

India-Azerbaijan Bilateral Relations

Background

India recognized Azerbaijan as an independent country in December 1991 soon after it proclaimed its independence from the USSR formally in October 1991. Diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on 28 February 1992. The resident Indian mission was opened in Baku in March 1999. Azerbaijan opened its resident mission in New Delhi in October 2004.

India and Azerbaijan have friendly relations and growing bilateral cooperation based on civilizational linkages, cultural affinities and shared values of understanding and respect for other cultures.

Historical relations

The '*Ateshgah*' fire temple in the vicinity of Baku is a fine example of the age-old historical relations and cultural exchanges between India and Azerbaijan. This 18th century monument, with a much older history, has wall inscriptions *in Devanagiri* and *Gurmukhi*, and is a surviving proof of the trade links and hospitality that Indian merchants on the Silk Route to Europe enjoyed in Azerbaijani cities such as Baku and Ganja. India's Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, former President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (as Vice President in 1956) and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1961) visited the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

Bilateral Visits

Vice President Shri Venkaiah Naidu visited Azerbaijan to participate in the XVIII NAM Summit held in Baku during 24-26 October 2019. This was the first ever high level visit from either side. Dr. S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister (EAM) also visited Azerbaijan to attend the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) Ministerial meeting held in Baku during 23-24 October 2019. Earlier, EAM met with Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov (EM), Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan on 27 September 2019 on the sidelines of the 74th session of the UNGA in New York. Smt. Sushma Swaraj, the then EAM had visited Azerbaijan on 4-6 April 2018 for attending the NAM Ministerial Conference and for the bilateral visit. During the visit, EAM had bilateral talks with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and a detailed meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, in which the discussed different areas of cooperation. Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri M.J. Akbar, visited Baku on 30 Nov-01 Dec 2017 to attend Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley visited Baku in May, 2015 accompanied by a delegation of Ministry of Finance to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors of ADB.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov paid a bilateral visit to India in May 2013. Besides, there have been several Ministerial level visits from Azerbaijan to India since 1991. Deputy Minister of Economy, Sahid Mammadov, visited India to participate in the Vibrant Gujarat Summit-2019 from 16-19 January, 2019. Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, visited Delhi to attend the 5th Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on 11-12 October 2018. Mr. Samir Sharifov, Minister of Finance visited India on 21 February 2018 and met with Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley to solicit India's support for their candidature for hosting IMF/ World Bank meetings in Baku in 2021. Mr. Kamaladdin Heydarov, Minister of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan participated in the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held at New Delhi on 2-5 November, 2016.

Bilateral Institutional Mechanisms

India-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Commission (IA-IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation was set up in April 2007 during the visit of then Minister of State for Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Shri Jairam Ramesh to Azerbaijan. IA-IGC is co-chaired by the Minister of Commerce and Industry from Indian side and the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources from Azerbaijani side. IA-IGC has held five sessions so far: New Delhi (Nov 2009), Baku (Apr 2012), New Delhi (Feb 2014), Baku (25-26 October 2016) and New Delhi (11-12 October, 2018). The fifth meeting of IAIGC was co-Chaired by Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Commerce and Industry from Indian side and Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources from Azerbaijan side.

India-Azerbaijan Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) mechanism was established in 1998 following the visit of then Minister of State for Ministry of External Affairs Ms. Vasundhara Raje. It is co-chaired by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs on the Azerbaijani side and Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs on the Indian side. The 4th round of FOC was held in Baku on 28 July 2016. The next FOC is scheduled to be held in New Delhi and dates for the same are being discussed.

Parliamentary Cooperation

The Parliament of India and Milli Majlis (unicameral Parliament of Azerbaijan) have had inter-parliamentary contacts supported by their respective Parliamentary Friendship Groups. A 20-member Indian Parliamentary delegation visited Baku on 6-10 October 2013 as Observers during the Presidential elections in Azerbaijan at the invitation of Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan. A joint Parliamentary delegation consisting of Mr. K.H. Muniyappa (Lok Sabha), Mr. Chintamani Malviya (Lok Sabha) and Mr. V Vijayasai Reddy (Rajya

Sabha) visited Baku on 12-22 Sept 2018 to attend the 100th anniversary of Azerbaijani Parliament. Mr. Nagif Hamzayev, Member of Azerbaijani Parliament, visited India in August-Sept 2019 under ICCR's (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) Distinguished Visitors Programme.

Azerbaijani Milli Majlis has set up a five-member India Friendship Group, consisting of Ms. Zeynab Khanlarova (Head), Mrs. Jale Aliyeva, Mr. Rufat Guliyev and Mrs. Sadagat Valiyeva. Azerbaijani Milli Majlis has sought that Indian Parliament should also establish an India Friendship Group in the Majlis to promote inter-parliamentary relations.

