India – Netherlands Relations

Since 1947, Indo-Dutch relations have been excellent, marked by strong economic and commercial ties, based on foundation of shared democratic ideals, pluralism, multiculturalism and rule of law. Indo-Dutch relations have been multi-faceted and encompass close cooperation in various areas including political, economy, academics and culture. Since the early 1980s, the Dutch Government has identified India as an important economic partner. The relations underwent further intensification after India’s economic liberalisation in the 1990s with growing recognition of India as an attractive trade and investment partner.

In light of convergence of economic and political interests, both countries see value in enhanced dialogue and have constantly striven to strengthen bilateral relations by leveraging each other’s strengths and are currently collaborating in strengthening and expanding the framework of cooperation in various areas like trade and investment, science and technology, information and communication technology, education and culture.

High-level exchanges/visits

There have been periodic high-level exchanges including the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Netherlands in 2004, followed by visits of Dutch Prime Minister Mr. Jan Peter Balkenende in January 2006 and the second State visit of Queen Beatrix to India in 2007. Other Ministerial-level visits include:-

Visits from Netherlands:
- November 2007: Foreign Trade Minister Mr. Frank Heemskerk.
- February 2008: Transport & Water Mgmt Minister Mr. Camiel Eurlings
- February 2009: Foreign Trade Minister Mr. Frank Heemskerk
- October 2009: Social Affairs & Employment Minister Mr. Piet H. Donner
- February, 2011: Mayor of Rotterdam, Mr. A. Aboutaleb
- April 2011: Infrastructure/Environment Minister Mrs. Melanie Schultz VHaegen.
- May 2011: Mayor of Amsterdam, Mr. E. van der Laan
- July 2011: Foreign Minister Dr. Uri Rosenthal
- November 2011: Minister of Agriculture and Foreign Trade Mr. Henk Bleker.
- December 2011: Mayor of The Hague, Mr. Jozias van Aartsen
- March 2012: Mayor of Amsterdam, Mr. E. van der Laan
- May 2012: Minister of Health, Welfare and Sports Ms. Edith Schippers

Visits from India:
- March 2008: Minister of Science, Technology & Earth Sciences Shri Kapil Sibal
- May 2008: Minister of State Food Processing Industries, Shri Subodh Kant.
- June 2008: Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Shri Vayalar Ravi
- September 2008: Minister of Law & Justice, Shri H.R. Bhardwaj
- November 2008: President ICCR, Dr. Karan Singh.
- November 2008: Finance Minister, Shri P. Chidambaram
- September 2009: Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Shri Vayalar Ravi.
- May 2010: Visit of Minister of State for Communication & IT, Shri Sachin Pilot
- September 2011: Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Shri Vayalar Ravi.
- April 2012: Minister of Shipping, Shri G.K.Vasan
- May 2012: Minister for Agriculture & Food Processing Ind., Sh. Sharad Pawar
- October 2012: Minister of Health & Family Welfare Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad
Foreign Office Consultations were resumed in January 2011 after a long hiatus when the earlier Dutch Coalition Government of VVD-CDA took over in October 2010. This was followed by a number of high-level visits from Netherlands aimed at carrying forward the momentum of bilateral engagement at Ministerial level. These included visits by Dutch Minister of Infrastructure & Environment Mrs. Melanie Schultz Haegen Foreign Minister Dr. Uri Rosenthal, Agriculture Minister Mr. Henk Bleker, Health, Welfare and Sports Minister Ms. Edith Schippers, as well as by Mayors of Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague with delegations. Recent Ministerial visits from India included that of Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Shri Vayalar Ravi; Minister of Shipping, Shri G.K.Vasan, Minister for Agriculture & Food Processing Industries Shri Sharad Pawar and Minister for Health Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Dutch Foreign Minister’s official visit to India from 4-6 July 2011 covered extensive discussions with EAM on wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues. Both sides explored opportunities for Dutch investment in logistics, water management and communications and agreed to redouble efforts to enhance trade and economic ties. Dutch FM also met National Security Adviser to discuss issues of strategic importance.

