India-Belgium Relations

The diplomatic relations between India and Belgium were established in 1948 and our bilateral relations are cordial and friendly. In recent times, Belgium has acknowledged the growing importance of India’s global role both in political and economic spheres and in this context has emphasized the value of strengthening economic relations between the two countries.

Political Relations:

High Level Visits: India to Belgium: Sh Pranab Mukherjee, Hon’ble President of India visited Brussels at the invitation of the King of the Belgians (02-05 October 2013). This was the first visit by President of India to Belgium. During the visit he met the King of Belgians, the Prime Minister and jointly inaugurated the Europalia-India Cultural Festival with the King of the Belgians and five MoUs were signed between Indian and Belgian Universities during the visit. The other visits at high-level from India in recent times include that by the Minister of External Affairs, Shri Salman Khurshid from 30-31 January, 2013, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textile, Shri Anand Sharma from 24-26, June, 2012; Minister of State, Smt. Preneet Kaur to Brussels from 15-19 April, 2012; Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Brussels from 9-11 December 2010, which was also the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister since 1978 (when PM Sh Murarji Desai visited Belgium); by Vice President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari to Brussels from 3-5 October 2010 to attend the ASEM 8 Summit, during which he briefly interacted with the King of the Belgians and held a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Yves Leterme.

Belgium to India: Recent high-level visits to India include those by Princess Astrid who led the Economic Mission with around 350 CEOs to India in November 2013, accompanied by Mr. Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs. Mr. Didier Reynders had earlier visited India in August 2012. The then Crown Prince Philippe (20-27 March 2010) also had led an economic delegation of around 350 member to India, the then King of the Belgians, Albert II visited from 3-12 November 2008 accompanied by Queen Paola, the then Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht and a sizeable academic and business delegation; and by the then Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt from 2-7 November 2006.

In 2014, Sh Dinkar Khullar, Secretary (West) visited Brussels from 26-27 March 2014 during which he met Mr Dirk Achten, Secretary General of Belgian Foreign Ministry and discussed bilateral and international issues of mutual interest. Sh J Satyanarayana, Secretary (DIT) visited Interuniversity Micro-electronics Centre (IMEC), Leuven, Belgium on 12 March 2014 and discussed on the collaboration in the semi-conductor sector between Indian and IMEC.

Bilateral Treaties and Agreements: The agreements signed and in force between India and Belgium are as follows: MoU between the National Bank of Belgium and Reserve Bank of India concerning Mutual Cooperation, signed in Brussels on 13 March 2013; MoU on cooperation for effective development and modernization of Railway sector in August 2012; Social Security Agreement in November 2006 (came into force in September 2009); Agreement on cooperation in the field of Science & Technology, signed in November 2006; Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation (DTAA), signed in August 1997; Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement (BIPA) signed between India and Belgium-Luxembourg
Economic Union (BLEU) in November 1997; Cultural Agreement of September 1973; and Air Services Agreement of April 1967.

**Cooperation in multilateral Fora (UNO):** Indian and Belgium have been enjoying cordial relationship at the UNO and related matters. Belgium supported India’s candidature to the permanent membership of the UNSC, including for India’s UNSC candidature for the period 2021-22. Belgium also supported India on specific exception at NSG in 2008.

**Commercial Relations:**

**Economic and Trade Relations:** Belgium is one of India’s important trading partners in the EU. Trade in gems, jewellery, precious stones and metals constitute around 82.9% of bilateral trade (2013). India’s IT & Telecom sector is well represented in Belgium. Several Indian companies in the chemicals sector have also established offices/warehousing facilities in Belgium, particularly near the port city of Antwerp. Belgian business interests in India cover dredging, chemicals, engineering goods, banking and finance, electronics and software, fertilisers, and biotechnology.

**Bilateral Trade:** Belgium is India’s second largest trading partner in the European Union. During the 2013 (January to December), the bilateral trade declined by 1.15% as a result of global financial situation and stood at € 12.05 billion as compared to € 12.19 billion in 2012 (which is 9% lower when compared to figures of 2011 which stood at € 13.35 billion). The major items of Indian exports to Belgium in 2013 were: gems & jewellery; chemicals & chemical products, base metals & articles, mineral products, textiles etc. The major items of Indian imports from Belgium in 2012 were gems & jewellery, chemicals & chemical products, machinery & mechanical appliances, base metals & articles, plastic products etc.

