

THE ISRAEL PROJECT

CONFERENCE CALL

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**SPEAKER:
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JENNIFER LASZLO MIZRAHI: Hello and welcome. This is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, founder and president of the Israel Project. The Israel Project, as I think most of you know, is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., and with a major office in Israel. Our core mission is education: trying to educate the press and the public about the real facts about the Middle East, Israel in particular, but other issues that impact the Middle East as well.

We are especially delighted in the expanding relationship between India and Israel and believe that it has a very important role to play for the world ahead. To that end, we are very deeply honored to have a very special speaker with us today, Ambassador Mark Sofer. He is an Israeli diplomat and became the Israeli ambassador to India in 2008.

He joined the Israeli foreign ministry in 1981 and has held diplomatic positions in Peru, Norway and New York. He served as ambassador to Ireland from 1999 until 2002 and in the early 1990s he served as policy advisor to foreign minister Shimon Perez.

Born in London, England, Ambassador Sofer holds a bachelor's in science in economics and international relations from the London School of Economics and an M.A. in international relations from the Hebrew University. Ambassador Sofer, thank you so much for being with us today. We're deeply honored to have you with us. And we welcome you to the call and invite you to give an opening statement on Israel-India relations.

AMBASSADOR MARK SOFER: Thank you very much, indeed, Jennifer, and good evening, everyone. Good evening here and good morning or afternoon wherever it is where you are. Well, as you just mentioned, Jennifer, correctly, the relationship between India and Israel has, in fact, blossomed.

It's a very new relationship, as a matter of fact. It started only in 1992. Prior to that, it wasn't a neutral relationship; it was actually a rather negative relationship. The Indian authorities, for political reasons which we can discuss later if anyone's interested, really took a rather negative point of view towards Israel in the Middle East conflict and towards Israel bilaterally.

But that has undergone what can only be described as a metamorphosis since 1992, since the establishment of relations in late January of 1992. Or actually, it was early February. And since then, what we have seen, I think, is a dynamic relationship, the likes of which is existent between very few, indeed, if at all, two countries in the international area. And this is borne out in the actual facts and figures over and above the people-to-people relationship.

For example, trade in 1992, when we established relations, was about \$180 million. I'm talking mutual trade and civilian trade, of course. And in 2010, we have just – or 2009, we topped \$4 billion in mutual trade and we've started, now, discussions on a free-trade agreement, which experts – not Israeli or Indian, but major companies – I think it was Ernst & Young –

project a threefold increase within four years once the agreement is signed. So we're talking 12, \$13 billion in a very short period of time. And I'm talking, again, and I stress, only of civilian trade.

But also the agricultural relationship, the cultural, even the political relationship has blossomed far beyond our wildest dreams. And India is a crucial player in international arena. And it may be what some would call – certainly an economic superpower, but moving towards being a political superpower as well. And this is a relationship which has a great deal of value, I think, for both countries.

MS. MIZRAHI: Fabulous. Well, we're so delighted to hear about these relationships. We have many, many questions that have come in from reporters and from people around the world. From the editor of The Correspondent, we have a question: "Where are the Indo-Israel relations headed? Do you think India needs to come clear regarding its Middle East policy and concerning its relations to the ties with Muslim nations? Do you think India is a soft state?"

AMB. SOFER: Well, I'm not quite sure – maybe it's because I'm not an American, I don't know the actual – what the real meaning of a soft state is. But if you ask me whether India should come clear, I think it has come clear, to be honest with you, on its relationship.

And it has never hidden the fact from the Arab world that it has a strong and friendly and excellent relationship with Israel, on the one hand. And it's never hidden from us that it has a strong and friendly and excellent relationship with the Arab world, on the other hand. I think it's a proof that this isn't a zero-sum game of any form, that you can, if you play your cards right – and one should – have an excellent relationship with both.

And actually, that's what India does. It imports enormous energy from the Gulf and the other countries in the Middle East, on the one hand, and has an excellent relationship with Israel at the same time. It's respected all around. So I think on its Middle Eastern policy, we have to make a differentiation, really, between the hype that is sometimes reported and the actual facts on the ground and that the Indian Middle East policy is not that different from the Israeli Middle Eastern policy.

