

**Embassy of India
Stockholm**

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India-Latvia Bilateral Relations

Relations between India and Latvia are warm and friendly, based on shared commitment to democracy. Popular interest in Indian culture among the Latvian people has strengthened ties. Bilateral contacts date back to the time when Latvia was part of the Soviet Union and had a twinned status with Rajasthan. India recognized Latvia as a sovereign and independent state on September 7, 1991 and established diplomatic relations on 25 February 1992. The Latvian Government opened its Embassy in New Delhi in January 2014. The Indian Mission in Stockholm is concurrently accredited to Latvia.

Political Relations

Since establishment of diplomatic relations, there have been a number of visits between India and Latvia. The latest was the visit of Hon'ble Vice President of India (HVPI) Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu to Latvia from August 19-20, 2019. HVPI was accompanied by a high-level delegation including Shri Sanjay Shamrao Dhotre, Minister of State for HRD, Communications and Electronics & Information Technology, Smt. Raneer Narah, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, Shri Manas Ranjan Bhunia, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, Shri Ramesh Bidhuri, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha and other senior officers of the Government of India and a 25 member business delegation led by ASSOCHAM, CII and IMC (*with ASSOCHAM as the lead chamber*). HVPI held meetings with President of Latvia and Prime Minister of Latvia. HVPI visited the Saeima House and met the Acting Speaker of Saeima. A Bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled by HVPI at the National Library of Latvia on 20 August 2019.

HVPI also participated in the Latvia-India Business Forum (LIBF) organized jointly by the Embassy of India to Latvia and Sweden and the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (LIAA) on August 20, 2019. HVPI and the President of Latvia witnessed the signing of Cooperation MoUs between (i) Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) and the Indian Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) and (ii) Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

An Indian Parliamentary delegation led by Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan from 13-17 June, 2018. The Parliamentary delegation comprised of Members of Parliament Shri Ramsinh Pataliyabhai Rathwa, (Lok Sabha), Shri N.K. Premachandran, (Lok Sabha), Shri A.T.(Nana) Patil, (Lok Sabha), Smt. Kamla Devi Patle, (Lok Sabha), and Shri K. C. Ramamurthy, (Rajya Sabha). The

Parliamentary Delegation led by Hon'ble Speaker had official meetings with the President of Latvia Mr. Raimonds Vejonis, Speaker of the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) Ms. Inara Murniece, Prime Minister Mr. Maris Kucinskis. The delegation also met with the Saeima Group for Interparliamentary Relations with India, chaired by Latvian Parliamentarian Mr. Atis Lejins.

Prime Minister of Latvia Mr. Māris Kučinskis visited India from 2-6 November 2017. This was the first-ever visit at Prime Ministerial level between the two countries. Latvian PM and delegation participated in the "World Food India 2017" in New Delhi. PM Kučinskis met Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 3 November 2017. Both leaders held discussions on various aspects of bilateral ties as well as important regional and global issues of mutual interest and focused on building closer cooperation in the areas of trade & investment, food processing and culture, among others. During the visit, the Protocol amending and supplementing the Agreement between India and Latvia relating to Air Services was signed. PM Kučinskis called on the President of India in New Delhi on 3 November. A 16-member business delegation from 7 Latvian companies participated in World Food India 2017. PM Kučinskis also held meeting with the Governor of Maharashtra.

Other high level visits from Latvia included the visit by Latvian President in 1997; Speaker in 2003; Deputy Prime Minister in 2003; Foreign Minister in 2006, September 2013 and November 2013; Minister of Culture in 2007 and March 2016; Minister for E-Governance in 2007; Economics Minister in February 2010; and Foreign Minister in January 2020 to participate in the Raisina Dialogue.

Minister of Electronics & IT and Law & Justice Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad visited Latvia from 13-16 September 2016. Minister Prasad met the Speaker of Saeima, Ms. Inara Murniece, who was acting as the President in the latter's absence. He also called on the Latvian Prime Minister, Mr. Maris Kucinskis. He had discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Economics, Mr. Arvils Aseradens, and the Latvian Minister for Justice, Mr. Dzintars Rasnacs. The two sides agreed on a meeting of a Joint Group of Experts to work out a roadmap for enhancing and expanding bilateral cooperation, including in economic, education and tourism sectors.

