

## On a new keel: Netanyahu's visit to India

Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to India](#) this week was the final step in the process of fully normalising the bilateral relationship. That process began in 1992 when India established diplomatic ties with Israel, with major milestones in 2003 when Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India, in 2015 when President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel, and in 2017 when [Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel](#). With Mr. Netanyahu's six-day visit, the focus is now on the future, and their joint statement drew a 25-year timeline in which to realise the potential of the strategic partnership. The close personal equation between the two leaders was evident throughout the visit, with Mr. Modi hosting Mr. and Ms. Netanyahu in Gujarat, where they flew kites and took part in a roadshow. Mr. Netanyahu also made the traditional trip to the Taj Mahal, and a symbolic journey to Mumbai's Chabad House, one of the sites of the 26/11 terror attacks where Israeli citizens were among those killed. On business, Mr. Modi welcomed Israeli partnership in Indian manufacturing, pointing to the winning combination of an India that has "size and scale" and an Israel that has "sharpness and edge". Mr. Netanyahu's case, made at a speech inaugurating the Foreign Ministry's annual Raisina Dialogue, was that the two countries have a "natural partnership" and a "natural friendship" that also caters to their need for hard power.

With a relationship that is more open, India has also decided to have a more honest conversation with Israel on the peace process. While the Modi-Netanyahu meeting in July 2017 had practically brushed aside the Israel-Palestine peace process, the joint statement issued on Monday in New Delhi "reaffirmed their support for an early resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians". This indicates that the two Prime Ministers had a deeper conversation on the issue this time, including India's vote at the UN against the decision of the United States to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Mr. Modi is expected to visit Ramallah as well as meet Jordan's King Abdullah II, who as the custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem is leading peace efforts in the Arab world, and is due in New Delhi shortly. This would take forward India's commitment to assisting in finding a just solution for the conflict. It will require using the leverage India has built over the decades among Israelis and Palestinians in order to join global and regional powers in pushing them back to the negotiating table. It will also involve challenging Mr. Netanyahu's contention that struck a jarring note in his otherwise successful visit. He said: "The weak don't survive. The strong survive. You make peace with the strong. You ally with the strong." India must stick to its strategy of strengthening ties with Israel without damaging its commitment to the West Asian peace process, and build its friendships and alignments in a way that goes beyond an appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.

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