

Shalom Namaste

PM's Israel visit puts people at the heart of bilateral ties

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Israel trip once again highlights his government's penchant for bold decision-making on the foreign policy front. Not only has this trip brought India-Israel relations out of the closet, it has also elevated bilateral ties to a strategic partnership. There was quite notable personal chemistry between Modi and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu. From describing the India-Israel partnership as a "marriage made in heaven" to taking a stroll together on the Olga beach, Netanyahu went the extra mile with the Indian premier.

This personal bonhomie has translated into enhanced policy synergies. A slew of agreements have been signed in sectors such as



agriculture, water conservation and satellite technologies. India is already Israel's largest defence client, and transactions in this area are slated to further increase in the near future with New Delhi waiting to receive armed drones from Tel Aviv. On the business front, Indian and Israeli companies signed strategic pacts worth \$4.3 billion. Around 30 CEOs from both sides promised to power the economic and investment relationship,

commending the setting up of a \$40 million innovation fund.

Add to this the announcement of a new direct flight between India and Israel, and the simplification of rules for obtaining Overseas Citizen of India cards for Indian-origin people in Israel. Overall the visit garnered significant attention for people-to-people connections, with Netanyahu even stating that the two countries had a human bridge between them. This was bolstered by Modi meeting 26/11 survivor Moshe Holtzberg and visiting the Indian War Cemetery in Haifa. In that sense, Modi's visit has put people at the centre of bilateral ties. This should not only hold the two countries in good stead but also put their partnership on a firm, independent track.