And it's not that different, as a matter of fact, from the moderate Arab Middle Eastern policy, in that it supports a two-state solution: Israel living side-by-side with a Palestinian state, with secure borders for Israel, but also for open freedom for the Palestinian people. And it's never made any secret of that. And I think if you look at those basic contours, that certainly cuts a bold arc to both sides of the equation.

MS. MIZRAHI: We have from the Jewish Voice a question: "India and the Jewish community have a long, positive history. What is the current status of the historical Indian-Jewish communities and what is their likely evolution?"

AMB. SOFER: Well, I think, actually, what I omitted to mention at the beginning and I should have done – I apologize – is that I think underlying the basic principle of the Indian-

Israeli dynamic since 1992, and certainly before then, is the total and utter lack of anything that could be construed as anti-Semitism in India.

The meaning of the word is almost unknown to Hindus, even to the Muslim community here as well, which I should say, immediately and straightaway, is not in any way, shape or form, extreme. And the opposite's the case. There is a very strong Sufi element within the Muslim community here in India, in which we have good relations with many organizations, them being around 18 percent or something of the Indian population, about 150 million people.

And so the Jewish community here right now is very, very small indeed. It's only around a few thousand, maybe four or 5,000, the majority of whom have come to Israel in the last period of time and have contributed in Israel as well. But I think today the Jews are basically centered in – I know they're basically centered in Mumbai and in Thane, which is a little – it's a place just outside Mumbai.

A few are in Punjab and a very, very small community in Calcutta, which used to be a major center, and in Ahmedabad, which is in Gujarat, where there is a beautiful synagogue, but only about 150 Jews. So we're talking of a few thousand only. And we estimate something in the region of 80,000 or so Indian Jews in Israel, mainly from the three communities, which is the Bene Israel, the Cochin and what's called the Baghdadi Jews, who come from India.

So the community, as I say, is small. It has some great figures in Indian life. There is still today – he lives in Delhi, actually – one of the great generals and one of the most respected Indian military leaders, Gen. Jack Jacob, who is very, very active in Jewish affairs and is considered, really, one of the – sort of, the high priest of so much in Indian military issues. He was the hero of the Bangladesh War between India and Bangladesh.

We've had, of course, the poets here in India, the poet that's in Ezekiel, et cetera. The list goes on. And so I think that the Jewish community here is very small today. You hear from the Indians, whoever you meet, how sad they are that the community has become so small. And so many of them long for the community to be back what it was.

MS. MIZRAHI: The next question, from the same reporter, asks: "Is it possible, even likely, that the environmentally preferable electric-vehicle technology now being developed in Israel could be incorporated into the economical mass-market Nano car now being manufactured in India?"

AMB. SOFER: Oh, my goodness. Well, I'll tell you something. I shall be seeing Ratan Tata at the end of this week. He is actually accepting an award from the Federation of the Israeli-Indian Chambers of Commerce for businessmen of the decade here in India. We're very proud to have somebody of his stature. And I'll ask him that question.

I wish I could answer it off pat, but not being a car mechanic, I don't know. It's a cheap car. It's already in the streets here; you can see them. Indians love it. I don't know how it'll clog the roads here, which are not exactly unclogged. But nonetheless, I think that I'll have a

word and ask if we can get together with the Shai Agassis of the world and see if we can incorporate it into the Nano.

MS. MIZRAHI: Fabulous. The next question, from the University of Texas: “How does the Iran-India pipeline factor into Israel-India relations?”

AMB. SOFER: Well, one of the difficulties of a conversation of this nature is that it’s very much on record. And so I won’t make any prognosis about what I think will actually happen with the Iran-India pipe, the Iranian-Indian pipeline – which is not, I should say, an Iranian-Indian pipeline, but an Iranian-Pakistani-Indian pipeline, or that’s what it’s projected as. And that’s a very crucial P there.

The Indian side of it has not moved forward in the last few years and one can surmise why. And it’s really, I think, one can guess about the Indian-Pakistani part playing a role. One can guess about the other issues involved there as well. And I think that your analysis will be as good as mine. It hasn’t progressed, I think, for a few years now.

