

## Indo-Israel Relations from 1977 to 1984

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### **Abstract**

*The upgradation of Indo-Israel ties to the Ambassadorial level marks a new turning point in the history of post-independence Indian foreign relations. It signifies the end of the Cold War perspective which dominated India's foreign policy formulation till now. The decision also marks an important change in India's approach towards the Palestine problem. Though India recognized the state of Israel in September 1950 and a Consulate of Israel was opened in Bombay in 1951. But India desisted from establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel for a long time due to various reasons. The most important reason was the blatant disregard which Israel displayed for all civilized code of conduct in international affairs. It not only occupied land which did not belong to it but also refused to negotiate a settlement, India, which has always championed the cause of anti-racism and anti-colonialism could have established full diplomatic relations with Israel without compromising on these principles.*

**Key words:** *Indo-Israeli relations, Janta Party, Likud Party, Camp David Agreement, Occupied Territories*

### **Introduction**

Zionists were particularly interested in India. Both during the pre-state years and after becoming a state, they made various efforts for developing close relationship with India. Zionist leaders were fascinated by the charismatic Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. In the early years of Independence, they left no stone unturned in their efforts to woo Indian friendship.<sup>1</sup>

At different stages, Indian governments were approached by Israeli governments for normalization of relations. The agenda had been pushed forth by various Israeli leaders. Ben Gurion was always interested in India and Buddhism. He wanted to win Nehru to Israeli side but this did not yield any positive result. Moshe Sharett was very much interested in India and her national movement but he could not fulfill his dream of Indo-Israeli diplomatic relations. He occupied an important place in the decision making process of Israeli government. Israeli government's failure to develop diplomatic ties with India might be attributed in same way as to Sharett's failure in diplomacy. His personal and national pride was not

conducive to Nehru. But conclusively Indian National leadership did not see eye to eye with Israelis and were in no mood to abandon the Palestinian national claim over their own lands.<sup>ii</sup>

However, during the Congress rule, there had emerged a strong pro-Israeli lobby in India. The Chinese invasion of 1962 was seen by this group of people as an acid test of friendship. Israeli transfer of weapons like mortar to India during the crisis was seen as an act of friendship.<sup>iii</sup> Since then, this lobby had been campaigning for Israel in India. Moreover there have been certain groups of people in India who wanted closer ties with the state of Israel since the day of independence. In the 1950s, Israel had been condemned and friends of Israel were silenced, when the latter collaborated with Western Imperial power. But, during the early part of 1960s and more after the June War of 1967, these groups of people and the right wing opposition parties got the opportunity to criticize government's policy and advocated for normalization of relation. In 1977, a conglomeration of parties in opposition to Congress formed first opposition government.

### **3.1 Formation of Janta Government and its Policy towards Israel (1977-1979)**

Following the assumption of power by the Janta Party on 24 March 1977, Atal Behari Vajpayee was given the portfolio of external affairs. Both Desai and Vajpayee were known as critics of several aspects of Indian foreign policy. Mr. Desai belonged to the Constituent of Janta Party and Vajpayee belonged to the right leaning Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) also a Janta constituent, which had specific views about India's relations with other countries as also the type of non-alignment and India's nuclear policy.

The foreign policy of a country undergoes certain changes, when there is a new government or leadership in power. When Janta Party came to power in 1977, it was expected that the foreign policy of India would also change. Hopes and fears were expressed both in India and abroad about the changes in India's foreign policy by the new leadership. This was mainly because some leaders of the opposition parties had in the past opposed some aspects of Mrs. Gandhi's foreign policy. It was expected that the new government would try to establish better relations with the U.S and also hoped for tilt of India's foreign policy towards the state of Israel. The U.S Newsweek wrote that the new Prime Minister was "a staunch anti-communist and was expected to tilt his non-alignment towards the western bloc". The opinion of the Washington Post was that the changes in India's foreign policy would represent "something of a windfall for Washington" and the defeat of the Congress party had offered "fresh opportunities" for America and Israel.

