

## **India announced projects worth \$17.9 mn for Palestine**

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**Ramallah (Palestine):** India on Monday announced projects worth \$17.9 million in Palestine, as also a grant of \$5 million, as President Pranab Mukherjee arrived here from Amman on a maiden visit of an Indian head of state to this troubled country.

The projects, announced soon after delegation-level talks between the two sides, cover a \$12-million technology park, \$4.5 million towards an institute of diplomacy, \$1 million for an India-Palestine ICT and Innovation Centre.

"The grant is for budgetary support for Palestine," Anil Wadhwa, secretary, east, in India's external affairs ministry, said during a media briefing, adding that this was part of India's ongoing support towards capacity building in Palestine.

He also said the number of seats for Palestinians under the Indian and Economic Cooperation Programme was being doubled to 100, while scholarships to students to study in Indian universities will now be up to 25 from 10 earlier.

President Mukherjee, who had arrived at the Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv earlier in the day, immediately proceeded for Ramallah, changing his limousine at Bitunia, the check point between Israel and Palestine.

Among his other engagements, he laid a wreath at the mausoleum of late Palestine president Yaseer Arafat, paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi, and took part in a ceremony to name a road and a roundabout in the central quarters of this city as Sharia-al-Hind and Maidan-al-Hind.

During the delegation-level deliberations, where the bulk of the articulation by the Indian side was by the president, New Delhi once again reiterated its position over its unwavering support for the Palestine cause, and that it favoured a negotiated settlement with Israel.

The Indian interlocutors present at the talks, said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas gave a detailed presentation on the issues of conflict with Israel, and even circulated a position paper on the subject.

One of the issues he wished to emphasise was how in a matter of 78 years, the Palestinians-held territory had shrunk from what they claimed was at 100 percent historically, to 80 percent in 1937, 44 percent under the UN partition scheme, 22 percent by 1967 and 12 percent now.

President Abbas said his country just wanted the Israelis to agree to the 1967 de-facto lines endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1988.

The Indian president, on his part, said they believed in arriving at a negotiated settlement, rather than the road of conflict, based on the Quartet Roadmap, proposed by the US, EU, Russia and the UN, as also various resolutions at the United Nations.

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