

INDIA-BELGIUM BILATERAL RELATIONS

POLITICAL

Belgium was among the first European countries to establish diplomatic relations with independent India in September 1947. Our close bilateral relationship is based on shared commonalities and commitment to the rule of law, federalism and pluralism. Belgium supports India's aspiration for permanent membership of the UNSC.

High Level Visits

From India:

Minister of External Affairs, Dr. S. Jaishankar, met his Belgian counterpart, Mr. Philippe Goffin, on the sidelines of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 17 February 2020.

Minister of External Affairs, Dr. S. Jaishankar, visited Brussels on 29-30 August 2019. During the visit, he met his Belgian counterpart, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Mr. Didier Reynders and had comprehensive discussions on a range of bilateral and regional issues.

Vice President of India Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, during his visit to Brussels for the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) hosted by the European Union on 18 -19 October 2018, called on His Majesty the King of the Belgians and discussed bilateral cooperation between Belgium and India as well as contemporary issues of shared interest.

Minister of External Affairs, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, visited Belgium on 20-22 June 2018 and held a bilateral meeting with Belgian DPM and of Foreign Minister, Mr. Didier Reynders, and reviewed the ongoing bilateral cooperation and issues of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Belgium on 30 March 2016, just a few days after a deadly terrorist attack in Brussels. Both leaders, strongly condemned the attack, pledged to combat terrorism and reviewed the bilateral partnership. An MoU for bilateral cooperation in Biotechnology and a Letter of Intent on the existing MoU on Shipping Cooperation were signed.

Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, led a 7-member parliamentary delegation to the Belgian Parliament on 23-26 June 2015.

President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, paid a State visit to Belgium on 2-5 October 2013 and jointly inaugurated the Europa-India Cultural festival jointly

with the King of Belgians. During the visit five MoUs were signed between Belgian and Indian Universities.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Belgium on 9-11 December 2010.

Vice President Shri M. Hamid Ansari visited Brussels on 3-5 October 2010 and led the Indian delegation to the 8th Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM).

There have been regular Ministerial level interactions between the two countries. These include visits by: MoS for Health, Shri. Ashwini Kumar Choubey in September 2019 for the Global Vaccine Summit 2019; Minister of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping Shri Nitin Gadkari in 19-20 November 2014; MoS for External Affairs Gen (Retd) V K Singh in October 2014 for WW I centenary commemoration; EAM Shri Salman Khurshid on 30-31 January 2013; and MoS for External Affairs Smt. Preeti Kaur on 15-19 April 2012.

From Belgium:

On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of India-Belgium diplomatic relations, the King and Queen of the Belgians, Their Majesties King Philippe and Queen Mathilde, paid a State visit to India on 5-11 November 2017. They were accompanied by H.E. Mr. Didier Reynders, DPM and Minister of Foreign & European Affairs, H.E. Mr. Geert Bourgeois, Minister-President of Flanders region, H.E. Mr. Willy Borsus, Minister- President of Walloon region and H.E. Mr. Rudy Demotte, Minister-President of the Wallonia-Brussels region, and a number of senior officials. A large business and academic delegation also accompanied them.

In addition to the official programme, Their Majesties inaugurated an exhibition on 'India's contribution in World War I' and launched a book on "Indians in Flanders Fields". Their Majesties also took part in various business and academic seminars organized during the visit. They also visited Taj Mahal.

In Mumbai, His Majesty participated in a remembrance ceremony at the Memorial of the 2008 terrorist attack at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, and visited Oval Maidan for a cricket demonstration.

Mr Pieter de Crem, Secretary of State for Foreign Trade of Belgium visited India on 13-18 January 2015 and later on 15-19 February, 2016. Belgian Foreign Minister Mr. Didier Reynders visited India in August 2012. Prime Minister Mr. Guy Verhofstadt visited India on 2-7 November 2006.

The Belgian Royal family has traditionally led economic delegations to India. Princess Astride led an economic Mission to India comprising of 350 CEOs in November 2013. King Philippe (as Crown Prince) led an economic delegation of 350 business leaders to India on 20-27 March 2010. King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgians visited India on 3- 12 November 2008.

Foreign Office Consultations

The inaugural Foreign Office Consultations were held on 2 May 2018 in Brussels led by Smt. Ruchi Ghanashyam, Secretary (West), MEA on the Indian side and Mr. Dirk Achten, Secretary General, MFA on the Belgian side. The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international affairs.

ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL

India's Joint Economic Commission Meeting (India-BLEU JCM) with the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union, established in 1997, is the main vehicle for discussing the bilateral economic and commercial issues. The 16th India-BLEU JCM was held in New Delhi on 17 September 2019.

