

How PM Modi's historic Israel visit will benefit us

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focus

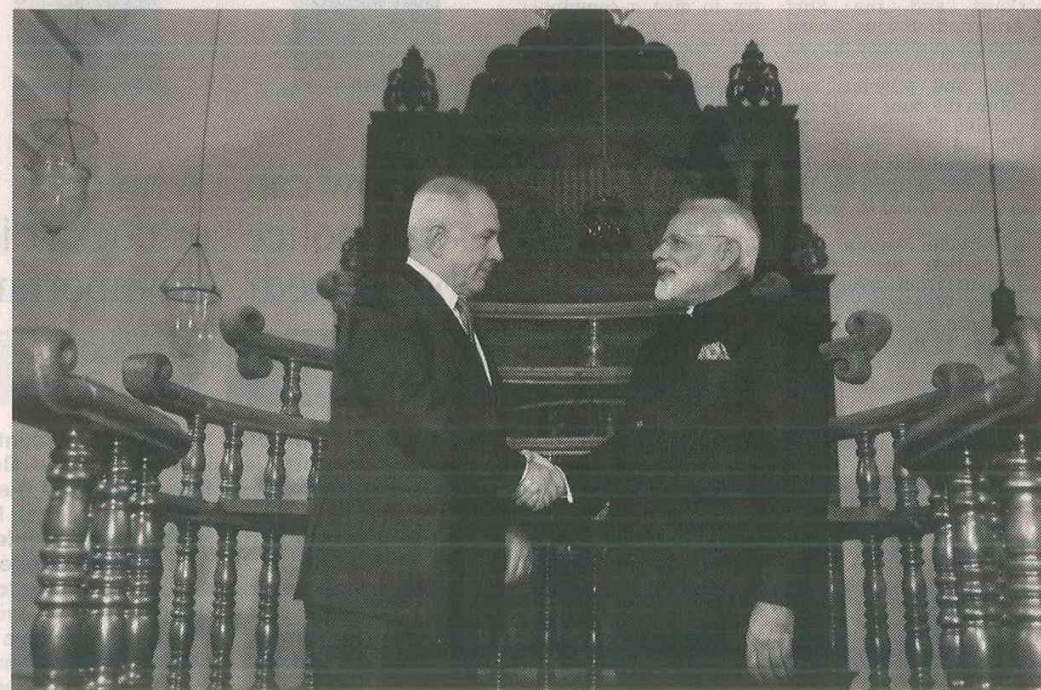
■ The combo of Modi's visits to the US and Israel, one after the other, has caused severe indigestion to both China and Pakistan...

Aapka swagat hai, mere dost (welcome, my friend)," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. Breaking protocol, he personally received the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, an honour previously accorded only to the US President and the Pope and that too with Israel's entire Cabinet present at the airport. "It is truly a historic visit," said Mr Netanyahu, who termed the friendship between their two countries as "natural". Soon after he announced that a \$40 million innovation fund was being set up for cooperation between India and Israel. In his comments, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India counts Israel as an important partner in its path to development and a strong resilient partnership with it will be his focus.

"You said when it comes to India-Israel relationship, sky is the limit. But actually my friend, the sky isn't the limit because today our space programmes are working towards reaching even greater heights," Mr Netanyahu said with a smile. "The tie between our talented, innovative people is natural. It is so natural that we can ask what took so long for them to blossom... We love India... We have been waiting for the last 70 years for a visit by an Indian Prime Minister," the Israeli PM affirmed and hailed Mr Modi as "a great leader of India and a great world leader".

The significance of these statements is borne by the fact that the Jewish people, often persecuted in history, found India a friendly country to be in and the many synagogues they built stand as a testament to the Indian spirit of inclusiveness. Maharashtra has 16 synagogues, including six in Mumbai itself and two in Pune. Gujarat has one in Ahmedabad, New Delhi has one and Kerala has at least five in three of its districts. The earliest synagogue in Kerala dates back to as early as 1130, while almost all others were built in 1800s to early 1900s.

