waiting nearly 70 years, in fact.”<sup>21</sup>

### ***Relationship a Result of Change in Indian Foreign Policy***

The change in the Indo-Israeli relations is a result of the changes in the Indian foreign policy. New Delhi was quick to change its foreign policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War in early 1990s. An Indian professor in an American university says, “Since the end of the Cold War, and despite the persistence of its moral rhetoric, India's foreign policy has found another lodestar: the unvarnished pursuit of self-interest.”<sup>22</sup>

Strengthening of relations with the US and Israel was an important part of this change. India’s emergence as an important economic and technological centre has pushed it to move from an idealist to a more pragmatic role seeking its due place in the world.

The UK daily, *The Independent*, described the India-Israeli alignment as “the biggest realignment of the global order since the Second World War.” The British newspaper further said that the “Indian PM Modi’s visit to Israel puts him firmly on the side of Trump and his international strongmen.”<sup>23</sup>

As a result of strengthening relations with Tel Aviv, India changed its traditional pro-Palestine policies while still claiming that it supported the Palestinian people’s

---

<sup>20</sup> “In ‘Hot Mic’ Gaffe, Netanyahu Spills the Beans On Modi’s View of Palestine,” *The Wire*, 21/7/2017, <https://thewire.in/160295/modi-netanyahu-open-mic/>; Vicky Nanjappa, *One India*, 22/7/2017, <http://www.oneindia.com/international/what-benjamin-netanyahu-said-on-modi-that-journalists-accide-2502250.html>

Mr Modi forgot, or did not know, that Israel thrives on the water stolen from the West Bank ever since it occupied it in June 1967.

<sup>21</sup> “Israel Aerospace gets \$630m missile defense deal for Indian Navy”, *Times of Israel*, 21/5/2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-aerospace-gets-630m-missile-defense-deal-for-indian-navy/>

<sup>22</sup> Sumit Ganguly, “India's Machiavellian Turn,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29/7/2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703940904575396303258103826> (accessed on 13/9/2017).

<sup>23</sup> “Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel puts him firmly on the side of Trump and his international strongmen,” *The Independent*, London, 4/7/2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/Voices/india-israel-modi-netanyahu-trump-on-his-side-a7823461.html>

struggle for statehood within the 1967 borders. Modi-Netanyahu communiqué last July supported this but with the Israeli riders about its security concerns.

The Indian rhetoric about Palestine is in deference to the Arab and Muslim countries as well as to the sentiments of the Indian Muslims, who have been steadfastly vocal in their support to Palestine ever since the project of the Jewish homeland started in earnest after the First World War. With this stand, India also wants to blunt Muslim World support for Pakistan against India, especially over Kashmir.

India was the first country in the world to recognise the Palestinian statehood and allow the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to open an “embassy” in New Delhi in 1980. Yasir Arafat was always treated as a special guest in New Delhi and was welcomed as a head of State. India gifted a piece of land to Palestine in the diplomatic enclave in New Delhi and also built the embassy building on this land. India also offers an small annual assistance of around \$10 million to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and one million dollars to The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugee in the Near East (UNRWA).

After revision of its policies, India stopped condemning Israel for its occupation and human rights and international law violations. For example, it did not condemn the Israeli war against Hizbullah in South Lebanon in 2006. India also was very late to take notice of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza Strip in December 2008–January 2009 and when it finally did, it advised *both sides* to refrain from violence. In the summer of 2014, Modi’s government did not allow an opposition proposal to condemn Israel in the Indian parliament over the so-called “Operation Protective Edge” against Gaza Strip. Next year (2015), India abstained from voting on the UN report censuring Israel over the “Operation Protective Edge”.

Despite this, India continues to claim to this day that it supports the Palestinian people and their right to have a sustainable state according to the UN Security Council resolutions 1397 and 1515. The Indian stand on Palestine has plummeted to “historical rhetorical support,” as David Melford, the then US ambassador in Delhi, was quoted as saying in 2011.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Failure of Arab Countries***

Indian disinterest in Palestine is a result of a long process. Mustafa El-Feki, an Egyptian diplomat who spent some years in New Delhi and later served as the head of the foreign affairs committee in the Egyptian Parliament, has tried to explain why the Indian stand changed so drastically *vis-à-vis* Palestine and Israel. While stressing that both India and Israel have different reasons for their *rapprochement* (India wants US

