

India-Belgium Bilateral Relations

POLITICAL

Belgium was among the first European countries to establish diplomatic relations with independent India in September 1947. Our bilateral relations are close and friendly, based on shared commonalities as two mature democracies committed to the rule of law, federalism and pluralism. Belgium supports India's aspiration for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

High Level Visits

From India:

Vice President of India Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, during his visit to Brussels for the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) hosted by the European Union on 18-19 October 2018, called on His Majesty the King of the Belgians and discussed bilateral cooperation between Belgium and India as well as contemporary issues of shared interest.

The External Minister of India Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Belgium on 20-22 June 2018. EAM held bilateral meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium Mr. Didier Reynders. The two leaders reviewed the ongoing bilateral relations and discussed matters relating to UNSC reforms, development cooperation, counter terrorism and other regional issues. During her visit, EAM also interacted with the members of the Indian community and dignitaries representing a cross-section of leading professionals and officials of the European Union and Belgium at the BOZAR (Centre of Fine Arts).

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid an Official visit to Belgium on 30 March 2016, which was preceded by a deadly terrorist attack in Brussels. Both leaders, while condemning the attack, underlined the need for all countries to effectively deal with terrorism emanating from their territory or territories under their control. Following the visit, a Memorandum of Understanding for bilateral cooperation in Biotechnology and a Letter of Intent on the existing MoU on Shipping Cooperation were signed.

President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee paid a State visit to Belgium on 2-5 October 2013 and jointly inaugurated the Europalia-India Cultural festival jointly with the King of Belgians. During the visit five Memorandums of Understanding were signed between Belgian and Indian Universities.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Belgium on 9-11 December 2010.

Vice President Shri M. Hamid Ansari visited Brussels on 3-5 October 2010 and led the Indian delegation to the 8th Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM).

There have been regular Ministerial level interactions between the two countries. In the recent past, Minister of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping Shri Nitin Gadkari paid a visit to Belgium on 19-20 November 2014; MoS for External Affairs Gen (Retd) V K Singh represented India at the World War I centenary commemoration events in October 2014; EAM Shri Salman Khurshid visited Belgium on 30-31 January 2013; Minister of State for External Affairs Smt. Preneet Kaur visited Belgium on 15-19 April 2012.

From Belgium:

The King and Queen of the Belgians, Their Majesties King Philippe and Queen Mathilde, paid a State visit to India on 5-11 November 2017. They were accompanied by H.E. Mr. Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign & European Affairs, H.E. Mr. Geert Bourgeois, Minister-President of Flanders region, H.E. Mr. Willy Borsus, Minister-President of Walloon region and H.E. Mr. Rudy Demotte, Minister-President of the Wallonia-Brussels region, and a number of senior officials. A large business and academic delegation also accompanied them. The visit assumed significance as India and Belgium celebrated 70 years of diplomatic relations in 2017.

In addition to the official programme, Their Majesties inaugurated an exhibition on 'India's contribution in World War I' and launched a book on "Indians in Flanders Fields". Their Majesties also took part in various business and academic seminars organized during the visit. They also visited Taj Mahal.

In Mumbai, His Majesty participated in a remembrance ceremony at the Memorial of the 2008 terrorist attack at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, and visited Oval Maidan for a cricket demonstration.

Mr Pieter de Crem, Secretary of State for Foreign Trade of Belgium visited India on 13-18 January 2015 and later on 15-19 February, 2016. Belgian Foreign Minister Mr. Didier Reynders visited India in August 2012. Prime Minister Mr. Guy Verhofstadt visited India on 2-7 November 2006.

The Belgian Royal family has traditionally led economic delegations to India. Princess Astride led an economic Mission to India comprising of 350 CEOs in November 2013. King Philippe (as Crown Prince) led an economic delegation of 350 business leaders to India on 20-27 March 2010. King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgians visited India on 3-12 November 2008.

Foreign Office Consultations

India and Belgium formalized Foreign Office Consultations in March 2016. The inaugural Consultations were held on 2 May 2018 in Brussels at which the Indian side was led by Smt. Ruchi Ghanashyam, Secretary (West), MEA and the Belgian side by Mr. Dirk Achten, Secretary General of the Federal Public Services Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Belgium. The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international affairs.

Parliamentary Interactions

Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan led a 7-member parliamentary delegation to the Belgian Parliament on 23-26 June 2015.

ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL

Joint Economic Commission (JEC) between India and Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union (India-BLEU), established in 1997, is the main vehicle for discussing bilateral economic and commercial issues. The biennial JEC is held alternatively in the three countries followed by a yearly mid-term review. The 15th India-BLEU JEC took place on 29 May 2017 in Luxembourg. A review meeting (via video conference) was held on 3 May 2018. The next meeting of the JEC is scheduled to take place in India in 2019.