But Janta party's foreign policy reflected not only the nation's enlightened interest but in many ways it was a continuation of previous government's foreign policy and its aspirations and priorities at home. It opposed all forms of colonialism, neo-colonialism and racialism. It stood for friendship for all. It was committed to genuine non-alignment free from attachment to any power bloc. It strove for the peaceful settlement of all international disputes and worked with other third world nations to establish a new and just international economic order. It stood for regional cooperation for the common good and for global detente free of new blocs or spheres of influence and based on universal and general disarmament. It upheld Human Rights and denounced their violation wherever and whenever this occurred.<sup>iv</sup>

Morarji Desai and Atal Behari Vajpayee, immediately after assuming power made various pronouncements with regard to new Government's foreign policy. Desai declared that the policy of non-alignment was indispensable for India.<sup>v</sup> Vajpayee while addressing the meeting of the coordinating Bureau of the non-aligned countries at New Delhi said on 7 April 1977 that India was committed to the policy of genuine non-alignment.<sup>vi</sup> Vajpayee further declared on 9 April 1977 that even his former party – BJS, had it assumed power on the eve of independence in 1947, it too would have followed the policy of non-alignment 'for this policy was designed to preserve national independence and forces of peace'. On being reminded that he as leader of the BJS had in the past frequently criticized the policy of non-alignment, Vajpayee quipped, 'forget the Jana Sang... we have left the past behind'.<sup>vii</sup>

Foreign Minister Vajpayee told to the Lok Sabha on 29 June 1977 that "non-alignment is not the policy of an individual or a party. This is based on national consensus... the policy of non-alignment is in fact, a logical and essential extension of the national independence in the field of international affairs".<sup>viii</sup> He further added that 'non-alignment frees a nation from the pressure to borrow foreign models or adopt other ideologies which may be alien to a nation's civilization or its ethos'.<sup>ix</sup>

By making such pronouncements, the Janta leaders had envisaged the broad framework of their party's foreign policy which encompassed main characteristics like "genuine" or "proper" non-alignment, priority to better understanding and cooperation with immediate neighbours, renewed interest in commonwealth and an appropriate nuclear policy of India.

It was widely expected that India's West Asia policy might undergo a major change after the establishment of the Janta Government in New Delhi in March 1977. But when Janta Government came into power at centre, they continued the old policy of India towards West Asia, i.e. to back the Arabs and

the Palestinians, despite their canvassing for a change in foreign policy when they were in opposition. It reaffirmed that for the establishment of peace in West Asia, Israel should vacate those territories which they had been occupying since 1967 and give Palestinians the right to self-determination or even separate state of their own in which they could live in security and peace. The Indian government also reportedly deplored Israel's activity of aggression and of building Zionist settlements in the Occupied Territories which aggravated tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians.<sup>x</sup>

### **3.2 Formation of Likud Party Government (1977) and its Policy towards India**

On the other side, in Israel as a result of Yom Kippur war, which took place in October 1973, the Alignment Party was defeated by the Likud party in 1977 elections. From 1977 to 1991, the Likud party dominated the Israeli political scenario. The Likud party called for the implementation of a plan for the Palestinians that would give them complete autonomy on the West Bank and in Gaza, which had been occupied by Israel since 1967.

Likud's new policy for west bank settlement was based on the Likud's ideology that the entire West Bank is part of "Greater Israel". It was designed to establish Israel's presence in the west bank and Gaza Strip firmly and extensively. This effort entailed doing everything possible to erase the "green line" (the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the Occupied Territories in 1967) and to place Jewish settlements where they would obstruct any future attempts to divide the West Bank into separate Jewish and Arab enclaves.<sup>xi</sup>

In Sharon plan for settlement which developed under the Likud, there was a change from the plan developed by Labour party for the Jericho area. While Labour had left the Jericho region as an open corridor to link the West Bank population with Jordan as part of its "Jordanian Option" the World Zionist Organization plans, which the Likud approved, insisted on placing six settlements around the town of Jericho to prevent even a small corridor connecting Palestinians with East Jordan. The placement of new settlement underscored the direction of Likud's policy.<sup>xii</sup>

There was a link between the political system in Israel and the Israeli foreign policy. The foreign policy was influenced by the lobbying of pressure groups and associations, particularly on subjects directly related to the national security of the state of Israel. Nevertheless, traditionally the people of Israel preferred to give the various governments a free hand in handling foreign policy not directly related to the immediate national interests of Israel and to give their political support to the government foreign policy that was announced. In fact, opinions and attitudes held by the public in the field of foreign affairs were

actually formed by foreign policy itself or by how the foreign policy has been presented by the government.<sup>xiii</sup>

The need for friendship with Asian countries, including the specific need for normalization of relations with India was approved by the party through its foreign policy platform in 1959 and was incorporated into a more general form of the policy provision of the coalition programme. In the early 1950s the Mapai party had some internal debates about its foreign policy orientation and international priorities in general and Asia in particular. In 1977 when the Likud Party dominated the political scenario, the only exception was Moshe Dayan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first Likud government. He paid a secret visit to India in August 1977 where he met Prime Minister Desai and the Minister of External Affairs A.B. Vajpayee.