---

<sup>24</sup> “Indian support for Palestine ‘historical rhetorical’”, *The Hindu*, 17/3/2011, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article1547636.ece>



and Israeli technology while Israel wants to enlist the support of an important country), El-Feki says that Arabs' tendency to look at conflicts in Asia from an Islamic prism, reluctance of Arab leaders to visit India frequently and rejection of the Indian request to join Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969 are some of the reasons why India slowly moved towards Israel. Stressing that giving a religious colour to the Indo-Pakistani conflict was wrong, El-Feki says, "We have lost India so far for no good reason... We have failed to stay close to an industrially advanced state, one with nuclear and space capabilities... I believe the Arabs have only themselves to blame for India's change of heart on the Palestinian question."<sup>25</sup>

### ***India-Israel Trade and Economic Ties***

Trade between India and Israel grew exponentially. It was just about \$200 million in 1992, when they established diplomatic ties, but it stood at \$5.02 billion in 2016–2017, rising 2.3% in 2016–2017 after four consecutive years of fall. This involves \$3.06 billion of exports and \$1.96 billion of imports. Israel currently has investments of around \$122 million in India.<sup>26</sup> A report by Accenture and Nasscom said investments between Israel and India could produce as much as \$25 billion in sales by 2025.<sup>27</sup> Days before Modi's arrival in Israel on 4 July this year, Netanyahu government passed a 280 million shekel (\$79.3 million) budget to promote exports to India.<sup>28</sup>

The Indo-Israeli economic ties are mainly in defence, agriculture, trade and water management. The two countries are negotiating a free trade agreement. There are a number of joint ventures, especially in the field of joint production of weapons. An Indo-Israel agriculture action plan for 2015–2018 is operational, and 15 of the proposed 26 centres of excellence in agriculture are being developed in India with Israel's help to showcase the latest technology to Indian farmers. This includes the Agricultural Centre of Excellence at Gharaunda in Karnal in Haryana state near Delhi. During Modi's Israel visit, the two countries established a \$40 million fund for research and development projects. After weapons, India's major imports from Israel in 2016–2017 included natural or cultured pearls and precious stones, worth \$1.11 billion.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Mustafa El-Feki, "An Indo-Arab blunder?", SAN-Feature Service, 15/2/2007 (reproduced from *Al-Ahram Weekly*).

<sup>26</sup> "Indian Premier, in Israel Visit, Seeks to Break Barriers in Trade and History," *New York Times*, 4/7/2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/04/world/middleeast/india-israel-narendra-modi-benjamin-netanyahu.html?rref=collection/sectioncollection/middleeast#CMEPBulletin>

<sup>27</sup> "How Narendra Modi snub helps Israel decouple ties from Palestinian question," *Financial Express*, Delhi, 9/7/2017, <http://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/how-narendra-modi-snub-helps-israel-decouple-ties-from-palestinian-question/755963/>

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> "5 reasons why Israel matters to India," *Economic Times*, New Delhi, 4/7/2017, [http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/5-reasons-why-israel-matters-to-india/articleshow/59438739.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/5-reasons-why-israel-matters-to-india/articleshow/59438739.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

## *Israeli Activities in India*

Once Israel opened an embassy in New Delhi in 1992, it has been busy building a strong lobby in India. It has befriended important figures in the political and civil life including some journalists and has started a website in various Indian languages. It continuously invites Indian personalities, including Muslim leaders, journalists and students, to visit Israel. It even offers scholarships to Indian students for higher studies in Israeli universities. On return, these students become ambassadors of Israel. Some of them are now serving in Indian universities where they are busy propagating Israeli views and suppressing support for Palestine.

Israel has also been building bridges with religious leaders, including Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, who are invited to conferences in Israel or US. Indian Muslims have reacted sharply against some Muslim personalities visiting Israel. This led to keeping such visits under the wraps of secrecy, but the visits have not stopped.

Israel maintains a most active embassy in New Delhi. It is the only foreign country whose embassy is establishing direct relations with Indian states and which provides security and other services to them as well as to private parties.

Another Israeli activity in India is to convert North-East Indian tribes in Manipur and Mizoram states who claim to be remnants of the lost Jewish Manasseh tribe, although there is no historical proof to support this claim and genetic tests have disproved this theory. Yet a few thousand of these tribals have been converted over the years to Judaism and sent to Israel,<sup>30</sup> where they share the fate of the Falashas and engage in menial jobs and work as border guards. As a result of this activity, which is not appreciated by the Indian authorities, a mini-Israel called “New Jerusalem” is taking shape in North-East India.<sup>31</sup>

Israeli citizens are active in India in commercial activities including farming, construction and security services.<sup>32</sup> There are 30 centres of agricultural excellence either established or planned across 10 Indian states.

