



**AMBASSADOR
REPUBLIC OF IRAQ
INDIA**

A Brief Speech
By
H.E. Mr. Ahmad Berwari
(Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to India)
at the International Relations Conference on "Link West: India and the
Gulf"
at the Symbiosis School of International Studies, Pune.
October 11, 2015, 9.30 a.m.

- **Mr. Chairman**
- **Excellencies**
- **Respected Faculty Members**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am delighted to be at this significant occasion and first of all I would like to express my sincere thanks for giving me the opportunity to deliver a talk focusing especially on bilateral relations between Iraq and India namely: "India's Relations with Iraq" at this International Relations Conference with the theme of "Link West: India and the Gulf" organized by the Symbiosis School of International Studies in Pune.

Over here, it would be worthy to mention very briefly that Iraq and India have been enjoying strong cultural, economic, and political relations since ancient times. Iraq was one of the few countries in the Middle East with which India established diplomatic relations at the Embassy level immediately after its independence in 1947. Both countries signed the "Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship" in 1952 and a trade agreement in 1953 as well as agreement of cooperation in cultural affairs in 1954.

All these diplomatic and friendly initiatives set the tone for strengthening and consolidation of bilateral relations. This also provided concrete framework for expanding ties and cooperation in various fields between the two countries that have become multi-dimensional, and cover all facets of relationship including diplomatic, political, economic, educational, cultural as well as scientific and technical area.

IRAQ-INDIA RELATIONS:

Iraq is not only a country, it is a civilization and that is why from ancient times, people from India have been visiting Iraq. There are many historical accounts of these. Visit and stay of Guru Nanak in Baghdad is one such high mark. The Noble Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore also visited Iraq in 1932. The Indian seafarers and dhows frequently touched Basra for trade. Iraqis were thus well exposed to trade and cultural aspects of Indians. Soon Basra had India Street as one of its main roads, just as Baghdad has India Street in the central business district. Indian films and music are other important factors which popularized India and Indian culture in Iraq.

Groups of Indian pilgrims to Najaf and Kerbala have been regular feature for centuries. Many Indian pilgrims also visit Baghdad to pay respects at the shrine of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Geelani, the famous Sufi Holy man.

For India, Iraq was among the largest export markets before the 1991 gulf war. Presence of more than 80,000 Indian professionals, businessmen and workers reflected strong economic ties. Iraq-India Joint Commission meetings are being held to facilitate expansion of economic relations in a structured manner. The number of Indian workers in northern Iraq is increasing steadily. Here in Delhi, Iraq-India Economic Cooperation Council has been set up to promote greater economic and commercial cooperation.

The two-way trade is dominated by Iraqi crude oil exports to India. Currently, Iraq is the second largest exporter of crude oil to India after Saudi

Arabia. It is to be noted that the trade and economic relations between Iraq and India have been growing since past few years. The volume of trade exchange between the two countries during the financial year 2013 - 2014 was about (20) billion dollars and it was about (15) billion dollars in the financial 2014 - 2015. And the Iraqi oil export to India was the percentage majority of this amount. There is also a clear desire from officials in both countries in strengthening these relations, as there is huge potential to further raise our bilateral trade.

1 - Common interests:

There are many commonalities that bring Iraq with India:

On the humanitarian level, both the two countries enjoy broad humanitarian legacy that can be employed for the benefit of their peoples and humanity.

On the political level, it should be for the two countries as two developing countries to believe in the non-aligned policy. The political rapprochement between their regimes is normal and not encountered difficulties and can be beneficial to the peoples of the two countries with the coordination of their positions of regional and international issues.

On the commercial level, the importance of India emerges as a huge market where most of the goods and commodities, machinery and services, which are needed in Iraq, are available. In India, labor is available (skilled and unskilled), different raw materials, and expertise in the management and construction, organization and experience in community building and the ability to coexistence between the different spectra of the same society.

2 - Mutual visits and official delegations:

The first contact at a high level between the two countries since the events of 2003 had been in 2007, when the former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of oil, visited to New Delhi, and consequently bilateral relations began to expand in growing where the two countries exchanged delegations and signed several agreements and memoranda of understanding to strengthen different cooperation between the two countries.

Iraq - India relations have witnessed remarkable development at all levels during 2013 and exchanged numerous visits between senior officials of the two countries. The most significant development is the visit of the former Iraqi Prime Minister His Excellency Mr. Nuri Al-Maliki to New Delhi, in the period 22-25/08/2013 at the head of an official delegation including the ministers of oil, agriculture and Head of the PM Advisory Board and chairman of the investment and the Under Secretary of State and Deputy Minister of Health and other officials as well as a delegation from the businessmen. His Excellency held official talks with the former Indian Prime Minister, which resulted in the signing of four (4) important MoUs for cooperation in the fields of: 1) energy, 2) water resources, 3) political consultations between the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs and 4) cooperation between the Foreign Service Institutes in the two foreign ministries.

The delegation also visited the city (Mumbai) and met with the Indian businessmen and industrialists where they discussed the prospects for economic and trade cooperation between Iraq and India and ways of developing them.