### **3.3 Secret Visit of Moshe Dayan to India**

When Moshe Dayan came to India, there were no diplomatic relations between India and Israel even though; an Israeli consulate was established in Bombay. The main reason behind the visit was to muster diplomatic relations with India. During his visit Mr. Dayan met with the then Indian Prime Minister and had some discussions with him. The then foreign minister Vajpayee had always nursed a desire to have good relation with Israel. The moment he got a chance, he single mindedly pursued this desire

Prime Minister Morarji Desai's secret meeting with the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan, in New Delhi showed Desai's special interest in settling the Arab-Israeli dispute and his desire to support the creation of Palestine state. In his talks with Dayan, Desai said:<sup>xiv</sup>

“You must make peace with the Arabs. The Israeli have suffered from the Nazis and from Persecution in Europe, but Palestinian should not be made to pay for that”. . He further stated: “Israel was now established fact, the Arabs must guarantee her existence, but Israel must make possible the rise of a Palestinian state, the Arab Territories, which Israel should evacuate”.

He was equally firm with Moshe Dayan on Indo-Israeli relations. He refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and even to allow a second consulate in India. There was no tangible development or breakthrough in Indo-Israel relationship.

Though the Public pronouncements did not suggest change in the Indian Foreign Policy. Vajpayee was somewhat critical of Indian Policy with regard to West Asia. He was against the unqualified support given by India to the Arab States especially during the Arab-Israeli conflicts. He spoke for a policy based on reciprocity. He thought that the attitude of the most Arab States during the India's war with China and Pakistan had given a severe jolt to the Indians in the 1960's. Vajpayee attempts in arranging the visit of Moshe Dayan is a case in point. While Vajpayee wanted to upgrade the relations with Israel, Prime Minister Mr. Desai categorically refused it by saying that his government would fall if Dayan's visit became publically known.

### **3.4 India and Camp David Accord**

The changing political scenario in Egypt and Israel after the October war of 1973 was noticed by U.S.A., Henry Kissinger, then secretary of state of the United States of America, made use of these changes and took the initiative to bring peace in the region. His mediation led to the conclusion of five agreements between Egypt and Israel and Israel and Syria in 1974, however, the proposed disengagement agreement between Jordan and Israel which never took off.<sup>xv</sup> Thus, the "Shuttle Diplomacy" of Kissinger was to a great extent successful and created an atmosphere of trust between parties concerned, which made the task easier for Jimmy Carter in the coming years.

When Carter assumed office in 1977, he outwardly affirmed American support for the Palestine homeland. Since then, Egypt and Israel began moving closer. The change in the leadership and political environment created a better atmosphere for negotiation. Israel was willing to restore Sinai to Egypt, and Egypt decided to recognize Israel.<sup>xvi</sup> The Government of Egypt had its own predicaments in domestic and international affairs. On the other side, the Israeli government faced certain changes in her politics. Peace was already on the agenda; though the labour and the Likud differed on this question. Yitzhak Rabin had already visited U.S.A. After Rabin, Sadat also visited Washington on Carter's invitation to discuss the Arab-Israeli problems. Since then there were various exchange of visits by the Arab leaders and Israeli leaders. Carter invited Sadat and Begin to meet him on 5 September 1978 at Camp David.<sup>xvii</sup>

President Anwar-el-Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel arrived with delegations of about a dozen officials including several cabinet ministers and senior advisors at Camp David, in the Catocin mountain range of northeastern Maryland on September 5, 1978. For thirteen days, the three delegation were locked up at Camp David, secluded from the outside world during this period of negotiations, in spite of many hurdles they succeeded in producing of two documents, one was "A

framework for Peace in the Middle East” and the other was “framework for the conclusion of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel”.

There were mixed reactions to the Camp David Agreement. Supporters said that it was a historical achievement in the history of West Asia, whereas critics hold the opposite view. They criticize it for failing short of its objectives.

India’s response to Camp David Agreements was twofold. The official statement in the first instance welcomed the peace process because it brought the two parties around the table to discuss their bilateral problems and the conflicting interest of the two states, which had their repercussions on the international affairs. India also underlined the drawbacks inherent in the peace treaty itself.

US President Carter and Egypt’s President Sadat sought Desai’s support for peace efforts at Camp David. Repeating India’s known stand for the solution of the conflict, Indian Prime Minister commended “efforts to bring about a peaceful solution” to the West Asian crisis. In the Parliament Vajpayee also commended Camp David Agreement to seek a peaceful solution. He, however, expressed India’s unhappiness over the US stand on Jerusalem. Expressing doubts about its success in the face of hostile Arab reaction, he feared that it might create new tensions in the area. Mentioning shortcomings of the agreements reached, he remarked:<sup>xviii</sup>

“The question of Palestine is the core of the West Asian problem and unless the Palestinian people are restored their inalienable rights, including the right to return and set up their own National State, there cannot be just and lasting peace in the region, Camp David Agreements is silent on Jerusalem and the PLO has not been accepted as a representative body of the Palestinian people though it has been fighting for their liberation and has made immense sacrifices”.

