



## The Visit of the President of Israel to India: A Brief Assessment

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After a gap of 19 years, the Israeli Head of State, President Reuven Rivlin's visit to India has re-invigorated the Indo-Israel relationship—which is based on a stable, strategic, mutual understanding, cooperation and development—despite having no formal strategic partnership. The year 2016 is being celebrated as the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Indo-Israel diplomatic relations in 1992. The nature of Indo-Israel relation stands on the understanding of each other's regional and international imperatives, understanding each other's regional vicissitudes. The present Israeli Presidential visit, which is the third such high-level visit from Israel post 1995 (President Ezer Weizmann visited India in 1997 and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2003), is being seen as noteworthy amongst political and strategic circles. There have been ministerial visits between the two nations, the most recent being that of the Indian Home Minister (2014), and the Indian Defence Minister (2015) and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj (2016) and the Presidential visit of Pranab Mukherjee (2015), which was the first-ever visit by an Indian Head of State to Israel. The present visit by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to India was made at the invitation of the Indian President.

During the visit, President Rivlin, who was accompanied by a large delegation of business and academic leaders, visited Chandigarh to open an agro-tech conference in the city of Chandigarh along with the Indian President, held meetings with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indian Education Minister Prakash Keshav Javadekar, as well as met several senior ministers, industrial and business delegates, educationists and academicians, as well as with leaders of the Indian Jewish communities. It may be noted here that many people from various identified Jewish communities in Indian states of Kerala and Manipur as well as states having Jewish population, who have traced their roots to Jewish ancestry, have re-settled in Israel.

President Rivlin also oversaw the signing of more than 20 education collaboration agreements. The President's visit stressed the promotion of academic ties, including student exchanges, joint-

research projects, and paving pathways for promoting academic cooperation between Israeli and Indian universities and colleges. It also stressed the enhancement of strengthening business investments and technological sharing in agriculture, water and irrigation technologies (including micro-irrigation in drought-prone areas and water management) and other innovative areas, along with improvement of broadening the scope of mutual business cooperation and investment. While addressing the India-Israel Academic Summit, President Rivlin stated that presently, 10 per cent of the international students and researchers in Israel are from India apart from 40 joint-research projects, which are supported by both governments. Most Israeli universities have Indian studies, such as Tel Aviv University which has a course to teach Marathi to students. However, there is significant scope for improvement in widening the vistas of education diplomacy. The Israeli delegation comprised of twelve high-level delegates from the Israeli Council for Higher Education's budget committee as well as from various leading universities and educational institutes in Israel.

President Rivlin, while addressing a Joint Press conference with PM Modi, mentioned the complementarities that have opened up larger scope for collaboration in the areas of agriculture, education, water and solar power, all of which he called a four-coloured revolution, which also is the vision of the Indian leadership. Rivlin further stated that the present Indo-Israeli relationship is not just a strategic or economic partnership, but "a partnership which is making a difference for Israelis and Indians in the water we drink, in the food we eat, in the technology we use, and many important areas of our lives". Bolstering the principle of 'Make in India', President Rivlin added the motto of 'Make with India'. Rivlin stressed the assimilation of Israeli innovation with India's industrial power in jointly creating a synergy between the two nations. He stated the strengthening of commercial relations that have been spread across 'a growing variety of goods and knowledge: from water treatment to telecom products; from optics to metal, from defense and aviation, to diamonds, textile, chemicals and medical equipment'.

While India continues to be challenged by its neighbour that unabatedly sponsors and uses terrorism as a state policy, the present tensions in the South Asian remain significantly high, the Indian leadership stressed. The fight against terrorism gets strengthened when both leaderships condemn terrorism of any form. Israel, too, has been a victim of terrorism. President Rivlin pledged full support to India in fighting terrorism. He stated that "Terror is terror is terror, whoever carries it out and whoever are its victims. And we all have the duty to condemn in our words, and fight with our deeds against this terrible evil". PM Modi stressed the need for a joint understanding to counter such threats that remain a major obstacle in the path of peace and development. While understanding the strategic imperatives of India, and the good relations that India has with Iran, which has clearly stated its intention of destroying Israel, President Rivlin appreciated India's support to Israel during periods of exigencies.

Speaking at a dinner, hosted in honour of the Israeli President, by a private think-tank and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), Dr. Naushad Forbes, President, CII, stated that relations between India and Israel have come out of the closet, as the warmth that was reflected between

the two leaderships provided a significant dynamism and direction for the relations. During the dinner, Sunjoy Joshi, Director, Observer Research Foundation stated that for India, Israel is a country that faces myriad challenges, but does not hesitate to counter them with definitive policies and actions. Both countries have opened up new vistas for collaboration and R&D, including various innovations and technological dimensions in the areas of defense and agriculture, and have attained the level of maturity and openness to declare themselves as 'friends'.

India, in the last few years, has entered into significant defence collaborations with Israel, which include developing the Barak surface-to-air missile defence systems with India's DRDL along with various other arms and defence equipments, including 'Spike' anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM), joint collaboration in developing micro- and nano-satellites along with strengthening the existing technology associated with unmanned aerial vehicles for the purpose of surveillance and counter-terrorism operations, information and radar technologies as well as air defence systems. Israel remains to be the third highest supplier of defence equipment to India, with around \$12 billion worth of purchase history over the last decade. In October 2016, Indian defence ministry cleared procurement of combat radio sets for the Indian army from Israel, one of the latest defence procurements from Israel. There remains significant scope for developing joint platforms through the sharing of technological expertise and skills for strengthening defence and counter-terrorism mechanisms. However, the stress of the present visit of President Rivlin was portrayed publicly as strengthening the educational, innovative and business avenues between the two nations, while paving the path for Indian Prime Minister Modi's planned visit to Israel in 2017, which as per the Israeli ambassador, Daniel Carmon, would be a very important visit for both the nations.

While avenues in agriculture, energy and defence have already been explored in the past, greater synergies in the field of solar power, technical education and joint R&D initiatives would bring the necessary impetus and momentum to the much understated ties.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.