

India – Tunisia Relations

India has traditionally maintained cordial and friendly relations with Tunisia since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1958. The first resident Indian Mission at the level of Cd'A was established in Tunisia in 1963 and raised to the Ambassador level in 1976. The Tunisian Embassy in New Delhi was set up in 1981. Tunisian leaders have expressed admiration for India's democracy and its leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru; the state that India's freedom struggle has served as an inspiration for Tunisia.

Under the two regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the two countries also shared a respect for secularism, and moderation was a hallmark of Tunisian foreign policy. Bilateral relations continued on an even keel. In the early 2000s, progress was made in bilateral cooperation in phosphates with the establishment in 2006 of the joint venture in this sector. In international fora including UN, cooperation between Indian and Tunisia was very good – the countries supported each other's candidatures to these bodies and had similar positions.

Several high-level visits took place in this period. Notable among them were that of Vice-President Zakir Hussain in July 1964, Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in April 1984, Vice-President M. Hidayatullah in May 1984 and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992. Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral paid a visit to Tunisia in 1999. From Tunisian side, First Lady of Tunisia, Wassila Bourguiba visited India in November 1982, followed by that of Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali in 1983, FM Habib Boulares in 1991 and FM Habib Ben Yahya in December 2000.

In post-Revolution Tunisia, Shri E. Ahmed, MOS (EA) paid the first Ministerial visit to Tunisia from November 5-7, 2012 and called on H.E. Moncef M. Marzouki, President of the Republic, H.E. Hamadi Jebali, Prime Minister, H.E. Mustapha Ben Jafaar, NCA Speaker, H.E. Rafik Abdessalem, Foreign Minister, Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Americas and Asia) and Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahdah Movement.

Shri Srikant K. Jena, MoC (I/C) for Chemicals & Fertilizers paid a 3-day visit to Tunisia from July 11-13, 2013 to mark the commencement of TIFERT plant, the India-Tunisia joint venture for manufacturing phosphoric acid. In addition to his working session with Minister of Industry Mehdi Jomaa, MoS called on President Moncef Marzouki and held discussions on issues of bilateral interest with Abdellatif Makki, Minister of Health, Nouredine Bhiri, Minister in-charge of Political Affairs, Ridha Saidi, Minister in-charge of Economic Affairs and Riadh Betaieb, Minister for Vigilance against corruption.

External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid paid a 2-day official visit to the Republic of Tunisia on 2-3 February 2014 in a first ever bilateral visit at EAM level from India since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1958. EAM called on the President H.E. Dr. Moncef Marzouki, Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Mehdi Jomaa and met with Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Mongi Hamdi. He also met with Sheikh Rashid Ghannouchi, President, Ennahda party and Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi, President, Nida Tounes party. EAM conveyed the felicitations of the government and the people of India to the Tunisian leadership on the historic achievement of the adoption of the

Constitution by the democratically-elected National Constituent Assembly. He also conveyed India's wholehearted support for the people of Tunisia in their struggle for democracy and India's admiration for the significant progress made by the government and leadership of Tunisia in the transition towards a durable democracy. He informed the Tunisian leadership of India's readiness to share its expertise in building durable institutions of democracy, particularly in connection with voting methods and the work of the Election Commission.

An India-Tunisia Joint Commission has been established under the co-chairmanship of the respective Ministers of State *for External Affairs*; its 11th Session was held in New Delhi in April 2012. In addition, there are Joint Working Groups in (i) Information and Communications Technology, (ii) Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), (iii) Drugs and Pharmaceuticals, (iv) Hydrocarbon sector, and (v) Textiles, which have been meeting regularly.

Pursuant to Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology signed between the two countries in 2006 which envisages encouragement of scientific conduct through exchange visits, participation in scientific activities such as workshops, seminars and participation in technological exhibitions, etc., the 3rd India-Tunisia Joint Committee on S&T also met in Tunis in May 2013.

Under India Africa Forum Summit, a twinning programme between Pasteur Institute of Tunisia and ICGEB has been agreed upon for cooperation in specific training programmes in the areas of biochemical sciences; and building infrastructure/facilities in research. A joint workshop was held in Tunis on May 23-24, 2013.