Commenting on Israeli-Egyptian peace Treaty in the Lok Sabha on 2 April 1979, Vajpayee was constrained to underline the basic requisites, to which India was committed for lasting peace.<sup>xix</sup> He felt that the treaty in face of unanimous Arab hostility would jeopardize international peace and adversely affect the economy of the world. He observed that the treaty under the US auspices fell short of comprehensive solution of the West Asian crisis and called upon the super powers to defuse the existing situation by pressurizing Israel in accordance with UN resolutions.

Commenting on India's stand on Camp David Agreement, The Times of India wrote in its editorial that India had neither dismissed the agreements nor accepted them uncritically. India though initially accepted the Camp David Agreement and the Egypt-Israel Treaty of March 26, 1979, expressed its profound reservations. For India, it meant the total abandonment of the cause of the Arab countries and Palestine as an act of complicity with the sustained occupation with the Arab Palestine Territories. India was categorical in its condemnation of the threat by the USA to use the veto in the UN Security Council against any resolution concerning the Israeli atrocities on the Arab-Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. While expressing concern about the sharp divisions and tensions resulting from this Agreement, India in its reaction to these developments finally stated that the Palestinian question was central to the entire dispute and unless that was resolved to the full satisfaction of the Palestinians themselves, there could not be lasting peace in the region.<sup>xx</sup>

On the Palestine issue Prime Minister Desai expressed similar sentiments as his predecessors in office. He felt that the Arab refugees had to be settled and Israel had to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, which would then be proclaimed a Palestine State. He recognized the Israelis right to exist and its security concerns. Referring to his talks with Sadat, he said, "I told Sadat that one could not turn the clock back that Israel was now an established fact and that you Arabs must guarantee her existence, but Israel must make possible the rise of Palestinian State".<sup>xxi</sup>

India's Policy during the Janta regime was the same as the earlier policy. There was no basic change. The period during Janta Government rule witnessed a very grim situation in Indo-Israel relations. The hopes which Israel had in the early years had vanished in the later years and she tried to make use of whatever opportunities she could find to woo Indian Friendship.

### **3.5 Israeli Invasion of Lebanon and India's Reaction**

On June 6, 1982, Israel attacked Lebanon. This invasion lasted intermittently three months involving a great loss of civilian life and had nefarious repercussions. The Israeli troops remained in the various parts of Lebanon up to 1985. In the first week of August and 18th September 1982, Israel launched the largest attacks against PLO camps in Lebanon and devastated the largest refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila where 6,000 PLO men, women and children were dislodged and dispersed in various Arab countries. Israel wanted to push the PLO and its basis away from the Lebanese borders encamped near the Israeli border in order to create a buffer zone which, according to Israel, could bring halt to the Palestinian attacks and shelling over the Jewish settlements in northern Galilee.<sup>xxii</sup> Sabra and Chatila devastation and



the unending killing would go down as the largest annihilations in the history of West Asia after the creation of Israel, where Israelis met with the Phalangist militia and mowed down Palestinian men, women and children alike so that Palestinian nationalism would shatter forever. It was in cold blood that the invaders destroyed fourteen Palestinian refugee camps and the three major cities.

In the aftermath of this tragedy the Israeli government was compelled by international pressure to appoint a commission of inquiry. The Kahan Commission submitted its report in February 1983. It did not however establish any direct responsibility, politically and militarily, on the Israeli authorities but displayed it as an indirect involvement of negligence of the Defense Ministry headed by Ariel Sharon as well as a lack of foresight on the part of certain military officers. Following the recommendations all of them including Ariel Sharon were compelled to resign from their posts.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Indian government was shocked over the inhuman tragedies, perpetuated on the Palestinian people. It directly contacted various governments, including those of USA, USSR, France and other diplomatic channels and urged them to take initiatives in resolving the crisis. The Israeli invasion was decried as a dastardly measure and an 'inhuman' and "barbarous expression" of power. The Indian Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and others condemned Israel's action in and outside Parliament where India's support for the Palestinian cause was reiterated.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Meanwhile, an emergency meeting of the Non-Aligned Coordinating Bureau was held at Nicosia where India as its member played an important role in exposing the crisis. Its Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao remarked on 6 June 1982:<sup>xxv</sup>

“We have been witness to the enactment of a savage drama involving the butchery of our Palestinian brothers and sisters, a violation of most fundamental principles of humanity. It is an attempt to exterminate a people whose hearts and homes Israel has occupied illegally for well over three decades by force who have been compelled to find shelter and sustenance elsewhere and who have resolved to back their territory, their right and their dignity. The Indian government and people of India remain committed to their cause for it is also our cause and the cause of freedom-loving peoples everywhere.”

