INDIA ISRAEL CENTRE
भारत इज़राइल केंद्र

The Hindi Heartland View

Where Israel stands among India's partners in the Hindi heartland

2nd
as a friend to India, after Russia

2nd
most widely recognised for helping India

75%
trust Israel among those aware of its cooperation with India

I Introduction

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, referred to in this report as the Hindi heartland[1], together account for more than a third of India's population, about 42 crore people at the 2011 Census. Studies of how Indians view the world nonetheless tend to draw on metropolitan audiences, and the Hindi heartland is examined far less often. This is also a region where India's partnership with Israel has a direct presence in everyday life. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar each host two Indo-Israel Centres of Excellence in horticulture, which train farmers in Israeli methods of irrigation and cultivation, and the region has supplied the largest share of the Indian workers recruited for employment in Israel since 2024.

This report examines how adults aged 21 to 40 across these five states see seven of India's most important and engaged partners: Israel, Russia, the United States, Japan, France, the UAE and Singapore. Some of these relationships stretch back many decades, while others have deepened considerably in more recent years. Respondents assessed each country on friendship, reliability in difficult times, trust, technology, the benefits of defence and technology cooperation, and the importance of cooperation in agriculture, water and business. Assessing Israel alongside these partners places its standing in context.

This is the third survey of young Indians conducted by the Centre in 2026, following studies in May and September. The earlier surveys drew on urban respondents across India; this study extends the series to the Hindi heartland.

II Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to measure public perceptions of India's bilateral partners among adults aged 21 to 40 in the Hindi heartland. A comparative structure was chosen deliberately. Rather than asking respondents about Israel in isolation, the questionnaire asked them to assess seven partner countries on identical measures, which allows Israel's standing to be read against that of partners with different histories, scales of engagement and visibility in Indian public life.

Data were collected in October 2026 through two complementary modes. The first was an online survey administered through an AI-assisted digital research platform, with respondents selected at random from the platform's panel across the five states, covering Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and towns. The second was an in-person survey conducted by field

[1]The term "Hindi heartland" is used in this report only as a shorthand for the five states covered by the study. The report makes no claim about the linguistic, cultural or political character of the region or of its residents.

enumerators, with respondents also selected at random. Both modes used an identical questionnaire administered in Devanagari Hindi, so that responses could be pooled into a single dataset of 1,023 respondents. Using two modes broadens coverage beyond the digitally active population that online panels tend to reach.

The questionnaire comprised eleven items. Respondents rated each of the seven countries on six dimensions: friendship with India, reliability in difficult times, technology and innovation, trust, the benefit to India of defence and technology cooperation, and the importance of cooperation in agriculture, water and business. Each dimension used a five-point response format ("very much", "quite a lot", "a little", "not at all" and "don't know"). Further items asked which countries respondents know to be helping India, how they think India's relationship with each country should develop, and which country India should prioritise in deepening ties.

Parameter	Specification
Sample size	1,023 respondents (online 513; in person 510)
Age	21 to 40 years
Gender	691 men, 332 women
States	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand
Coverage	Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and towns
Survey modes	Online, through an AI-assisted digital research platform; in person, through field enumerators
Language	Hindi
Countries assessed	Israel, Russia, United States, Japan, France, UAE, Singapore
Field period	October 2026

Responses from the two modes were merged, checked for consistency and standardised before analysis. Results are reported as percentages of all respondents, including those who answered "don't know". Ratings are reported using the Top-2-Box measure, the share of respondents answering "very much" or "quite a lot" on a given dimension. Unless stated otherwise, every percentage quoted for a rated dimension is a Top-2-Box figure. Where the report refers to the strongest response alone, it says "very much". Differences between groups were tested for statistical significance using chi-square tests at the 95 per cent confidence level. As a single-wave study, the findings describe perceptions at the time of fieldwork.

Where comparable, selected results are set against two earlier India Israel Centre surveys of young Indians: *How India's Gen Z Sees Israel* (May 2026, 500 urban respondents aged 18 to 29) and *The Indian Gen Z Worldview* (September 2026, 500 respondents aged 18 to 29). The earlier surveys differ from the present study in age range, geography and mode. Comparisons therefore indicate the direction of change on similar measures and are not a strict like-for-like trend.

