

# India, Israel trade pact to unlock vast potential: PM in Israeli parliament

Congress and Left parties say Modi's visit amounts to betrayal of the Palestinian cause

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday that Indian and Israeli trade negotiators were working on an “ambitious trade agreement” which “will unlock the vast potential” in the trade relationship between the two countries.

An Israeli trade delegation is currently in India, and held a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday.

As the Prime Minister entered the Knesset, its members chanted his name. His address at the Israeli Parliament on Wednesday — part of his packed schedule during the two-day visit to the country — underlined the strong ties between the two countries.

In his speech at the Knesset, the PM said the two countries are also working closely in other sectors, including the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, and the I2U2 Framework between India, Israel, the US and the UAE. Modi termed the defence and security ties between the two countries as “an important pillar” of the partnership, and said the two countries signed a defence cooperation agreement in November.

The India-Israel defence security partnership is of vital importance in the current uncertain world, Modi said.

During his speech, Modi said he was born on September 7, 1950 — the same day



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu upon his arrival in Tel Aviv, Israel

PHOTO: PTI

that India formally recognised Israel. He said that just like Israel, India had been a victim of terrorism and supported all efforts that contribute to peace and regional stability. Modi, whose visit to Israel has been criticised by Opposition parties in India for its timing, told the Knesset, that he brings “deepest condolences from the people of India for every life lost in the barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7”. “We feel your pain, we share your grief, India stands with Israel firmly with full conviction in this moment and beyond,” he said.

The PM also detailed the contribution of Jews to modern India in several fields, including that of Lieutenant General JFR Jacob in India's 1971 war with Pakistan.

Welcoming Modi at the Knesset, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu described him not just as “a dear friend”, but as a “brother”. Netanyahu said he was deeply moved by Modi's visit to Jerusalem, and that the Indian PM was a “great champion of Indian-Israeli alliance”.

Since Modi's first visit to Israel in 2017, India and Israel have “doubled our trade”, “tripled our cooperation” and quadrupled India-Israel ties “in ways that I cannot describe”, Netanyahu said. “In a world where anti-semitism is rising, India stands out where Jews were never persecuted and only welcomed, thank you India,” he said.

The Israeli PM also mentioned the “Modi hug”, calling it “something special” which reflected warmth. Modi was received

at the Ben Gurion airport by Netanyahu and his wife, Sara earlier in the day.

The Israeli PM said India is a gigantic power, and Israel is gigantic in spirit. Modi was conferred with the ‘Speaker of the Knesset Medal’ in recognition of his contribution to strengthening strategic relations between India and Israel.

The Speaker of the Knesset, Amir Ohana, called Modi's visit in July 2017 historic as he was the first Indian PM to visit Israel. He added that Modi was making history again as the first Indian PM to address the Knesset. Ohana said bilateral cooperation has deepened between the two countries, especially in security and technology.

India-Israel ties were elevated to the level of strategic partnership during Modi's visit in 2017. Modi's visit to Israel has come under focus because of the ongoing tensions in West Asia, including deteriorating ties between the US and Iran.

Opposition parties have criticised the PM's Israel visit. Congress' general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh on Wednesday said the PM is displaying “moral cowardice” when the entire world is critical of his “dear friend” and Israeli PM Netanyahu. The Left parties said that the trip comes at a time when Israel is “waging a genocidal war in Gaza” and amounts to betrayal of the Palestinian cause. In a statement, the Politburo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said the visit would “legitimise the murderous regime” of Netanyahu.