

Bilateral Brief: India-Costa Rica

India and Costa Rica enjoy cordial and warm relations, which are being strengthened by the growing commercial engagement between the two countries. Following India's appointment of an Honorary Consul in San Jose in 1995, Costa Rica reciprocated by opening an Honorary Consulate in New Delhi in 1996. Costa Rica opened its Embassy in New Delhi in April 2010. The Indian Embassy in Panama is concurrently accredited to Costa Rica.

Recent important Bilateral Visits:**The Hon'ble Vice President of India (HVPI)** visited Costa Rica from 7-9 March 2019. He was accompanied by a high-level delegation, including Shri K.J. Alphons, MoS for Tourism, Shri R.K. Kashyap, Member of Parliament and senior officials. This was a first ever high-level visit from India to Costa Rica and provided an opportunity to review, deepen and expand bilateral relations in diverse areas particularly in the field of development partnership. Some of the potential areas identified during the discussions for bilateral collaboration included: Tourism, particularly eco-tourism, space and biotechnology, renewable including solar and hydel, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, ICT particularly e-governance, urban transport and e-vehicles. Costa Rica was keen to benefit from Indian generics, biologicals, biosimilar. The **Minister of State for External Affairs, Gen (Dr.) V.K. Singh (Retd)** visited Costa Rica on 21-22 July 2015. Shri C.K. Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change led a delegation to Costa Rica from 8-10 October, 2019 to attend Pre-COP 25 Meeting.

From the Costa Rican side, the Vice Foreign Minister of Costa Rica Ms. Lorena Aguilar Revelo, visited India (7-9 Sept. 2019) for attending a meeting of the 14th Conference of Parties (COP 14) of UNCCD. During this visit, she also had a meeting with JS(LAC). The Second Vice President of Costa Rica, Ms. Ana Helena Chacon Echeverria, accompanied by Mr. Alexander Mora Delgado, the Minister of Foreign Trade participated in the 6th India-Latin America and Caribbean Conclave held on October 8-9, 2015 in New Delhi. This was preceded by the visit of Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations, Mr. Alejandro Solano Ortiz, for participating in the second round of Foreign Office Consultations in March 2015 and that of Mr. Alexander Mora, Minister of Foreign Trade in February, 2015 as a Guest Speaker at the NASSCOM Leadership Forum at Mumbai.

Foreign Office Consultations between India and Costa Rica were held in August 2012 in Costa Rica. Second round of FoCs was held on March 16, 2015 in New Delhi, led by Shri Swaminathan, Special Secretary(AMS&CPV) from India and Mr. Alejandro Solano Ortiz, Deputy Foreign Minister from the Costa Rican side.

Bilateral Agreements / MoUs: The following MoUs/Agreements have been signed between the two countries: MoU on Foreign Office Consultations; MoU for setting up of Centre for Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT), MoU between the Foreign Service Institutes, Agreement on Exemption on Visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic, Official and Service Passports; Letter of Intent for Cooperation in the field of Biotechnology; MoU on Technical Cooperation; MoU on Economic Cooperation (pending for implementation on Costa Rica side)

and International Solar Alliance (Costa Rica signed the ISA Framework Agreement, but it has not yet been ratified).

India's Assistance to Costa Rica: India's assistance to Costa Rica includes, donation of photovoltaic equipment worth Rs.1.85 million in 1997 for setting up a solar energy research laboratory for training purposes at the University of Heredia under the ITEC programme; donation of a telephone exchange to Costa Rica's telecom operator ICE in 1998, and a relief assistance of US\$ 25,000 to help rehabilitate flood victims in 1996. India also donated 18 Bajaj 3-wheelers in Dec 2005 to be used by the police department of San Jose. India donated US\$ 100,000 for relief and rehabilitation of victims of Hurricane Tomas in Nov 2010. A Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) was installed by CDAC at National Technical University (UTN), Alajuela, Costa Rica in Feb. 2016. APTECH deputed one head and two trainers for imparting training from May 2016 to April 2018. Centre has been functioning with local professors since Oct, 2018.