Shri Vayalar Ravi, Hon’ble Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs and Civil Aviation, visited Netherlands from 24-26 September 2011 and met his Dutch counterpart to discuss bilateral issues. He also inaugurated the first Annual Diaspora Conference in The Hague on 25 September 2011. This was followed by visits of Dutch Minister for Agriculture & Foreign Trade Mr. Henk Bleker in November 2011 and by Mayor of City of The Hague Jozias van Aartsen to New Delhi and Mumbai in December 2011. New areas of enhanced bilateral cooperation were explored during visit of Dutch Trade Mission led by Mayor of Amsterdam E.van der Laan to Mumbai, Pune and Bangalore from 25-31 March 2012.

A delegation led by Union Minister of Shipping Shri G.K.Vasan visited Netherlands from 1-2 April 2012 to attend launch ceremony of a Dredger acquired by Dredging Corporation of India Ltd (DCI) from Dutch supplier - IHC Merwede at Ijssel shipyard in Rotterdam. Former President APJ Abdul Kalam delivered the keynote address at the Geospatial World Forum at Amsterdam on 24 April where he highlighted use of spatial technology applications as a societal tool for enriching the Common man’s livelihood.

There were important Ministerial level visits in May 2012 by Union Minister for Agriculture & Food Processing Industries Shri Sharad Pawar to The Hague and by Dutch Minister for Health, Welfare and Sports Ms. Edith Schippers to New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai. Shri Pawar met his Dutch counterpart, Agriculture Minister Mr. Henk Blekker. Highlights of the visit included meeting of Joint Working Group on Agriculture and signing of Bilateral Work Plan and JAWG Action plan of Cooperation for 2012-2016. Ms. Schippers’ visit to India included meeting with Union Health Minister Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad in New Delhi. Discussions covered cooperation in public health and drug regulatory mechanisms and collaboration with Karnataka State Government in Health sector for promoting Life Sciences and joint ventures in health technology.

Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad later paid a return visit to Netherlands in October 2012 and had a bilateral meeting with his counterpart at The Hague. Both Ministers agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation through signing of a broad-based MoU in field of health & medicine, as well as a sectoral MoU between respective food regulatory authorities to formalize cooperation in area of food safety. Shri Azad also addressed the
Ministerial Meeting and Conference on "Responsible Use of Medicines & Anti-Microbial Resistance" at Amsterdam.

A high level delegation from State Government of Kerala, led by Vice Chairman of Kerala State Planning Board, Shri K.M. Chandrashekhar, visited Netherlands from 21– 26 November, 2012. Besides visiting various centres of excellence of Wageningen University and organizations in horticulture and floriculture sectors, delegation had extensive discussions with senior functionaries of Dutch government on establishing a Centre for Advanced Training in High Tech Agriculture (CATHA) in Kerala.

Engagement with new Dutch Government

Following Parliamentary elections in September, a new Coalition Government of Liberal VVD Party and Left Wing Labour Party took over on 5 November 2012, under PM Mark Rutte’s leadership. The new coalition Government, with Frans Timmermans as new Foreign Minister, is committed to continuing its policy of maintaining warm bilateral relations with India. Following is the composition of the new Dutch Cabinet:-

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<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Mark Rutte (2nd term) (VVD Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Lodewijk Asscher, Deputy Prime Minister &amp; Minister for Social Affairs and Employment (Labour Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Frans Timmermans (Labour Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Jeroen Dijsselbloem (Labour Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defence Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert (VVD Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Security &amp; Justice Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Ivo Opstelten (VVD Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interior &amp; Kingdom Relations Minister</td>
<td>H.E. Mr. Ronald Plasterk (Labour Party)</td>
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Economic and Trade Relations

Despite the Eurozone crisis, Netherlands continues to exercise considerable influence, within EU and NATO. Its importance is seen from the fact that it is among the few EU AAA rated countries. Trade and investment cooperation - a key component of India-Netherlands relationship - has shown satisfactory growth over the years. Two-way trade has continued to grow steadily, reaching Euro 5.287 billion in 2011. Netherlands remains among the top ten partners of India in terms of trade volume with positive balance of trade in favour of India. It is also one of the largest investor in terms of foreign direct investment into India with FDI inflows during period 2000 to 2011 amounting to US $ 5.62 billion (accounting for 4.3% of total inflows into India). Indian investments into Netherlands during period 1996 to 2010 amounted to $11.46 billion. The current ongoing Eurozone crisis has not seriously impacted trade and investment flows between India and Netherlands. India’s exports to and imports from Netherlands have significantly increased during past 3-4 years and the same is true for trade in services.