The crisis in West Asia had received considerable attention and time from the UN General Assembly. In this connection, various resolutions were passed. Most of them were either piloted or co-sponsored by

India to achieve some settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict and the creation of the Palestinian national entity. India championed the Palestinian cause based on justice and natural rights of the universe and in the General Assembly a specific request by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Countries demanded resumption of an Emergency Session of the General Assembly to discuss the problem of the Palestinians. India co-sponsored the resolution. It reaffirmed the provisions of the Hague Convention relevant to the protection of civilian persons in times of war and demanded that the same must be extended to all the territories of Palestine, including Jerusalem. However, Israel treated all these measures with scant regard.

Among other measures, with the coming up of new Israeli aggression against Lebanon and over the Palestinian refugee camps, the Special Session of the UN General Assembly was resumed for two more days from sixteen to nineteen August 1982 to consider the new situation in Lebanon. India co-sponsored the resolution which was adopted on 20 June 1983. It condemned Israel for its non-compliance of the UN resolutions and disregard over the Council's ceasefire resolutions. At this juncture it was resolved that an international conference on Palestine would be held in Paris in August 1983.<sup>xxvi</sup>

As a token of goodwill gesture, India had also sent medicines and foodstuffs to the PLO in Beirut in order to mitigate the sufferings of the hapless people. N. Krishna in a separate address in the name of PLO in the General Assembly session and reiterated India's support and commitment to the PLO for the cause it was fighting for. At home, leading Indians continued to point out the UN failure over Palestine. "The world will have to conceive a new body that will examine and implement the Palestinian people's demand for human rights" opined a Supreme Court Judge, D.A. Desai at a meeting on Human Rights in Palestine" in New Delhi.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **3.6 India, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**

On the question of Palestine refugees, India has consistently maintained that the only permanent and just solution was the return of the refugees to their homes in what is now Israel. This stand has been expressed by the Indian government representatives in the UN on more than one occasion. When the UN created the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to take care of the immediate and urgent needs of the displaced Palestinians on a temporary basis, India gave firm support to it. India also provided direct bilateral assistance to the Palestinians. India stated that food and shelter, the first basic necessities of a refugee, should be provided and continuously improved. However, the humanitarian aspect of the resettlement was only a part of the broader issues having political implications for the Palestinians and for West Asia. India

maintained that it was the duty of the world public opinion to enable the refugees to choose freely between repatriation and compensation, and considered it a duty of Israel to create a climate of confidence in which refugees could return home safely with dignity and honour and could enjoy full exercise of the right of self-determination. In the beginning Nehru had asserted, “Palestinian refugee’s problem is above all a human problem and Afro-Asian community should make fullest endeavour to get this solved”<sup>xxviii</sup>.

“Mahatma Gandhi had voiced the feelings of all Indians and the substance of all congress resolutions: “The basic or tragic fact of the situation is that in order to undo, or atone for, the wrong done to the European jews, another people, the Arabs of Palestine, were wronged. And this has been done through a series of broken promises including the one declaring that in the creation of Jewish homeland, nothing shall be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Over a million innocent Arabs driven out of the land and the beastly manner in which this was done are not things that can be glided over – even after the lapse of 20 long years. The usual glib argument is that the Arab countries could easily have absorbed these refugees. How the Western sponsored Baghdad Pact wrecked all efforts for a peaceful settlement of the West Asian dispute”<sup>xxix</sup> “Indian nationalism was alive to the imperialist course of Britain not only in India but also in countries like Palestine. The policy following the Balfour Declaration promising a homeland for Jews in Palestine and the administration of the British mandate were blatant imperialist projections. Palestine’s partition was among the more notorious partitions in this century of partitions”<sup>xxx</sup>.

A Lucknow weekly, Ujala in its issue appealed to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to launch a fund for the victims of the Israeli attack. Even though India itself was faced with severe problems of food grain scarcity and high prices, we should do our bit for our Arab friends, it added. The Indian delegate observed: “To think of winding up the task of relief and rehabilitation at the present time without a political settlement, would be highly dangerous”<sup>xxxi</sup>.

India recognized the PLO under the leadership of President Yasser Arafat as the sole and legitimate representative of the Arab-Palestine people. India’s ties with the PLO became closer in the period from 1972-82. It can be attributed to these facts:<sup>xxxii</sup>

Firstly, PLO's identification with other liberation movements like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Africa, gradually clarified the doubts about the character of the Palestinian struggle.

