

2 CHAPTER

India and Egypt Relations

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Historical Background of India–Egypt Relations
- Commercial Diplomacy
- Visit of Mohamed Morsi to India in 2013
- Analysis of the visit of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to India

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIA–EGYPT RELATIONS

The relations go back to third Century BC when first instance of trade was visible. India and Egypt established a sea trade contact and India undertook trade with Egyptians during the reign of female Pharaoh Hatshepsut. The ancient Egyptians worshipped gods that bore certain resemblances with the ones Indians did. Some resemblance is also seen between India and Egypt in ancient temples, architecture, paintings and sculptures. The mummies in Egypt were wrapped in Muslin cloth traded from Bengal.

However, the ancient diplomatic push was given by Hatshepsut who established a diplomatic mission in India to strengthen the economic trade. India exported silk, medicines, incense sticks in the ancient times. Over a period of time, a spice trade between south coast of India and Egypt began and pepper emerged as a major commodity to be traded. This led to establishment of an ancient spice route. Cairo, during ancient times, became a hub for transport of spices to Europe and the rest of Arabia. The mediaeval times also saw regular diplomatic exchanges between India and Egypt. Since the time that Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, the British began to take more interest in the affairs of West Asia. Egypt and India eventually faced a common struggle against British colonialism. In India, as Indian National Congress took the leadership role in the national movement, in Egypt, the nationalist, liberal Wafd party (Hizb al-Wafd, that came into existence in the aftermath of World War-I) under Saad Zaghloul Pasha took charge. During the Indian National movement, India provided tremendous support to the Wafd party and Nehru himself visited Egypt many times. After India became independent, the Indo–Egyptian relationship evolved on the basis of a common historical bedrock. The similarity of views of India and Egypt on the Palestinian question gave both a common ground to forge a similar ideology. India established diplomatic ties with Egypt in 1947 itself.

Egypt (1922 to 2017-18)

Egypt gained independence from the British in 1922. From 1924, the Wafd party took

control of Egypt. Two important Wafd party leaders—King Farouk and his son King Fuad II—continued to rule Egypt till 1952. The year of 1952 saw the Egyptian army led by Ghamal Abdel Nasser, Mohammed Naguib and Sadat Anwar undertake a bloodless coup, known as the Egyptian Revolution. The house of Fuad II ended and Naguib along with Aly Maher assumed power. Naguib somehow was not aggressive in the execution of the reforms programme. In 1954, Naguib was succeeded by Abdel Nasser. Nasser ruled till 1970 when he was replaced by Sadat Anwar. Anwar was assassinated on 6th October, 1981, paving the way for Hosni Mubarak. During the Arab Spring, Hosni Mubarak stepped down after 18 days of demonstration and was replaced by Mohamed Morsi. Morsi's government was, however, not stable, and gave way to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as the President. Mubarak was later tried and handed a life term for corruption and abuse of power.



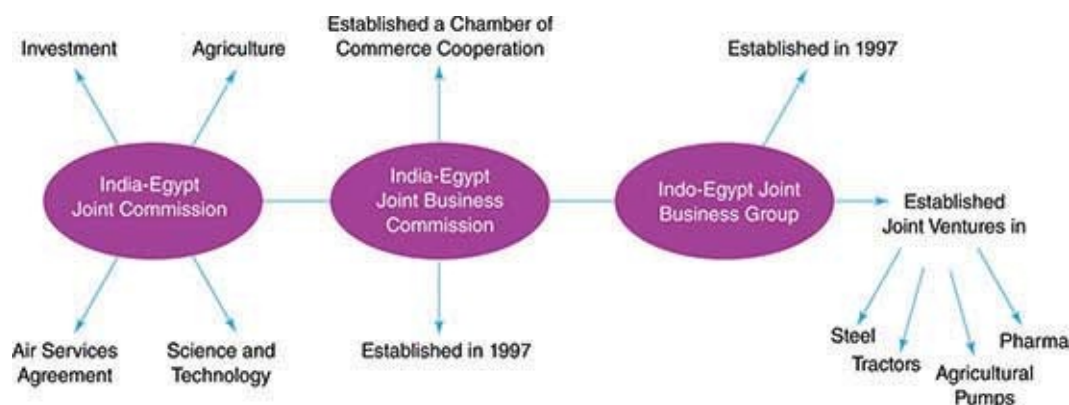
After Indian independence, the bilateral visits between India and Egypt continued. In 1952, the then Indian Vice President, S. Radhakrishnan, stopped at Cairo while going to Paris to attend a UNESCO meet. During his visit, both sides agreed to open up cooperation in science and culture. Nehru also visited Cairo in 1953 and 1955. During Nehru's stopover at Cairo in 1955, he met Ghamal Nasser. Egypt never joined any military alliance during the Cold War and maintained relations with India through the prism of neutrality. The Egyptian leadership studied the Indian economy model during the Cold War and replicated the heavy industrialisation model in Egypt. Egypt was also an ardent supporter of NAM, which acted as the most instrumental link between India and Egypt, cementing the logic of positive neutrality. The Nehru–Nasser friendship became the model for our relations and that the two leaders met 19 times in all. Egypt stood by India during the Goa crisis, and Indo–China war 1962. However, after the death of Nehru in 1964 and Nasser in 1970, the warmth of the golden era of Indo–Egypt relations finally ended. The relations continued during Anwar Sadat and Indira Gandhi's era and India continued to support Egypt and Arabs in the Palestinian issue. In 1978, Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. This decision of Egypt led to its own isolation in the Arab world. But its relations with India still continued. When the Cold War ended, Narasimha Rao and I.K. Gujral both paid state visits to Egypt. In 2011, India supported the democratic transition in Egypt as a part of the ongoing Arab spring. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi visited India in October, 2015, to participate in the Third Indo–Africa Forum Summit. In 2015, Nitin Gadkari, India's shipping minister, was sent to Egypt as a special envoy of the Prime Minister for the opening ceremony of the New Suez Canal.

COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

India and Egypt, as noted previously, have had ancient trade based relations. In the modern era, India exports meat products, cotton yarn, fabrics, transport equipment and pharmacy products to Egypt and imports crude oil, petroleum, raw cotton and coal from Egypt.



More than fifty private Indian firms today are conducting business in Egypt. Some of the prominent firms include Grasim India Limited, Aditya Birla Group, a Joint Venture of SCIB chemicals and Asian paints. HDFC and SBI are two banks that are present in Cairo. Gas Authority of India (GAIL) has stakes in Fayoum and Natagas while OVL has discovered oil in North Ramdan concession in Gulf of Suez. Under ITEC programme, India, since 1986, has also been providing training to Egyptian diplomats.



VISIT OF MOHAMED MORSI TO INDIA—2013

In 2013, Mohamed Morsi paid a visit to India to strengthen ties. It is important to understand that since Sadat Anwar's times, Egypt had adopted a pro-western stance in its foreign policy. The Westernism continued even during the times of Hosni Mubarak. However, as Arab Spring ushered in a democratic change in Egypt, the ensuing leadership broadened the outlook. Mohamad Morsi, especially, has directed Egypt to initiate a Look East Policy, with India as a focal point. Morsi, in his visit to India, articulated that under Egypt's Look East Policy, Egypt wants to learn pluralism from India and wants Indian cooperation in strengthening Egyptian democracy. He invited Indian firms to participate in the Suez Canal Free Trade Zone and also asked India to establish a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Morsi also envisaged a future Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two states. The vision Morsi had set for India was to make Egypt the hub for all its engagement in Africa and West Asia.



Modi, Morsi, El-Sisi and Indian policy

The first democratically elected President of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted in a coup and replaced by El-Sisi. On 16th May, 2015, an Egyptian court awarded death sentence to Mohamed Morsi. The new Indian government, led by Modi, has preferred to remain silent on the award of the court. This is very much in line with the Indian policy of non-interference in internal matters of the Arab world. India has followed this policy since its independence.

In 2015, the Indian External Affairs Minister visited Cairo and a decision was taken to review trade, political and economic relations between India and Egypt. Since 2002, India and Egypt have been negotiating a Preferential Trade Agreement. A decision has been taken to speed up the PTA negotiations. During the visit of the Indian Foreign Minister, cooperation has been envisaged in IT, pharmaceuticals, apparel and healthcare sectors. In March, 2015, the Indian Ambassador in Egypt led a delegation of 43 members from 25 companies to participate in Egypt Economic Development Conference and a number of pharmacy and textiles firms expressed interest in business in Egypt.

India–Egypt Cultural Diplomacy

In March, 2016, India established the first India Chair in Ain Shams University in Egypt. This was based on a MOU between ICCR and Ain Shams University signed in March 2016 itself. This India chair will help India to leverage ICT and foster cultural bonds between the youth of India & Egypt. The centre established will be operational from October 2016 & will act as a hub of academic exchanges. India has also organised a “Glimpse of India” programme and has performed Kabeliya Rajasthani folk dance on 67th Republic Day celebrations of India in Egypt.

ANALYSIS OF THE VISIT OF ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI TO INDIA

The Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi visited India in September, 2016 and reiterated the proximate and close partnership between India and Egypt. The economic trade between India and Egypt in the last 5 years has increased by 60% and the investment

is continuously rising in a number of fields. The President also noted the success of India during the Nile festival which has helped the Egyptians to experience different aspects of Indian culture. On the same lines, 'Egypt by Ganga' festival is likely to offer the Indians an opportunity to learn about Egyptian culture. The President sought support from India in helping Egypt develop the SME and IT sectors. The President also envisaged the participation of India in new Suez Canal Project which has an ambitious plan to setup a Suez Canal Development Arc that will act as a bridge between Africa and West Asia. The President sought the participation of Indian investors in making the Suez Canal area an international logistical hub as it will offer Indian investors preferential access to the Arab, African and European markets since Egypt has FTAs with the market.