The India-Israel partnership in numbers

35
Indo-Israel Centres of Excellence in agriculture across India, the 35th inaugurated in June 2026

USD 3.93 bn
India-Israel merchandise trade in 2025-26, up from USD 3.62 bn in 2024-25

250+
Indian agricultural officers trained in Israel under the Indo-Israel Agricultural Project

Sept 2025
Bilateral Investment Agreement signed; Free Trade Agreement talks held in February and July 2026

III Israel Among India's Partners

On the two measures that most directly capture how a partner is regarded, Israel is placed second of seven. Sixty-two per cent of respondents rate Israel as a good friend to India, and 57 per cent say it stands by India in difficult times. Only Russia, India's partner of longest standing and its principal defence supplier for decades, is rated higher on both. Israel is ahead of Japan, France and the United States on each.

Israel is also the second most widely recognised partner for its practical contribution. Asked which countries help India in some area, 42 per cent named Israel, ahead of the United States and Japan. On trust, Israel is third at 57 per cent, behind Russia and Japan and ahead of France, the UAE, Singapore and the United States.

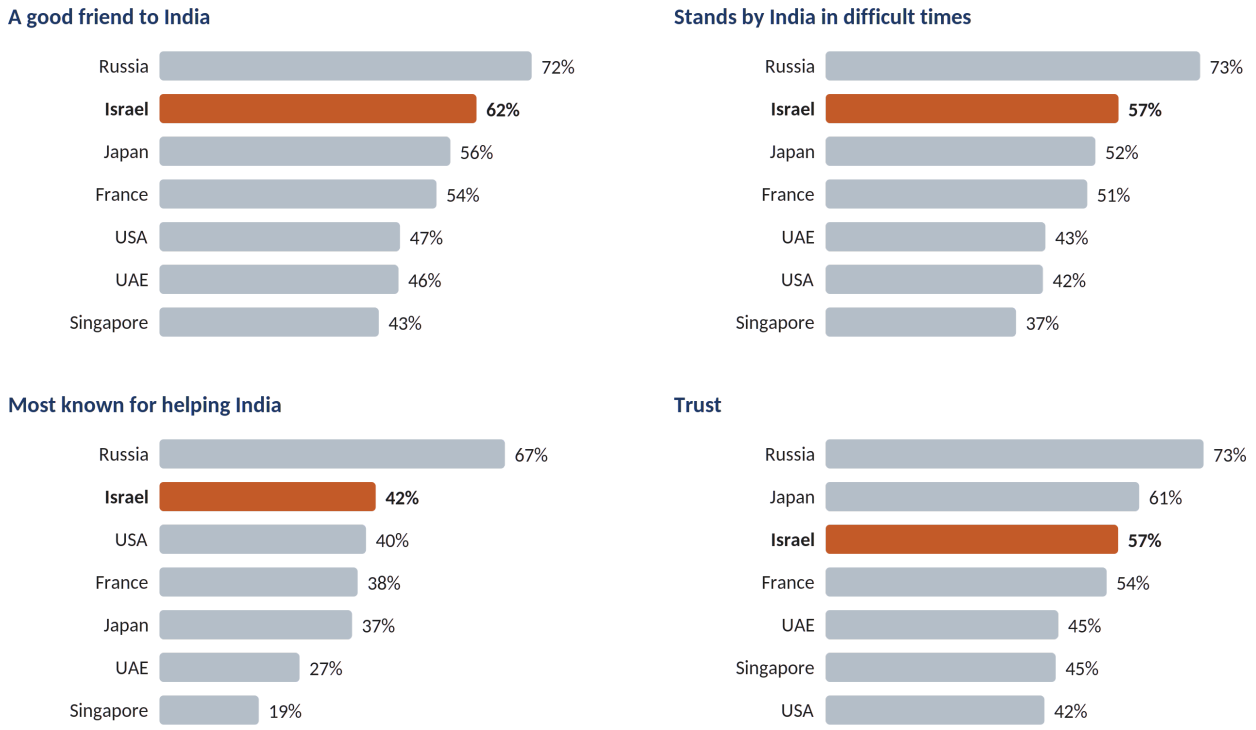


Figure 1: Perceptions of India's partners, % Top-2-Box (for recognition, % naming the country as helping India). n=1,023.