The focus of our bilateral relations has traditionally been on trade and investment. India is Belgium's second largest export destination and fourth largest trade partner outside the EU with a significant contribution from the Indian diaspora. Bilateral trade between India and Belgium during 2017 amounted to € 12.71 billion with exports from India to Belgium of € 4.78

billion and imports from Belgium to India of € 7.93 billion. The leading exports from Belgium to India are in the sectors of gems & jewelry (rough diamonds), chemicals and chemical products and machinery and mechanical products. The major exports from India to Belgium are in the sectors of gems & jewelry (finished product), base metals and articles, and chemicals and chemical products.

To promote seafood exports, India participates in the 'Seafood Expo Global' - the world's largest annual seafood trade event in Brussels.

Cumulative FDI inflows from Belgium to India amounted to USD 1.3 Billion during 2000 – June 2018. Belgium is 22nd largest investor in India.

There are around 160 Belgian companies present in India. Several Indian companies, particularly in the IT and software sectors, such as TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HCL, etc. have established base in Belgium to cater to the Belgian as well as European markets.

Skill Development

There is an MoU between the Ministry of Shipping of India and Antwerp Port Authority for training by the latter of Indian Port officials.

SECTORAL COOPERATION

Science & Technology

India and Belgium cooperate in the field of Science and Technology under the framework of an MoU signed during the visit of the Belgian Prime Minister to India in November 2006. A Joint Committee on S&T has been established based on the agreement.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Charles Michel during the former's visit on 30 March 2016 to Brussels jointly carried out the remote technical activation of a 3.6 metre optical telescope located at Deosthal in Uttarakhand.

India and Belgium cooperate in dedicated fields in Science and Technology under the frameworks of MoU on Cooperation in Space Technology (1998); MoU between TERI India and VITO-Belgium (2014); MoU between BARC and SCK – SEN (Belgian Nuclear Research Centre, 2012) covers cooperation in

management of nuclear waste, geological disposal technique, advance research reactor systems and collaboration in the context of INPRO project of the IAEA.

Energy

An MoU for cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy between India and Belgium (Federal/ Regional level for Energy) was signed on 29 September 2015. A Joint Working Group has been constituted which has been deliberating through the DVC.

ICT

An MoU between India and Belgium for cooperation in the field of Information Communication Technology and Electronics (ICT&E) was signed on 7 November 2017 during the visit of the Belgian King to India.

EDUCATION & CULTURE

Around 600 Indian students are pursuing their studies in Belgium Universities in Ghent, Leuven, Antwerp and Brussels. Five MoUs in the area of education were signed during the State visit of Rashtrapatiji in 2013, namely: a) MoU between JNU and University of Ghent; b) MoU between Delhi University and University of Ghent; c) MoU between Delhi University and Group T International Engineering Academy of the University of Leuven, Belgium; d) MoU between DU and Free University of Brussels (ULB); and e) MoU between the University of Hyderabad and University of Ghent.

India and Belgium have a Cultural Agreement in place since 1973. India was the partner country for the Europalia-India Cultural Festival held from 4 October 2013 to 26 January 2014 in Belgium. The festival was jointly inaugurated by Rashtrapatiji and the King of the Belgians. The festival included nearly 300 events showcasing Indian art and antiquities, music and dance performances, cinema, theatre, literature, as well as cuisine, hosted by about 200 partner venues across Belgium.

Previously, an Indian festival 'TEJAS' was organized by ICCR from October 2006 to January 2007 in Belgium.

The then EAM Shri Salman Khurshid unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the office complex of the Governor of the Antwerp province on 30 January 2013. A bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was inaugurated at the Literary Garden

in the Faculty of Arts of the Catholic University of Leuven on the occasion of Gurudev's 154th Birth Anniversary on 7 May 2015.

PARTICIPATION OF INDIAN SOLDIERS DURING FIRST WORLD WAR

More than 9000 Indian troops had made the supreme sacrifice in Flanders fields during World War I. To commemorate the sacrifice by Indian soldiers, an Indian Memorial Pillar was re-installed alongside Menin Gate in Ypres on 12 March 2011, where the annual Armistice Day celebrations are held.

On the centenary of the armistice of World War I, a memorial concert for the Indian soldiers was held at Knokke Heist on 11 November 2018. This was 16th such edition. On 18 November 2018, the annual commemoration ceremony for Indian soldiers who participated in World War I took place at the Indian Memorial in Ypres.