And India is looking at other directions into how to augment its energy. Of course, it’s a country of 1.2, 1.3 billion people and extremely thirsty for oil. It doesn’t seem to have any – at least, right now – any open sources of oil, especially oil. I’m not so much talking of gas at this stage. And it doesn’t seem to have found any. So I don’t think the IPI, as it is, is actually moving fast and I don’t know if it will. But so I’m not quite sure that we should look at that as being a major harbinger of energy for India in the very near future.

MS. MIZRAHI: Does India have nuclear power?

AMB. SOFER: India’s a nuclear state, as you know, with nuclear weaponry. It has refineries. It uses mainly – it’s coming from oil. The main usage of, the main energy is oil. But they are developing extremely fast and, especially, together with a number of Israelis, alternative sources of energy, especially in the three fields of wind, wave and waste, biowaste sources of energy.

So there is a shortage of electricity in India; of that there’s no doubt. And they know it and they’re working on how to fix it. And this is one of the things that many Israeli companies and engineers are working with as well.

MS. MIZRAHI: Actually, we got a number of questions about that, Ambassador, looking for some specific examples. One question, which comes from Mr. Bessen (ph), is: “How lucrative and realistic are the economic opportunities for Israeli companies, specifically in the areas of clean tech, water conservation and tourism?”

AMB. SOFER: I’ll start with the third, tourism, which is a rather easy one for us. We’re looking at the Indian market from the Israeli tourism point of view as a fascinating market. India is a market which is growing, is an economy which is growing at an enormous speed, as we know, as you know. It’s eight to 9 percent. Even during the global downturn, it was going at six and it’s back up again to 9 percent.

And the tourism from India to Israel is growing rapidly. There are problems, of course. The need for visas is always one of the harbingers on both directions, as a matter of fact. But there are – 2 percent of Indians are Christian, with a strong link to the holy sites – pilgrim tourism. The 2 percent, in Indian terms, of course, is 30, 40 million people, or 25 – something like that – million people, which is a lot in and of itself.

Israeli tourists come to India at an amazing – I almost said alarming – pace. We're talking about 40 to 50,000 a year, usually postmilitary, who are coming for a little bit of shanty, or whatever it's called here, and for rest and relaxation after the hectic times that they've spent in school and military and before the university. But we're seeing, also, the profile of others who are coming here: growing numbers to learn much more about Indian culture, Indian mentality, ashram, yoga and a deeper tourism there as well.

On the question of the other two issues that are involved, especially water conservation: This is probably the most important issue facing India today, I would have thought, is the issue of water. Water in all its forms: It's water management, water conservation, water creation, water usage, education about water. All of these things are crucial, mainly because there are enormous problems of water in India right now. In fact, many cities have water for maybe an hour a day, or even less in certain areas, desert areas, like Rajasthan.

It's in crisis, in the crisis zone. And so we are working very closely indeed with India, trying to – we have our experts coming in both directions. We've brought over any number of water delegations to here. They're working very closely. But I think it's also another question of new technology. It's a question of educating the farmer what crops to grow: You don't grow rice, for example, in desert areas, or you don't – one shouldn't switch the tap on in the morning to water a field and leave it on all day. There are drip-irrigation systems.

I would say, actually, that the drip-irrigation system is probably the best ambassador that we have here in India. And whatever you go – this is a country of 700 million farmers, 700 million people who are dependant on farming and food for their daily needs. And water, of course, being the main, crucial ingredient for that. And so anything that can be done in that field is crucial for both countries.

We have the expertise. They have the human capacity to absorb this expertise and use it. And one cannot underestimate that in any way at all because some of these technologies are very sophisticated and there is never any difficulty whatsoever in planting and transferring these technologies to India, be it the larger farmer or the ministry of agriculture. Of course, when you're talking about the small-time subsistence farmer, you have to talk of a lesser degree of technology.

So water management and water issues are very, very high on our joint agenda. We don't always get the press that people are interested in because they're always looking at other issues in the relationship, which, I suppose, is natural in many respects. But nonetheless, the water issue is central.

And clean tech fits in, in fact, in the same way. We just had a delegation here, three weeks ago, of 20 Israeli businessmen in the field of clean tech. And the parliamentary delegation that came back from Israel of extremely high-level, cross-party Indian parliamentarians from both houses spent, actually, most of their time in clean tech and water-technology facilities within Israel and brought it back home and want to implement them in their own constituencies.