Cooperation in the UN and Multilateral Fora

Azerbaijan is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) since 2011. In recent years, cooperation in the UN elections has increased and India and Azerbaijan have supported each-others candidatures for the international organizations after tying up reciprocal arrangements. Azerbaijan supported candidature of Justice Dalveer Bhandari at the ICJ; Mr. Anirudha Rajput at International Law Commission; Dr. Neeru Chadha at ITLOS; Council of International Maritime Organization on reciprocal support arrangements. In 2019, Azerbaijan extended support for our four candidatures and conveyed unilateral support to our two candidatures. India and Azerbaijan also cooperated in UNESCO to support each-other's proposals and Azerbaijan's support for inscription of Jaipur City in the list of World Heritage Sites of UNESCO was valuable.

Economic and Commercial

Over the years, India's bilateral trade with Azerbaijan has increased substantially from around US\$ 50 million in 2005 to around US\$ 922 million in 2018. During January-November 2019, the bilateral trade is US\$ 1069 million. Substantial trade of Indian goods and products is carried through UAE and other third countries which do not get reflected in the trade statistics of India or Azerbaijan. The important items of direct and indirect imports from India are rice, electric heating resistors, air and gas compressors/ ventilation units, drugs/human vaccine, meat of large horned livestock, machines and equipment to process materials by temperature's changes, bromides and oxides bromide and black tea. The primary import of India from Azerbaijan is crude oil.

In terms of Indian investment in Azerbaijan, ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL) had acquired shares worth US\$ 1 billion in March 2013 in development project of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (2.72%) oil field and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipe line (2.36%) from US Company Hess. Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) is also showing interest in exploring Azerbaijani oil sector and is in discussions with SOCAR. Sun Pharma is providing

technical know-how for a plant being built by Gilan Holding for production of solid consistency drugs in Sumgayit.

Connectivity

Both India and Azerbaijan are members of the International North- South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which has the potential to provide the shortest and the cheapest route for trade between our regions. Azerbaijan has developed its railways infrastructure to facilitate INSTC connectivity. The next INSTC Coordination Council Meeting will be held in Baku in 2020.

Azerbaijan Airlines had started a direct flight between Baku and New Delhi in June 2019. But due to some unavoidable circumstances, the flights have been suspended by the airlines.

Cultural exchanges and collaboration:

The cultural exchanges over ages between Azerbaijan and India have led to close cultural affinity and shared traditions. World renowned Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi had a profound influence on eminent Indian poets like Amir Khusrau. In recent past, the famous Azerbaijani artist late Rashid Behbudov, a noted tenor who switched to singing popular Azeri songs in European classical tradition was a close friend of late Raj Kapoor. Famous singer Elmira Rahimova spent two years studying Indian music/dance in India in the late 1950s. These artists were instrumental in popularizing Indian music and songs in Azerbaijan. Indian intellectuals like Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore are well known in Azerbaijan and his Birth Anniversary is regularly celebrated by local organizations. A Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) was signed between India and Azerbaijan on 12 October 2018 during the 5th IA-IGC held in New Delhi.

Indian cinema continues to have a large following and Azeri language TV channels screen Hindi films periodically, including the new Bollywood cinema as well as the older movies of Raj Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan, Mithun Chakraborty, Hema Malini, etc. Recently, the Indian Mission, in collaboration with Baku Youth Center, organized an Indian Film Festival. Indian music and dance groups sponsored by the Indian Council of Cultural relations (ICCR) regularly participate in music and dance festivals in Azerbaijan. Yoga is immensely popular in Azerbaijan and the International Day of Yoga on 21 June is attended by several Yoga practitioners and enthusiasts from Azerbaijan with much enthusiasm.

To mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Azermarka under the Ministry of Transport, Communication and High Technologies has commissioned a 60 gepik postal stamp in 2019. The Executive

Power of Baku also supported planting of 150 trees to mark this historic occasion.

Cooperation in Education

Under the Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, the Government of India offers twenty fully-paid training courses to professionals from Azerbaijan every year India also provides one scholar slot every year to Azerbaijani students under the General Scholarship Scheme of the ICCR. A Hindi teaching Center has been functioning in the Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL) since October 2010 with support from the ICCR which has deployed a Hindi Chair at the Center. ICCR has a Hindi Chair which conducts Hindi classes. Some students from Azerbaijan have completed a special course for foreigners at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra. AUL has also sought setting up of a Sanskrit Chair. Baku State University has also sought setting up of Hindi Chair.

2017 - 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations

Year 2017 was observed as India-Azerbaijan Friendship Year to mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Azerbaijan. Several cultural events were organized in association with India Association Azerbaijan to mark the year.

Indian Community:

The Indian community in Azerbaijan comprises of about 1300 persons, including professionals employed with international companies in the oil and gas sectors, businessmen engaged in commodities trading, catering and restaurant business and construction workers on short-term contracts. There are three Indian associations, viz., Indian Association Azerbaijan (IAA), Baku Malayalee Association (BMA) and Tamil Sangam, which work in close association with the Embassy of India in Baku. They regularly hold social events to celebrate major Indian festivals and events. The Indian community which is at the 4th/5th place in Azerbaijan among the expatriates, in terms of numerical strength, is very active both professionally and socially and has integrated well with the local population.

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Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Baku Website: <http://www.indianembassybaku.gov.in/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/indiainazerbaijan/>

Embassy of India, Baku Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/indembassybaku>