

India - Bulgaria Relations

Bilateral Political Relations

Relations between India and Bulgaria are longstanding, warm and friendly. The two countries, which happen to be ancient civilizations, are proud of their glorious cultural heritage. People to people contacts and cultural links between the two countries pre-date the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1954 and there are traces of contacts between the peoples of the two countries as early as the 8th Century AD.

Bilateral high-level visits include that by Vice-President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1954), PM Indira Gandhi (1967), President V.V. Giri (1976), President Sanjiva Reddy (1980), PM Indira Gandhi (1981), Vice President R. Venkataraman (1985), President S. D. Sharma (1994), Vice President Krishan Kant (2000) and President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (2003). From the Bulgarian side, their Presidents - Mr. Todor Zhivkov (1976 & 1983) and Mr. Petar Stoyanov in 1998, and Prime Ministers – Mr. Stanko Todorov (1974, & 1980) and Mr. Sergei Stanishev in 2007.

Despite political changes witnessed by the two countries in the last six decades, India and Bulgaria, as two independent nation-States have developed a close, cordial and multi-dimensional relationship. The multi-faceted relationship has flourished based on continuity and mutual understanding and has progressively evolved into a binding friendship.

Bulgarian Tourism Minister Nikolina Angelkova visited India during 23-24 November 2015. During the visit, she met Minister of State for Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation and held talks on promotion of tourism between the two countries. Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Labour & Employment, Shri B. Dattatreya, led an Indian delegation for the 5th ASEM Labour & Employment Ministers' Conference held in Sofia on 2nd December, 2015. Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Economy Mr. Alexander Manolev visited India on 5 - 6 March 2018 for the 18th Session of Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi on 6 March 2018 and to participate in the 4th edition of "India-Europe 29 Business Forum" (IE29BF). During the visit, an MOU was signed between the Bulgarian and Indian Startup Associations during IE29BF on 5th March, 2018. Honourable Minister of State for Textiles Shri Ajay Tamta visited Bulgaria on 8-11 May 2018. During the visit, he met Minister of Economy of Bulgaria Mr. Emil Karanikolov, Board of the Indian Bulgarian Business Chamber and prominent members of the Indian community. Apart from Sofia, he undertook site visits to Plovdiv, Sliven and Burgas, visiting farms (Namdhari Seeds, Plovdiv) and factories producing fiber, fabric and apparel (Mars Armor, Sofia; Manish Textiles, Plovdiv; & Edoardo Miroglio Textiles, Sliven). During his meeting with the Bulgarian Minister of economy both sides comprehensively reviewed the possibilities for strengthening bilateral trade and economic cooperation, exploring possibilities of collaboration in the field of textiles including joint production and sourcing of cotton, silk and raw materials from India.

Important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements

The two countries have signed agreements on Tourism; Avoidance of Double Taxation; Combating Organized Crime, International Terrorism and Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics and Psychotropic substances; Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations; Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement; Air Services Agreement; Defence Cooperation; Science and Technology; Extradition; Cooperation in Youth Affairs and Sports; Information Technologies; Economic Cooperation; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Civil and Commercial Matters; Treaty on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons; Protocol for Amending the Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investment; Protocol of Intent on Labour Relations; Employment and Social Security; Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development; abolition of visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports; Programme of Cooperation in the field of Science & Technology, Programme of Cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine and Programme for Cooperation in the Fields of Science, Education and Culture.

Bilateral Commercial and Economic Relations

Trade and investment relations between the two countries, though of modest level, have been on rise since last few years. However, there is still considerable untapped potential keeping in view Bulgaria's geo-strategic location, EU membership and India's strong economic growth and profile. Our trade with Bulgaria still reflects the traditional export basket of India which is not reflective of the true export profile of India of today. Mutually beneficial opportunities exist for investment in agriculture, food processing, IT, Pharmaceutical, manufacturing, tourism and construction.

