

India-Latvia 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 contracts 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 February 25, 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 from Latvia to India, including by the Latvian President in 1997, by Speaker in 2003, Deputy Prime Minister in 2003, Foreign Minister in 2006 and in September & November 2013, Minister for Culture in 2007 and in March 2016 and Minister for E-Governance in 2007. An important visit was that of the Latvian Economics Minister who, accompanied by a business delegation, visited India in February, 2010. From India, there have been three visits by Minister of State for External Affairs, the last one by Smt. Preneet Kaur in 2011. The 5th round of Foreign Office Consultations was held in April 2012 in Riga and the last round (6th) of Foreign Office Consultations was held in New Delhi on February 3, 2015.

There were other high-level interactions between the two countries in the recent past. The Latvian President Raimonds Vējonis met Hon'ble Vice President Hamid Ansari on July 16, 2016 on the sidelines of 11th ASEM Summit in Mongolia. Minister of State for External Affairs Gen (Dr.) V.K. Singh and the Foreign Minister of Latvia Mr. Edgars Rinkevics met in Luxembourg on November 5, 2015 on the sidelines of ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Most recent visit from Latvia to India was that of Minister of Culture Ms. Dace Melbarde who visited India from March 11-13, 2016. She had bilateral discussions with India's Minister of State for Culture and Tourism Dr. Mahesh Sharma on March 11. It was agreed that a programme on cooperation in culture between India and Latvia for 2017-2019 should be worked out. She also visited the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and met its Director General Mr. C. Rajasekhar and discussed bilateral cultural exchanges. She also attended the World Culture Festival from March 11-13, 2016.

Most recent visit from India to Latvia was by Minister of Electronics & IT and Law & Justice Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad from September 13-16, 2016. This was the highest ever political visit from India. 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.

The Minister of State for Health and Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), Mr. Shripad Yesso Naik, who visited Riga from May 15-18, 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. The Minister visited Sigulda where an integrative healthcare centre is planned to be set up. This was the first Ministerial visit from India to Latvia since March 2011 and gave a boost to bilateral relations.

Ms. Vrinda Sarup, Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy led a 3-member delegation to Riga from April 27-28, 2015 to attend the 5th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Education Ministers' Meeting. A three 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 May 28-29, 2015. They also called on the Deputy State Secretary of Health on May 29, 2015 and discussed possible collaboration in the field of Ayurveda and establishment of AYUSH Chair in Latvian Universities.

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 28th February, 2012; and (xi) Agreement on Prevention of Double Taxation and Tax Evasion was signed in September 2013.

India and Latvia also 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.

In December 2010, an India-Latvia Parliamentary Friendship Group was 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 April 3-12, 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 invitation had been accepted in principle with dates to be decided through diplomatic channels.

Economic & Commercial Relations

Bilateral trade stood at about US \$ 141 million 2015-16. Major Indian exports are tea, coffee, tools, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, garments, iron & steel etc. Major Indian imports include chemicals, fertilizers, iron & steel, machinery etc. There is scope for growth of textiles, agro-products, gems and jewellery, chemical dyes and pharmaceuticals.

Bilateral Trade for the last five years:

Year	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
India's Exports	96.18	104.08	102.07	98.12	79.50
India's Imports	141.53	73.63	103.89	36.22	61.64
Total	237.71	177.71	205.96	134.34	141.14

Source: Ministry of Commerce, India. Figures are in US \$ million and year refers 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. As per Latvian Register of companies, till 2013, there were 87 Indian companies registered in Latvia but the total investment is only about US \$ 1 million. 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 are less than US \$ 0.1 million. 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.

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 September 9, 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.

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 May 28-29, 2015. 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, proposal to set up an Ayurveda Chair and 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 600 and mostly engaged in business activities. This includes around 100 Indian students studying medicine and technical courses in Latvian Universities. Number of persons of Indian origin is about 20.

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Useful resources:

Mission's Web: www.indianembassy.se

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

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/eoistockholm>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/eoistockholmsweden>

Newsletter: <https://issuu.com/eoistockholm>

Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: www.mfa.gov.lv/en

Central Statistical Bureau: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en>

Government of Latvia: <http://www.mk.gov.lv/en>