**Bilateral Investment:** Belgium has emerged as the 24th largest investor in India and the 10th largest within the EU, but the total FDI in India from Belgium is still relatively small, being less than 0.25% of the total. The cumulative FDI inflows from Belgium into India amounted to US$ 492 million from 2000 to 2013. In the recent past, Indian investment in Belgium has exceeded investment by Belgian firms in India, mainly by way of acquisition of Belgian firms by Indian companies. Several Indian companies, particularly in the IT and software sector, have established base in Belgium to cater to the Belgian as well as European markets, one such recent example is collaboration in the telecom sector between Tech Mahindra and Base Telecom.

**India-BLEU Economic Joint Commission Meeting (JCM):** The 13th Economic JCM between India and BLEU (Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union) took place in Brussels on 01-02 July, 2013. Both sides discussed the ways to enhance cooperation in areas such as transport, infrastructure, consular access, higher education, skill development, science & technology, market access, customs facilitation and measures to diversify bilateral trade. To address the declining bilateral trade, it was agreed to work towards enhancing bilateral trade to a balanced target of € 15 billion by 2015. The JCM mechanism was revived in 2008 and since then has been regularly meeting biennially, the next meeting is scheduled to take place in India in June 2015.

**Science & Technology cooperation:** A framework agreement for cooperation in Science and Technology was signed during the visit of the Belgian Prime Minister to India in November 2006. Under this agreement, an India-Belgium Joint Committee on S&T has been
set up. At the third meeting in 2013, progress in cooperation was noted in the field of astronomy, where a DOT 3.6m telescope being built in Nainital (India) with Belgian assistance. India and Belgium also have an MoU on cooperation in space technology, which was signed between the two sides in November 1998. An MoU between BARC and SCK – SEN has been signed in June 2012 covering cooperation in management of nuclear waste, geological disposal technique, advance research reactor systems and collaboration in the context of INPRO project of the IAEA. During the recent visit of Sh J Satyanarayana, Secretary (DIT) to the Interuniversity Micro-electronics Centre (IMEC), Leuven, Belgium in March 2014 the possibility of collaboration between Indian and IMEC in the field of semiconductor, including capacity building in R&D, education and training were discussed.

**Cultural Cooperation:**

From 4 October 2013 to 26 January 2014, India was the partner country for the prestigious Europalia-India Cultural Festival. Europalia International is an organization partly funded by Belgian Government and involved in hosting country specific biannual cultural festivals, spanning for three months. The Europalia-India Cultural Festival included nearly 300 events showcasing Indian art and antiquities, music and dance performances, cinema, theatre, literature, thought as well as cuisine, hosted by about 200 partner venues across Belgium. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was the nodal organization on the Indian side for the event. ICCR had earlier organised an Indian festival ‘TEJAS’ in Brussels from October 2006 to January 2007.

On 30 January 2013, Minister of External Affairs, Shri Salman Khurshid inaugurated a bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the office complex of the Governor of Antwerp province. To commemorate the sacrifice made by thousands of Indian soldiers in Flanders during World War I, an Indian Memorial Pillar was rebuilt and reinstalled alongside Menin Gate in Ieper in 2010, where the annual Armistice Day celebrations take place. Belgium has invited India to participate in the centenary events to commemorate World War I which will be held between 2014-2018. India’s involvement, including a high level participation in the centenary events are being worked out.

**Education:** Indian students are amongst the largest beneficiaries of the scholarships and student exchange programmes offered by the European Union (EU) under Erasmus Mundus, Marie Curie and other programmes. As a result nearly around 600-800 Indian students are pursuing various courses in educational institutions of Belgium, including University of Ghent, Leuven, Antwerp and Brussels.

To further strengthen this engagement in the field of education, following 5 MoUs were signed during the visit of President of India to Belgium in October 2013:

(i) MoU between JNU and University of Ghent
(ii) MoU between DU and University of Ghent
(iii) MoU between DU and Group T International Engineering Academy of University of Leuven
(iv) MoU between DU and Université Libre De Bruxelles (ULB)
(v) MoU between University of Hyderabad and University of Ghent

There are two ICCR sponsored chairs in Belgium, one at the University of Ghent (Hindi Chair) and the second at the University of Leuven (Indian Studies). While the first one
is operational since 1988, the MoU on ICCR Chair on Indian Studies was signed on 4 October 2013 during the visit of President of India and is yet to be operational.

**Indian Community in Belgium:**

The Indian Diaspora in Belgium numbers around 18,000 as per estimates from the local Government. Of these, nearly 10,000 are Indian citizens, while others have acquired various nationalities. Around 2,500 NRIs/PIOs are based in Antwerp, mainly from Gujarat, and are involved in the diamond trade.

**Useful Resources:**

For more information and latest updates please visit Embassy of India to Belgium, Luxembourg and European Union website: http://www.indembassy.be/

*****

July 2014