

India-Lithuania Bilateral Brief

Historical Background:

Lithuanian language, which is the oldest living Indo- European language, has a lot of similarities with Sanskrit hence signifying possible close ancient links. Until conversion to Christianity in 13th century, the people in Lithuania worshipped nature and had a trinity of gods - Perkunas, Patrimpas, and Pikuolis . This concept of trinity had a lot of similarities with Hinduism. In recent times, the first direct knowledge about India reached Lithuania through Lithuanian Christian missionaries who started serving in India from 16th century. Lithuanian philosopher and ideologue of the 19th century, Vyduenas was extremely interested in Indian philosophy and he even created his own philosophical system, closely based on the Vedanta. In the 1930s and 1940s, two Lithuanian travelers - Antanas Poska and Matas Salcius - spent several years studying Sanskrit and Indian culture and travelling in India. They also met Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Diplomatic Relations:

India recognized Lithuania (along with the other Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia) on 7th September 1991 after acceptance of their independence by the erstwhile USSR. Diplomatic relations were established with Lithuania on 25th February 1992. Lithuania opened its Embassy in New Delhi on July 1, 2008 and has Honorary Consuls in Mumbai and in Bengaluru. An Honorary Consul of India in Vilnius has been in operational since October 2014.

Bilateral Visits:

Hon'ble Vice-President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu paid an official visit to Lithuania from August 17-19 2019, leading a high level delegation including Shri Sanjay Dhotre, Minister of State for HRD, Communications, Electronics and IT and three Members of Parliament - Shri Ramesh Bidhuri, Shri Manas Ranjan Bhunia and Smt Raneer Narah. This was the first high level visit from India to Lithuania since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 .During the visit, HVP held delegation level talks with the President Nauseda and met the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas). The HVP addressed, the Indo-Lithuanian Business Meeting and members of the Indian community, at a Community Reception hosted by Ambassador. Hon'ble Vice-President also visited Kaunas which is the 2nd largest city of Lithuania. Aside from a meeting with the Mayor, he paid a visit to the Kaunas Technical University. Three MOU's, namely, cultural exchange programme (CEP), agricultural work plan and exchange of protocol for implementing the extradition treaty were signed during the visit.

The 8th Foreign Office Consultations with Lithuania were held in Vilnius on 5 March 2019. The Indian side was led by Shri A.Gitish Sarma Secretary (West) and the Lithuanian side by their Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Darius Skusevicius.

MoS for Agriculture, Shri Mohanbhai Kundariya, visited Lithuania in October 2015, for the unveiling of a sculptural composition of Mahatma Gandhi and his Lithuanian friend, Hermann Kallenbach. A delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri M.J. Akbar, visited Lithuania in May 2017 in commemoration of 25th anniversary of bilateral relations.

From India, other visits include - Shri Salman Khurshid, MoS (External Affairs) in August 1995; Shri Rao Inderjit Singh, MoS (External Affairs) in October, 2005 and Shri Anand Sharma, MoS (External Affairs) in March 2007. Shri Rao Inderjit Singh, MoS, met with Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis and Deputy Speaker Gintaras Steponavicius. Shri Anand Sharma, MoS (External Affairs) paid an official visit in March 2007. MoS for External Affairs, Mrs. Preneet Kaur, visited Vilnius in March 2011. She again visited Vilnius in July 2011 to attend a Ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies (COD).

From Lithuania, the major bilateral visits to India include: (i) Prime Minister Adolfas Slezevicius in September 1995. (ii) State Visit by President Valdas Adamkussit in February 2001, accompanied by his wife, as also by the Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis and a delegation of Lithuanian businessmen. During the visit, three agreements were signed.

The Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Mr. Vygaudas Ušackas, visited India in December 2009 accompanied by the Minister of Economy and a 30-member business delegation. Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Asta Skaisgirytė Liauškienė, visited India in November 2011 and met Secretary (West).

The Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Mr. Linas Linkevicius, visited New Delhi to attend the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM FMM11) in November 2013. He again visited New Delhi in October 2017, on his second visit to India, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations.

Bilateral Agreements

The following Agreements have been signed between India and Lithuania:

Agreement on Trade and Economic Co-operation (July 1993) ; Protocol on Bilateral Consultations between the two Foreign Offices (August 1995) ; Memorandum of Understanding on Air Services (November 1999) ; Agreement on Air Services (February 2001) ; Agreement on Cooperation in Spheres of Culture, Science and Education (February 2001) ; Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation (October 2001) ; Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPA) (March, 2011) ; Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation (DTAA) (July 2011) ; Agreement on the exemption from visa requirement for holders of diplomatic passports (November 2013) ; Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for the years 2016-18 (March 2016) ; MoU on Agriculture and Allied Sector (July 2016) ; Extradition Treaty (October 2017) ; Protocol amending the Bilateral Air Services Agreement (October 2017); Work Plan for 2019-2022 on Cooperation in Agriculture and Related Fields (August 2019); Cultural Exchange Programme for 2019-2021 (August 2019) and Protocol on Exchange of Instruments of Ratification of the Treaty on Extradition (August 2019)

Commercial Relations

The bilateral trade between India and Lithuania reached a record high of US\$ 367.15 million in the year 2016-17 before decreasing to US\$ 339.51 Million in 2018-19 according to Indian statistics. Major items of import from India include pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, textiles and consumer goods. Major items of export to

India include machinery and mechanical appliances, high tech optical instruments, base metals and articles of base metal, chemicals, sulphur, lime and cement.

HCL Technologies (HCL) announced in December 2018 an expansion of its strategic relationship with Barclays, including becoming Barclays' preferred partner for IT infrastructure services. HCL's Operation Centre was formally inaugurated on December 11, 2019 in Vilnius, Lithuania. The event was attended by Vice Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Government of Lithuania, Mr. Elijus Civilis. HCL has established two state of the art delivery centres in Vilnius. An Investment of about US\$200 million has been made by Indorama, a Lohia Group company, from their Thailand branch, in the Klaipeda Economic Zone in a plant to manufacture plastic resin. This investment has given visibility to India in Lithuania. It is the largest single line PET resin plant in Europe with lowest carbon footprint.

Cultural Relations

Study of Indian languages (mainly Hindi and Sanskrit) has been carried out at the Vilnius University for several decades. A separate centre of Indian studies, under the Department of Oriental Studies, was set up in the Vilnius University in 1996. Lithuanians have great interest in Indian cultural traditions, including Yoga. More than 70% Lithuanians visiting India have spiritual and yogic interests. There is special interest in Ayurveda. The Kaunas Ayurveda Centre arranges lectures on Ayurveda. The ISKON Movement has a very active temple in Kaunas.

ITEC

Under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme (ITEC), since 1993, over 250 Lithuanian nominees have attended various courses in diplomacy, English, banking, mass communications, financial management, urban development management, IT, auditing etc. The Lithuanian leadership at the highest level has expressed appreciation for the ITEC programme.

Visas

The Embassy of India in Warsaw issued 176 visas while nearly 3959 Lithuanian nationals availed of e-visa in the year 2019. A total of 4135 visas were issued to Lithuanian Nationals to visit India in 2019.

Indian Community

The Indian community is around 1000, majority of whom are students. Over the last few years, some Indian IT experts have come to Lithuania to work on IT projects.

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