

## Business above politics

Two quick prime ministerial visits between India and Israel during the last few months complete the normalisation of bilateral relations that began in 1992. This is a good moment for India to end its excessive politicisation of the relations with Israel.

When he visited Israel nearly two decades ago, the then external affairs minister, [Jaswant Singh](#), had expressed public regret that Delhi's Israel policy was a prisoner of India's "vote-bank" politics.

Singh was, of course, making the familiar argument that India's hesitations on Israel were about the Congress's political "appeasement" of the nation's Muslim minority. Now many critics of the BJP return the compliment by suggesting that Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s warmth towards Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is about "injecting Hindutva" into India's foreign policy.

Domestic politics can never be eliminated entirely from the conduct of any nation's foreign policy. But there is no escaping that internal considerations have had a debilitating affect on India's engagement with West Asia. The sources of this distorting influence are deep and go back to the pre-independence period.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire for example had a traumatic impact on the Subcontinent's Muslims at the beginning of the 20th century. As the leading force of the national movement, the [Indian National Congress](#) struggled to cope with the consequences. The Partition made matters worse. Pakistan's claim to represent all the Muslims in the Subcontinent generated pressures of its own in India's regional policy engagement and led to an occasional disaster like the attempt to join an organisation of Islamic countries in 1969.

[Jawaharlal Nehru](#) was quick to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel when it was founded in 1948. However, more than four decades elapsed before Delhi established full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992. Although India has stepped up cooperation with Israel since then, it remained hesitant about political engagement at the highest level.

The only exception came when Prime Minister [Atal Bihari Vajpayee](#) hosted the Israeli premier, Ariel Sharon, in 2003. With reciprocal visits of Modi and Netanyahu to mark the 25th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations now behind us, Delhi must focus on the economic dimension of India's engagement with Israel. On the political front, Delhi fortunately has good relations with all the key regional actors in West Asia.

India's unmet challenge in the region is about realising the full potential of commercial cooperation with countries ranging from Israel to Iran and Turkey to the UAE. The slim economic pickings from Netanyahu's visit underline the urgent imperative of moving from the political to the commercial in West Asia.

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com