Indian firm "Elder Pharmaceuticals" acquired a majority stake in a pharmaceutical company "Bio-meda" in Plovdiv in 2007. In 2014, the first major Bulgarian investment in India under "Make in India" initiative was done by the Bulgarian company Prime Petroleum for packaging bitumen in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra. There has been modest level of investments by Indian and Bulgarian companies in sectors like agriculture, IT, food processing, pharmaceuticals, entertainment etc.

Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown 76% during 2016-17, but there is a lot of scope for expanding the current bilateral trade basket as well as for enhancing the quantum in the existing items of export and import. There are great complementarities in IT, biotechnology, agriculture sector, food processing industry, hospitality and entertainment sectors. The following table shows India's trade with Bulgaria during the last five years:

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(In Million US \$)					
Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
<i>India's Exports</i>	168.10	266.45	145.53	239.53	173.24
<i>India's Imports</i>	93.65	103.66	93.72	182.22	141.94
Total	261.75	370.11	239.26	421.75	315.18

(Source: Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI)

Major items of Indian Exports to Bulgaria are Organic chemicals; unmanufactured tobacco; medicaments; electric parts; wool; paving blocks, slabs, bricks; polymers of propylene; ferro-alloys.

Major items of Bulgarian Exports to India are Laboratory instruments & apparatus; animal feeding preparations; kraft paper; radio-broadcasting apparatus; aluminium waste & scrap; machinery for working rubber or plastics; copper waste & scrap; engines & motors.

The Indian-Bulgarian Business Chamber (IBBC) was formed in August 2015 with the participation of reputed Bulgarian companies at the initiative of the Embassy. The Chamber has been working for expansion and facilitation of business and trade links between India and Bulgaria by creating appropriate awareness among the business establishments in the two countries. During the last three years, IBBC and the Embassy had organized well attended business forums in Sofia (February, 2016), Plovdiv (June, 2016), Varna (October, 2016), Burgas (November 2017) and Sofia (January 2018). The event organized in Sofia on 24 January 2018 was attended by leading CEOs of prominent business establishments in Bulgaria. Presentations by Ambassador on the India opportunities, on socioeconomic advantage of India and cooperation between Indian and Bulgarian companies were made by Associate Professor Krassen Stanchev and Mr. Stamen Yanev, Executive Director InvestBulgaria Agency respectively. The event has resulted in creating awareness and enthusiasm in doing business with India.

The Bulgaria-India Business Forum was organized in Sofia on 25 September 2017 by Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI), Balkan India Business Association (BIBA) and Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council (EC-SEPC). An 11-member ECSEPC business delegation from India visited Bulgaria to participate in the event.

A Bulgarian-Indian Technological Forum has been established in September 2016 in Plovdiv to encourage, assist and support the development of tie-ups, initiatives and projects of mutual benefit between Bulgarian and Indian scientific institutes, organizations and firms in the sphere of high technologies. Ambassador Pooja Kapur delivered the key note address at the inauguration of the first course on Web Application Development at the Indian Institute of Hardware Technology, Plovdiv on 30 October 2017 and noted that it was a proud moment in the relations between Indian and Bulgaria which have now matured to such an extent that we have such futuristic collaborations, which are forward looking and directly impact the relations of our countries.

A two-day International IT Forum called IT HUB CONNECT was organized on 26-27 March 2018 by the Embassy in partnership with the Indian-Bulgarian Business Chamber (IBBC) and the American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria (AmCham Bulgaria), under the auspices of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Keynote speeches were delivered by Mr. Rosen Plevneliev, former President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ms. Maria Gabriel, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mr. Emil Karanikolov, Bulgarian Minister of Economy, Mr. Nenad Popovic, Minister of Innovation and Technological Development of Serbia, Mr. Damjan Manchevski, Minister of Information Society and Administration of Macedonia, Mr. Besim Beqaj, Minister of Innovations and Entrepreneurship of Kosovo and Ambassador Pooja Kapur. The event primarily focused on strengthening the relationship between the thriving IT industries in the Balkans, India and US, setting a common ground for cooperation. Cyber security and data privacy was another key topic on the agenda. More than 500 participants from key IT companies attended the event which was widely covered in the local media.

