

India-Belarus Bilateral Relations

India's relations with Belarus have been traditionally warm and cordial. India was one of the first countries to recognize Belarus as independent country in 1991. Formal diplomatic relations were established and the Indian diplomatic mission was opened in Minsk in 1992-with the first Resident Ambassador joining in January 1993-followed by the opening of Belarusian Embassy in New Delhi in 1998. Belarus opened its Honorary Consulate in Kolkata in December 2002 and in Mumbai in September 2018. In August 2022, the new Belarusian Consulate General in Mumbai was inaugurated.

Bilateral relations between India and Belarus are marked by broad understanding on issues of mutual interest. The two countries enjoy a comprehensive partnership and have established mechanisms for exchanging views on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues through Foreign Office Consultations, Intergovernmental Commission (IGC), Joint Commission on Military Technical Cooperation, and other thematic bilateral mechanisms.

The 7th round of FOCs was held in August 2022 in New Delhi, chaired by Secretary (West) and the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus. The two countries have signed a number of Agreements/MoUs on various subjects, including trade and economic cooperation, culture, education, media and sports, tourism, science & technology, agriculture, textiles, Avoidance of Double Taxation, Promotion and Protection of Investments, and defence and technical cooperation.

Both countries have exchanged high level visits at regular intervals. Hon'ble Rashtrapati's State Visit in June 2015 to Minsk, the first Presidential visit from India to Belarus, provided significant impetus to further expanding bilateral relations. During the visit, six MoUs for cooperation in areas such as broadcasting, standardization, textiles, and financial securities were signed and a Roadmap for future cooperation was exchanged. Government of India also announced a line of credit (LoC) of US\$100 million to Belarus. President of Belarus visited India in 1997, 2007 and 2017.

The two countries cooperate and coordinate their efforts in the international, multilateral and regional matters with a commonality of views on several international and regional issues. Belarus has been supportive of India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UNSC, and supported India's candidature for the non-permanent seat of UNSC for the years 2021-22. Belarus also supported India at Nuclear Suppliers Group meetings. Similarly, India has supported Belarus for its membership in the NAM and also other international and multilateral fora like IPU. India's supportive stand on various Resolutions in Geneva and New York (especially during India's non-permanent membership of UNSC in 2021-22) targeting Belarus for violation of human rights and restrictions on freedom of expression have also been appreciated by Belarus. Belarus recognizes India as an emerging global power and seeks to develop a "strategic relationship" with India.

Bilateral trade between the two countries remains below its true potential. Bilateral trade based on data from Department of Commerce for April – December 2023 stands at USD 44.73 million. India has a trade surplus of USD 22.37 million with Belarus, for this period. Belarus played an

important role in the setting up of the Advance Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials in Hyderabad in 1991. Indian PSU, BHEL, was awarded a contract worth US\$ 55.5 million under Gol's credit line for the Grodno Power Project-II in 2013. A Digital Learning Centre in ICT at High Technology Park in Minsk set up with India's Rs. 50 million credit line began operating in February 2011 and was formally inaugurated in January 2012.

BelAZ signed a contract with Coal India Ltd. for supply of 77 mining dump trucks in October 2019. Under a subsequent contract, 6 dumptrucks of 220 tons capacity each, have already been delivered. BelAZ signed an MoU with Enrika, an Indian company, for establishing a joint venture for servicing the Belarusian dump trucks in India. Belarus participated in the India International Trade Fair in November 2012 as 'Partner Country' and again in 2016 as Focus Country. Belarusian Trade Minister visited Mumbai in February 2016 to participate in the 'Make in India' conference.

During 9-10 November 2022, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus H.E. Mr. Vladimir Makei visited India to co-Chair the 11th Session of the Indian-Belarusian Inter-governmental Commission on Trade, Economy, Industry, Science, Technology and Culture (IGC-TEC).

On 9 November 2022, FM Makei met External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar and both sides reaffirmed the friendly and constructive nature of bilateral cooperation. FM Makei also held discussions with Shri Mansukh Mandaviya, India's Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers wherein the two sides discussed issues related to supply of Potash from Belarus to India.

The 11th Session of the IGC-TEC was held on 10 November 2022 and was co-Chaired by FM Makei and Shri Som Prakash, Minister of State for Commerce & Industry from the Indian side.

