

India-Iraq Bilateral Relations

India and Iraq have historical and civilizational ties. Iraqi port of Basra was not only the market par excellence of the Indian merchandise including textiles, spices, food-grains and other commodities for the Arab world but also of the famous pearl trade that flourished mainly through the Indian traders and jewellers. Indian soldiers and railway workers from British India had played major role in ensuring the security in this region during the colonial era and have left an imprint in the region that many Iraqis still proudly claim their Indian ethnic descent. India and Iraq have even shared agricultural practices. The breed of the southern Iraqi Jamus or the water buffalo had been brought by Harun Al Rashid from India. The Iraqi Philosophers and Sufi saints like Hasan al Basri, Junaid Al Baghdadi and Sheikh Behlul had such an impact on the spiritual movements in India that Guru Dev Nanak Saheb came personally to Baghdad to deliberate on the ontological and the epistemological questions with Sheikh Behlul who hosted him for nearly three months. Iraqi spiritual leader Sheikh Syed Abdul QadirJeelani has enormous following in India where he is referred to either as DastagirSaheb or Ghous-al-Azam. On the other hand, Indians were among the foremost to patronize the Shrines and Sarai Khanas of the heritage of Islam's primeval martyrdom at Karbala. Thousands of Indians visit the shrines of Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas in Karbala every year and also the shrine of Sheikh Abdul QadirJeelani in Baghdad.

Since the outbreak of war in Iraq, India has been supporting a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq. India responded to the urgent needs of Iraq for relief and economic reconstruction directly and as part of international efforts under the UN auspices. In response to UN Secretary General's urgent appeal, India committed US\$ 20 mn for assistance to the Iraqi people in 2003. Activities under this pledge included supply of milk powder through World Food Programme, training of Iraqi Foreign Service officers in diplomacy, and other Iraqi officials in Information Technology. In cooperation with World Food Programme (WFP), India provided fortified biscuits to Iraqi school children and Iraqi refugees in Syria. In addition, India contributed US\$ 10 million towards the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) for investments, reconstruction and development in Iraq.

High-level visits: There have been high-level political exchanges between the two countries in recent years which are summarized below:

Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq visited India on July 24-26, 2017. In New Delhi, he had delegation level talks with EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. Dr. Jaafari called on Vice President Dr. Hamid Ansari and also had a meeting with Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of State (IC) for Petroleum & Natural Gas. He also visited Mumbai during the visit.

General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs visited Iraq on July 12-14, 2017. He handed over a letter from EAM to Iraqi Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari congratulating the Iraqi Government on liberation of Mosul from ISIS. MoS also met Deputy Foreign Minister Najjar Al Khairallah; NSA Mr. Faleh Al Fayyadh; and Secretary General of the Council of Ministers of Iraq and Head of Crisis Unit Mr. Mahdi Al Alaq. In his meetings, MoS enquired about the whereabouts of the 39 Indian nationals missing from Mosul since 2014.

Mr. Humam Al Hamoudi, Deputy Speaker of Iraqi Parliament visited India in April 2017 and had meetings with General (Retired) V. K. Singh, MoS in the Ministry of External Affairs and other leaders.

Dr. HamedYounis Saleh, Deputy Oil Minister of Iraq led a delegation for the PETROTECH 2016 held in New Delhi on 5-7 December 2016.

Minister of State for External Affairs Shri M.J. Akbar visited Iraq on 21-23 August 2016. During the visit, the Minister met the President of Iraq Mr. FuadMasum; Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament Dr. Salim Al Jabouri; Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, and the National Security Advisor MrFaleh Al Fayyad. He also paid a visit to the Holy city of Karbala where he had met the Chairman of the Provincial Council of Karbala, religious leaders, and members of the Indian Community.

The First round of India-Iraq Foreign Office Consultations was held in New Delhi in Nov 2015. The Iraqi side was led by Mr. Nazar Al Khairallah, Deputy Foreign Minister and Indian side by Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs.

Mr. Faleh Al-Fayyadh, National Security Advisor of Iraq visited India in December 2013 during which an MoU on Cooperation between the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and Al Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies, Baghdad was signed.

Prime Minister of Iraq Mr. Nouri Al Maliki paid a State visit to India in August 2013. He was accompanied by a large delegation including Minister for Oil, Minister for Agriculture and leading Iraqi businessmen. 4 MoUs were signed during the visit including on Cooperation in Energy Sector; on cooperation between the two Foreign Ministries; on Cooperation between the Foreign Service Institutes of both sides; and on Cooperation in the field of water resources management.

External Affairs Minister Shri Salman Khurshid paid a visit to Iraq in June 2013. This was the first visit to Iraq by EAM from India since 1990. The last round of the bilateral Joint Commission meeting was held in July 2013 in Baghdad. Indian side was led by Dr. VeerappaMoily, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas and the Iraqi side by Mr. Abdul Kareem Luaibi, Minister of Oil.

Parliamentary Exchanges: There is Iraq-India Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Iraqi Parliament (Council of Representatives) led by Mr. Helal Al Sahlani. All of its seven members are high-profile political leaders from across the country. Mr. Osama Al Nujaiifi, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament had visited India in December 2012 and had meetings with Speakers of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Mr. Humam Al Hamoudi, Deputy Speaker of Iraqi Parliament visited India in April 2017.