Tourism

Tourism is an area, which holds prospects for both the countries. Bulgaria, with its beautiful mountains, the Black-Sea coast boasting of cities like Varna and Burgas, has become an attractive destination for Bollywood film Industry too. In July 2006, Member of Parliament and film actor Shri Vinod Khanna visited Bulgaria for shooting of his film 'Godfather'. Several big banner movies like "Bahubali", "Dilwale" starring Shah Rukh Khan & Kajol and Ajay Devgan's "Shivaay" were extensive shot at various locations in Bulgaria. Recently Telugu Movie "*Aganathavas*" and Bollywood film "Bhramasra" starring Amitabh Bachchan, Ranbeer Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, were shot at various locations in Bulgaria. Indian films have helped in popularizing Bulgaria as an interesting tourist destination among the Indian public. Ambassador Pooja Kapur met Bulgarian Tourism Minister Angelkova on 18 December 2017 and discussed how to enhance tourist inflows and tourism related investment between India and Bulgaria.

Cultural Relations and people to people contacts

While the interest of Bulgaria in India existed since many centuries, during the 19th century, the Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Rakovsky expressed support and sympathy for the people of India on the occasion of the India's First War of Independence in 1857.

Indian culture has enjoyed considerable popularity in Bulgaria right from the days of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Bulgaria in 1926 which was an important milestone in developing literary relationship between the two countries. Indian classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishadas, Bhagvat Gita and Panchatantra as also the modern authors like Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand and Amrita Pritam are very popular among Bulgarians. Some of the eminent Bulgarian poets like Hristo Botev, Hristo Smyrensky and Nikola Vaptsarov have also been widely translated to Indian languages.

Indian culture enjoys considerable popularity in Bulgaria. In modern times, right from the days when Rabindranath Tagore was awarded Nobel Prize in 1913 and his visit to Bulgaria in 1926, Indian culture has been well received which is evident by the popularity of not only the Indian classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagvat Gita* and *Panchatantra* but also such well-known modern Indian authors like Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand and Amrita Pritam. Some of the eminent Bulgarian poets like Hristo Botev, Hristo Smyrensky and Nikola Vaptsarov have also been widely translated in to Indian languages. So far, we have signed 17 Cultural Exchange Programmes and the last one was signed in New Delhi in March 2018 for the period 2018-20.

There are a sizeable numbers of Bulgarians who are extremely close and friendly towards India. There are several institutions / organizations connected with India which are involved in promoting Indian culture, music and dance, Ayurveda, Yoga etc. There is an Indology Department in Sofia University. Two schools are named after the former PM Indira Gandhi, a secondary school in Lyulin District of Sofia and a Kindergarten in *Pravets*. There is an Indira Gandhi Street, a Jawaharlal Nehru Boulevard and an Indira Gandhi monument in Lyulin Municipality of Sofia. Indira Gandhi Secondary School, Lyulin also houses a bust of former PM Indira Gandhi.

As a part of the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures, Sofia University has an Indology Department, which, since 1983, has been conducting courses at graduation and post-graduation levels. One of the lecture halls in the Indology department is named Rabindranath Tagore Hall. There is a visiting chair for a Professor of Hindi from India at the Indology Department of Sofia University and similarly in the Delhi / Jamia Milia Islamia Universities for a Professor of Bulgarian language. Students from Indology Department of Sofia University are also sent to Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra to learn Hindi language every year on a one year scholarship given by the Government of India.

There are several friendship societies involved in spread and propagation of Indian culture through organization of cultural activities with support from the Indian Embassy. Friends of India Club was founded in 1991 and has members from all fields of life: writers, scholars, diplomats, artists, journalists, and musicians. The Club with the help of Embassy brings out "*Svetilnik*" magazine annually which covers different aspects of Indian culture and society and organises cultural activities regularly. The East-West Indological Foundation was established in 1997. The main objective of the Foundation is to promote the implementation of Indology in diverse ways and at different levels, supporting cultural troupes from India and organizing cultural shows in Bulgaria. Namaste Bulgaria, Devam Foundation, Association India, Bulgaria are also involved in promoting Indian culture by organizing Indian film festivals, cultural shows and supporting India related events from time to time. A number of cultural/educational events are organized by the Embassy in cooperation with these friendship societies/cultural organisations.