Secondly, PLO's ideal of a secular, democratic and non-sectarian state made its impact on the Indian mind. India's sympathetic attitude towards PLO was principled and in no way to counter Pakistan's effort for support against it in Arab countries. In sum, India's policy was based on three promises, viz. (a) Israel must withdraw from the Arab Palestinian territory it had occupied by force, whether in Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon or elsewhere, (b) The right of the Arab-Palestinian people to a homeland must be recognized and given effect to. (c) Israel's right to exist as a state in independence and security should be acknowledged. These were the broad outlines leaving considerable scope for negotiations and compromise. But, in India's view starting only from the third promise and insisting on its implementation first was putting the cart before the horse. The three premises had to form part of a package settlement.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

India deplored Israel's obstruction of the UN efforts aimed at establishing peace based on justice in accordance with the Security Council resolution of November 22, 1967, and recommended to the UN to take adequate measures against Israel if it continues to disregard the UN efforts. During the Janta period, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then External Affairs Minister, felt that a lasting solution to the Arab Palestinian question could not be found or peace ensured in the region by keeping the PLO under Yasser Arafat, out of any negotiations. He said that India was with them and was prepared to raise its voice wherever necessary and fight with them shoulder to shoulder.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The government of India supported resolutions in the General Assembly of the UN which accepted the status of the PLO and accorded her an observer status. In view of the widening relationship and recognition achieved by the PLO in other parts of the world and in the UNO and in keeping with India's policy of continued warm support for the cause of the liberation of all occupied territories, the government of India agreed to the request of the PLO to open a separate office in New Delhi.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Y.B. Chavan, the then External Affairs Minister from 1974-77, said that our relations with the Muslim world in West Asia are much closer than they were 30 years ago. Our position on Palestine as a heritage of our freedom struggle has brought us both politically and emotionally together. With the pioneering role, Jawaharlal Nehru and Col. Nasser played in the NAM, the relationship with many leading Arab nations improved and later on most of the Arab nations joined the NAM. He further said that India should

stand on principles on the conflicting issues relating to Palestine state. For that matter, India has to work for unity amongst the Arab countries themselves.

Being a founding member of the NAM India's help to the Arab cause has been well known. Consequently, the Lusaka Summit of 1970, the Algiers Summit of 1973, reiterated sympathy and support to the just struggle of the Arab people of Palestine. At Colombo Summit of NAM in 1976, the PLO unit then an observer took part in this summit as a full member in a gesture of support for the Palestine cause by the NAM countries. At New Delhi conference of NAM, the countries agreed to unconditional withdrawal of Israel from Palestine, condemned USA for giving military and political support to Israel. The Harare Summit of NAM in 1986 pledged support to the Palestinians for a homeland. It also reiterated its resolve to carry on struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, racism and Zionism. The Belgrade Summit of 1989 called for restoration of rights of the Palestinian people. It called for convening an international peace conference on West Asia under the auspices of the UN.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In the early 1980s the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi came to power, after her party's victory in national elections. She retreated that India considered the Arab Palestinian question as central to the West Asian situation. India during this period granted full diplomatic status to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which opened its office in New Delhi in 1972. On March 28, 1980 she said, "The plight of the Palestinians has been one of the tragedies of history. Few people have been more systematically oppressed and humiliated in their own land".<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi delivered a speech at the dinner hosted in honour of Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO in New Delhi on May 21, 1982. She said:<sup>xxxviii</sup>

"You are the symbol of a people afire with the spirit of freedom. We welcome you as a gallant fighter for a just cause. Your vision, courage, and determination have galvanized the Palestinian Movement. Your leadership has given it dynamism and strength. She further asserted that as long as 1920, before many around this table were born, Gandhi spoke up for the people of Palestine, Nehru wrote about the Palestinian cause and the INC repeatedly affirmed its solidarity with the aspirations of Palestinians. In 1936, the Congress Party observed a Palestine Day. Support to Palestine was a plank of our foreign policy. The plight of your people constitutes a challenge to human dignity. This is why India and

the entire NAM have supported your heroic fight. We express our strong opposition to the organized repression of Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank through large-scale attacks on the civilian population, through the dismissal of popularly elected mayors and by the economic exploitation of the region. How can there be peace at the expense of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people? Your visit is a major event in the interest of Indo-Palestinian and which we are determined to expand”.

She further categorically affirmed her government’s unconditional steadfast support by saying:<sup>xxxix</sup>

“We are of one mind in our support for the brave homeless and much harassed Palestinian people. Israel feels free to commit any outrage, unabashed in its aggression, unrepentant about its transgression of International Law and behavior. But can it forever obstruct the legitimate rights of the Palestinians?”

