

India- Armenia Bilateral Relations

Background

India recognized the independent Republic of Armenia on December 26, 1991, and India's Ambassador in Moscow was concurrently accredited to Armenia. From September 1992, India's Ambassador in Kiev (Ukraine) was given the concurrent charge of Armenia. India opened its Resident Mission in Yerevan at the level of Charge d' Affaires on 01 March 1999; the first Resident Ambassador Shri Bal Anand assumed charge in Yerevan in October 1999. Armenia, which had opened its Honorary Consulate in April 1994, established its Embassy in New Delhi in October 1999 at the level of Charge d' Affaires, followed by the arrival of the first Resident Ambassador Armen Baibourtian in May 2000.

Historical background:

Historians have suggested that when Assyrian warrior queen Semiramis invaded India in 2000 BC, some Armenians accompanied her as they probably did Alexander the Great in 326 BC. According to literary evidence, there were Indian settlements in Armenia established by two Indian Princes (Krishna and Ganesh escaping from Kannauj) who along with their families and large retinue had arrived in Armenia as early as 149 BC and were allotted land in Taron region (now in Turkey) by the then rulers of Armenia. Thomas Cana is said to be the first Armenian to have landed on the Malabar Coast in 780 AD. The first guidebook to Indian cities in Armenian was written in the 12th century. By middle ages, the Armenian towns of Artashat, Metsbin and Dvin had become important centers for barter with India which exported precious stones, herbs and stones to Armenia and imported hides and dyes. A few Armenian traders had come to Agra during the Mughal Empire. Emperor Akbar, who is believed to have an Armenian wife Mariam Zamani Begum, was highly appreciative of the commercial talents and integrity of the Armenians, granted them numerous privileges and considerable religious freedom as also an opportunity to serve in his empire in various capacities. In the 16th century, Armenian communities emerged in Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Agra, where the first Armenian Church was consecrated in 1562. Indian classical singer Gauhar Jaan, the first to be recorded on gramophone in 1902 was of Armenian origin. The Armenian language journal "Azdarar" published in Madras (Chennai) in 1794 was the first ever Armenian journal published anywhere in the world. The vestigial Armenian community in India is now mainly settled in Kolkata. The Holy Church of Nazareth, erected in 1707, repaired and embellished in 1734 is the biggest and the oldest Armenian Church in Kolkata.

During the Soviet era, President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (September 1964) and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (June 1976) visited the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Political Exchanges

Since 1992, there have been three Presidential-level visits from Armenia (1995, 2003 and 2017) and three visits to India at the level of Foreign Minister (2000, 2006, and 2010). Vice President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha Shri B.S. Shekhawat led a Parliamentary delegation to Armenia in October 2005. A goodwill Indian Parliamentary delegation comprising 8 Members of Parliament from different political parties, led by Shri Paban Singh Ghatowar, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Parliamentary Affairs & Development of North-Eastern Region visited Armenia in November 2013. Hovik Abrahamyan, the then Chairman (Speaker) of the Armenian National Assembly [Parliament] led an 18-member delegation to India (December 2013) and called on President, met Lok Sabha Speaker, External Affairs Minister, then Leader of Opposition Mrs. Sushma Swaraj and other dignitaries. Shri Ashok Gajapathi Raju, Minister of Civil Aviation visited Armenia on 12 November, 2016. Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President visited Armenia from 24-26 April, 2017 and met the Armenian President, Prime Minister and Catholicos of All Armenians. Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, the then President of Armenia visited India from 2-4 November, 2017 for participating in the inaugural session of World Food India in New Delhi.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met in New York on the sidelines of the United National General Assembly on 25 September 2019. Mr. Arsen Torosyan, Minister of Health of Armenia visited India during 2-6 December 2019 to participate in GAVI International Conference. He also met Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Health and Family Welfare on 5 December 2019.

Institutional Mechanisms

Bilateral dialogue between India and Armenia includes the mechanisms of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) and Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological, Cultural and Educational Cooperation ((IA-IGC), and periodic high-level interactions. Both the FOC and IA-IGC are co-chaired by Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs from the Indian side and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Armenian side. The 7th session of IA-IGC and 8th round of FOC were held in Yerevan on 1 April, 2016. The next round of FOC and IA-IGC are scheduled to be held in New Delhi and dates for the same are being discussed between the two sides.

Cooperation in the UN and Multilateral Fora

In recent years, Armenia supported India's candidature at the UNESCO, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and UN Board of Auditors, International Telecommunication Union Council, inclusion of

Yoga in the “Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO” and ICJ. India supported Armenia’s claim for declaring its national bread ‘Lavash’ as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2015.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

India’s bilateral trade with Armenia was USD 64.79 million in 2019. The trade figures for the last 3 years are as follows:

	2017	2018	2019
Indian Exports	USD 19.8 mn	USD 51.4 mn	USD 61.3 mn
Indian Imports	USD 2.8 mn	USD 0.56 mn	USD 03.49 mn

Indian exports to Armenia consist of bovine meat, agricultural products, electrical equipment, cut and polished diamonds, optical equipment, plastics, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, garments, chemical goods and cars, while Armenia's exports include non-ferrous metals and raw-rubber. Indian Group “Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited,” Gandhinagar (Gujarat) won a World Bank financed contract (approximately US\$ 22 million) in November 2012 for designing, supplying and installation of high voltage transmission towers in Armenia. The project has since been completed.

Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council (ESC) organized the visit of a ten-member Indian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) delegation representing various Indian software companies to Armenia in December 2013. A “Make in India” presentation was organized by the Embassy on 6 October, 2014 in Yerevan. The event was attended by the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economy and Agriculture and other high level dignitaries and businessmen in Armenia.

