

## **India-Cambodia Bilateral Relations**

Historically, India-Cambodia relations dates back to the beginning of C.E. or perhaps even before when Hindu and Buddhist religious and cultural influences emanated out of India to Cambodia & greater region of South East Asia. Cambodians are predominantly Buddhist but they retain a strong influence of Brahminical rituals and mythology. The magnificent structure of Angkor Wat temple, built between 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, is a glorious testimony of pervading influence of temple architecture of India. Indian influences are also seen on the earlier temples of Cambodia such as Preah Vihear, Koh Ker Sambor Prei Kuk and other historical sites.

### **A. Political Relations**

India and Cambodia enjoy warm and cordial relations. In the 1950s, India was associated with the International Control Commission on Indo-China. India's contribution as Co-Chairman of this Commission came in for widespread appreciation in Cambodia. After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, India was the first country to recognize the new government and reopened its Embassy in 1981. The Embassy had been closed during the Khmer Rouge regime. Post Khmer Rouge phase (1979-91), India offered legitimacy to the regime and helped building capacity of the leadership. India also responded to an appeal by the Cambodian Government to send a team of experts from Archaeological Survey of India in 1986 for the restoration of the famous Angkor Wat temple.

There exists abundance of goodwill for India in Cambodia, which has been sustained by regular interactions of political leaders, exchange of bilateral visits, aid and assistance, capacity building, cultural exchanges, concessional loans for developmental projects and restoration & conservation of old temples in Cambodia.

In the context of India's 'Act East' policy and the ASEAN, Cambodia is an important interlocutor and a good partner. Contemporary times have witnessed expansion of cooperation in diverse fields such as institutional capacity building, human resource development and extension of financial assistance in infrastructure projects, social security projects and capacity building in defence.

The bilateral relations have been reinforced by several high level visits. Post colonial era, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Cambodia in 1954. Subsequently, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Cambodia in April 2002 and November 2002. President of India Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil visited Cambodia in September 2010. Other high level visits to Cambodia included PM Dr. Manmohan Singh in November 2012, Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari in September 2015. In 2018, there had been three high level visits from India. Commerce Minister Shri Suresh Prabhu visited Cambodia in May 2018, Raksha Mantri Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman in June, 2018 and External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj in August 2018. In 2019, Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Shri Suresh Prabhu visited Siem Reap, Cambodia to attend the RCEP Inter-Sessional Ministerial Meeting.

From Cambodian side, Prime Minister Hun Sen has visited India many times; the recent being in January 2018 when he paid a state Visit to India and also participated in the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit and as Guest of Honour at the Republic Day Parade 2018 along with other ASEAN Leaders. In 2019, from the Cambodian side, H.E. Mr. Pan Sorasak, Minister of Commerce and H.E. Mr. Sok Puthyvuth, Secretary of State, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications visited India for participating in 4<sup>th</sup> India-ASEAN Expo and Summit and 11<sup>th</sup> India Telecom – an exclusive International Business Expo" respectively.

## **Assistance & Aid Projects:**

India and Cambodia have signed various Agreements and MoUs in the fields of bilateral cooperation, trade & commerce, cultural exchanges, capacity building, concessional loans for developmental projects and restoration and conservation of old temples in Cambodia.

Government of India had sent experts from Archaeological Survey of India for restoration and conservation of Angkor Wat temple from 1986-1993. The excellent work carried out by Indian experts is still appreciated by Cambodia. Restoration of another temple complex at Ta Prohm has been a major ongoing project. In 2018, India committed to help part restoration of ancient temple of Preah Vihear.

India had been assisting Cambodia in diverse fields for its economic and social growth and is continuing to do so. In the past, India had gifted medicines, rice, indelible ink and lately supply of water pumps to Cambodia. Lines of Credit have been extended for Water Resource Development and laying of transmission lines. India also assisted in the project for redevelopment of India-Cambodia Friendship school in 2015.

Under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation(MGC) initiative, India helped in establishment of the Asian Traditional Textile Museum at Siem Reap. The museum, one of its first kind in Cambodia, was completed in December 2011. It is headed by an Indian Director appointed by ICCR. It has exhibits on textiles from the Mekong Ganga regions and hosts various events demonstrating linkages between these regions.

Also under MGC initiative, beginning from 2015-16 India has been assisting Cambodia with small Socio-Economic projects known as Quick Impact Projects in the fields of agriculture, health, women empowerment, capacity building, sanitation, environment and information technology every year. These Projects have received overwhelming response and created a distinct and visible impact among beneficiaries. These projects have been doubled annually since 2019 onwards.

As a major initiative towards capacity building, in addition to the existing schemes of training of Cambodians under ITEC programme & ICCR scholarships for students, India has also committed to offer assistance in setting up a Centre of Excellence in IT and IT-enabled services in Cambodia. The ITEC slots have been increased to 200 per year since 2019.