MS. MIZRAHI: That's so interesting, Ambassador, because drip aggregation is something that really can help the individual farmer. It's not a complicated technology to implement, but it can be so impactful for their ability to have a livelihood that is successful. Does Israel get any credit when it's involved for sharing such technology, or does it just, kind of, happen quietly, behind the scenes, in a way that they don't know Israel's involved in that?

AMB. SOFER: Well, first of all – and this I stress in every way – the relationship between Israel and India has overcome this, sort of, you know, let's score points on this. Everybody in India, whoever you talk to, knows of the drip irrigation. I said earlier and I meant it that the best ambassadors for us are the companies that deal with drip irrigation.

You are right: It can be low-tech, in the sense that drip-irrigation systems don't have to be highly computerized. The best systems are highly computerized, but that might be, in some cases, a little bit too soon in some parts of India. But whatever you go, throughout this subcontinent – it's not really a country – there are Israeli drip-irrigation systems everywhere, including in many, many private homes here in Delhi. But you go to Punjab, which is considered the wheat field of India – the chief minister was in Israel just a few months back. The place is completely full of drip irrigation.

Or in the south, in Tamil Nadu; wherever you go – and we're talking of states here each of which has 50, 60 million people – you know, the size of European countries. And if one can be beneficial in bringing sustenance to the man and woman in the street, I think, at the end of the day, that is the man issue in the bilateral relationship between two states, and not the political issues, not the strategic issues, not the United Nations voting patterns.

All of this is important that it goes on and everything. But at the end of the day, I do strongly believe that the underlying factor between any two countries – and Israel and India are proving it in fighting the desert, in fighting poverty, in using water in a better way, in improving farming techniques, in working together to build new technologies – I think this is crucial.

If I could add something, Jennifer, without droning on – and cut me off if I am – we signed a memorandum of understanding between Israel and India in the field of agriculture in early 2008. And this is being implemented in the most successful way possible in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, where Mumbai, of course, is, and now in Gujarat, in the fields of floriculture, horticulture and mango production, which is a crucial issue for the farmers here.

It's building up centers of excellence, some sort of model farms, where farmers are coming from far and wide to learn about the new technologies that have been implemented in

these centers of excellence with Israeli technology. And it's going much better than we thought it would, much better.

And this is a government project. This is not a private project; it's the government of Israel's money and government of India's money. And I think this is, for me, the most exciting issue that we are dealing with here in India is this because it touches the very man and woman at the lowest level of Indian society.

MS. MIZRAHI: I have a question from Rom Neryaian (ph), who's following up on a book that was published called "The East Moves West: India, China and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East," by Geoffrey Kemp of the Nixon Center.

And his question is, "In view of the close cooperation being developed between India and Israel and in view of the fact that China may turn out to be an enemy of both India and the U.S. over the medium to long term, is it proper for India" – excuse me, "for Israel to continue to supply advanced and sophisticated weapons or technology to China?"

AMB. SOFER: Well, to the best – I'm not an expert on China, but to the very best of my knowledge – it is quite a high level of knowledge, if you don't mind my saying so – I don't think Israel is supplying any advanced technology or defense weapons to China. I'm not talking about India here; you said China.

MS. MIZRAHI: China.

AMB. SOFER: And I say that's a little bit, sort of, tongue-in-cheek, with brackets, I don't think it's the case at all. India is moving towards the United States. It's going to be a long process. It won't be from today till tomorrow. There's a lot of baggage there, I think, on both sides of the equation.

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan, a 60-year-old relationship, has not been weak. India has been very much in the nonaligned camp. It was a very close relationship, or had a very close relationship with the Soviet Union. And its relations with Russia today are very good as well. And so I don't think that from today till tomorrow, you can see a real symbiotic relationship between India and the United States, but certainly, a very close moving together, which goes on day in and day out.

And as far as I understand, President Obama will be coming to India in, I think, early November. And Prime Minister Singh was in the United States, I think, the first official-level prime minister who visited the United States after the American elections. So there's definitely a moving together there. And I don't think – certainly, I don't hear it here in India – of any untowardness, any eyebrow-raising about an Israeli-Chinese, highly sophisticated transfer of technologies in the defense field. And the reason you don't hear it is that it doesn't exist.