From India, there have been four visits by Minister of State for External Affairs, the last one being the visit of MoS Shri M. J. Akbar from 22-24 May 2017. He met with the President of Latvia Mr. Raimonds Vejonis; Speaker of the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia) Ms Ināra Mūrniece; Prime Minister of Latvia Mr Māris Kučinskis; Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Economics of the Republic of Latvia Mr Arvils Ašeradens; and Foreign Minister of Latvia Mr. Edgar Rinkevics. A bilateral Visa Exemption Agreement for Diplomatic Passport Holders was signed on 23 May. The Minister, along with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economics of

Latvia Mr Arvils Ašeradens, jointly inaugurated “India – Latvia Business Conference on 24 May 2017. The Minister gave a talk on “India’s Global Vision – A Foreign Policy Perspective” at a Reception hosted by Ambassador Monika Kapil Mohta on 23 May 2017. The Minister also inaugurated Yoga Corner at the Botanical Garden in Riga and India Section in the National Library of Latvia.

The Minister of State for Health and Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), Mr. Shripad Yesso Naik, visited Riga from 15-18 May 2016. The delegation also included Secretary (AYUSH) and Director of the All India Institute of Ayurveda. The Minister met the Latvian Health Minister Mr. Guntis Belevics and the Members of Latvian Parliamentary Committee for relations with India led by Mr. Atis Lejins. The Minister also met Rector and other important functionaries of the University of Latvia and discussed cooperation in the field of integrated systems of medicine, including Ayurveda and Yoga, and setting up a Chair of Ayurveda and an AYUSH Information Cell at the University of Latvia. This was the first Ministerial visit from India to Latvia since March 2011 and gave a boost to bilateral relations.

A 3-member AYUSH delegation led by Dr. K.S. Dhiman (KSD), Director General, Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) visited Riga to attend the International Scientific Network on Ayurveda organized by the University of Latvia on 28-29 May 2015. They called on the Deputy State Secretary of Health on 29 May 2015 and discussed possible collaboration in the field of Ayurveda and establishment of AYUSH Chair in Latvian Universities. The 6th round of Foreign Office Consultations was held in New Delhi on 3 February 2015. Ms. Vrinda Sarup, Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy led a 3-member delegation to Riga from 27-28 April 2015 to attend the 5th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Education Ministers’ Meeting.

President Ram Nath Kovind met Latvian President Raimonds Vējonis in Zagreb, Croatia on March 28, 2019 during President Kovind’s bilateral visit to Croatia. Vice President Hamid Ansari also met Latvian President Raimonds Vējonis on 16 July 2016 on the sidelines of 11th ASEM Summit in Mongolia. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met Latvian Foreign Minister Edgar Rinkevics in New York on 18 September 2017. Minister of State for External Affairs Gen. (Dr.) V.K. Singh and the Foreign Minister of Latvia, Mr. Edgars Rinkevics, met in Luxembourg on 5 November 2015 on the sidelines of ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

Following institutional agreements/arrangements have been put in place for promoting trade, investments and other relations:- (i) Declaration of Principles and Directions of Co-operation signed in September 1995; (ii) Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation in the fields of Culture, Arts, Education, Science, Mass-Media and Sports signed in Sept 1995; (iii) Agreement on Economic and

Technical Cooperation between Latvia and India signed in Sept 1995; (iv) Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations signed in September 1995; (v) Air Services Agreement signed in October 1997; (vi) Agreement on the Inter- Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation signed in June 2001; (vii) Cultural Exchange Agreement was signed in May 2006; (viii) Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement signed in February 2010. (ix) Agreement on Health was signed on 28 February 2012; and (xi) Agreement on Prevention of Double Taxation and Tax Evasion was signed in September 2013 (x) Bilateral Visa Exemption Agreement for Diplomatic Passport Holders was signed on 23 May, 2017 (xi) Agreement on Cultural Exchange Programme was signed on 20 August 2019.

India and Latvia have reached a reciprocal support arrangement whereby Latvia would support India’s candidature to the UNSC non-permanent seat for 2021-22 and India would support Latvian candidature to the UNSC non-permanent seat for 2026-27.

Since December 2010, an India-Latvia Parliamentary Friendship Group has been set up in Latvian Parliament. A similar Friendship Group has also been set up in Parliament of India. The Chairman of the Latvia-India Friendship Group and Member of Parliament, Mr. Atis Lejins, visited India from 3-12 April 2015 under the Distinguished Visitors Programme of ICCR. The then Speaker of Latvian Parliament had visited India in October 2012 and had invited her Indian counterpart to Latvia. The current Chair of the India Latvia Parliamentary Friendship Group is Mr. Krisjanis Feldmans.