Some 40 thousand Israelis visit India annually, while around 30 thousand Indians visit Israel every year. India is a preferred destination of Israeli boys and girls after the end of their compulsory military training. Thousands of them descend on Goa on the Western coast of India.

There are also Israeli criminal gangs which are active in narcotics production and smuggling. They are engaged in organised crime and smuggling narcotics from

---

<sup>30</sup> “Rabbi backs India's 'lost Jews'”, BBC, 1/4/2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4400957.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4400957.stm)

<sup>31</sup> John Kaminski, “Second Israeli State emerging in India” *The Rebel*, 20/8/2009, [http://www.therebel.org/opinion/zionism/second\\_israeli\\_state\\_emerging\\_in\\_india\\_2009082020427/](http://www.therebel.org/opinion/zionism/second_israeli_state_emerging_in_india_2009082020427/); Etgar Lefkovits, “118 Bnei Menashe immigrants arriving in Israel”, *Jerusalem Post*, 23/8/2007, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1187779146925&pagename=JPost%2FJP%2FArticle%2F>; and “Solomon’s temple being built quietly for the past 30 years,” *The Milli Gazette*, New Delhi, 16-31/3/2014, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *The Milli Gazette*, New Delhi, 1-15/3/2007, p. 13.



Delhi to Goa and from there to European destinations. They occupy some areas in Himachal Pradesh state in north India, Delhi's Paharganj area and Goa. These are no-go areas for ordinary Indians. Reports have been published from time to time about gang wars and murders between these groups. An Israeli narcotics smuggler called Yanis, *alias* Atala, jumped bail in September 2010 and fled to Israel.<sup>33</sup>

Due to their licentiousness and unruly behaviour, Israelis have aroused the anger of local people in Goa, so much so that the Council of Social Justice Peace, a Church organisation in Goa, wrote an open letter in June 2012 to churches in Palestine/Israel protesting against the behaviour of these Israelis. Later, this letter was expanded into a 96-page booklet which said, "Our study revealed how dehumanised these young people had become and how, because of an oppressive and cruel system of illegal military occupation, even the victimisers had turned casualties and victims of their own cruelties."<sup>34</sup> The issue of Israelis' misbehaving in India, flouting rules and indulging in illegal businesses has been raised from time to time in the Indian media. Strangely, these startling developments quickly disappear from the pages of Indian newspapers. The issue was also raised in the Israeli Parliament, Knesset, in January 2007.<sup>35</sup>

In April 2012, India cancelled an arms deal and placed the Israel Military Industries, the largest Israeli arms manufacturer, on the black list for ten years after it was exposed that it paid kickbacks on arms deals involving the production of weapons like artillery shells for Bofors guns and Barak missiles.<sup>36</sup> Israel at the time claimed that the US, Russia and Indian Muslims were responsible for cancelling the Israeli arms deal.<sup>37</sup>

Israel does not mind indulging even in espionage in India. An Israeli spy couple was detained, interrogated and deported for this crime in Feb. 2012.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *The Milli Gazette*, New Delhi, 16/10/2010; "Absconding Israeli drug dealer is back home", IANS, 26/9/2010, [http://www.ummid.com/news/2010/September/26.09.2010/israli\\_drug\\_king\\_come\\_back.htm](http://www.ummid.com/news/2010/September/26.09.2010/israli_drug_king_come_back.htm); and Jamie Romm, "Israelis in Goa disastrous for tourism," *Jerusalem Post*, 13/12/2009, [www.jpost.com/International/Israelis-in-Goa-disastrous-for-tourism](http://www.jpost.com/International/Israelis-in-Goa-disastrous-for-tourism)

<sup>34</sup> IANS, "Ex-Israeli soldiers holidaying in Goa are dehumanised," *Deccan Herald*, 11/6/2012, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/256136/ex-israeli-soldiers-holidaying-go.html>

<sup>35</sup> Harinder Mishra, "Israel House seeks steps for image makeover," *Asian Age*, New Delhi, 5/1/2007.

<sup>36</sup> *Times of India*, 17/4/2012; "India penalizes Israeli military firm over graft," PressTV, <http://www.abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=309466>; "Antony freeze on Israel firm," *The Telegraph*, 7/6/2009, [http://ummid.com:80/news/June/07.06.2009/antony\\_freeze\\_on\\_srael\\_firm.htm](http://ummid.com:80/news/June/07.06.2009/antony_freeze_on_srael_firm.htm); and Josy Joseph, "India told us to keep deal secret," *DNA*, 28/3/2009, <http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1243290>.