It should be noted that a number of other mutual visits were carried out between the two countries during 2013, including the visit of the former Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas of India to Baghdad, where he headed the meetings of the Joint Commission between the two sides in the period 7-8 July 2013. His Excellency, the Indian Minister met with the former Iraqi Prime Minister and former deputy prime minister and minister of oil. The Indian External Affairs Minister previously also visited to Baghdad from June 19 to 20, 2013. He met with the former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister as well with the former Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament.

3 - Most other important visits between officials of the two countries:

1. The visit of the former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs to New Delhi in the period 27/02 to 02/03/2012, heading a delegation that included former Iraqi Minister of Trade and Chairman of the Investment Authority.
2. Visit of the former Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament to New Delhi in the period 15-20/12/2012 at the head of a delegation that included a number of members of the Council of Representatives and conducted talks with the former Speaker of the Indian Parliament with a view to strengthening bilateral parliamentary relations between the two countries.
3. Visit of the former Iraqi Minister of Water Resources and his accompanying delegation at the invitation of the Indian Minister of Water Resources during the period 20-24/5/2013.
4. Visit of the Iraqi National Security Advisor to New Delhi for the period 17-18/ 12/2013 at the head of a delegation that included members of the Iraqi officials of the National Security and Ministry of Interior and the Director General of the Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies at the invitation of the former Indian National Security Advisor.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry played an important role in facilitating the convening of the joint committees and their access to its objectives, and the Iraqi Embassy performed its duty in the ministry's representation in many of the meetings, visits and discussions which took place between Iraqi and Indian sides which led to access to a lot of understandings for cooperation and coordination between them and is awaiting execution.

During the Iraq-India Joint Commission meetings in the period 7-8/7/2013, various aspects of cooperation were discussed and strengthened, especially in the fields of energy, trade, industry, infrastructure, water resources, housing, scientific and technical cooperation, petrochemical industries, civil aviation, training of Iraqi cadres and cooperation in electricity, planning, agriculture,

iron, transport, health, science and technology, youth and sports sectors and cooperation between the two foreign Ministries.

Iraq and India are associated with historical ties and have framed these friendly relationships with signing on about (16) previous agreements and MoUs from the year 1952 up to the year 2013, for cooperation of the two countries in different fields including air transport, trade, energy (oil and gas), economic, technical, cultural, scientific, as well as cooperation between the Ministries of Water Resources.

There are also a number of drafts of proposed MoUs between the two sides specifically in the fields of Health, Agriculture, Culture, Tourism, Public Projects and Mutual legal assistance which are being followed up by the embassy:

We hope that there will be more frequent visits by Indian leaders and businessmen to Iraq. The direct flights by Iraqi Airways will facilitate inexpensive and hassle-free travel between the two countries. These will also help Indian exporters who might prefer air shipments which will save time and money for many consignments.

Iraq and India have shared extremely close educational and cultural ties over the years. A large number of Iraqi students are enrolled at Indian universities, notably Pune, Hyderabad, Delhi and Bangalore. Educational collaborations with regard to research in science and technology and strategic studies could be explored. Iraq and India have cultural affinities that cover cuisine, language, music and architecture. These affinities should be built on to encourage inter-university exchanges.

In the past, Indian professors & engineers were engaged in Iraq for variety of training programs. The Government of India is admitting a large number of Iraqis to Indian institutions annually for professional training. This is besides

the ICCR scholarships annually to the Iraqi students for master and Ph.D. level advanced courses in Indian universities.

The Iraqi community in India mainly consists of the Iraqi students coming to India for higher education at their own expenses and they are mostly small percentage of fellowships belonging to various ministries. The total number of the Iraqi students along with their families is about seven thousands (7,000). Apart from the educational connection, India remains a favorite destination for medical tourism for patients, notably, from Iraq. More than 18,000 Iraqi nationals visited India during 2014 for Medical Treatment. There are also nearly (250) people from the asylum seekers to other countries.

Here, let me say clearly that Iraq has been unfortunately suffering from some uncertain situations in terms of peace and security since more than one year for its citizens as well as for foreigners working in the Iraq. And obviously this is basically because of the ISIS, the terrorist groups. This is really a matter of concern to many countries including India from security point of view for their nationals in Iraq.

India is not officially involved in the current international coalition to fight terrorism in Iraq, but the official position stated that the Indian government is condemning terrorism and terrorist organizations in Iraq and the willingness of the Indian side for coordination and cooperation in this area, especially since India suffers itself from terrorism and has a fear of its extensions and the presence of threat from terrorist organizations to operate in the Indian arena.

On the other hand, India fears for its citizens working abroad, including in Iraq and had been or would be at risk of harm because of his stance on terrorism. As it happened at detention of (39) Indian workers in the city of Mosul in 2014 by the ISIS that have evacuated about seven thousands (7000)

of Indian workers and brought them back to India because of the security situation in their areas. India supports the positions of Iraq in regional and international organizations in accordance with the principle of reciprocity.

At the last and not least, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate our desire to strengthen and expand the multi-dimensional bonds and cooperation between the two friendly countries.

Thank you!