The cooperation has been continuing in defence sector with the conduct of annual training capsule for Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in Peacekeeping and Demining modules; defence courses under ITEC; goodwill visits by Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard ships and exchange of official delegations. India has also gifted fifteen sniffer dogs to Cambodia for demining activities.

## **B. Commercial Relations**

Cambodia has maintained its economic growth at an average rate of 7.1% in 2019, compared to an average of 7% in the last decade. Sectors that have contributed to economic growth of the country are Agriculture, Construction, Tourism and Garment & Footwear. Cambodia's overall total trade reached US \$ 27.51 billion in 2018. Its exports valued at US \$ 12.29 billion in 2018, increased by 14% as compared to 2017 while imports reached US \$ 15.22 billion with an increase of 16.90%. Cambodia imported significantly from Asia at the average of 91.23% of total imports in 2018. Key imported commodities are vehicles, petroleum products, motorbikes and

other consumable goods. The main export destinations are the United States and European Union. Cambodia's exports to US increased by 29% in 2018, compared to 4.6% in 2017 while to EU market also rose, growing at 12.9% in 2018, compared to 9.3% in 2017. Garment, footwear, rubber, textiles, fish products and other agricultural products are top exports to the globe.

Although economic interaction between India and Cambodia is limited, the trade and investment figures have changed positively in recent years. Bilateral trade reached US \$ 249.92 million in 2019 with an increase of 10.24% as compared to 2018. India exported US \$ 167.83 million worth of goods to Cambodia in 2019, with a decrease of 5.84% as compared to 2018 while imports valued at US \$ 82.09 million in 2019, with 69.43% increase as compared to 2018.

To promote trade and business relations, Hon'ble Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Sri. Suresh Prabhu, visited Cambodia in May 2018 to participate in Indian - CLMV Business Conclave in Phnom Penh. India and Cambodia jointly organized some events in Cambodia such as 5<sup>th</sup> India-CLMV Business Conclave and Incredible India Road Show in May 2018. Besides organizing events in Cambodia, Cambodian government officials and business delegations participated in 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Textile Technology & Engineering Show, Logix India 2019, India Telecom Fourm 2019, 4<sup>th</sup> India ASEAN Expo 2019, India-CLMV Economic Integration through value chains and Asian Health 2019 and other events in India. Moreover, H.E. Sok Puthyvuth, Secretary of State, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications attended the 11<sup>th</sup> India Telecom – An Exclusive International Business Expo” in New Delhi on 11-12 February, 2019 and H.E. Pan Sorasak, Minister of Commerce led the Cambodian delegation, which attended the 4<sup>th</sup> India-ASEAN Expo and Summit in March 2019 in New Delhi.

On bilateral investment, India invested US \$ 19.8 million in 2016. However, for the last three years, exact figures showing the volume of investment between India and Cambodia are not available. There are a few Indian companies which are investing in multiple sectors including Mesco Gold, Bajaj Cambodia, TVS and Sram Mram Limited. The Government of India has initiated a planned economic engagement with CLMV region. India's trade with CLMV countries has experienced significant growth over the years, from US\$460 million in 2000 to \$4.97 billion in 2004 and \$14.5 billion in 2017. Currently, India is the largest trade partner of CLMV nations in South Asia. Cambodia and India have signed agreements on cooperation in the areas of but not limited to agriculture, scientific and technological cooperation, entrepreneurship development and tourism. Negotiations are underway for finalising the text of India-Cambodia Bilateral Investment Treaty. The economic relations between the countries are also facilitated by the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement.

### India-Cambodia Merchandise Trade

India - Cambodia trade has been growing steadily in the last few years. In 2016, the overall trade showed a decline, the trend positively stood in 2017. Indian exports have been dominated by pharmaceuticals, yarn, leather and some engineering items. Cambodian exports are mostly primary products. The increase of Indian exports in 2017 & 2018 is largely derived from exports of motor vehicles, drug formulation, biological products, fabrics, finished leather, etc. Business engagement between Indian and Cambodian traders and investors has increased during the past few years and we expect to witness enhanced growth in trade in years to come.

**Figure 1: India-Cambodia Trade Volume (2016-2019)**

Trade with India	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Total Trade</b>	153.15	168.30	226.69	249.92

<b>Exports</b>	110.02	120.28	178.24	167.83
<b>Import</b>	43.13	48.02	48.45	82.09
<b>Growth %</b>	(18.55)	9.89	34.69	10.24

(Source:-The Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, GoI)

## **India – Cambodia Investment**

With a positive growth, Foreign investment inflow to Cambodia is expanding continuously. According to The Council for the Development of Cambodia, total foreign investment reached US\$3.6 billion in 2016. India investment worth US\$19.8 million (0.55%) ranked in top 10 foreign investors in Cambodia. The major investments from India are in the field of agricultural machinery, power, construction and mining.