Economic & Commercial Co-operation: The eco-friendly policies of Costa Rica motivated the country to import 50 Reva electric cars duty-free a few years ago. Other exports include textiles, tubes, pharmaceuticals, and agro-chemicals. Scorpio SUVs are imported in small quantities. Bajaj three-wheelers and two-wheelers are assembled in Costa Rica by MASESA, the leading importer and distributor of motorcycles in the country.

Bilateral Trade: India-Costa Rica bilateral trade in 2019-20 was US\$175.34 million. The exports to Costa Rica were US\$126.63 million while the imports from Costa Rica were US\$48.71. The main export items comprise of automobiles, pharmaceutical products, textiles and clothing, motor cycles, organic chemicals, electrical machinery, and miscellaneous products like notebooks, cables, and tires. Major imports from Costa Rica, consist of wood and articles of wood, integrated circuits and micro assemblies, optical medical or surgical instruments, and to a lesser extent, nuts, coffee, tea, glass and glassware.

Commercial and Trade Delegations: A Business Forum was organized in Costa Rica in March, 2019 in which leading Costa Rican and Indian companies participated. Further, webinars are being organized during the ongoing pandemic in collaboration with Associated Chamber of Commerce India, AmChamCosta Rica and other government stake holders to boost bilateral trade relations. In the past, a 16-member delegation from the Export Promotion Council of India Plastic (Plexconcil) visited Costa Rica in March 2015. A 19-member business delegation from the Costa Rican Export Promotion Council, CRECEX, participated in the India International Trade Fair 2007 organized in New Delhi in 2007. There have been several exchanges between software companies in India and Costa Rica over the past decade.

Indian companies operating in Costa Rica: Leading IT companies, viz. Infosys, Wipro, WNS, L&T Infotec and CSS Corp are operating in San Jose. Recently United Phosphorus Ltd (UPL) has also established a unit in Costa Rica which will be its regional Headquarters. Gravita is also operating there.

ITEC Programme: The ITEC programme is popular in Costa Rica and 20 ITEC slots were allocated for the year 2018-19, which have been doubled to 40 slots as announced during the HVPI Visit to Costa Rica in March 2019.

Culture: There is a great deal of interest in India's history and cultural heritage in Costa Rica and much of the credit for this goes to Prof Hilda Chen Apuy who visited India on a UNESCO

scholarship in the 1950's and introduced studies on Indian History, Philosophy and Sanskrit at the University of Costa Rica in San Jose. Since its inception in 2015, the International Day of Yoga is being celebrated with widespread participation of over 200- 300 Costa Ricans in cooperation with local Yoga Institutes and the Indian Community in San Jose. Vide a Presidential Decree issued on October 26, 2018, all activities and initiatives related to promotion of Yoga and meditation have been declared to be in public interest and as part of this initiative, Yoga is being made a part of the curriculum for students in public schools. On the occasion of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, celebrations were held in Costa Rica with the help of the Costa Rica Indian Association (CRIA) in Oct. 2018 & 2019. There is a proposal to establish a Chair for Indian Studies at the University of Costa Rica, as announced during the visit of HVPI to Costa Rica in March 2019. HVPI Mr. Mauricio Torres Paniagua, a Yoga instructor and a Civil Engineer travelled to India for participating in the KumbhMela in February 2019.

Visa & Consular matters: Indian nationals can enter Costa Rica as tourists for stay up to one (1) month with a valid US or Canadian Visa. However, the Costa Rican work authorization and employment visas for spouses of Indian IT and other professionals working in Costa Rica, often takes two to three years and is a bottleneck that needs to be addressed.

Multilateral Cooperation: Costa Rica has, by and large, been supportive of India's candidature in the multilateral fora. Costa Rica has also signed the ISA Framework Agreement on Sept 1, 2017, but is yet to ratify it.

Indian Community: The Indian Community of about 600 persons, consists mostly of IT professionals, taking advantage of Costa Rica's proximity to the US. It also includes businessmen, engaged in exports of wood, NGOs and the Missionaries of Charity. There are nine Indian restaurants run by Indians in Costa Rica. The Costa Rica Indian Association (CRIA) (www.crindian.org) established in 2010 has been active in organizing social and cultural programmes, as well as trade promotion activities, in collaboration with the Indian Embassy.

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