The focus of our bilateral relations has traditionally been on trade and investment. India is Belgium's second largest export destination and third largest trade partner outside the EU. Trade in diamonds dominates our bilateral trade. Trade in diamonds constituted more than 50% of the bilateral trade between India and Belgium in the first semester of 2019.

Belgian exports of goods to India amounted to slightly less than € 3.5 billion [US\$ 3.91 billion] in the first 6 months of 2019, which represents a decrease of 18% as compared to the same period of 2018.

Belgian imports of goods from India amounted to € 2.4 billion [US\$ 2.68 billion] in the first 6 months of 2019, representing a slight decrease of 1.3% as compared to the same period of 2018.

According to the latest trade figures for 2019, Belgian exports of services to India amounted to €174.6 million [US\$ 194.61 million] in the first 6 months of 2019, representing a decrease of 1.7% as compared to the same period of 2018.

Belgian imports of services from India stood at € 245.1 million [US\$ 274.13 million] in the first 6 months of 2019. This is a decrease of 7.6% as compared to the same period of 2018.

Total investment by Belgium in India stood at US\$ 1,941 million from April 2000 to September 2019, making it the 19th largest investor in India (up from 22nd largest in 2018).

There are around 160 Belgian companies present in India. Several Indian companies, particularly in the IT and software sectors, such as TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HCL, etc. have established base in Belgium to cater to the Belgian as well as European markets.

SECTORAL COOPERATION

Science & Technology

India and Belgium cooperate in the field of Science and Technology under the framework of an MoU signed during the visit of the Belgian PM to India in November 2006. A Joint Committee on S&T has been established based on the agreement. The remote technical activation of a 3.6 metre optical telescope located at Devasthal in Uttarakhand was jointly carried out by the Prime Ministers of India and Belgium during PM's visit to Belgium on 30 March 2016. India and Belgium cooperate in dedicated fields in Science and Technology under the frameworks of MoU on Cooperation in Space Technology (1998); MoU between TERI India and VITO-Belgium (2014); and MoU between BARC and SCK - SEN (Belgian Nuclear Research Centre, 2012).

Other areas of bilateral cooperation

An MoU for cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy between India and Belgium (Federal/ Regional level for Energy) was signed on 29 September 2015. An MoU for cooperation in the field of ICT was signed on 7 November 2017 during the Royal Mission to India and a Joint Working Group on ICT met in Brussels in September 2019 to discuss and identify areas of mutual interest. Through an MoU between the Ministry of Shipping of India and Antwerp Port Authority training of Indian Port officials is being facilitated.

EDUCATION & CULTURE

Around 600 Indian students are pursuing their studies in Belgium Universities in Ghent, Leuven, Antwerp and Brussels. Five MoUs on education were signed during the State visit of Rashtrapati in 2013, namely: a) MoU between JNU and University of Ghent; b) MoU between Delhi University and University of Ghent; c) MoU between Delhi University and University of Leuven; d) MoU between DU and Free University of Brussels (ULB); and e) MoU between the University of Hyderabad and University of Ghent.

India and Belgium have a Cultural Agreement in place since 1973. India was the partner country for the Europalia-India Cultural Festival held from 4 October 2013 to 26 January 2014 in Belgium. The festival was jointly inaugurated by Rashtrapati and the King of the Belgians. The festival included nearly 300 events showcasing Indian art and antiquities, music and dance performances, cinema, theatre, literature, as well as cuisine, hosted by about 200 partner venues across Belgium.

Previously, an Indian festival 'TEJAS' was organized by ICCR from October 2006 to January 2007 in Belgium.

The then EAM Shri Salman Khurshid unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the office complex of the Governor of the Antwerp province on 30 January 2013. A bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was inaugurated at the Literary Garden Page 6 of 6 in

the Faculty of Arts of the Catholic University of Leuven on the occasion of Gurudev's 154th Birth Anniversary on 7 May 2015.

More than 9000 Indian troops had made the supreme sacrifice in Flanders fields during World War I. To commemorate the sacrifice by Indian soldiers, an Indian Memorial Pillar was re-installed alongside Menin Gate in Ypres on 12 March 2011, where the annual Armistice Day celebrations are held. On the centenary of the armistice of World War I, a memorial concert for the Indian soldiers was held at Knokke Heist on 11 November 2018. This was 16th such edition. On 18 November 2018, the annual commemoration ceremony for Indian soldiers who participated in World War I took place at the Indian Memorial in Ypres.

INDIAN DIASPORA

According to the latest estimates, there are around 23,000 members of the Indian Diaspora in Belgium – of these, 12,386 are Non-Resident Indians (NRI), around 8000 are Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), around 600 are Indian students and around 2000 are IT Professionals.

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