The Embassy organized a presentation in Yerevan on 23 August, 2017 on investment and tourism opportunities in Gujarat. A similar presentation on Andhra Pradesh was organized on 17 November, 2017.

A 12-member business delegation sponsored by MEA and led by CII visited Armenia from 28-29 September, 2017. Development Foundation of Armenia organized a business forum with the delegation on 28 September, 2017. CII signed a MOU with Development Foundation of Armenia and another MOU with Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Armenia.

Six delegates from the Ministry of Health of Armenia participated in the Advantage Healthcare Summit organized by Ministry of Commerce, FICCI and Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC) from 12-14 October, 2017 in Bangalore.

A delegation from Pharmaexcil visited Armenia in November 2019 and held meeting with Mr. Arsen Torosyan, Minister of Health of Armenia, Mr. Varos Simonyan, Deputy Minister of Economy, and representatives of different government bodies of Armenia.

Cultural Cooperation

'Vishwa Hindi Diwas' is celebrated in the Yerevan State Linguistic University (YSLU) annually. Elocution and recital of poems' competitions are held and winners given cash awards.

The first International Day of Yoga (IDY) was celebrated in Armenia on 21 June 2015 in which over 300 Armenians from different walks of life participated. The IDY event created awareness about yoga benefits among Armenians. IDY was again celebrated in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

"Days of India Culture" were celebrated from August 31 to 5 September 2015 with the initiative by a couple of local friendship and Indian cultural promotion groups and supported by the Embassy.

Ministry of AYUSH of Government of India and Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU) have signed a MoU on establishment of a short-term (two semester) Chair on Homeopathy in YSMU.

"India Day" was celebrated in Yerevan on 14 January 2017 with Indian handicrafts, mehndi, photo exhibition, Indian dances and playing Indian songs on traditional Armenian musical instrument Khemencha. A Bollywood movie was screened on the occasion.

An exhibition "Sunny India of Aslamazyans" was organized in Gyumri on 31 March, 2017 on paintings of Aslamazyan sisters on Indian themes. A Bollywood movie was screened in Gyumri the same day.

The group led by Padam Sri Pratibha Prahlad gave a Bharatnatyam dance performance in Yerevan on 12 October, 2017. Manjari Chaturvedi gave a Sufi Kathak dance performance in Yerevan on 30 October, 2017. On 4 August, 2018, Embassy participated in Teraz festival (national costume festival) organized by the Yerevan Municipality in Yerevan.

Embassy participated in the "Cultural Renaissance" festival organized by State Committee of Tourism in Dilijan on 9 September, 2018.

An India Armenia Joint postage stamp was released in Yerevan on 29 August, 2018. A Joint Philately exhibition was also held on the occasion.

Government of Armenia has been extending cooperation for celebrating the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Hay Post (Armenian Post) issued a stamp on Mahatma Gandhi on 23 May 2019.

15 members from Armenia which included 3 artisans and 11 artists participated in the 34th Surajkund International Craft Mela 2020.

Relief/Developmental Assistance

India donated USD 2.2 mn in cash and USD 1.1 mn earthquake relief in 1988; gifted 750 MT of wheat and 250 MT of rice following the 2000 drought; gifted 300 Indian tractors worth US\$ 5 million in 2006; set up an IT Centre of Excellence equipped with PARAM super computer in Yerevan worth US \$ 1.67 mn; extended assistance of US\$ 215,000 for the restoration of a dilapidated school building in Lori region; and provided computer labs to 72 schools in Tavush region in 2013 worth US\$ 0.5 mn. The Project benefits over 14,000 students in the region. India has implemented a “Telemedicine” project in Armenia and a project on “Establishment of Computer Labs” in 50 schools of Vayots Dzor region in 2017.

Humanitarian Assistance

On 11 September 2013, in a formal ceremony arranged by the Ministry of Health of Armenia, Ambassador donated 324 boxes of ‘Kelfer Capsules’ [16200 capsules] to the State owned hospital “Muratsan”, run by the Yerevan State Medical University [YSMU]. The medicines worth Rs.1,50,000 were gifted by CIPLA, one of the Indian Pharmaceutical Companies, as a humanitarian assistance for treating 20-25 young children suffering from ‘Thalassaemia’ in Armenia. The request for donation of this medicine came from the Minister of Health of Armenia.

In 2016, at the renewed request of the Armenian Minister of Health for donation of the medicine, 324 boxes containing 16200 capsules were delivered by CIPLA which were handed over to the Armenian side.

The same number of Kelfer tablets were delivered to YSMU in 2018 also.

ITEC & Hindi Language

There is an overwhelming response from Armenians to join various courses under ITEC programme. Armenia utilized 22 out of 25 ITEC slots offered in 2016-17 for short and medium term courses. A Hindi Language Chair at the Yerevan State Linguistic University (YSLU) has been functioning since January, 2010. Hindi is also taught by a Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (KHS) trained Armenian national in Galik College in Ijevan (150 km. from Yerevan) and around 36 students are studying at present. Armenians avail 2 annual ICCR scholarships to pursue various

courses in India and a couple of scholarships in KHS. One Dr. Mariam Nalbandyan, an Ophthalmologist from Armenia attended a one month training at Dr. Shroff's Charity Hospital, New Delhi under the 'Aid to Eurasia' programme.

Indian Community

The Indian community in Armenia is small and consists largely of over 800 students pursuing medical education at the Yerevan State Medical University and the Yerevan Engineering & Polytechnic University. There are another 50-70 more Indians living and working/engaged in business and some of them are married to local Armenians.

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Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Yerevan Website: <https://eoiyerevan.gov.in/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/indiainyerevan/>

Embassy of India, Armenia Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/indiainarmenia>