<sup>37</sup> Yaakov Katz, "US, Russia, Indian Muslims out to down IAI deal," *Jerusalem Post*, 2/4/2009, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite%3Fcid%3D1238562885120%26pagename%3DJPost%252FJPArticle%252FShowFull&ct=ga&cd=bG4htz3AuU0&usg=AFQjCNHmos4oodmUAYqc9ieb8OQwoCRL7A>

<sup>38</sup> "India Trusts Israel, Does Israel Trust India?," *Defence World*, 7/2/2012, <http://www.defenseworld.net/go/defensenews.jsp?id=6546&h=India%20Trusts%20Israel,%20Does%20Israel%20Trust%20India>.

Mumbai's Chabad House, attacked during the 26/11 terrorist attack on Mumbai, seems to be an Israeli espionage centre. Israelis were able to smuggle out of this centre a huge safe and transported it safely to Israel, see Elias Davidsson, *The Betrayal of India*, Pharos, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 453f.

Despite these hiccups, India and Israel have started a number of joint ventures to produce arms and armaments but no big success has been achieved so far, especially because the Israelis have failed to transfer technology to India. A number of projects, like the Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM) project, are running late, despite the fact that India is footing the entire bill of such joint production.

Despite tall claims, Israeli weapons have not been of any special help to India. For instance, their much touted border control electronic sensors have proved ineffective and infiltration from the Pakistani side into the Indian side of Kashmir continues unabated. Israeli drones too have failed in India.

### ***Involvement in Terror***

Israel has been found involved in Hindu terror in India. The official chargesheet filed by the Maharashtra Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) in Malegaon 2008 blasts case, contains an explosive transcript of discussions about the contacts of the Hindu terrorist Abhinav Bharat group with Israel, which supported the Hindu terrorists' bid to topple the Indian secular state and establish in its place a Hindu state in India.<sup>39</sup> Strangely, this part of an official chargesheet has been hushed-up, there has never been an open discussion about it in India and Israel has never been asked to explain the nature its relations with the terrorists of Abhinav Bharat. In Srilanka, also, Israel was helping both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Srilankan armed forces.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> See some excerpts of these transcripts in Subhash Gatade, *Godse's Children*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2013, p. 397; SM Mushrif, 26/11 Probe – why judiciary also failed?, Pharos, New Delhi, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2014, p. 211; Badri Raina, "India, America, Israel: The Three Amigos", ZNet, 12/6/2010, <http://www.zcommunications.org/india-america-israel-by-badri-raina.html>; Subhash Gatade, "Bomb Blasts in Nepal: Global Dimensions of Hindutva Terror," Kafila, 15/6/2009, <http://kafila.org/2009/06/15/bomb-blasts-in-nepal-global-dimensions-of-hindutva-terror/>; "ATS TAPES," Tehelka Magazine, 7:30, 31/7/2010, [http://archive.tehelka.com/story\\_main46.asp?filename=Ne310710TerrorTapes.asp](http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main46.asp?filename=Ne310710TerrorTapes.asp); Hetal Vyas, Deepthiman Tiwary and Anand Holla, "Purohit was in touch with Nepal king for a separate state," Mumbai Mirror, 21/1/2009, <http://www.mumbaimirror.com/article/15/200901212009012103263539076ef3826/Purohit-was-in-touch-with-Nepal-king-for-a-separate-state>

In these transcripts, Lt. Col. says, *inter alia*, "Purohit: I have contacted Israel. One of our captains has come back from Israel. They have told him: show us something on ground meaning even our website has not yet been launched. We have simply given them papers to which they advised us to wait and watch for six months. We had asked them for four things - continuous and uninterrupted supply of equipment and training; second thing allow to us to start our office with saffron flag in Tel Aviv; number 3: political asylum; number 4: support our cause in UNO that Hindu nation is born. They have agreed for two things but did not accept two. They do not want to fly our national flag in Tel Aviv. They said that our relations with India are improving and we want that; we cannot strain those [relations]. The other thing they told us that they would not support us on international forum for next two years as long as your movement does not gather movement. Political asylum anytime, for equipment and training once we show something on ground. [If] I achieve this. Yet I feel that my sole opinion should not suffice. A council for that must be constituted": *The Milli Gazette*, 16-31/12/2010, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Victor Ostrovsky & Claire Hoy, *By Way of Deception*, New York, n.d., pp. 67-68, 127-129. This book may be accessed on the Net at <http://www.solargeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/library/by-way-of-deception-victor-ostrovsky-claire-hoy.pdf>. If Israel could do it with the Srilankans, why not with India?