Measure	Rank of seven
A good friend to India	2nd
Stands by India in difficult times	2nd
Recognised for helping India	2nd
Trust	3rd
Defence and technology cooperation benefits India	3rd
Cooperation in agriculture, water and business is important	3rd

Unfavourable views of Israel are limited, and they are concentrated among respondents who are unaware of what the partnership does for India. Negative opinion appears to reflect limited familiarity far more than considered opposition (more details in section VII).

IV Strength of Conviction

Looking at the strongest response alone sharpens the picture. Thirty-one per cent of respondents say Israel is "very much" a friend to India, the second-highest share after Russia and well ahead of the United States (22 per cent) and Japan (21 per cent). The same pattern holds for reliability in difficult times, where 28 per cent answer "very much" for Israel, again second only to Russia.

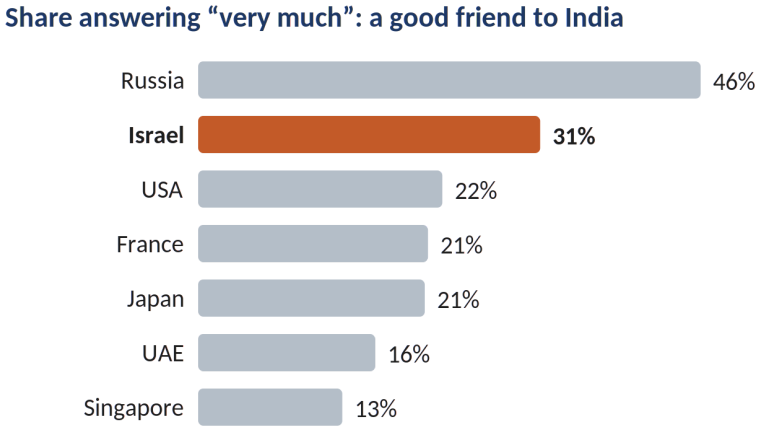


Figure 2: Share answering "very much" when asked whether each country is a good friend to India. n=1,023.

Because every respondent rated all seven countries, Israel can also be compared with each partner person by person. The results are striking. **Against every partner except Russia, respondents are considerably more likely to rate Israel the better friend to India than the reverse.** Forty-six per cent rate Israel above Singapore, 45 per cent above the United States and 43 per cent above the UAE, while only about a quarter rate any of these countries above Israel. Israel also leads Japan (38 per cent against 26 per cent) and France (37 per cent against 24 per cent).

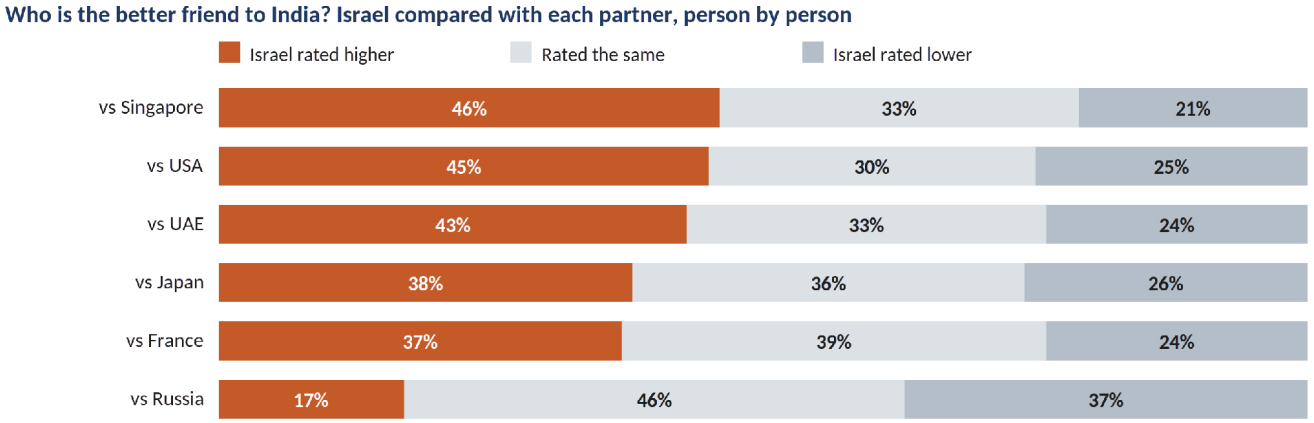


Figure 3: Israel compared with each partner on friendship with India, % of respondents rating Israel higher, the same or lower. n=1,023.