Following in-depth talks Mr Modi and Mr Netanyahu, India and Israel signed seven agreements to step-up cooperation in key sectors like space, agriculture and water conservation. A memorandum of understanding was signed between department of science and technology and Israel's National Technological Innovation Authority for setting up of \$40 million worth India-Israel Industrial Research and Development and Technical Innovation Fund. Mr Modi said, "We are of one view that together our scientists and researchers would develop, build and implement



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterpart from Israel Benjamin Netanyahu shake hands during their visit to the Israel Museum to witness an exhibition on India-Jewish Heritage in Jerusalem recently — PTI

mutually beneficial solutions in the field."

B. Bala Bhaskar, joint secretary (West Asia and North Africa) in the ministry of external affairs, is reported to have stated prior to this visit that Israel has expressed its "great willingness" over the last three years to participate in India's flagship initiatives, like Make in India, Clean Ganga, Smart Cities and Digital India. Stating that there has been ongoing cooperation in the agriculture sector, he said: "With the help of Israel we have established centres of excellence in various states aimed at increasing productivity, crop management and water management."

Inviting Israeli youth to visit India in large numbers, Mr Modi announced that Delhi-Mumbai-Tel Aviv flights will start

soon. To the Indian diaspora in Israel, he informed that India will soon open an Indian cultural centre in Israel and assured that Indians in Israel will never face difficulty in obtaining OCI and PIO cards, clarifying that even those who have completed compulsory service in the Israeli Army will not face any trouble in obtaining an OCI card.

During a recent pre-Modi's visit seminar, at Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), retired ambassador Shyam Saran expressed hope that the visit would have a significant impact on taking forward the diplomatic and strategic ties between the two nations.

The earliest signs of unannounced India-Israel military collaboration were during the 1962 Sino-Indian war, and later in

both the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars. India reciprocated during the six-day war in 1967 by providing Israel with spare parts for French-made Mystere and Ouragan aircrafts as well as AMX-13 tanks (also French-made). However, when Israel offered to refurbish Indian Army's World War II vintage British made Centurion tanks, whose crews had destroyed disproportionately large numbers of Pakistan Army's relatively newer Patton and its other tanks in both the 1965 and 1971 wars, India declined the offer, much to the disappointment of personnel of regiments equipped with them. By 1974, the Centurions were sold off to some African nation and were replaced with the then new indigenous tank, which hardly saw any battle and was

eventually replaced.

Former Indian Air Force Chief, Air Chief Marshal N.A.K. Browne, India's first defence attaché to Israel after the start of India-Israel diplomatic relations in 1992, disclosed during the IDSA seminar, that missile pods timely provided by Israel in 1999, were of great help in capturing Tiger Hill from the Pakistan Army during the heightened confrontation in Kargil area. In the same confrontation, Israel also supplied the Indian Army with artillery shells, which there was a shortage of.

In the late 1990s, a crucial defence deal was the Indian purchase of Barak 1, a very versatile air-defence missile, capable of intercepting the US-made Harpoon missiles deployed by Pakistan.

Minister of state for defence Subhash Bhamre

is reported to have stated that over the past two years, contracts signed by India for the procurement of weapons and military platforms with Israel, make it India's second largest source for weapons after the United States.

Three months before Mr Modi's Israel visit, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) was awarded a \$2 billion contract of military hardware to India, considered to be "the largest defence contract in Israel's defence industries' history". IAI announced that it has signed a mega-contract worth more than \$1.6 billion to provide advanced medium-range surface-to-air missiles (MRSAMs) to the Indian Army. The balance of about \$400 million in contracts has been awarded to Rafael Advanced Defence Systems.

Israeli weapon systems and equipment acquired by India are the Barak 1 surface to air missiles (SAMs), medium range SAM, Spyder surface to air mobile air defence system, smart, precise, impact, cost effective (Spice) precision bombs, Phalcon airborne warning and control system (AWACS), Heron armed drones, Spike anti-tank guided missiles, Galil sniper rifles, Aerostat radars and the IWI Tavor assault rifles.

The combo of Mr Modi's visits to the US and Israel, one after the other, has caused severe indigestion to both China and Pakistan. While China is freakishly out with transgressions in many locations along the Line of Actual Control, Pakistan has been smarting as much of its terrorists' movements across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir that have been detected by Israeli surveillance devices.

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