Many Dutch multinationals and major companies like Phillips, Shell, Unilever (Hindustan Lever in India), KLM, the three big banks – ABN AMRO, ING, Rabobank and others have a growing and successful presence in India. Dutch SMEs with niche technologies and world-class expertise are also actively looking at the Indian market.
Similarly, several Indian companies including major IT companies have established their presence in Netherlands. There have been major acquisitions and mergers by Indian companies including that of Tata Corus (now Tata Steel), Apollo – Vredestein, acquisition of Theodoor Gilissen Bankiers by Hindujas and many Indian companies are exploring the possibilities for further tie-ups. The proposal for opening a branch of State Bank of India in Amsterdam is also under process.

There is potential for further bilateral collaboration in areas like water management; infrastructure, logistics, ports, highways; inland water transportation; ICT; biotech; agriculture, agro-processing, floriculture; creative design industry. Main Indian exports to Netherlands are - textiles & garments; electric machinery & equipment; agricultural products and processed foods including marine products; leather goods; cars and other vehicles; organic chemicals; rubber, plastics & works thereof; mineral and metal products. Main products imported from Netherlands to India are - machinery/equipment; medical/optical instruments; chemicals; plastics, metal products.

A number of Bilateral Treaties, Agreements and MOUs have been concluded in diverse areas ranging from economic and commercial cooperation, culture, science and technology and education. These include:-

- Air Services Agreement (May 1951)
- Treaty for the Mutual Surrender of Fugitive Criminals (Anglo – Dutch Treaty of 1898 effected in 1971)
- Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation (February 1983)
- Cultural Agreement (May 1985)
- Agreement on Scientific Cooperation (November 1985)
- MoU for cooperation in the field of telecommunications (September 1987)
- MoU on environmental cooperation (January 1988)
- Avoidance of Double Taxation Prevention of Fiscal Evasion (July 1988)
- MoU on cooperation in agriculture and animal husbandry (September 1990)
- Agreement for the promotion and protection of investments (November 1995)
- MoU for investment promotion (February 2004)
- MoU on Cultural Cooperation (October 2007)
- MoU in the field of Ports and Maritime Transport and Logistics (February 2008) - further extended in May 2011 for 3 years.
- MoU on Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (March 2008).
- Social Security Agreement (October 2009).
- MoU for establishment of “Long-Term Chair for study of Contemporary India” at Leiden University between Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Leiden University (December 2010)
- MOUs proposed to set-up short term Chairs for India Studies in Amsterdam University, Erasmus University Rotterdam; Maastricht & Nyenrode Universities.
- Letter of Intent (LOI) for Cooperation in areas of Corporate Governance and CSRs (June 2011)

The latest revised Protocol on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion in respect of Taxes on income and capital was signed by Ambassador Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee and Mr. Frans Weekers, Dutch State Secretary for Finance, at a formal ceremony held at Dutch Ministry of Finance on 10 May 2012. Revised Protocol brings Convention in line with OECD standards.
Culture and Education

The two sides have had regular exchanges in cultural and educational fields including Indology, Arts and contemporary issues. Indo-Dutch cultural cooperation has been based on establishment of cultural institutions, exchange of scholars, cooperation and exchanges in Education & Science, Art & Culture, Literature and Mass Media.

The Embassy took a major initiative in 2011 to commemorate 150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who had left his footprint in Netherlands during his visit in September 1920.