During the visit, FM Makei also held a meeting with Shri Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce & Industry. The two sides confirmed their firm focus on creating favorable conditions for increasing mutual trade and implementing joint projects in such areas as engineering, pharmaceuticals, and infrastructure development.

FM Makei also addressed the Belarusian-Indian Business & Investment Forum, organized under the auspices of the National Center for Marketing and Price Study of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), which was attended by more than 60 Indian companies.

Belarusian business delegations have participated in Global Maritime India Summit, World Food India, UP International Trade Show, and various other exhibitions held in India during 2023.

In December 2023, an 8-member business delegation led by FICCI visited Minsk. The delegation held B2B meetings with counterparts from Belarus, and visited Belarusian enterprises to assess potential opportunities for cooperation. A Belarus – India Business Forum was organised jointly by FICCI and Belarusian National Center for Marketing, during the visit.

Belarus participated in both editions of the Voice of the Global South Summit. Minister of Energy Viktor Karankevich participated in the first edition of the Summit held in January 2023 and Minister of Industry Alexander Rogozhnik participated in the second edition of the Summit held in November 2023.

Pharmaceuticals is an important area of cooperation, and forms a major component of India's exports to Belarus. The first meeting of the Joint Working Group for cooperation in the pharmaceuticals was held in New Delhi in February 2017. The 2nd meeting of the JWG on Pharma was held on 4 August 2023 in virtual format. The meeting was chaired by Economic Adviser of the Department of Pharmaceuticals from the Indian side and the Deputy Minister for Health from the Belarus side. A delegation of 19 pharma companies, led by Pharmexcil visited Belarus and participated in the international exhibition Healthcare of the Republic of Belarus in May 2023.

The 2nd meeting of the Joint Working Group on Textiles was held on 18 September 2023. It was chaired by Trade Adviser from the Ministry of Textiles on the Indian side and the heads of Bellegprom and Belneftekhim on the Belarus side.

Science and Technology is an important component of bilateral relations as both countries have a strong scientific and technological establishment. The 9th meeting of the India-Belarus Joint Science & Technology Committee was held virtually on 5 Aug 2020. The two sides agreed to launch a Joint Research call for proposals. Under this joint call (launched in July 2022), out of the common proposals received, several projects in areas such as ICT, new materials, Biotech and medicine have been jointly selected for funding during 2023-24. A CSIR delegation, led by Secretary, DSIR visited Minsk in May 2023 and held meetings with their counterparts from National Academy of Sciences and State Committee of Science and Technology of Belarus.

During 12-13 March 2024, Foreign Minister Sergei Aleinik visited India. In the meeting with EAM, the two sides reviewed progress in the entire gamut of bilateral relations. They discussed ways to further intensify political cooperation and interaction in international organisations. Special attention was paid to the prospects of India-Belarus trade and economic cooperation. Parliamentary cooperation was discussed in the meeting with Sh. Om Birla, Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha. Foreign Minister Aleinik met Commerce and Industry Minister Sh. Piyush Goyal, and discussed preparations for the 12th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic and Commercial matters. Cooperation in the area of potash imports from Belarus to India was discussed in the meeting with Sh. Manuskh Mandaviya, Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Belarus is a partner in the ITEC Program of the Ministry of External Affairs since 1993. Over 350 Belarusian professionals have benefited under the Program through various professional courses in designated institutions in India.

The Indian Community in Belarus consists of around 101 Permanent Residents and 1056 Temporary Residents, including 916 students, almost all of them pursuing studies in medicine in State medical universities in Belarus. Indian art and culture, dance, yoga, ayurveda, films, etc. remain popular among Belarusian nationals. Many young Belarusians also take keen

interest in learning Hindi and classical dance forms of India. Hindi classes had been started at Belarusian State University (BSU), Minsk in September 2017, the first batch of 15 students completed their 2-year course in July 2020. A Centre of Indian Culture at BSU, Minsk was inaugurated in July 2020. With the support of Local Resource Persons, classes of Yoga, Indian dance forms and Hindi, are held at the Embassy.

Belarus is part of India's e-visa program. Direct flights were started on the Minsk-Delhi route by Belavia in August 2023.

Ambassador of India in Belarus: Shri Alok Ranjan Jha

Ambassador of Belarus in India: H.E. Mr. Mikhail Kasko

Website - <https://www.eoiminsk.gov.in/>

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