

## **India-Belize Relations**

Belize, formerly British Honduras, is the only English-speaking country in Central America and is a member of the Commonwealth and the System of Integration in Central America group. Belize gained independence on 21 September 1981. It is a small country with area of 22,800 sq. kms. and a diversified population of around 370,000 and is located on the Caribbean Sea - with Mexico in the north and Guatemala on the west.

The Indian Ambassador to Mexico is concurrently accredited as India's non-resident High Commissioner to Belize. Present High Commissioner, Shri Muktesh K. Pardeshi presented his credentials on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2016. Both sides have an Honorary Consul General in the other country.

### **Political**

Notwithstanding the distance, India and Belize enjoy friendly, warm, and cordial relations. Belize traditionally supports India on most issues, in the UN and other multilateral fora, and vice versa. Several bilateral visits at political and senior levels have helped promote ties, which included those of Mr Philip Zuniga, President of the Belizean Senate for attending a Parliamentary Conference in New Delhi in September 2007 and Mr John Birchman Saldivar, Minister for Sports and Governance for the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in October 2010, from the Belizean side and of Shri Sujan Chakraborty, MP, for a Commonwealth Parliamentary study on environment in Belize in February/March 2007 and Shri Kamal Nath, Minister of Urban Development for the Board Meeting of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in Belize in May 2012. MOS (EA) Gen. (Retd) V K Singh had a meeting with Foreign Minister of Belize in May 2015 on the sidelines of India-SICA Ministerial meeting in Guatemala City.

### **Bilateral cooperation**

India has offered a line of credit of US\$30 million to Belize as part of the lines of credit extended to SICA countries. India also offers 2 training slots to Belize under ITEC Program and a few ICCR Scholarships. Belizean diplomats are also provided training at the Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs.

In recent years, India has extended cooperation to Belize for disaster relief and for development by way of a gift of Bajaj 3-wheelers, medicines, cricket sets, and computer sets for an India Belize Friendship Computer Centre (St. John's College). During 2013, India sent on deputation a senior IPS Officer under the ITEC programme for one year as Adviser to the Commissioner of Police of Belize. A proposal for setting up a Vocational Training Centre in Belize City, as requested by the Prime Minister of Belize, at a cost of INR 39 million has been approved by Government of India and the MoU for this is under finalization.

Recently, Government of India gifted 39 computers for The Orange Walk Institute for Vocational Education & Training at a cost of over US\$ 40,000/-, and approved gifting a Fire Fighting Truck for the remote town of Punta Gorda at a cost of US\$ 300,000/-.

Belize and India concluded in September 2013 the bilateral Agreement for the Exchange of Information and Assistance in Collection w.r.t. Taxes (AEI&ACT).

### **India-SICA Dialogue**

India established this dialogue forum at the level of the Foreign Ministers, with the countries of the System of Integration in Central America, including Belize, to provide an institutional framework for strengthening and expanding the relationship

with the Central American countries. The third meeting was held in May 2015 in Guatemala City. Cooperation in a wide range of issues are being discussed by this forum including UN Reform, terrorism, climate change, nuclear disarmament, food and energy security and disaster management.

A Business Forum has been set up to promote trade between India and SICA. India also announced a Line of Credit of US\$ 240 million to the eight SICA countries, including US\$ 30 million to Belize, either for country-specific or joint SICA projects.

### Economic & Commercial

Bilateral trade is understandably limited ranging in recent years to US\$ 12-25 million. In 2016, the total trade was US\$ 13.7 million only. Indian exports (US\$ 12.5 million) were mainly tobacco products, textiles and auto parts, and imports (US\$ 1.2 million) were mainly agricultural products, processed foods and apparel. Certain sectors of the Belizean economy such as tourism, fishery and food processing offer good potential for Indian investors. The pharmaceuticals sector may also be of interest to Indian companies based in Latin America to expand their distribution network to Belize.

### Indian Community

Belize has over a 500 strong Indian business community, mainly Sindhis, that migrated there from India and other Caribbean Countries in the recent decades and constitute a valuable link between Belize and India. Together with dependants, the community is about 1500 individuals of which roughly 200 are NRIs and rest PIOs.

There is also an “East Indian” community, about 7,000-8,000 strong, that migrated to Belize from the Caribbean over a period of time beginning 150 years ago, who are totally assimilated with the local society but have evinced interest to re-discover their lost Indian roots, through various Indian cultural programmes and activities. There are two community organisations, viz., the Belize Indian Merchants Association (BIMA) based in the Corozal Free Trade Zone and the recently revived Belize Indian Community (BIC) based in Belize City. Both have their own temples which act as community centres for the larger cultural needs of the community. The community organized a Diaspora Conference in August 2014, with participation from several Caribbean and other countries.

The Belizean nationals have been extended the facility of online e-Tourist visas for visiting India. Recently, Belize government has exempted Indian nationals (among other nationals), who possess a valid US visa or US Green Card from the requirement of obtaining Belizean visa for short term visits to Belize for business, tourism or official work. Such Indian nationals will be issued an entry permit for stay up to 90 days at their entry point to Belize. An agreement to mutually exempt visa requirement for official and diplomatic passport holders has been recently signed by India and Belize in September 2017.

### Useful Link

Embassy of India to Mexico & Belize website:

<http://www.indembassy.org/index.php>

Facebook : India in Mexico <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInMexico/>

Twitter : India in Mexico <https://twitter.com/indembmexico?lang=en>

Monthly Newsletter : India in Mexico

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