MS. MIZRAHI: From the Madras Christian College in India, a question about, how do you envision the next 10 years in India-Israel space collaboration and its applications to civilian and strategic dimensions?

AMB. SOFER: Well, the space relationship that we have with India is actually very strong. It's not surprising the question is coming from Chennai, or from Tamil Nadu. That's the area where a lot goes on, of course. ISRO, the Indian space agency, is situated in Bangalore, the main area of it.

We've had already, as you know, a couple of launches of satellites. They haven't been a secret and they've been published widely. One was done by the – it was commercial – one was from, I think, Tel Aviv University and the other from the Israel aircraft industry.

One of the reasons that things have gone so well between the Indian and the Israeli cooperation is space is, as I said earlier, we find that the scientists here, the engineers and the technicians in India – actually, you don't get better than them anywhere in the world. It's not a secret, either. They're coming back in huge numbers now from the United States, or from wherever they've been studying, and beginning their careers outside of India. And there's a sort of a reverse brain-drain going on at this very moment.

And a cursory visit to Bangalore proves that out immediately. I was there recently and I know the Silicon Valley in the United States: I'm not quite sure which is more dynamic today. And that's not to make any derogatory statement about the United States Silicon Valley, but there is nothing in the world in the field of high-tech, including space technology, which does not exist in India, nothing.

And so we're very happy of that cooperation. I think, as I said at the very beginning, this eye-to-eye, this man-to-man or woman-to-woman – we are not looking down on them, on Indians, in any way whatsoever and they are not looking down on us in any way whatsoever. It's a real eye-to-eye discussion on the highest level. And there is no difficulty whatsoever in working with them. And this is what we have found.

I should say – and I won't hide this; I'll say it openly – also in the defense field, which there is a relationship. It's not something I want to hide. It's not something I want to talk about, but it's no secret that there is a defense relationship between Israel and India.

But also in the high-tech field, in the space research and the space activity, I don't know how it's going to develop. I think it's difficult to know. I don't even know, to be honest with you, what Israel's space wishes are, over and above the satellites, in the near future. But the collaboration is there; the cooperation is there. And how it will develop, I think, time will tell.

MS. MIZRAHI: Harry Ploss, who's the treasurer of the Israel Project, asks: "Can you give us an update on the Iran petroleum sanctions?"

AMB. SOFER: As far as India is concerned?

MS. MIZRAHI: Yes.

AMB. SOFER: Well, you know – and I'm not making any excuses for India. They can do it much better than I can – or not any excuses, any play for the Indian position. But it's not quite – it's a very complicated situation, the Indian-Iranian relationship. And it has enormous historical roots of, you know, the Zoroastrian roots, the Farsi, the fact that it's taught in almost every major university, the historical.

They're, more or less, neighbors, actually, India and Iran, not too far away from each other. There's quite a number of Shia Muslims here in India as well. I think it's something like 10 percent of the Muslim community, or 12 percent, are Shia. And again, we're talking of a large number: That's what, 12, 15, maybe up to 20 million people, which is a lot of people.

Indians have been very, very careful indeed and it's not a secret at all that they have followed the sanctions regime carefully. They have their very specific point of view in Iran on how those sanctions should go. They haven't hidden it.

They voted in the IAEA, as we know – their abstention, starting from about three years ago and voting with the, sort of, not with the Iranians, has already started a few years back. I don't think the Iranians were very happy with that and they don't make that hidden either. But it's a very complicated, long-ranging and not an easy one. And we also shouldn't forget that there's an enormous amount of oil that India is importing from Iran.

But what they have done, really, the Indians, is that they have always stood by the letter of the sanctions regime. They may not support it; they may wish for another way out. They may be looking for other ways of moving forward, but they have never broken the sanctions regime as, in fact, some other countries have.

MS. MIZRAHI: So you don't see them using other front companies in Dubai or other places?

AMB. SOFER: No. No, absolutely not. That's not the way they work here in India. They're very up front in that respect. They're not looking to do any type of (fiddle ?) of that nature, absolutely not.

