

Bilateral Relations: India - Turks and Caicos Islands

Overview:

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) comprises of two island groups in the North Atlantic Ocean (area 430 sq. km., population 53, 701 (as on July 2018) and is a British Administered Overseas Territory (BAOT). Its GDP is US\$823 mn. and per capita income is over US\$ 35000.

In August 2009, the British government had imposed direct rule over the islands after an inquiry discovered evidence of corruption and incompetence in the islands' government. Consequent to the imposition of direct rule by the UK Government in 2009, the then Governor Mr. Gordon Wetherell assumed full responsibility for running the Turks and Caicos Islands. Even in normal course, the UK appointed Governor wielded vast executive authority as a member of the TCI Cabinet. But after suspension of the Constitution, he became the sole repository of the entire executive and legislative authority. In October 2013, Mr. Peter Beckingham was appointed Governor of Turks and Caicos Islands. TCI being a British Overseas Territory, the British Government is largely responsible for its external relations and defence matters, though TCI maintains diplomatic relations with its neighbours and the US.

General elections were held in Turks and Caicos Islands on 15 December 2016. The result was a victory for the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), with Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson becoming the islands' first female Premier.

TCI is neither a member of the United Nations, nor is represented on most International organizations. It is a member of the Caribbean Development Bank, Interpol, and the UPU and is an associate member of the CARICOM. It has no resident diplomatic representations from other countries. Though it has neither participated in various international fora nor articulated its position on climate change, it has serious stakes in the on-going International discussions, inter alia, on account of rising sea levels, warming of the oceans, coastal erosion, degradation of the marine environment, declining of fish stocks, and increased frequency and intensity of storms and hurricanes, which threaten not only the sustainable development and fragile infrastructure but also the very existence of small island developing countries. Grand Turk island suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Maria on 22 September 2017 resulting in loss of power and communications as well as damage to housing and businesses.

Political:

As the external relations of the Turks and Caicos Islands are conducted by the British Foreign Office, our major thrust has been to explore opportunities for strengthening economic interaction, disseminate information on India as part of our outreach efforts, provide consular services to the Indian community and the local population, and to assist the Indian community in rescue and relief efforts in case of natural calamities, as the territory is prone to periodic hurricanes and storms. Overall, our interaction is rather limited.

The High Commissioner of India to Jamaica is concurrently accredited to the Turks and Caicos Islands. Bilateral relations between India and Turks and Caicos Islands

have been friendly. There have been no high-level exchanges and no bilateral agreements. Our offer of 2 slots every year under the ITEC/SCAAP is not being utilised.

Trade and Investment:

Because of proximity and connectivity, the US is the largest trading partner and over 70% of tourism business originates from there. Bilaterally, there are no major areas of convergence between India and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Our bilateral trade has been insignificant and investment is almost non-existent.

Year	India's Exports (US\$ in millions)	India's Imports (US\$ in millions)	Total (US\$ in millions)
2014-15	0.15	0.01	0.16
2015-16	0.16	0.02	0.18
2016-17	0.78	0.03	0.82
2017-18	1.15	0.02	1.17
2018-19	0.26	-	0.26

(Source: Ministry of Commerce-Export Import Data bank)

Cultural Relations and Indian community:

Indian community is estimated to be very small numbering up to 250 members but vibrant and contributing significantly to TCI economy. Indian community includes a few Sindhi business families who are well established in the field of retail jewellery and electronics business, a small number of doctors, nurses, teachers, chartered accountants, and other professionals. A sizeable number of Indians are also employed in the Indian owned business establishments and the local hospitality industry including hotels and restaurants.

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