A 4-member IIFT experts' team visited Tunis, 22-28 September 2013, and conducted a week-long Executive Development Programme on International Business (EDPIB) for Tunisian officials in close cooperation with the Diplomatic Training Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia. Young career diplomats of the Foreign Ministry and officials of the Commerce and Investment & International Cooperation Ministries from various parts of the country participated in the business specific short-term training courses, specially designed for Tunisian participants, on the themes of finance, trade, investment, services & general issues.

As a follow up to the recommendations made by the 11th session of India-Tunisia Joint Commission, the 5th session of Joint Working Group on Drugs and Pharmaceuticals was held in New Delhi on November 5, 2013. Issues of bilateral interest such as commercial exchange in the field of medicines, vaccines and medical equipments; means to realize joint investments in pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, vaccines and serums; scientific research cooperation in development of new medicines; fast-track registration of medicines etc. were discussed.

Third meeting of Joint Working Group on SMEs was held at New Delhi on 02nd April, 2014 in which the two sides discussed possible activities of bilateral cooperation and agreed to facilitate collaboration among SMEs of both countries in select verticals.

The 2nd Session of India-Tunisia Joint Working Group on Information and Communication Technology (JWG on ICT) was held on June 29, 2015 in New Delhi. Both sides agreed on cooperation in IT-ITeS & Electronics manufacturing sector,

exchange of best practices in digital India initiatives, e-governance, digital economy and in Technoparks between the respective agencies.

Bilateral Agreements/MOUs

Several Agreements and MOUs have been signed between India and Tunisia. These include an Indo-Tunisian Trade Agreement (1960), Agreement on Friendship and Technical, Economic and Scientific Cooperation (1965), Cultural Agreement (1969), Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation (1994), Agreement on Scientific and Technology Cooperation (1995), Extradition Treaty (2000), Protocol of Cooperation between Diplomatic Institutes of the two countries (2002), Agreement in the field of Small and Medium Enterprises (2007), Air Services Agreement (2007) and Cooperation Agreement between Tunisia Radio and All India Radio (2012). The MOUs include those on utilization of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes (1997), on Agriculture (2000), on Tourism (2000) and on Cooperation in Communication & Information Technology (2004).

Bilateral Trade

Tunisia has been a reliable source for phosphates (a primary input for our fertilizer industry) since 1950s. Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Phosphoric Acid are the two major products being imported from Tunisia. India accounts for over 50% of Tunisia's global phosphoric acid exports.

India, on the other hand, exports a wide range of products. Significant among them are mobile telephones, earth moving equipment, machinery, articles of iron and steel, marine products, sugar, tea, pulses, raw tobacco, finished leather, fine chemicals, polyethylene and yarn, etc.

Bilateral trade which touched US\$ 562.65 million in 2012 was in India's favour with exports to Tunisia at US\$ 381 million and imports at US\$ 181.7 million. However, the political instability and continued sit-ins and strikes in mining sector, have negatively affected trade with Tunisia. During 2014, India's exports to Tunisia reached \$283.92 million, while imports from Tunisia were \$148.45 million. The annual bilateral trade during last few years is as under:

Trade Data - Annual (US\$ million)

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 1st quarter
India's Exports	222.25	280.16	351.62	380.94	313.11	283.92	61.4
India's Imports	236.17	304.07	143.96	181.70	85.77	148.45	19.4
Total	458.4	584.2	495.6	562.6	398.9	432.37	80.8

(Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tunis)

Joint Venture

There is one Indian joint venture in Tunisia – "Tunisia-India Fertilizer SA" (TIFERT) launched in 2006 for manufacturing Phosphoric Acid. This US\$450 million project has 30% shares distributed equally between Coromandel Fertilizers Ltd and the Gujarat State Fertilizers Ltd, while the remaining 70% are held equally by two Tunisian state enterprises. The installed capacity of the plant is 360,000 tons of phosphoric acid and the entire production is to be shared equally by the two Indian partners. The plant has become operational in May 2013 and shiploads of phosphoric acid have started reaching India since July 2013.