On trust, 43 per cent of respondents place Israel above the United States. On friendship, Israel leads every partner except Russia.

V Defence and Technology

Sixty-one per cent of respondents see India benefiting from defence and technology cooperation with Israel, and 30 per cent choose the strongest response, "very much", the second-highest share of any partner after Russia. Defence has been the most

consistent strength in the Centre's surveys this year. In May, 48 per cent of young urban Indians associated Israel with defence and military strength, its most cited attribute. In September, 52 per cent rated India's defence ties with Israel as strong, placing Israel third, ahead of the United States and France.

Perceptions of Israel's technology have risen on a comparable measure. 63% of respondents regard Israel as advanced in technology and innovation, up from 51 per cent in the Centre's May survey. These figures reflect a partnership that has long included defence systems, joint research and industrial technology, and that both governments have sought to extend into investment and trade.

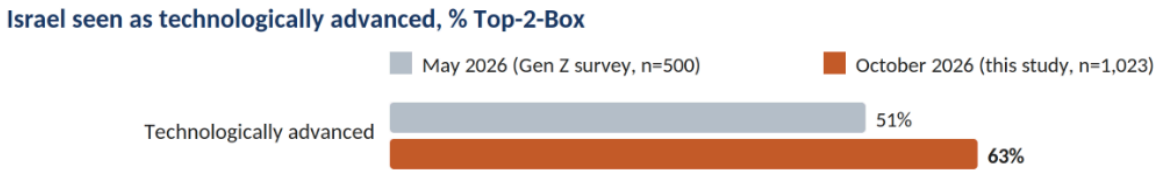


Figure 4: Share rating Israel as technologically advanced, % Top-2-Box. May 2026 survey (n=500, urban, aged 18 to 29) and present study (n=1,023).

Three in ten respondents say India benefits "very much" from defence and technology cooperation with Israel, second only to Russia.

VI Agriculture, Water and Business

Sixty per cent of respondents consider cooperation with Israel on agriculture, water and business important for India, placing Israel third of seven, close behind Japan. Eight in ten regard it as important to at least some degree. Among respondents who know of Israel's cooperation with India, three in four (75 per cent) rate this cooperation as important.

The development record behind these views is substantial. The Indo-Israel Agricultural Project, run by India's Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture with MASHAV, Israel's agency for international development cooperation, inaugurated its 35th Centre of Excellence in June 2026. The centres demonstrate Israeli methods such as drip irrigation, fertigation and protected cultivation, adapted to local crops, and train farmers and state officials. Four of them are in the heartland: the centres for mango at Basti and for vegetables at Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh, and the centres for mango and litchi at Vaishali and for vegetables at Nalanda in Bihar.

The economic relationship is also gaining structure. Bilateral merchandise trade rose to USD 3.93 billion in 2025-26. A Bilateral Investment Agreement was signed in September 2025, and negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement, revived with Terms of Reference signed in November 2025, completed their second round in July 2026.

Six in ten respondents consider cooperation with Israel in agriculture, water and business important for India, and only one in ten consider it unimportant.

VII Awareness and Perception

The clearest finding of the study concerns the relationship between knowledge and regard. Respondents who know that Israel helps India in some area rate it far more highly on every measure. Among them, 75 per cent trust Israel, compared with 43 per cent of those who are not aware. The gap is widest on defence and technology cooperation, where 83 per cent of the aware group see a benefit to India, against 46 per cent of the rest.

