

## **India's stand at UNHRC a qualitative leap in ties: Israel**

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**Jerusalem:** Israel today hailed India's abstention at the UNHRC vote on Gaza war as a "qualitative" leap in bilateral ties that made it a "normal relation without hangups", even as India maintained that the vote does not mark any shift in its policy on the Palestinian cause.

The remarks came as India and Israel held Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), days after the highly publicised vote.

The consultations were led by Secretary (East) at Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Anil Wadhwa, and his Israeli counterpart, Director General Dore Gold.

Israel is said to have expressed its appreciation for India's stand during the vote at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

The FOC is a routine dialogue between the two sides to review bilateral relations and not related to the vote.

Mark Sofer, the deputy director-general at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs who is currently heading the Division for Asia and the Pacific at the ministry, later told The Jerusalem Post that the dialogue came at a particularly "auspicious moment".

The relationship, which has been steadily improving over the years, has taken a "qualitative" leap forward since (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's election, he said.

Now the relationship has transformed into a "completely normal relationship, without hangups," Sofer, who has served as Israel's Ambassador in New Delhi, told the daily.

"The qualitative change in the relationship is palpable in every single sphere, and that is important to note," he said adding that India represents "a quarter of the world population and everyone is running to be there".

Sofer attributed a part of the improvement in ties to a "chemistry" that exists between Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Prime Minister Modi.

The two leaders had met in New York last September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly and since have constantly kept in touch.

Sources at the PMO here said that Netanyahu had reached out to Modi before the UNHRC vote as well.

Wadhwa, speaking to PTI, however, said that India has already clarified its position on the UNHRC vote which was a "principled" one in connection to the ICC (International Criminal Court) which was referenced in the resolution.

"We have communicated to the Israeli side about our position and I am also going to convey the same to the Palestinian side when I meet their leadership later today and tomorrow," Wadhwa said.

"The FOC covers the whole gamut of bilateral relations and we focused on strengthening and expanding our engagement in various fields, especially agriculture and science and technology".

- PTI