In spite of its pre-occupations with preparations for General Elections in December, 1984, India sent a delegation led by the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to attend the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Palestine National Council held in November, 1984.<sup>xl</sup> Inaugurating the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Coordinating Bureau, that met in Delhi April 19-21, 1985. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, who was heading NAM, took a strong stand and spoke sharply on the issues of racialism, colonialism and the rights of the oppressed people.

He reiterated the solidarity of the NAM with the PLO and said that non-aligned nations could not remain silent over the sufferings of the Palestinian people and for their righteous struggle for regaining their homeland.<sup>xli</sup>

The Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said at Cairo: “we support the struggle of the Palestinian people led by the PLO as their sole representative”. The Palestinian people could not be denied their right of a homeland. Mr. Gandhi said, adding that Israel must withdraw from Arab lands.

India strongly condemned attack on the PLO Headquarters in Tunisia in October 1985 and the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sent messages of solidarity and support to both the PLO Chairman and the Tunisian Prime Minister. India also supported resolutions condemning this attack in the UN Security Council and in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).<sup>xlii</sup>

India proposed for a UN sponsored International Conference on West Asia. The visit of Mr. Yasser Arafat in August 1987 underscored the strong ties between India and the Palestinian people. Shri B. Shankranand, the then Minister for Water Resources had earlier represented India at the Algiers session of the Palestinian National Council in April 1987.<sup>xliii</sup>

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, speaking at Damascus on June 4, 1988 said:<sup>xliiv</sup>

“Our freedom fighters regarded the struggle for the liberation of Palestine as part of our struggle for national independence... Freedom came to India. But India was partitioned. Within weeks of our independence, the partition of Palestine was mooted. In the name of justice for a few, injustice was inflicted on the many... in consequence; West Asia has harvested the bitter fruit of four decades of violence and hate, of oppression and suffering. This must end. West Asia needs peace founded in justice. A just and durable peace in the region is an essential element in our struggle for a world order based on non-violence, tolerance and compassion.”

In October 1988, Mr. Yasser Arafat visited India, he was assured of India's full support. India whole heartedly supported and welcomed the West Asian peace plan proposed by Mr. Yasser Arafat before the UN General Assembly meeting in the special session at Geneva to discuss the question of Palestine. The then Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi congratulated the PLO leader Mr. Yasser Arafat for declaring an independent state of Palestine in November 1988 and welcomed the proposal of the Palestine National Council met in Algiers for an international conference on West Asia under the auspices of the UN. The Indian representative at the UN urged Israel to respond adequately and constructively to the PLO's new offer for negotiating lasting peace in West Asia under the mediation of the UN to take seriously the PLO renunciation of terrorism. The President R. Venkataraman said, “Mr. Arafat's bold and courageous initiatives for peace had entirely transformed the every West Asian question and had most deservedly won universal acclaim.”<sup>xlv</sup>

Israeli atrocities against unarmed Palestinian Civilians in the occupied territories were strongly condemned by India. India had expressed regret at the US refusal of a visa to the chairman Arafat to address the UN General Assembly Session in New York. The speaker of the Palestinian National Council, Sheik Abdul Hameed El-Sayeh visited India in March 1988. India had deplored the assassination in Tunis in April 1988, of Khalil Al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Palestine Revolutionary Forces.<sup>xlvi</sup>

During the visit of Yaser Arafat to India in 1989, the PLO Embassy in New Delhi was renamed “The Embassy of the state of Palestine”. India strongly feels that the moderate and constructive proposals of the Chairman Arafat need to be reciprocated by other involved countries in order to find a solution to the longstanding West Asia problem. India is convinced that only convening of an International peace conference under the UN auspices with the participation of all parties to the Arab-Israeli dispute including the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people can lead to a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian problem and durable peace in the region.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The President Yasser Arafat visited India in March 1990, to receive the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International understanding. He briefed the Indian leaders on the situation prevailing in the occupied territories. During the visit, degree of Doctor of Science was also conferred on President Arafat by Jamia Millia Islamia. The then Minister for External Affairs, I.K. Gujral participated in the meeting of the NAM committee of Nine on Palestine in Tunis in March 1990.<sup>xlviii</sup>

The then Minister of state for External Affairs K.K. Tewary said the acceptance of the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 was an element of the framework of negotiations of the PLO and India hoped that Israel’s response will be positive and in line with their previous commitment to Resolution 242.<sup>xlix</sup> The PLO has done what the world has asked it to do. There must be an adequate and constructive response if the peace process has to move forward.