Their point of view is known on Iran. We may agree or disagree with it, or we may have a different approach towards Iran than they do – and we do have a different approach towards Iran than they do – but I think India and I know that India is very strict in following the sanctions regime, even if they're not happy with it. And they are not looking for ways around, to try and find, you know, the easy way out – a little bit of, you know, behind the scenes or under the table. That's not what they're doing at all, which doesn't mean that there isn't a strong relationship between India and Iran on the sanctions. It doesn't mean that there aren't interactions between the political leaders of India and Iran. They are and they go on.

But I don't think we should look – one should look at this as necessary, you know, the be all and end all of all evil. There are major constraints here. We know what Iran is. They know what Iran is and what it stands for. India is very, very far, indeed, from being a state which can condone and does condone any type of fundamentalist regime.

Let's not forget this is the country which was based – founded – and still flourishes on the Gandhian tradition which is based very largely on secularism. And so I think that there are moral issues here. There are historical issues here. There are a number of questions going on – that's going on – between the two, but they are very strict in the international law area as far as Iran is concerned.

MS. MIZRAHI: Jonathan Schwartz of the American Jewish Committee asks, "Given the high level of trade, tourism and other cooperation, at what point, if any, might we see India begin to support Israel at the United Nations?"

AMB. SOFER: Well, I think that's a good question and it's something that we bring up with them a lot. I don't think the question of supporting Israel is concerned – is the issue. I think maybe what Jonathan Schwartz is referring to is maybe a less negative issue vis-à-vis Israel at the United Nations.

I think, though, it's important to look at both sides of the coin. It's true that the Indian voting patterns at the United Nations, like a number of other countries, incidentally, are not optimal, to use the understatement of the year. India has a number of constraints, as I said earlier, oil, as I said earlier, conflict with a Muslim country which coerces it do a number of – as I said earlier, a very, very large constituency which is perceived – wrongly, I should say – perceived as being knee-jerk.

And here, I'm talking here of the Islamic community and until recently, had a – quite a large and substantial and prominent party here in government, which no longer is there, of course and is actually quite decimated since the last elections in India. It's also a democracy, of course, which means that you have – you cannot ignore the internal constituency and I think we have to understand all of that.

The other side of the coin is, I think if you look at what happens prior to 1992 and where we are today, it's very important to remember that India used to be the first country that would stand up and walk out when an Israeli representative would stand up to talk. This was very common in the '70s and the '80s.

India was at the forefront of the anti-Israel stampede in the '70s and the '80s and just any cursory look at the statements and the actions taken by them then would be very blatant. However, what you're certainly seeing now is first and foremost, if we just put the voting itself by the side, there is never an Indian sponsorship of an anti-Israel resolution at the United Nations, completely in opposite; completely the opposite of what was the case.

And you very rarely, if at all – I actually can't even recall one, but, no, I don't want to say that there wasn't any – you'll never find an Indian statement after the vote, which is also very common, standing up and making a statement lambasting Israel. Those have disappeared off the order of the day.

We usually have an extremely good cooperation with the Indian mission at the United Nations. I know the ambassador very well, actually. I've met him on two occasions and I'm talking of New York and in Geneva as well. But voting patterns are not easy to change because of other constraints. I think they will happen.

But personally, I think it's first and foremost for the voting patterns to change on the Middle East and issues – it would be good if things moved in the Middle East at a faster pace, which would make it easier for countries with constraints. And of course, here, I don't – I mean I feel strongly, though, that the voting patterns are wrong. But I'm not sure that that should be the major factor in the India-Israel relationship. Of course, it is on the order of the day.

MS. MIZRAHI: Daniel Mandell (ph) asks, "Indians have exhibited, over the years, a sympathy for Israel, born of understanding that like India, faces Muslim extremist terrorists who kill its civilians. In this light, how has Indians, the government, media and ordinary people, reacted to the Gaza flotilla incident and its aftermath?"

AMB. SOFER: Well, I think that the premise of the question is that correct. I think that there is a great deal of understanding and that falls in one of the major factors underlying the strong public opinion – support – for Israel, I think, that every public – which makes life quite a lot easier sometimes – (chuckles) – for me than say for my Western European colleagues.

But without doubt, the public opinion here in India for the main part is friendly toward Israel for a number of reasons. Some of them I've spoken about earlier, you know, the agricultural, the technical issues involved in the all – that they have towards Israel for these technological achievements in the field of agricultural and water.