Mahatma Gandhi was honoured in Netherlands in a special way through opening of an Indian Cultural Centre named “Gandhi Centre” in The Hague on occasion of his birth anniversary on 2nd October 2011. Dr. Karan Singh, Hon’ble MP and President of ICCR inaugurated the Centre in presence of Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, Mayor of The Hague. Inauguration of the Gandhi Centre brought to fruition a 40-year old long cherished dream of the Government of India, of the Indian and Surinami Hindustani Diaspora as well as of the Embassy. It would serve as an important hub for cultural interaction between the two countries. The Gandhi Centre, operationalized within 3 months with minimum resources, celebrated its first anniversary on 2 October 2012. The Embassy, through activities at the Gandhi Centre, has continued its efforts to combine and bring to Netherlands a great variety of India’s rich cultural and civilizational heritage and influences that have worked to create modern India.

Events held at Gandhi Centre

- Gala cultural finale to the year-long commemoration of Gurudev Tagore’s 150th Birth Anniversary in May 2012;
- Lecture by H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar on “Eternal Values in Changing Societies”;
- Lecture by Ms. Kirti Menon, great grand-daughter of Mahatma Gandhi on “Eternal Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi in Today’s Troubled World” in June 2012;
- Concert showcasing rich repertoire of traditional Classical music and fusion music by Grammy award winner and Tabla Maestro Bikram Ghose and his father Pandit Shankar Ghosh on 31 July 2012;
- Odissi Dance performance by a 11-member ICCR sponsored troupe led by Ms. Aruna Mohanty, marking a fitting commemoration of first anniversary of establishment of Gandhi Centre in October 2012;
- Colourful extravaganza of Rajasthani folk dances, traditional music and acrobatic performances by Dhoad Gypsies of Rajasthan in November 2012.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Leiden University, Netherlands was signed on 8 December 2010 for establishment of the first ever Long-Term Chair for study of Contemporary India at Leiden University. The Chair started functioning from September 2011. Similar Chairs are contemplated to be set-up soon in Amsterdam University, Maastricht University and Erasmus University, Rotterdam. Erasmus University has also signed MOUs with IIIT, Allahabad, Tata Fundamental Research Institute and Law & Governance Faculty of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Women’s empowerment activist - Smt. Elaben Bhatt was conferred “Dutch Freedom Award” at a ceremony attended by Queen Beatrix and PM Mark Rutte on 12 May 2012.
NRI/PIO community

Netherlands has second largest population of people of Indian origin in Europe (next only to UK). It is home to about 220,000 Indian and Surinam Hindustani Diaspora, wholly integrated into Dutch society. Although their forebears left India nearly 150 years ago, the Hindustani-Surinami community has deep cultural links with India and is active in promoting cultural cooperation through well-established institutions. There has been a Member of Parliament from the community. Prominent Surinamese are members of Municipal Councils, like current Dy Mayor of Hague Municipality – Mr. Rabin Baldewsingh.

The Indian Community as well as the host country is deeply attached to the legacy of Gandhiji. Gandhi Jayanthi is a major event here. There are statues of Gandhiji at several locations in Netherlands.

The Indian community has played a significant role in contributing to the cultural traditions of both countries in a mutually harmonious and beneficial manner while also helping in expanding and creating a favourable climate for further improvement of bilateral business relations through organisations like the Netherlands India Association (NIA) and Netherlands India Chamber of Commerce and Trade (NICCT). The Indian community is the fastest growing group of expatriates in metropolitan Amsterdam and has in its own way contributed to the enrichment of cultural ethos as well as the commercial success of the city.

It is unprecedented that two prominent Persons of Indian origin based in Netherlands have been awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman (in 2009 and 2011) for their contribution to Diaspora related issues. The last awardee – Mr. Wahid Saleh, is a social entrepreneur and a community leader based in Netherlands who has received the award for his contribution to activities supporting educational institutions in Assam and Northeast region in India.

NRIs and PIOs from Netherlands regularly participate in Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conventions. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Europe - the third edition in the series of regional mini-PBDs - was held in The Hague on 19 September 2009, in partnership with Embassy, Hague Municipality and Indian Diaspora organizations in Netherlands. The Annual Diaspora Conference held in The Hague on 25 September 2011 was jointly inaugurated by Hon’ble Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs Shri Vayalar Ravi and Mayor of The Hague Mr. Joziás van Aartsen, while the subsequent Diaspora Conference held on 30 September 2012 in Amsterdam was jointly inaugurated by Mayor of Amstelveen and Mayor of Haarlemmermeer.

December 2012