INDIAN DIASPORA

The Indian Diaspora in Belgium numbers about 18500, as per estimates of the Belgian Government. Of this, nearly 10000 are Indian citizens. Around 1500 Indian IT professionals work for various Belgian companies and there are about 600 Indian students in various Belgian universities. Around 2500 NRIs/PIOs are based in Antwerp, mainly involved in the diamond trade.

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India-EU Bilateral Relations

POLITICAL

India-EU bilateral relations date back to the early 1960s with India being amongst the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community in 1962.

A Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994 took the bilateral relationship beyond trade and economic cooperation. The Cooperation Agreement together with the Joint Political Statement signed in 1993, opened the way for annual ministerial meetings and a broad political dialogue. A multi-tiered institutional architecture of cooperation has since been created, presided over by the India-EU Summit since 2000. The first India-EU Summit took place on 28 June 2000 in Lisbon and marked a watershed in the evolution of the relationship.

The relationship was upgraded to a 'Strategic Partnership' during the 5th India-EU Summit held in 2004 in The Hague.

The 14th India-EU Summit was held on 6 October 2017 in New Delhi.

In December 2018, EU adopted a Joint Communication that sets out the EU's vision for a strategy to strengthen cooperation and partnership with India.

14th India-EU Summit

The 14th India-EU summit was held in New Delhi on 6 October 2017. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi led the Indian delegation while European Council President Mr. Donald Tusk and European Commission President Mr. Jean Claude Juncker led the EU side. EU HR Ms. Federica Mogherini also attended the Summit meeting.

The Leaders held wide ranging discussions on foreign and security policy, migration, trade, climate, research and innovation. A Joint Statement was adopted by the Leaders which reflected common understanding on these areas and reaffirmed commitment to strengthen the India-EU Strategic Partnership.

The Leaders showed their satisfaction at the progress made towards implementing the India-EU Agenda for action 2020.

The two sides reiterated their commitment to a comprehensive approach and cooperation to prevent and counter terrorism and an India-EU Joint Statement on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism was adopted by the Leaders.

Both sides, keeping in view their commitment under Paris Climate Agreement, also adopted India-EU Joint Statement on Clean Energy and Climate Change to implement 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development and lowering of greenhouse gas emissions. Stepping forward, both India and EU agreed to intensify their cooperation in the framework of International Solar Alliance (ISA) including training and affordable finances. A Joint Declaration between the Interim Secretariat of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), and the European Investment Bank (EIB) aimed at mobilizing investments for broad-based deployment of affordable solar energy applications across the 121 prospective member countries of the ISA was adopted.

The leaders also agreed to enhance India-EU cooperation on Urban Development with participation of Indian States and cities, EU Member States and regions/cities, building for dialogue on issues such as infrastructure, energy, sanitation and water management and adopted a Joint Declaration on Partnership for Smart and Sustainable Urbanization.

During the Summit, the two sides signed (i) implementing Arrangement between the Science & Engineering Research Board (SERB) and the European Research Council (ERC); and (ii) new euro 500 million EIB loan agreement for constructing a new line and 96 new trains for Bangalore Metro Phase-II project.

Leaders' meeting on the margins of G20

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi met the two leaders again on 1 December 2018 on the margins of the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires. The discussions between the Leaders focussed on strengthening India-EU relations, including joint efforts to counter terrorism.

25th Ministerial Meeting

Minister of External Affairs Smt. Sushma Swaraj and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Ms. Federica Mogherini met for the 25th Ministerial Meeting on 22 June 2018 in Brussels. During the meeting, the two sides discussed India-EU foreign policy and security cooperation and exchanged views on regional and international affairs. During her visit, EAM

also led the International Day of Yoga celebrations at the European Parliament on 21 June 2018.

Visit of Vice President – ASEM12

Vice-President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu led the Indian delegation to the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on 18-19 October 2018 in Brussels under the theme “Global Partners for Global Challenges.” During his intervention at the Summit Plenary, Vice President stated that India valued ASEM as a platform that brings together leadership of Asia and Europe to exchange views and address global challenges.

Parliamentary Interaction

The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee led by its Chairman MEP Mr. David McAllister, the Delegation for Relations with India led by its Chair MEP Mr. Geoffrey Van Orden and the European Parliament Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection led by Ms Vicky Ford (IMCO chair) visited India on 20-23 February 2017.

Foreign Policy Consultations

The 6th round of Foreign Policy and Security Consultations between India and the European Union were held on 18 September 2018; the Indian side was led by Mrs. Ruchi Ghanashyam, Secretary (West), while the EU side by Mr. Jean-Christophe Belliard, Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs, European External Action Service. The two sides reviewed the India-EU Strategic Partnership, discussed political and economic relations and exchanged views on regional and global issues of interest.