But definitely also because of the understanding of the geo-strategic situation that they are in and that we are in – there's a lot of similarities, and one of them being surrounded sometimes by – I should look for a diplomatic world – unpalatable neighbors in certain cases. I think India has, in often cases, many observers think maybe the worst – one of the worst neighborhoods in the world with a lot of troubled states around it over the years.

And of course the terrorism from the outside, of which the Mumbai issue – which you remember – which was the last time I gave a conference call here. The Mumbai issue was the last – sort of the manifestation of the troubles that both India and Israel are facing when Indians and Jews were killed.

Having said that, the Indians were very nonplussed indeed after the flotilla incident. They came out with a statement which we spoke to them about at the time. The press was negative, but you know, in a country like India where issues come in so thick and strong because it is a continent –

It did move off the agenda, I think, rather faster than it did in many other countries because nobody had a real reason to keep it on the agenda. They're not looking to needle or to find fault. They really are trying to cajole and help the Middle East move ahead and not take a

rabidly one-sided position or another. The incident, itself, as I said, wasn't a positive incident as far as India was concerned, oh no.

MS. MIZRAHI: Ambassador, I know your time is limited, so let me just ask you two more questions, if I might. The first is about the use of American Silicon Valley country's companies as Israel and India – for their engineering challenge and others. I see that Warren Buffett, a well known American billionaire investor is going to come to India with Stef Wertheimer from ISCAR. So how much of that kind of activity is going on? Is it – does it make the media? Do people care? What's the reaction?

AMB. SOFER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It's very much going on. Actually, as we talk, we have here, I met them this morning, a large delegation of India – of Israeli business in the field of state-of-the-art medical technologies, health and medical technologies. And they are meeting all of the biggest industrialists there of the Tata's, the Mahindra's, the you name it – the big hospital chains in India, et cetera, the doctors, many of whom actually come to Israel all the time, doctors here.

So the answer to your question, of course, is that there is a very strong relationship in the field of high-tech. I didn't know, until I read your excellent – if I might say – briefing about the Warren Buffett, Stef Wertheimer visit here in the next few months. And as a matter of fact, the biggest major technical – high-tech organizations and businesses of Israel are here anyway.

Elbit Imaging, for example, is building hospitals, dairy farms, real estate, throughout India. IDB of Nochi Dankner is here. The – Bangalore is full of Israeli companies. Delhi is, as well. I mean we estimate something in the region – and it's difficult to know because investment is not something that government A, know and B, needs to know.

But the Israeli investment here in India in the field of high-tech or high-tech-related products is somewhere around \$2 billion, which is very high. And it's two-way. It's a two-way street. So there's a lot of Indian investment and growing Indian investment in Israel. The biggest irrigation company in Israel, Kibbutz Na'an, was bought or merged with the largest irrigation company in India, called Jain Irrigation. Now, actually, the company is called NaanDanJain. And it's huge.

This has become one of the biggest – I think it's now the biggest irrigation company in India. And they're using high technologies. So the fact that Buffett and Wertheimer are coming is excellent. But they are not starting a new trend. And it's important to mention that. They are improving an existing one and I think that there's a growing realization of this India-Israel-American triangle which we ought to be doing much more on.

I don't have to talk to you, Jennifer, about the amazing Indian-American community in the United States and its success in the professional field. And I don't have to talk to you, of course, about the Jewish one. And so there's a very close relationship there as well. And I think that there could be a bridge to this tripartite high-tech activity.

MS. MIZRAHI: So Ambassador, the last question, which many people asked this question because we have many people who are active in U.S.-Israel relations who are on this call. And many of them are active in AIPAC, a pro-Israel organization of Americans that supports the U.S.-Israel relationship.

So they're asking about – if there are any such organizations in India, if so, who are they? Are they associated at all with any of the political parties? Do pro-Israel people get involved in any of the campaigns? Are there organizations trying to build the relationship? Or at this point, is it mostly just trade organizations? So that's the genesis of the question. And then, more self-interested from the perspective of the Israel Project, how important is it for an organizations like ours to work on bridging these relationships?

