

India – Timor Leste : Bilateral Relations

India was one of the early countries to establish diplomatic relations with Timor Leste (TL) and was represented at its Independence Day celebrations in May 2002 by a high level delegation led by the then Minister of State for External Affairs Shri Omar Abdullah. Letters of felicitations from the then President, PM and EAM were handed over on this occasion. An MOU formally establishing diplomatic relations was signed on 24 January 2003.

2. Indian diplomats, Ambassador Kamlesh Sharma (till 2004) and Dr. Atul Khare (till 2009), had served as the Special Representative of Secretary General (SRSG) in TL. Our DPR in New York was a member of the mini mission of the Security Council which visited TL in November 2012 to analyze the ground situation and hear views of all concerned on United Nations Integrated Mission in TL (UNMIT)'s withdrawal and post-UNMIT situation in TL.

3. TL supports India's permanent membership of the UNSC. This was formally announced by PM Alkatiri in 2003 at the UNGA. TL supported India's candidature for a non-permanent seat during 2011-12. TL extended their crucial support for the election of India's candidate Ms. Poonam Khetrapal Singh for the post of Regional Director, South East Asia Regional office (SEARO), WHO in September 2013. TL co-sponsored the Resolution on Yoga in the UNGA.

Important bilateral visits and meetings

4. The Vice Minister of Health of TL Mrs Natalia D. Araujo visited Delhi to participate in the International Conference on Traditional Medicine for South East Asian Countries in February 2013. The Minister of Health of TL Dr Sergio G.C.Lobo led a delegation to India in March 2013 and met with the Minister of Health and Family Welfare. Finance Minister of TL Ms Emilia Pires visited India in May 2013 for ADB Governors' Meeting.

5. EAM met the Foreign Minister of TL in Brunei on the sidelines of ARF Ministerial Meeting in early July 2013. The two Ministers discussed bilateral issues and ways to take the relationship forward. During the meeting, EAM offered to provide a grant in aid of US\$ 100,000 to Government of TL. (This grant was later utilized to donate an Ambulance to TL).

6. The Vice Minister of Health of TL Dr. Ana Isabel visited India to attend the Pharmexcil's International Business Meet held in Chennai in July 2015. Joint Secretary of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Mr. Anshu Prakash, accompanied by Director Mr. Amal Push represented India at the WHO Regional Committee Meeting held in Dili in September 2015.

7. Foreign Minister of TL Mr. Hernani Coelho visited India on 27-29 March 2016 and met with EAM, MOS (VKS) and Minister of Health & Family Welfare. This was the first ever visit by TL Foreign Minister to India. As a follow up, the Vice Foreign Minister of TL Mr. Roberto Sarmiento de Oliveira Soares visited India on 4-6 December 2016 and called on MOS (VKS), CIM and Minister of Health and Family Welfare.

8. Mr. Krishan Pal Gurjar, Hon'ble Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India visited Dili, Timor Leste from 7-10 April 2018 as Special Envoy of the

Government of India. During his visit, Hon'ble Minister called on the President of Timor Leste H.E. Dr. Francisco Guterres Lu Olo. The Hon'ble Minister extended an invitation from the President of India to the President of Timor Leste to visit India at an early date. The President of Timor Leste accepted the invitation and said that it is an honour for the country and people of Timor Leste to receive the invitation. The Hon'ble Minister also called on the Prime Minister of Timor Leste H.E. Dr. Mari Bin Amude Alkatiri, and met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation H.E. Prof. Dr. Aurelio Guterres and Minister of Justice H.E. Ms. Maria Angela Guterres Viegas Carrascalao. The Minister also had the opportunity to interact with the Minister of Tourism H.E. Mr. Manuel Vone and Minister of Education and Culture H.E. Prof. Dr. Fernando Hanjam.

9. The Hon'ble Minister briefed the Timor Leste leadership on the successful holding of the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Summit in New Delhi in March 2018 and invited Timor Leste, which is one of the prospective member countries of ISA, to join the Alliance.

10. During the visit, a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of health care and public health was signed between the two countries. The Hon'ble Minister concluded his visit by delivering a public lecture at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation on the theme "Indian Foreign Policy and Modinomics". The lecture was attended by civil servants, diplomatic community and the local media.

11. MOS (VKS) met former Foreign Minister of Timor Leste, H.E. Mr Dionisio da Costa Babo Soares on 2-8-2018 on the margins of EAS FM's meeting in Singapore. FMAS confirmed acceptance of the invitation extended by Rashtrapatiji through MOS Krishna Pal Gujjar in April 2018 during latter's visit to TL and added that the President of TL would visit India this year itself. Welcoming the visit, MOS (VKS) offered to expand areas of cooperation, including oil and gas sector, agriculture, health, defence, IT as well as in capacity building and skill enhancement. Later, current EAM met with Timor-Leste FM in Bangkok on the sidelines of EAS Summit on 2nd August, 2019 and reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

12. Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat paid a visit to Timor Leste from 8 to 13 April, 2019, the highlight of which were flagging off of two projects funded by India, one through the India – UN Development Partnership Fund and other through IBSA. The project on setting up of IT innovation labs in Oé-cusse Enclave of Timor-Leste was launched jointly by Ambassador, UNDP and Oé-cusse Administration on 10 April, 2019 with funding from India-UN Development Partnership Fund. Other project was inauguration of Sustainable Agriculture & Permaculture Learning Centre on 11 April, 2019 at Atekru, Aaturu Island, financed by IBSA Fund. Both the projects would empower different parts of Timor Leste, one in Oé-cusse Enclave in the field of education and other in Aaturu Island through enabling sustainable living of local communities. Ambassador met with the Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, Resident Heads of Missions of USA, Japan, Brazil and also interacted with Indian community and prominent Timorese of Indian origin separately.

