

Bilateral Relations: India - Turks and Caicos Islands

Overview

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), comprising two island groups in the North Atlantic Ocean, (area 430 sq. km., population 53, 701 (as on July 2018), GDP US\$823 mn.) with per capita income over US\$ 35000, is a British Administered Overseas Territory (BAOT). Grand Turk island suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Maria on 22 September 2017 resulting in loss of power and communications as well as damage to housing and businesses.

In 2009, the British government had imposed direct rule over the islands after an inquiry discovered evidence of corruption and incompetence in the islands' government. Consequent to the imposition of direct rule by the UK Government in August 2009, the then Governor Gordon Wetherell, assumed full responsibility for running the Turks and Caicos Islands. Even in the normal course, the UK appointed Governor wields vast executive authority, as a member of the TCI Cabinet, and after suspension of the Constitution, he became the sole repository of the entire executive and legislative authority, as the Cabinet stood dissolved. In October 2013, Mr. Peter Beckingham was appointed Governor of Turks and Caicos Islands. TCI being a British Overseas Territory, the British Government is largely responsible for its external relations and defence matters, though TCI maintains diplomatic relations with its neighbours and the US.

General elections were held in Turks and Caicos Islands on 15 December 2016. The result was a victory for the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), with Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson becoming the islands' first female Premier.

TCI is neither a member of the United Nations, nor is represented on most International organizations. It is a member of the Caribbean Development Bank, Interpol, and the UPU and is an associate member of the CARICOM. It has no resident diplomatic representations from other countries. Though it has neither participated in various international fora nor articulated its position on climate change, it has serious stakes in the on-going International discussions, inter-alia, on account of rising sea levels, warming of the oceans, coastal erosion, degradation of the marine environment, declining of fish stocks, and increased frequency and intensity of storms and hurricanes, which threaten not only the sustainable development and fragile infrastructure but also the very existence of small island developing countries.

Political

As the external relations of the Turks and Caicos Islands are conducted by the British Foreign Office, our major thrust has been to explore opportunities for strengthening economic interaction, disseminate information on India as part of our outreach efforts, provide consular services to the Indian community and the local population, and to assist the Indian community in rescue and relief efforts in case of natural calamities,

as the territory is prone to periodic hurricanes and storms. Overall, our interaction is rather limited.

High Commissioner of India to Jamaica is concurrently accredited to the Turks and Caicos Islands. Bilateral relations between India and Turks and Caicos Islands have been friendly. There have been no high-level exchanges and no bilateral agreements.

Our offer of 2 slots every year under the ITEC/SCAAP is not being utilised.

Trade

Because of the proximity and connectivity, the US is the largest trading partner and over 70% of tourism business originates from there.

Bilaterally, there are no major areas of convergence or divergence between India and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Our bilateral trade has been insignificant and investment almost non-existent.

Cultural Relations and Indian community

Indian community is estimated to be very small numbering up to 250 members but vibrant and contributing significantly to TCI economy and Indian community includes a few Sindhi business families who are well established in the field of retail jewellery and electronics business, a small number of doctors, nurses, teachers, chartered accountants, and other professionals are also there. A sizeable number of Indians are also employed in the Indian owned business establishments and the local hospitality industry including hotels and restaurants.

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