Following the Gulf war, the Palestine embassy in Baghdad has urged India to supply food from its reserves in Iraq for Palestinians in the country and in occupied Kuwait. India has stored about 5000 tonnes of food in Basra after unloading it from the cargo vessel, Vishwa Siddhi.

Indian solidarity with the people of Palestine was highlighted by the visit of Mr. Eduardo Falerio, the then Minister of State for External Affairs to Tunisia from 11 to 13 October 1991, when he called on Mr. Yasser Arafat and Mr. Farooq Qadumi the Palestinian Foreign Minister. The two sides exchanged views on the then upcoming West Asia Peace conference. On November 29, 1991 a function was held in New Delhi to observe the Indian solidarity Day with the Palestinian people. Dr. Najma Heptulla Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, recalled the background of the Palestinian struggle and India’s consistent support for the Palestinians rights.<sup>1</sup>



President Yasser Arafat visited India from January 20-22, 1992 on a state visit. Besides calling on the President, he had discussions with the Prime Minister, leaders of some political parties i.e. CPI, CPM, Janta Dal and B.J.P. also called on him. During his stay, President Arafat was also presented the Indira Gandhi International Award by the Indian Council of World Affairs. He held a press conference, at which he clearly articulated the Palestinian stand that any sovereign step that India might take by way of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel would be totally within India's prerogative.<sup>li</sup>

India's sympathy and support to the Palestinian people were reiterated by Prime Minister Narsimha Rao when he met President Yasser Arafat during his one day stopover in Tunis on November 20, 1992 on his way to Dakar to attend the G-15 summit. President Yasser Arafat briefed Prime Ministers on progress in West Asia Peace Process, especially in the Israel-Palestinian dialogue. Solidarity with the Palestinian people was expressed at a function organized by the Indian Council of cultural Relations to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity. Minister of state for External Affairs, Eduarde Falerio, who was the chief guest, reiterated India's consistent and unequivocal support to the Palestinian cause. India regretted the expulsion by Israel of more than 400 Palestinians from the occupied territories and urged Israel to rescind the expulsion order. India as President of the Security Council was instrumental in having UN Security Council Resolution No. 799 of December 18, passed which inter alia condemned Israel for the expulsions.<sup>lii</sup>

The signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and Israel was welcomed by India. India actively participated in the third and fourth round of the working Group Meetings of the multilateral track of the West Asia peace processes held in April/May/October and November 1993, respectively. India pledged at the Donors Conference in Washington on October 1, 1993 an amount of one million dollars for assistance in kind to the Palestinian people in Gaza and West Bank, and indicated her willingness to host a workshop in early 1994, in New Delhi as part of the on-going activities under the multilateral Working group on Arms control and Regional Security of the West Asia process.<sup>liii</sup>

Mr. R.L. Bhatia, Minister of State for External Affairs, visited Tunis in May 1993 as the PM's special Envoy to brief the chairman Arafat on issues concerning India and the PLO and to reassure India's continued support to the Palestinian cause.<sup>liv</sup>

Foreign Minister Faroukh Qaddumi on his visit to India in April 1993 emphasised the part played by India's permanent representative to the UNCHR Gharekhan who held negotiations with the Israeli

representatives not once but twice on Resolution 799 of the Security Council asking Israel to allow the 415 Palestinian deportees to return to Israel.<sup>iv</sup> In his short return speech, Mr. Qaddumi basically referred to India as one of the great supporters of the Palestinian cause right from the days of the Indian Freedom struggle itself. He mentioned that the examples set by Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru and other Indian leaders in their fight for freedom continued to inspire. The Palestinian people were also fighting for peace, equality and freedom.<sup>vi</sup> Khaled-El-Sheikh, the Palestinian Ambassador to India, on being asked by Indian correspondent that what kind of support do you expect from India he said, 'India has always supported our cause, we expect this will continue. The Chairman Arafat enjoys extremely cordial relations with your Prime Minister and at every stage of development during the Israel-Palestine talks he kept the Prime Minister informed'.<sup>vii</sup>

### Conclusion

The coming to power of Janta government as Jan Sangh its major component represented by no less a person Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee as its foreign minister had its repercussion on India's policy towards Israel. Nevertheless, the presence of Morarji Desai a true Gandhian did not allow much space to Vajpayee to maneuver the policies in favour of Israel. Moreover, in Israel, the ultra Zionist party led by Menahem Begin came to power which always wanted to usurp West Bank, Jerusalem and Golan Heights as part of "Greater Israel" project. Likud and its policies were continuously opposed by the Janta government and in spite of Vajpayee's overtures to Israel there was not much of development towards initiation of relationship with Israel. The postulates of India's foreign policy remained rooted in principled ideological stand that was to support the Palestinian Cause.

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