Economic & Commercial Relations

Bilateral trade stood at about US \$164.85 in 2017-18, which tremendously rose to US \$273.97 million in 2018-19. Major Indian exports in 2018 are Iron and Steel; Rubber and articles thereof; Other made-up textile articles; sets; worn clothing and worn textile articles; rags; Pharmaceutical products; and Aluminium and articles thereof etc. Major Indian imports include Iron and Steel; Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; Vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, and parts and accessories thereof; Optical, photographic, cinematographic, measuring, checking, precision, medical or surgical instruments and apparatus; parts and accessories thereof; and Wood and articles of wood; wood charcoaletc. There is scope for growth of textiles, agro-products, gems and jewellery, chemical dyes and pharmaceuticals.

Bilateral Trade

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Year								

India's Exports	96.18	104.08	102.07	98.12	79.50	115.60	112.22	115.52
India's Imports	141.53	73.63	103.89	36.22	61.57	39.65	52.63	158.44
Total	237.71	177.71	205.96	134.34	141.07	155.25	164.85	273.97

Source: Ministry of Commerce, India. Figures in US\$ million and year refer to financial year i.e. April-March.

Consequent to Latvia's accession to the EU, Indian companies can access the EU market through investment in Latvia. Its geostrategic location as a potential gateway to the CIS countries as well as Russia along with its excellent all weather ports add to the potential. Taking these factors along with the investment friendly policies of the Latvian government and the recent steady economic growth which saw Latvia emerge as the fastest growing member of the Euro-zone, Latvia offers good opportunities for Indian firms. However, investments in both directions are below potential. Potential areas of investment from India include pharmaceuticals and healthcare, telecommunications, IT and software development, heavy engineering and biotechnology. Cumulative figures of Latvian FDI in India is around US \$ 0.49 million from April 2000 to September 2018. There is a proposal for setting up a temperature-controlled cold storage and ware-house facility in the free port of Riga for which the Embassy is already in contact with APEDA for them to partner with M/s Bhandar. It is expected to promote Indian exports to Latvia and its neighbouring regions including Russia, CIS and Nordic countries.

Cultural and Educational Relations

Under the Cultural Exchange Programme for 2006-08 between the two countries, and even after it was put on hold in 2008 at Latvian Government's request, several Indian cultural troupes have performed in Latvia; mostly sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

During the visit of HVPI to Latvia, an MoU on Cultural Exchange between India and Latvia was signed on August 20, 2019.

Latvians have been regular beneficiaries of ITEC training programmes, the courses for foreign diplomats offered by the FSI as well as scholarships provided by ICCR.

The University of Latvia has established a "Centre for Indian Studies and Culture" which was formally inaugurated on 9 September 2013. It is organizing Yoga classes and Hindi classes as well as other activities to promote India. The University of Latvia and several other Latvian Universities are keen to establish collaborative relations with Indian Universities as well as to receive students from India. Seven Universities came together to open a Study in Latvia Centre (SLC) in Chennai in February 2014.

Embassy of India organized its inaugural event celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 19th October, 2018 in Latvia at the majestic City Council building in the heart of the Latvian capital city – Riga. LED video projections of Mahatma Gandhi’s message to the world were projected on the front facade of the iconic Riga City Council Building. The commemorative stamps on the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi were released, followed by playing of video of medley of the “Vaishnav Jan te Tene Kahiye ji” bhajan compiled by MEA. Embassy of India organized its 2nd event celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 20th October, 2018 in the premises of the Riga Technical University. Dr. Sangeet Gandhi, an award winning architect, designer, artist and a woman achiever from India, gave a talk on Khadi from Mahatma Gandhi’s perspective. Her famous Khadi works of art were also on display. Vibrant Gujarat delegation also attended the event and the Leader of the Indian business delegation also spoke on the occasion.

Promotion of Ayurveda in Latvia

There is promising potential for promoting Ayurveda and Yoga in Latvia. Both are popular and seen as ways to improve holistic healthcare. Further, the University of Latvia has been very supportive. As a result, the University of Latvia, in collaboration with the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore (AVP, which has received a grant as Centre of Excellence from AYUSH Ministry), has been conducting a 3-month Diploma course in Introduction to Ayurveda since February 2015. The students are mainly qualified allopathic medical doctors. The University also wants to offer higher level courses. It organised an international scientific forum titled ‘Fostering Latvia-India Cooperation’, dedicated to cooperation between Latvia and India in the field of research and education, including Ayurveda, on 28-29 May 2015. An Ayurveda Chair has been set up at the University of Latvia since June 2018. Other efforts to promote Ayurveda in Latvia include on-going translation into Latvian language of a book on Ayurveda which could be used as a text book, an Ayush Information Cell at the University of Latvia; and a joint study on Type-2 Diabetes.

Indian Community

There is a small Indian community in Latvia numbering around 2000 and mostly engaged in business activities. This includes around 1500 Indian students studying medicine and technical courses in Latvian Universities.

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