Bilateral Dialogues

India and EU have institutionalized dialogues, inter alia, on Counter-Terrorism, Cyber Security and Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. The two sides meet annually to discuss bilateral cooperation.

TRADE & INVESTMENT

The EU is India's largest regional trading partner while India was the EU's 9th largest trading partner in 2017. India's bilateral trade (both in goods and services) with EU in 2017 (Jan-Dec) stood at €117.2billion (\$132.44 billion) which include bilateral trade in goods of €85.9billion (\$97.01) and trade in services €31.3 billion (\$35.37billion), India's exports in goods in 2017 stood at €44.2billion (\$49.95 billion) while India's imports from the EU at

€41.7billion (\$47.12 billion). In 2017, the trade balance in goods was in India's favour by €2.5 billion (\$2.83 billion).

India's bilateral trade in goods for the period Jan-Oct 2018 with the EU stood at €76.3billion with India's exports valued at €38.9billion and imports at €37.4.

The EU continued to be one of the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for India with inflows valued at €5.054 billion (\$5.71billion) in 2017.

In order to diversify and boost our bilateral trade, India and the EU are negotiating a bilateral Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) since 2007. During the last India-EU Summit held in October 2017, the two sides expressed their shared commitment to strengthen the bilateral economic partnership.

In order to promote and facilitate investment flow from the EU, an Investment Facilitation Mechanism has been established in July 2017 for close coordination.

The India-EU Joint Commission dealing with economic and commercial issues meets annually, as do its three Sub-Commissions on Trade, Economic and Development Cooperation.

A Macroeconomic Dialogue on Financial Services Regulations has also been instituted and takes place annually.

Agriculture & Marine

The 9th meeting of the India-EU Joint Working Group on Agriculture and Marine products was held on 14 November 2017 in New Delhi and discussed bilateral issues related to trade in agricultural and marine products.

SECTORAL COOPERATION

Infrastructure

EU Commissioner for Transport Ms. Violeta Bulc visited India in December 2017 and delivered a keynote address at the Business Roundtable "India's Modernisation Agenda: Opportunities and Challenges for European Transport Companies." During her visit, she met the Ministers of Railways, Road Transport & Highways and Shipping, Civil Aviation and Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) opened its first office for South Asian region in March 2017, headquartered in New Delhi. The EIB has agreed to extend loans of Euro 450 million for the Lucknow Metro Project and Euro 500 million for the Bangalore Metro Phase II Project.

Energy

The India-EU Energy Panel which was constituted at the 5th India-EU Summit at The Hague in 2004 has met seven times in the past. Joint Working Groups have been constituted under the Panel to deal with Coal, Clean Coal Technology, Energy Efficiency/Renewable Energy.

Environment

The India-EU Joint Working Group on Environment, which deals with prevention of pollution, waste minimization, protection of biological diversity, sustainable forest management, environmental education etc held its 9th meeting on 29 June 2017 in New Delhi. The meeting was followed by the India-EU Environment Forum on 30 June 2017.

EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Mr Karmenu Vella led a Circular Economy Mission to India on 3-7 September 2018 aimed at further deepening India-EU Cooperation in policy formulation and fostering business opportunities in the sector.

Water

The newly formed India-EU Joint Working Group on Water Cooperation met for the first time on 28 June 2017 in New Delhi and identified priority areas for cooperation, viz. collaboration in research, innovation and technology, sustainable development of river basin, water governance, solar pumping for irrigation etc.

Science & Technology

The India-EU Science and Technology Steering Committee, which meets annually, held its 11th meeting on 6-8 June 2017 in Brussels.

Pharmaceuticals, Biotechnology & Medical Devices

The 9th meeting of the India-EU Joint Working Group on pharmaceuticals biotechnology and medical devices was held on 27-28 September 2018 in Brussels. During the meeting, the two sides discussed issues relevant for

the enhancement of collaboration and engagement in multilateral fora that could be further strengthened for mutual benefit.

ICT

A Dialogue on Information & Communications Technology has been instituted and the last meeting of the Joint Working Group on ICT took place on 20-21 March 2018 in New Delhi.

Aviation

The Horizontal Agreement on Civil Aviation between India and the EU, which was signed in 2008 became operational in February 2018.

CONSULAR

At the 13th India-EU Summit, a Joint Declaration on Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM) that facilitates legal migration on both sides was adopted by the leaders. A High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility has been instituted and held its 4th meeting was held in Brussels on 4 April 2017 in Brussels at which the two sides reached an understanding in advancing the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility, including through technical collaboration and undertaking projects in areas of mutual interest.

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