

# Weizman visit boosts Indo-Israeli ties

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

A seven-day visit to India on Dec. 30 through Jan. 5, made Ezer Weizman the first Israeli President to visit India, and was a high-profile act strengthening the fast-developing Indo-Israeli relations. Barely five years after New Delhi began to formally talk to Tel Aviv, Israel has become the second largest investor in India, behind the United States. The Middle Eastern former pariah has out-invested not only the western European countries, but Japan as well. This is perhaps the major reason for President Weizman's sojourn in India.

In concrete terms, the trip resulted in a further blooming of Indo-Israeli ties. Four bilateral agreements in the fields of industry, agriculture, the arts, and culture were signed by

President Weizman and Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda.

As seen by relevant circles in New Delhi, concerns expressed about the trip coming from the Pakistani government in Islamabad are likely meant for domestic consumption. India-Israel cooperation is of a strategic nature, in which the transfer of technology and manpower is the keystone. Such an alliance is bound to generate significant bilateral economic activities.

In addition, a well-developed alliance between India and Israel, which has been supported by Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, may act as an effective pacifying factor in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and for the Middle East region as a whole.

There is yet another reason why Pakistan's expressed "concerns" cannot be taken seriously. The government of China, which Islamabad claims as its "best and most trusted friend," had long developed a defense- and technology-associated strategic relationship with Tel Aviv. But not a whisper has been heard from Islamabad over the years on that count.

President Weizman told the press in New Delhi that his country was keen on cooperation with India, because India was "one of the most important countries which will play an important role in the 21st century." He opined that the next century would be the century of the eastern region, referring especially to China, Japan, Indonesia, and India.

Among the more interesting developments to come out of the Israeli President's trip, is the setting up of a model agricultural farm near Delhi at Pusa, the center of India's agricultural research. The farm will educate Indian farmers about drip irrigation systems and other modern agricultural technology. Israel will bear the cost of setting up the farm, including equipment and manpower, while India provides the land.

## Defense links

President Weizman was Israel's Air Force chief during the 1967 Mideast war, and had been in India for eight months in 1946 during World War II as an officer in the British Royal Air Force. He was keen to strengthen defense relations with India. Already a number of visits by defense delegations, particularly among Air Force personnel, have taken place.

The day President Weizman arrived, he had talks with the Indian prime minister, in which he reportedly offered to build for India an advanced fighter aircraft, Kfir, developed by the Israelis using the French Mirage design.

The offer includes setting up joint ventures between the two countries, with high-quality Israeli technology and advanced manufacturing techniques. Israel has offered its advanced multi-mode surveillance radar to the Indian Navy, ostensibly to counter the latest acquisition by Pakistan's Navy of P-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft from the

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- that Washington and Franklin championed Big Government?
- that the Founding Fathers promoted partnership between private industry and central government?

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According to David Troim, deputy director of Elta Electronics of the Israeli Aircraft Industries, the EL M-2022A Israeli surveillance system has a capacity of tracking 100 targets at a time and can be fitted to patrol helicopters. Besides employing it for long-range surveillance and moving-target surveillance, the radar, which has been designed for both fixed-wing and rotary-wing airborne platforms, can also be used for navigation and weather-monitoring purposes.

Just before President Weizman's arrival, the Indian daily *Times of India* reported on Dec. 27 that the Indian Air Force had acquired a sophisticated Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation (ACMI) system, which has been installed at the high-security Tactics and Air Combat Development Establishment located at the Jamnagar Air Base in the State of Gujarat in western India. The installation of the ACMI is significant, in light of the signing of a contract with Russia for purchase of 40 high-performance Sukhoi 30 Mk-1 long-range multi-role fighters.

There are indications that Indo-Israeli transport links will be updated soon, when the Israeli shipping company Zim and the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) introduce a direct containerized service between India and Israel. The Israeli airline, El Al, is already connecting Tel Aviv to two Indian cities, New Delhi and Mumbai.

### Trading interests

Some 20 top Israeli business leaders accompanied President Weizman on his trip to India. With the Most Favored Nation (MFN) agreement between the two countries already in effect, trade between the two countries will not only grow, but also diversify. Since 1992, two-way trade has grown almost threefold, from \$200 million to about \$560 million expected in 1996. Rough diamonds and chemicals constitute almost 80% of Israeli exports to India, while polished diamonds and cotton yarn constitute about 76% of Indian exports to Israel.

It is expected that India will soon step up its exports to Israel, especially pharmaceuticals, plastics and rubber, metals, and machinery. Prior to his departure for India, President Weizman told an interviewer in Jerusalem that he visualized India as a potential partner in high technology, software, the aircraft industry, and agricultural technologies.

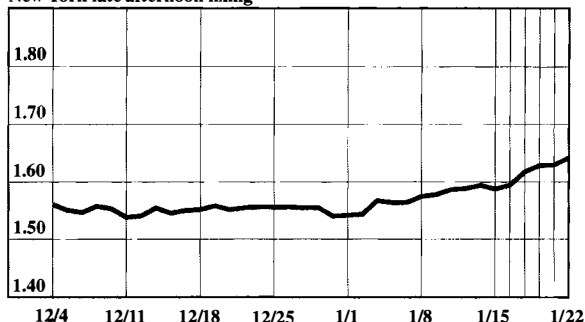
Reports indicate that both governments are contributing matching funds to finance joint research projects in the areas of biotechnology, lasers, optics, and information technologies.

Referring to the abundance of high-quality software engineers in India, President Weizman said, "We are in the process of bringing more Indians" to Israel. He said that India should consider Israel as a gateway for exports to the European Union, with which Israel has a free trade arrangement.

## Currency Rates

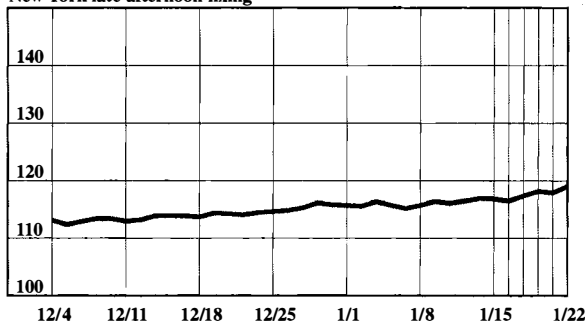
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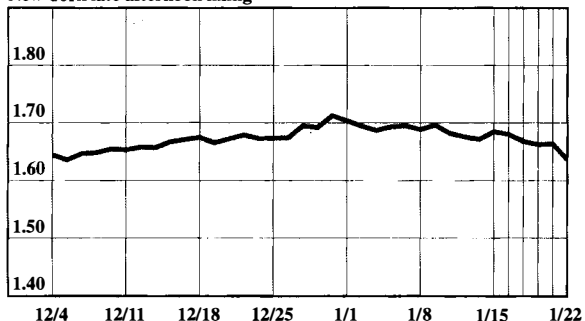
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