### **C. Cultural Relations**

India-Cambodia cultural and historical relations are about two millenia old when Indian culture, religion and trade emanated out of India and spread rapidly in various parts of South-East Asia. The pervading influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indian architecture are borne out by the magnificent structures at Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Bayon, Ta Prohm, Bantey Srei, Preah Vihear and other religious and historical sites in Cambodia. In order to strengthen our old age close cultural links, Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between India and Kingdom of Cambodia was signed in 2000 which has been renewed from time to time. During the State Visit of Prime Minister Hun Sen to India in January 2018, the CEP has been renewed for a further period of four years till 2022. During the visit of Hon'ble EAM in August 2018, a MoU between the Government of India and National Authority on Preah Vihear has been signed for restoration of some parts of Preah Vihear temple.

India had undertaken work for restoration and conservation of the Angkor Wat temple, which is a world heritage site of UNESCO and an important tourist destination in Cambodia visited by millions of tourist every year. At present, India is engaged in the restoration work of Ta Prohm temple in Angkor Archaeological Park. India was appointed Co-chair for the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) on Preah Vihear, another world heritage site and one of the oldest temples of Lord Shiva. ICCR has been maintaining a Chair on Buddhist & Sanskrit Studies at Preah Sihanouk Raja Buddhist University and a full time Indian Professor on Sanskrit and Buddhist Studies is deployed by Government of India in the University.

Government of India, with the support of Cambodian Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has been organizing yoga events to celebrate International Day of Yoga (IDY). The 4<sup>th</sup> IDY was celebrated in four cities of Cambodia in June 2018 which was attended by more than 3000 participants. In 2019, Embassy organized celebration of International Yoga Day in Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, Siem Reap and Battambang which witnessed participation of around 4,000 people. Cambodian Ramayana troupes frequently visit India for their performances in various cultural programmes and recently performed in Delhi and Lucknow in September 2019. Embassy of India, in collaboration with Preah Sihanoukraj Buddhist University, organized a four-day international conference on 'Buddhism in Southeast Asia' in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in September, 2018 which was attended by prominent Buddhist scholars of almost all Buddhist countries of the world. To highlight the linkages between Sanskrit and Khmer language, Embassy of India organized Sanskrit Day celebrations in 2018 and 2019 with participation of eminent Sanskrit scholars of Cambodia and organising cultural events with

participation of Indian and Cambodian artists. Various cultural/educational programmes are being organized by Embassy to revive the old age cultural linkages between India and Cambodia.

Government of India has deputed a full time Bharatnatyam teacher in the Embassy who has been conducting dance classes at Royal University of Fine Arts and at the Embassy and schools, etc. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has also deployed a full time Teacher of Indian Culture in Embassy of India, Phnom Penh for propagation of Yoga & Indian culture in Cambodia through organization of regular classes in Universities, organization of seminars, demonstrations etc. in various institutions/organizations.

Both India and Cambodia recognize and value not only our old age cultural and historical linkages but also our present robust cultural and people to people relationship and are engaged in strengthening bilateral cultural relationship between the two countries.

#### **D. Indian Diaspora**

The first Indians in modern times to settle in Cambodia arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of them came from the Southern province of Tamilnadu and they worked as jewelers, moneylenders and traders around Central Market in Phnom Penh. But they had to leave the country once the Khmer Rouge arrived. The Indians returned to Cambodia when Khmer Rouge was defeated.

Indian population in Cambodia is though small in number but it remains an intimate and close-knit group that has integrated well into local society. Approximate population of Indians in Cambodia is around 2000, which includes floating population of small scale sellers of household items from eastern India. Indians in Cambodia in general are working as professionals like doctors, NGO workers and also involved in business sectors like pharmaceuticals, education, restaurants, agriculture and plantations. Some of them are working in various institutions of the United Nations and also as advisers to Cambodian government agencies and institutions. The growing economy and stability in Cambodia is also attracting more opportunity seekers from India.

Despite small numbers of Indians in Cambodia, Indian culture is visible in this country. Indians usually mix in well with the local population. Indian festivals like Diwali and Holi are celebrated by the Indian community. Similarities in various cultural/religious practices of India and Cambodia make Indians feel at home in Cambodia. Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism are traditionally linked together and share traditions, rituals and holidays. Due to reach of satellite television, popular Hindi soap operas and films are shown by local TV channels dubbed in local Khmer language. Hindi film DVDs can be bought throughout the capital, and expatriates can peruse a number of Indian-based websites for the latest news and entertainment. The Indian Association Cambodia (IAC) is a non-profit Indian Community Development and Social Association, founded in the year 1993. It is run by an executive committee and supported by its general members. All executive committee members are volunteers and come from all walks of life for the support and development of India-Cambodia relations through various voluntary cultural, social and community development programs. IAC can be approached by Indian nationals in Cambodia for support and assistance.

#### **Useful Resources:**

*Embassy of India, Phnom Penh:* <https://embindpp.gov.in>

*Facebook page of the Embassy:* <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInCambodia/>

*Twitter handle of the Embassy:* @indembcam

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