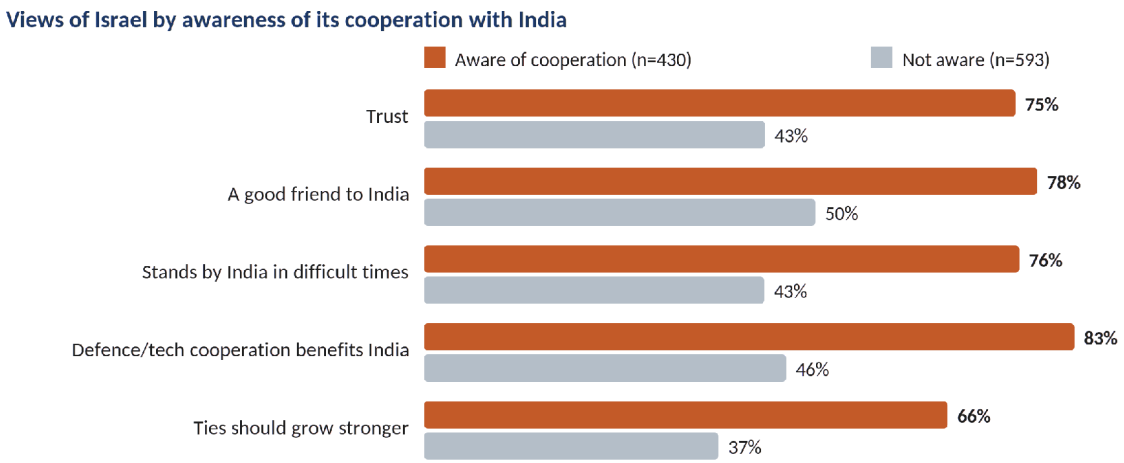


Figure 5: Perceptions of Israel by awareness of its cooperation with India, % Top-2-Box (for future ties, % saying they should grow stronger). n=1,023.

Negative views follow the same divide. Among respondents aware of Israel's cooperation with India, only 4 per cent say they do not trust Israel at all, against 17 per cent of those unaware.

Forty-two per cent of respondents are currently aware of Israel's contribution to India, and the pattern holds in both the online and the in-person survey. Because agricultural cooperation receives less public attention than defence, the Centres of Excellence and their work with farmers represent an area where wider visibility could translate directly into higher regard.

The finding is consistent with both earlier surveys. In May and September alike, respondents in Delhi NCR, where exposure to coverage of the partnership is highest, returned the most favourable ratings of Israel on every measure.

VIII A Closer Look Across the Heartland

Breaking the data down geographically shows that regard for Israel is highest where the partnership is most tangible. Across Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and towns, ratings are strongest in the parts of the heartland that host Indo-Israel Centres of Excellence or have sent large numbers of workers to Israel, and softer where these links are thinner. Earlier Centre surveys found the same relationship between exposure and regard among urban respondents, with Delhi NCR leading consistently.

The city-level results from the in-person survey show the same pattern more sharply. In Gorakhpur, 91 per cent of respondents trust Israel, and in Varanasi 88 per cent do so, with two in three respondents in each city choosing the strongest response. Both cities lie in eastern Uttar Pradesh, where links with Israel are unusually direct. The Indo-Israel Centre of Excellence at Basti sits on the Basti-Gorakhpur highway and serves farmers across the surrounding districts, and Gorakhpur division put forward the largest group of any division in the state for the January 2024 skill tests for construction jobs in Israel. Varanasi also records the highest awareness of Israel's cooperation with India of any city surveyed (63 per cent).

These local differences cannot be attributed to any single cause within a survey of this kind. They are, however, consistent with the study's central finding that regard for Israel rises where the partnership is visible in daily life, whether through farming, employment or wider public awareness.

IX Future Orientation

Asked how India's relationship with Israel should develop, half of respondents (50 per cent) want ties to grow stronger, and a further 28 per cent want them maintained at their current level. Taken together, more than three in four respondents support continuing or deepening the relationship.

The balance of opinion has also shifted since the Centre's May 2026 survey, in which 41 per cent favoured deeper ties with Israel and 20 per cent favoured reduced engagement. In the present study, the share wanting stronger ties is nine points higher at 50 per cent, while the share wanting ties reduced has fallen to 13 per cent. The proportion favouring the current level is unchanged at 28 per cent.