AMB. SOFER: What I would say as far as the first one is concerned – that the first part of the question is concerned is that there are pro-Israel organizations in India. Sometimes, they're religiously based; sometimes, they are politically based. And sometimes they are just drawn out of friendship – the Israel – the Indian-Israel Friendship Association has branches almost all over India.

In fact, I can't – I can't keep up with – one of the big problems I have is that this country is too big for us. And so we cannot cover it all and there are – wherever I go, there are branches. And so there is a lot of good will. I noted earlier – if I'm not mistaken – a recent – a public opinion poll.

It was actually quoted, I think, in Newsweek, a bulk of 58 percent support toward Israel in Indian public opinion, I think, is among the highest if not the highest in the world. And so as far as the bridging is concerned, it's certainly very, very, very far away from being just in the business community.

And the press here, we have right now, a group of journalists in Israel. We had – one of the major newspapers that's coming out next week – one of the major newspapers, one that has about 7 million readers is coming out with a major supplement on Israel at the end of this week – or the end of this month – we've seen the articles as well. I think any of us in Israel couldn't have written it better. And so the good will is there.

What I think we need to do and we cannot do enough of it in a huge continent or subcontinent like India is to deal more – and I would love to work with the Israel Project on this one – with the dissemination of the technologies which may be useful. I would say issues behind the conflict, if you were, on every field, medical, agricultural, water, almost any field of human activity and spread that out as much as we can to the masses.

I think the word “the masses” in a country like India is fitting because there are masses here. And the good will that the basics are there but we never know – and one can never know in a country of this size, how deep down we have got, because we cannot incorporate everybody.

So we meet only a certain – I would say – probably an elite of India – a cross section of the Indian community and so does – the parliamentarians have come here, the politicians who

come here, the businessmen, et cetera, et cetera, diplomats. It's impossible to meet people outside and outside of us – it's too many for us. And I think this dissemination is very, very important. Also, that they should get to know a little bit more is very important – about what they can use for their own good.

MS. MIZRAHI: How many people do you have on staff, Ambassador, to cover this massive country?

AMB. SOFER: Well, to be honest with you, this is our biggest embassy in Asia, by far. And I think today – and don't get me wrong here – maybe our third or fourth biggest in the world right now. And I'm including in this, Washington and others. The embassy has grown exponentially in the last few years as the byproduct of the relationship.

They, actually, I should say, have placed an extremely high diplomat as their ambassador in Israel as well. He was, for five years, a spokesman of the foreign ministry and one of the most senior figures in the ministry of what they call here, the Ministry of External Affairs. And so in that respect, I think – to be honest with you, Jennifer, if they quadrupled and it was like six or seven times the staff at the embassy, we wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface, to be honest.

And that's in all honesty. We have a consulate in Mumbai. We have an excellent consul general. We are hopeful that we will open a third one soon and you know, if we opened another 20, we would just about be able to get our – top of our hair above the water. It's impossible. And I don't think even countries 20 times the size of ours can cover all of India.

But I do think that you can make a difference. And senior ambassadors which I've spoken to – you know there are 160 embassies or 170 embassies here in India. They have more embassies in India and Delhi than there are in any other country in the world. I think there's not one country that they don't have diplomatic relationship – diplomatic relations with today – or embassies.

But I will say that I heard recently from an extremely senior ambassador here that under any count of the top five or the top 10 embassies or activities of states from the outside within Israel, Israel will also figure in that number. And what are we? We're a country which is, all in all, a third the size of Delhi or a third the size of Mumbai or half the size of Bangalore, et cetera, etcetera.

These are just cities and so when you hear that statement made by foreign – by a senior, senior foreign ambassador here and I can't say that it's not true. And I must say that it does show that even from the outside, the knowledge of the depth of the India-Israel relationship is quite there.

MS. MIZRAHI: Ambassador Mark Sofer, you're doing extraordinary work in extraordinary times. And as we hear such isolation of Israel in some of the European countries, to know that such a large and important country as India is welcoming Israel with such open arms and that you're able to bridge such critical relationships. Ambassador Mark Sofer, thank

you for what you do for Israel, for the Jewish people and for the world. Thank you for being with us today.

AMB. SOFER: Thank you, thank you very much, Jennifer. Good evening.

MS. MIZRAHI: Good evening.

(END)