

Israel proud to stand with India in its defence against terror: President Rivlin

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Mumbai: Israeli President Reuven Rivlin today pledged full support to India in fighting terrorism and said friendship between India and Israel is at work "day in, day out" and is not a relationship "we should be hiding".

Rivlin arrived in Mumbai on an eight-day visit to India, the first by any Israeli President in nearly two decades.

In an interview to PTI, the Israeli President acknowledged differences with India on the Palestinian issue but spoke warmly about the growing Indo-Israeli ties as the two countries prepare to celebrate 25 years of establishment of full diplomatic ties between them next year.

Pledging full support to India in fighting terrorism, Rivlin said that his country was proud to "stand with India in its defence of the values of democracy".

"Terror is terror is terror, whoever carries it out and whoever are its victims. And we all have the duty to condemn in our words, and fight with our deeds against this terrible evil," asserted the President, whose country is one of the biggest suppliers of defence equipment to India and is cooperating with it in a major way in dealing with terrorism.

Answering a question on "murmurs" in Israel that India keeps under wraps their relationship because of close ties with the Arab world and domestic political considerations, Rivlin said, "Israel is proud of our friendship with India and I believe that India is proud of its friendship with Israel.

"Again, this is not just a friendship of leaders and governments. It is a friendship between people in all walks of life, in all fields of study, in all areas of trade. This is not a friendship we should be hiding. This is a friendship that we see at work day in, day out, at the very forefront of building a better world for Israelis, for Indians, and for all peoples," he said.

In reply to a question on India's continued support for an independent Palestine with east Jerusalem as its capital, Rivlin said, "Friends may not always see eye to eye on everything, and as friends we can agree to disagree with respect and understanding.

"Israel understands and indeed shares India's desire to see a just and lasting solution to the conflict between us and the Palestinians. But no solution that may ever be found has a chance of success lest we work now to build confidence between peoples," the President said, and asserted that Israel and Palestine need to work towards "direct negotiations".

Rivlin, who is accompanied by a strong delegation of businessmen, will hold comprehensive talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi tomorrow on key bilateral and regional issues. On the long-pending FTA, negotiations for which were launched nearly five years ago between India and Israel, Rivlin said it is a "tool" that can have huge impact and boost the partnership.

As the two sides build and cultivate the growing partnership, there is a need to seek ways to help business sectors to work together in an inviting environment, Rivlin has said.

â€œWe need to supply them with the tools that will ease their way and will provide them incentives. An FTA is a tool that can have a huge impact and boost the partnership.

â€œBoth Israelâ€™s Ambassador in India, and Indiaâ€™s new Ambassador to Israel are playing an important role in

this, which is a matter in progress and I hope we can see it signed in the near future," the President said.

Rivlin also asserted that his visit was a chance not only to reaffirm Israel's commitment to continue building on all that has been achieved in the past 25 years of diplomatic relations, but to look at ways the two countries can work together to stretch even further the boundaries of innovation and imagination.

Importantly, this visit will focus on three areas of this cooperation, namely agriculture, water and education. These three areas in particular highlight what our two great nations are engaged in sowing the seeds for the future," he added.

During his meeting with Modi, Rivlin will reiterate his country's invitation to the Prime Minister.

Terming India-Israel relation "a growing partnership," he said there "is still much potential to develop it further."

Rivlin said Israel in particular has tremendous appreciation for the "Make in India" initiative of Mr. Modi. "Israel is ready and committed " motivated by our innovations and technological development " to be India's partner in all areas.... Some of the key areas we will be focusing on during the visit will be; water treatment and conservation, solar power systems, technology in agriculture, and food production."

Noting that his delegation included university heads and leading scholars, he said this was also a crucial area where he believed the cooperation could grow.

A great number of Indian students already study in Israel, and the rate of exchange and collaboration can be increased even further, he said, adding both Israel and India cherish the academic growth " as two great historic civilizations and two of the great innovating nations of the modern age.

- (With PTI inputs)