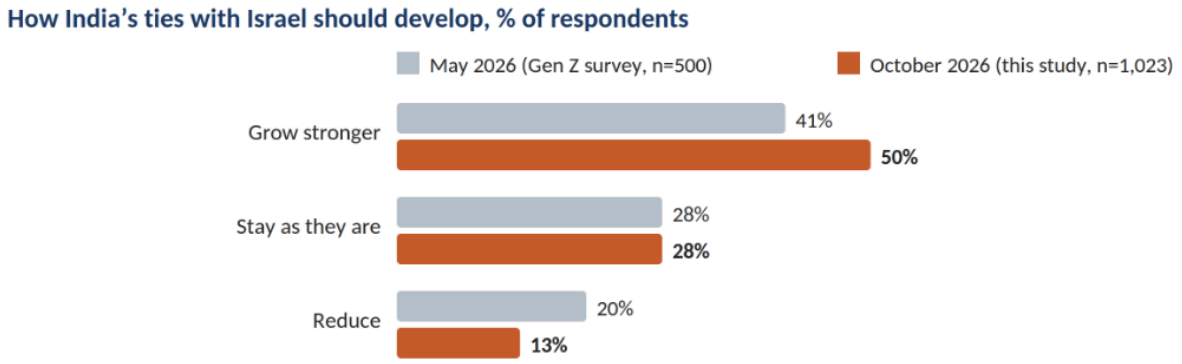


Figure 6: How India's relationship with Israel should develop, % of respondents. May 2026 survey (n=500, urban, aged 18 to 29) and present study (n=1,023).

Younger respondents show a distinctive pattern. In the in-person survey, one in five respondents aged 21 to 25 named Israel as India's best friend among the seven countries, the highest share of any age group. This echoes the Centre's September survey, which found the 22 to 25 age group the most receptive to stronger India-Israel cooperation.

X Conclusion

Among adults in the Hindi heartland, Israel holds a strong position relative to India's other partners. It is placed second only to Russia as a friend to India and as a country that stands by India in difficult times, and it is the second most widely recognised partner for its contribution to India. Compared person by person, respondents are more likely to rate Israel the better friend to India than the reverse against every partner except Russia, and on trust Israel leads the United States by a wide margin.

Read alongside the Centre's earlier surveys, the findings point in a consistent direction. Defence and technology remain Israel's defining strengths across all three studies; perceptions of its technology are higher than in May, and the share of respondents wanting stronger ties has grown while the share wanting them reduced has fallen.

The study also indicates where the relationship has room to grow. Regard for Israel rises sharply with awareness of what the partnership delivers, negative views are concentrated among those unaware of it, and the most favourable ratings come from the states and cities where the partnership is most visible. Fewer than half of respondents currently know of Israel's contribution to India.

In the Hindi heartland, Israel is regarded as one of India's closest partners, and regard for it rises wherever the partnership is visible.

Sources for contextual information

1. India Israel Centre, How India's Gen Z Sees Israel: Perceptions, Trust and Strategic Partnership, survey brief, May 2026.

2. India Israel Centre, The Indian Gen Z Worldview: Where Israel stands in Gen Z's map of India's global partnerships, September 2026.
3. Census of India 2011, state population totals for Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand.
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5. ANI and The Pioneer reporting on the 35th Indo-Israel Centre of Excellence, Munimpur, Jhajjar, Haryana, inaugurated 17 June 2026, and officer training under the project.
6. Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, "India and Israel Conclude Second Round of Negotiations for Proposed Free Trade Agreement", 24 July 2026; All India Radio News on the first round, February 2026; reporting on the Bilateral Investment Agreement signed 8 September 2025.
7. Government of Uttar Pradesh statement on construction workers employed in Israel, March 2026, as reported by The Statesman and Devdiscourse; The Telegraph on state-wise recruitment figures, November 2024.
8. IANS and PTI reporting on the Uttar Pradesh recruitment drive for construction jobs in Israel, Lucknow, January 2024 (division-wise skill test schedule); Asian Lite reporting on the Basti Centre of Excellence, March 2022.

Survey data: India Israel Centre perception study, October 2026, online and in-person surveys, pooled n=1,023.