Capacity Building and Development Cooperation

13. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in January 2003, India and TL have been cooperating at bilateral, regional and international levels. India has been offering economic, technical and capacity building assistance to TL through the following projects:

(i) Capacity Building: India continues to strongly support TL's developmental path and is eager to cooperate and contribute in TL's tasks of nation building. India extends 15 ITEC training slots and 10 ICCR scholarships every year. India offers slots to TL for training of their diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute of India. We cooperated with East Timor Development Agency to get nomination for women trainees.

(ii) Grant in Aid: GOI approved a Grant in Aid to TL in October 2008 for infrastructure projects. An amount of US\$ 100,000 was transferred by the Mission to TL in March 2010.

(iii) Cooperation in Health Sector and supply of Ambulance: A fully-equipped Ambulance unit which can serve as a mobile operation theatre was formally handed over to the Health Ministry of TL in January 2016. The Ambulance was funded by MEA at a cost of US\$ 70,620/-. Additional equipment for the Ambulance – Anesthesia Machine and Patient Monitor – were supplied to Timor Leste in July 2017. An MOU in the field of healthcare and public health was signed between India and Timor Leste on 7 April 2018 during the visit of Hon'ble MOS for Social Justice and Empowerment to Dili.

(iv) Centre of Excellence in IT: The project for setting up of a Centre of Excellence in IT in Dili was conceived in 2004 and subsequently revised with a new draft MOU which was shared with the TL side in March 2014 and last in March 2018. Concurrence of the TL side for the MOU is awaited.

(v) Bamboo Project: The project "Establishment of Bamboo Skills Development and Demonstration Centre in TL" was initially started by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in October 2004. The project with a combined budget of US\$ 1 million was completed in March 2012. The Indian technical partner was Cane and Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC) in Assam. The objective of this project is to establish bamboo as thriving industry sector in TL. A skills development centre was also established in order to create awareness of the potential and to train craftsmen.

(vi) Project under IBSA Fund: The project, "Conservation Agriculture, Permaculture and Sustainable Fisheries Management: Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security and Reducing Risk Disaster in TL" is being funded by IBSA for a total cost of US \$ 1.4 million. The project was developed by FAO in TL along with 2 NGOs - "naTerra" and "Conservation International" - under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of TL, is implemented in the remote part of the Aautro Island of Timor-Leste. As a part of the project, Sustainable Agriculture & Permaculture Learning Centre was formally inaugurated by Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries and Ambassador on 11 April, 2019 at Atekru, in Aautro Island. The Centre would serve as a learning centre for sustainable agriculture and natural resources conservation and development, thereby enhancing productivity in agricultural, horticultural and fisheries sector.

(viii) Project under India – UN Development Partnership Fund : The project titled, "Leveraging ICT to improve Education and Skills in Timor Leste" was launched on a pilot basis on 10 April in Oé cusse Enclave of Timor-Leste by Dr Mari Alkatiri, President of Special Administrative Region of Oé cusse and Special Zones for Social Market Economy of Timor-

Leste, Mr Roy Trivedy, Resident Coordinator of UN and Ambassador on 10th April, 2019. It would train in all 1007 children at primary school and 4370 young students attending secondary school in developing computer and mobile-based educative games in local language of Timor-Leste, Tetum, in the areas of financial, education, business development and environment awareness as well as train teachers and educators. The project, budgeted to a tune of US \$ 881,194 from India-UN Development Partnership Fund, is expected to be completed in two years, aims at enhancing IT literacy in schools, with a coverage of 12 schools, both through IT innovation labs and mobile IT innovation vans.

Bilateral Trade

14. India-TL bilateral trade during 2018-19 was US \$ 5.26 million in which major items of exports included pharmaceuticals, agricultural commodities, construction materials etc., Imports from TL in the past essentially consisted of chemical products. Volume of bilateral trade since 2014-15 is given below:

(US\$ million)

Year	Exports to TL	Imports from TL	Total Trade	Change (%)
2014-15	3.24	0.31	3.56	17.9
2015-16	3.42	0.03	3.45	-3.0
2016-17	2.31	0.17	2.49	-27.5
2017-18	3.32	0.10	3.42	+ 27.2
2018-19	5.26	-	5.26	+ 58.62
2019-20 (Apr-Dec)	4.64	-	4.64	

(Source : DOC, India)

15. India has extended duty free access to import of products from TL as part of its Duty Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme for LDCs. The Scheme grants tariff preferences to export of products originating in TL.

Indian community

16. Currently, there are about 30 Indians working as advisors in various Ministries, UN agencies and international donors. Some Indians are entrepreneurs and are engaged in trading and restaurant business. The Indian community has formed a friendship society called 'Association of Indians in Timor Leste' in February 2017.

As of January 2020