

Press Statement by Prime Minister during Visit of Prime Minister of Israel to India (January 15, 2018)

Prime Minister's Office

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Your Excellency Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

Members of the media,

It is a great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on his first ever visit to India.

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(My good friend, Welcome to India!)

Your visit, Prime Minister, is a long-anticipated moment in the journey of friendship between India and Israel.

Your visit is also a fitting climax to the commemoration of 25 years of diplomatic relations between India and Israel.

As our first honoured guest in 2018, your visit marks a special beginning to our New Year calendar. It comes at an especially auspicious time as people all over India are rejoicing the arrival of spring, renewal, hope and harvest. The festivals of Lohri, Bihu, MakarSankranti, and Pongal celebrate the splendour of India's diversity and unity.

Friends,

Last year in July, I carried the greetings and friendship of 1.25 billion Indians during my momentous journey to Israel. In return, I was overwhelmed by the generous affection and warmth of the Israeli people, led by my friend, Bibi.

In that visit, Prime Minister Netanyahu and I promised each other and our people to build a strategic partnership: of hope and trust and progress of diverse and cutting-edge cooperation, and of joint endeavours and shared successes. Such a promise flows as much from the natural affinity and friendship that have linked us for centuries as it does from the compelling win-win case for engagement in almost all spheres .

And it is a measure of our shared ambition and commitment that six short months after that visit; your extraordinary visit is taking place to India.

Today and yesterday, Prime Minister Netanyahu and I reviewed the progress in our relations and renewed our conversation on the possibilities and the opportunities that beckon us and need to be seized.

Our discussions were wide-ranging and intensive. They were marked by the desire to do more. Prime Minister, I have a reputation of being impatient in getting results.

If I may let out an open secret, I know that so are you.

Last year in Tel Aviv, you had expressed the intent to cut down bureaucratic red tape with a machete and forge ahead with speed.

Prime Minister, I am happy to tell you that in India, we are well on our way to doing just that. We have imparted our shared impatience to the implementation of our earlier decisions.

The results are already visible on the ground. Our discussions today were marked by convergence to accelerate our engagement and to scale up our partnership.

We will pursue this in three ways:

- First, we will strengthen the existing pillars of cooperation in areas that touch the lives of our peoples. These are agriculture, science and technology, and security.

We exchanged views on scaling up the Centers of Excellence that have been a main-stay of agricultural cooperation by bringing in advanced Israeli practices and technology.

In defence, I have invited Israeli companies to take advantage of the liberalized FDI regime to make more in India with our companies.

- Second, we are venturing into less explored areas of cooperation, such as oil & gas, cyber security, films, and start-ups. You will find this reflected in the agreements that were just exchanged. Several of these areas are indicative of our desire to diversify and broad-base engagement.

- And third,

we are committed to facilitating the flow of people and ideas between our geographies. It requires policy facilitation, infrastructure and connectivity links and fostering constituencies of support beyond Government.

We are working with Israel to make it easier for our people to work and visit each other's countries, including for longer work durations. To bring people closer on both sides, an Indian Cultural Center will soon open in Israel.

We have also decided to start an annual exchange of bilateral visits by 100 young people from science-related educational streams.

Friends,

Thriving two-way trade and investment is an integral part of our vision for a strong partnership. Prime Minister Netanyahu and I agreed on the need to do more in this direction. After the meeting in Tel Aviv last year, we will interact for the second time with our CEOs under the bilateral Forum.

I welcome the large business component that Prime Minister Netanyahu has brought along with him. Prime Minister Netanyahu and I also exchanged perspectives on the regional and global situation.

We reviewed our cooperation as a factor for stability and peace in our regions and the world.

Friends,

Yesterday, as his first stop after touching Indian soil, Prime Minister Netanyahu joined me at the re-named Teen Murti Haifa Chowk to pay homage to the memory of the brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives a century ago in the Battle of Haifa in Israel.

We are both countries that have never forgotten our history and our heroes. And we deeply appreciate this gesture by Prime Minister Netanyahu.

As we look to the future of this exciting partnership with Israel, I am filled with hope and optimism. In Prime Minister Netanyahu, I have a counter-part who is equally committed to taking the India-Israel relationship to soaring new heights.

Finally, I am delighted to have the chance to be with you, Prime Minister , in my home state, Gujarat, day after.

There, we will have another opportunity to see the fulfillment of the promise, which our mutual cooperation holds in diverse areas such as agriculture, technology, and innovation.

I wish Prime Minister Netanyahu, Mrs. Netanyahu and the delegation a memorable stay in India.

Thank you very much. Toda Rabah!

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