Mission actively organizes a number of high profile cultural events. Important events organized during recent times were Nada Yoga/Dhrupad performance by Padamshree Gundecha Brothers in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna from 19-24 June 2018; Dr. Ragini Makkhar & Naadyog Group – Indore, India won the World Cup of Folklore held in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria as part of the XXII Stara Planina Fest "Balkan Folk 2018" from 10 – 20 May 2018; screening of Bollywood film 'Mary Kom' in the MENAR Film Festival held in Sofia in January 2018; photo exhibition 'Apna Apna Bharat', organized at Sofia University on 25 September 2017 by the alumni of the Indology Department of Sofia University; performance by an 11-member ICCR sponsored Ras Garba troupe from Gujarat in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas from 15 – 25 August 2017; a national conference titled "India in Bulgarian Scholarships" held at Bulgarian Academy of Social Sciences on 15-16 June 2017 in collaboration with Friends of India Club; a sitar recital by Ustad Irshad Khan (nephew of Ustad Vilayat Khan) in Sofia on 31 March 2017; and a Bharatnatyam dance performance by Ms. Anjana Rajan in June, 2016. All the events were very well attended and were widely covered in the local print and electronic media.

Indian Embassy annually organizes ITEC Day reception with the participation of ITEC alumni from Bulgaria and Macedonia. At this event, participants of PCFD courses of FSI and scholars, who have attended Hindi course at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra are also invited. The last ITEC Day event was held at Embassy Residence on 28 November 2017. To promote and propagate Hindi language, Vishwa Hindi Diwas is celebrated annually at Sofia in cooperation with local cultural organizations and the Indology Department of Sofia University. A well-attended cultural event to mark Vishwa Hindi Diwas was organised in Sofia on 16 March, 2018.

The Embassy organized events to mark the first International Day of Yoga on 21 June 2015 in 9 Bulgarian cities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Svilengrad, Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Veliko Turnovo, Gabrovo and Pernik, in cooperation with important Yoga centers and various Indophile organizations of Bulgaria. The Second International Yoga Day was celebrated in Bulgaria on 21 June, 2016. The third International Yoga Day was organized in Bulgaria on 24 June 2017 across 27 cities in Bulgaria. The Fourth International Day of Yoga was celebrated with great fanfare across 33 cities and 3 communes in Bulgaria on 24 June 2018. The Hon'ble Vice President of Bulgaria, Her Excellency Madame Iliana Lotova graced the International Yoga Day celebrations in Sofia as Chief Guest. All these events were attended by more than 10,000 persons and were extensively covered in print and electronic media.

Indian Community

The Indian community is very small numbering around 250 permanent residents who are engaged in small business or work in companies. In addition, there are around 400 other Indians, mostly students studying medicine in the Medical Universities of Sofia, Plevin, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora, as well as representatives of IT companies, who come on temporary deputation for developing software for banks and multinational companies, who leave the country when their study courses or job assignments are over.

Air - Links with India

There are no direct air-links between India and Bulgaria. Indirect connections are through Vienna, Frankfurt, London, Moscow, Istanbul and Doha.

Schengen visa holders

Bulgarian government took a decision on 25 January, 2012 that until Bulgaria's full accession to the Schengen Area, the country will unilaterally apply visa-free regulations for holders of valid Schengen visas. According to the decision, holders of **valid**, multiple entry, Schengen visas may enter and stay in Bulgaria for a period of up to three months within each six-month period from the date of the first entry in this country without having a Bulgarian visa. Holders of single-entry Schengen visas and those whose Schengen visas have been utilized completely are not eligible for this facility.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India Sofia Website:

<http://www.indembsofia.org>

Embassy of India Sofia FaceBook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInBulgaria>

Embassy of India Sofia Twitter Page:

<https://twitter.com/IndiaInBulgaria>

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