### ***Popular support in India for Palestine***

With the exception of *Hindutva* (ultra Hindu nationalism) votaries, Indians, especially leftists and Muslims, remain steadfast supporters of Palestine. They issue statements, hold meetings, sit-ins and conferences on important occasions and speak out whenever serious developments take place like the attacks on Gaza Strip and siege of Al-Aqsa mosque last July. Many people even in India are unable to understand the mismatch of how a tiny country with a population of 8.5 million can teach and guide a great nation like India with a vast land, an old civilisation, and a population of 1.3 billion. Israel sells this relationship as a mutual struggle against “terrorism” and radical Islam. “We have the same enemy: radical Islam,” said Efraim Inbar of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv. “Like us, they live in a difficult neighbourhood,” he added, alluding to Pakistan and China.<sup>41</sup> But “terror” here has different connotations: Israel dubs the Palestinian resistance against occupation, which has sanction under international law, as “terror” while India is not occupying any other country’s land.

There is a nascent boycott-Israel movement in India. Indian academics, artists and litterateurs decided to boycott Israel during a seminar held in New Delhi’s Indian Social Institute in September 2010. A number of Indian professors criticised the India-Israel scientific cooperation agreement in August 2012. Labour unions in the south Indian port of Cochin announced the boycott of Israeli ships in June 2010 due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza Strip.<sup>42</sup> Indian artists boycotted an Israeli exhibition about India in 2012, saying, “we...have declined to exhibit our work, in solidarity with the International Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel called by the Palestinian intellectuals and artists, and the India Campaign. The boycott, inspired by the earlier successful international boycott against Apartheid South Africa, is a peaceful, non-violent Gandhian campaign, which is directed at mainstream institutions and not at individuals, to pressurise Israel to recognise the rights of the Palestinian people.”<sup>43</sup>

In general, while official India is eager to court Israel and strengthen relations with it, a vast section of Indians, especially liberals, leftists and Muslims, oppose Israeli policies of occupation and expansionism.

Of late, it has been observed that even Indian Christian groups are openly and unreservedly supporting the Palestinian people and condemning the Israeli

---

<sup>41</sup> "Israel Aerospace gets \$630m missile defense deal for Indian Navy", *Times of Israel*, 21/5/2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-aerospace-gets-630m-missile-defense-deal-for-indian-navy/>

<sup>42</sup> “Indian port union boycotts Israeli ships, cargo,” *Maannews*, 9/7/2010, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=298059>

<sup>43</sup> “Indian Artists boycott Tel Aviv Museum show,” *The Milli Gazette*, 16-31/8/2011, p. 3.

occupation and oppression. During a visit to Israel and occupied Palestine, Indian church leaders witnessed the discriminatory Israeli practices and brutal occupation. They came to the conclusion that Zionism is another form of Apartheid. Back in India, they are holding meetings and conferences and publishing articles and reports to enlighten Indians about the reality of Israel, which sells itself as the only democracy in the Middle East.

### *The Way Forward*

It is not expected that the current Indian government will change its policies towards Israel because these stem from an entrenched ideological anti-Muslim position. The current pro-Israeli government in India may last for another two years or, possibly, for another seven years if the ruling BJP wins the 2019 general elections. Votaries of Hindutva are not ready to change their policy towards Israel. A new non-BJP government may only revert to the previous hush-hush relations with Israel, limiting relations to arms buying, training and exchange of information on “terrorism.”

But this should not deter our friends in the Middle East. India being an open and free society, Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general, should accelerate their efforts to engage with the Indian civil society, especially with politicians, writers, artists and journalists. Rich Arabs should invest in India where cheap labour, abundant raw materials and a huge local market are a boon for any industry and business. In addition to enhancing cultural and literary contacts, Arabs should also send students in large numbers to Indian universities and institutions of higher learning, which offer world-class education and training. Only with a strong Arab footing and presence in India, Israeli influence can be blunted.



دراسة علمية



# الهند - إسرائيل من العلاقة السريّة الخجولة إلى العلاقة العلنية المنفتحة



د. ظفر الإسلام خان