Economic and Commercial relations

The economic and trade relations between India and Iraq slowed down after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the total bilateral trade has grown steadily since 2010, mainly due to increasing crude oil imports. The value of total trade increased from US\$ 5.7 billion in 2006-07 to US \$ 20.52 billion in 2012-2013. Trade figures in the subsequent years declined largely due to fall in the global oil prices, however bilateral trade has actually increased in quantity, both in exports and imports. In FY 2016-17, bilateral trade with Iraq was valued at US\$ 12.81 billion, accounting for about 1.95% of

our total foreign trade. Iraq was our 15th largest trading partner in 2016-17. Details of India's bilateral trade with Iraq in the last five years are summarized below:

(In \$ million)

| Year | India's Export to Iraq | India's imports from Iraq | Total |
|---------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 2011-12 | 763.97 | 18,918.47 | 19,682.44 |
| 2012-13 | 1,278.13 | 19,247.31 | 20,534.44 |
| 2013-14 | 918.03 | 18,520.86 | 19,438.89 |
| 2014-15 | 829.32 | 14,247.66 | 15076.98 |
| 2015-16 | 1,004.39 | 10,837.58 | 11841.97 |
| 2016-17 | 1,115.50 | 11,702.07 | 12,817.57 |

(Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India)

Iraq has consistently been among the top largest suppliers of crude oil to India. In 2016, Iraq supplied 37.81 MMT crude to India worth US\$ 11.63 billion. It was the largest supplier of crude to India in the first half of 2017. Indian Oil Corporation, HPCL and BPCL are the major importers.

In addition to import of crude in bulk oil, India also imports commodities like raw wool and sulphur from Iraq. Indian exports to Iraq consist of cereals, iron and steel, meat and meat products, pharmaceutical products, agro chemicals, cosmetics, rubber manufactured products, paints, gems and jewellery, ceramics, manufactures of metals, machine tools, electrical machinery and instruments, transport equipment, electronic goods, handicrafts, sugar, tea, garments. A significant volume of exports takes place through Dubai and other destinations.

Iraq used to be the main destination of huge project for Indian companies. In the post-war era, there is some presence of Indian companies: M/S MokulShriram JV had won a US\$235 Million contract to rebuild the sewerage system for Basrah; MsShapoorjiPollonji had won a US\$ 85 Million contract to rebuild a Hotel in Basrah and MsLancoInfratech had won a US 81 Million EPC contract to build the Akaaz power project.

The Mission organized the first Najaf-India Trade Show at the International Trade Fair ground in Najaf in September 2016 in which 34 Indian companies exhibited their products. The Trade Show was inaugurated by the Deputy Trade Minister of Iraq. The Fair was followed by B2B meetings between the businessmen of both countries at Najaf and in Baghdad.

Iraqi pharmaceuticals companies have been actively participating in various trade promotion events organized in India. More than 80 Indian pharmaceuticals companies are supplying medicines to the Iraqi market. A number of Indian hospitals are on the panel of Iraqi Health Ministry where the latter sends eligible Iraqi patients. The First Master Class on Epilepsy Surgery between the Neurosurgeons of both sides was held in Baghdad on March 3-4, 2017.

People to people contacts: The respect for each other's strength has been mutual between India and Iraq. The people to people and institutional contacts are so deep that today India has become the most preferred destination for Iraqis for seeking quality medical treatment. Hundreds of Iraqis prefer to send their children for higher education to India on self-financing basis. There is hardly a University in Iraq of which some faculty has not studied in India. About 10,000 Iraqi students have been doing their PhD, Masters and undergraduate studies in India. The Mission is currently issuing around 200 visas per day going up to 350-400 during the summer. Majority of the travellers visit

India for Medical purposes, tourism, education, and for business. In the calendar year 2016, a total of 42,135 visas of different categories have been issued by the Mission. The third UN International Day of Yoga was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Baghdad on June 17, 2017.

Capacity building: The academic linkages in the medical and engineering fields have throughout been vibrant. In terms of capacity building, India has annually been providing assistance to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to train officials of the Government of Iraq. For the year 2017-18, a total of 175 slots have been allotted under ITEC programme. In addition, India has been offering opportunity to Iraqi students for higher studies in India under 'General Scholarship Scheme' (GSS) organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). The Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC) has provided training to the Iraqi oil officials in India in various subjects related to downstream oil sector.

Indian community: Before the Gulf war in 1991, there were more than 80,000 Indian nationals in Iraq. Most of them left Iraq before the war started. After the 2003 invasion, thousands of Indian workers were recruited by contractors to provide various services to foreign military bases in Iraq. Many of them left with the deteriorating security situation in the country. With the lifting of the Government of India advisory against travel of Indians to Iraq which was in vogue from 2004 till May 2010, the number of Indian workers had steadily increased in the more stable Kurdistan region comprising Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk governorates, with better salaries and working conditions in steel mills, oil companies and construction projects. When the ISIS took over large parts of Iraq in 2014, Government of India evacuated thousands of Indian nationals from Iraq. At present, the total number of Indians in Iraq is now estimated to be around 10,000-12,000, mostly in Kurdistan region, Basra, Najaf and Karbala. About 30,000-40,000 Indians visit Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf and Samarra in Iraq for pilgrimage annually.

Useful Resources:

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| Website | - | http://indianembassybaghdad.in/ |
| Twitter | - | https://www.facebook.com/IndiainIraq |
| Facebook | - | https://twitter.com/EI_Baghdad?lang=en |

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