Projects

Indian companies M/s KEC International Ltd and Jyoti Structures Ltd have a presence in Tunisia. M/s Jyoti Structures is presently engaged in supply and erection of electric transmission lines worth US\$ 73 million. M/s. KEC International Ltd. of the RPG Group of industries has completed execution of a similar project worth US\$115 million and is now executing another contract amounting to US\$ 93 million.

A new assembly plant of Mahindra pickup trucks, the first ever in Africa, was established in Tunisia. The plant is located in Sousse on the east coast of Tunisia and targets to produce up to 2500 trucks per year. Indian auto company, Mahindra and Mahindra, provides the vehicles as knocked-down kits, to be assembled in the factory at Sousse by the Tunisian company, M/s. MEDICARS, with full technical support from the Indian company. The Tunisian partner company will also import other Mahindra products, including tractors, SUVs and 4X4s into Tunisia. The assembly plant was inaugurated on October 30, 2013.

In June 2015, the industrial launch of the assembly unit of TATA Motors Xenon pickups, trucks and ACE light commercial vehicles took place. The commercial launch of these vehicles will be in September 2015. Initially 1200 units will be assembled per annum.

ITEC/ Other Scholarships

In recent years, Tunisia has been evincing greater interest in the ITEC Programmes and the number of trainees has gone up. In the year 2014-15, India offered 60 ITEC slots to Tunisia. Under India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) 7 Tunisians attended various training programmes in India during 2014-15. Under India-Africa S&T Cooperation initiative (CV Raman Fellowship) 9 Tunisian researchers and scientists participated in during 2013-14, while 19 candidates participated during 2014-15. Under ICCR Scholarships for Higher Studies, India offered 15 slots during 2014-15 and 10 slots during 2015-16. Other Scholarships offered during 2014-2015 were: FSI (PCFD) 01 slot and CUNPKF 01 slot

Culture

Under cultural exchange programme, exchange of cultural troupes of two countries takes place on regular basis. A 12-member Indian dance and music troupe, sponsored by ICCR, performed in Tunis on January 25, 2013.

A 9-member Tunisian Sufi music troupe "De Chant Soufi Mechket Group" visited India to participate in the 3rd International Sufi Festival in Kolkata from February 1-3, 2013. The troupe also performed at Delhi and Surajkund International Crafts Mela from February 5-15.

A 17-member Indian Junior men Volleyball team participated in the 12th International Tournament of Kelibia, organized by the Tunisian Federation of Volleyball from July 23-26, 2013.

A 22-member Indian Classical dance troupe led by Pt. Rajendra Gangani visited Tunisia from July 25 to August 1, 2013 to perform in the most prestigious Carthage festival of Tunisia. They also performed at Kasserine, Zahra and Kelibia.

An 8-member cultural troupe Sonam Kalra Sufi-Gospel Project sponsored by ICCR visited Tunisia from September 28-30, 2014 under Cultural Exchange Programme and staged 2 performances at Embassy Residence and Municipal Theater, Tunis.

An 8-member Tunisian Sufi troupe visited India 10-11 February 2015 to perform in the 5th International Sufi Festival in Delhi organized by ICCR and in 'Sufi Sutra' held in Kolkata and Goa.

An Indian cultural group 'Lok Rang', performers of Bhangra dance, visited Tunisia from April 26 to 27, 2015 and staged three performances at several places.

Indian Community:

The permanent Indian community consists of a couple of families who have been here for over forty years. They are in business and lead their lives more or less like Tunisians. They, however, hold Indian passports. There are a couple of other families in Tunis on the staff of the African Development Bank and about 200 other Indians working in the interiors for Indian and foreign companies executing different projects.

Following collapse of law & order in Libya, Embassy has facilitated evacuation of more than 3000 Indians working in Libya through Djerba port of Tunisia and the Carthage International Airport of Tunis since July 2014. The evacuation is still going on intermittently.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Tunis website:

<http://www.embassyofindiatunis.com/>

Embassy of India, Tunis Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiainTunisia>

June 2015