

India - Bosnia and Herzegovina bilateral relations

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is located in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. It shares border with Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Following the break-up of former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) emerged as one of the six independent countries. The country is divided into two sub-state entities, the majority Bosniaks (Muslim-Croat Federation FBiH) and the majority Serbs *Republika Srpska (RS)* and an autonomous territory of *Brčko*. The office of internationally appointed High Representative holds a veto power over the governance. The independence of the country was marked by unprecedented ethnic conflict between Bosniak Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats for 3 years from 1992-95. This was one of the most serious ethnic strifes in recent history. Over 200,000 people were reportedly killed (the official figures stand at 100,000). The political tussle between different ethnic groups (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) continues till date.

2. Relations between India and BiH are friendly but remain fairly low key. Nostalgic references are still made to the days of former Yugoslavia when deep friendship between Nehru and Tito characterized relations between the two countries. Pt. Nehru and Indira Gandhi remain familiar names in the country. BiH sees India as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious democratic society. Bosnia is also grateful to India for sending about hundred Indian police observers during the height of the ethnic conflict as part of United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH). Following the successful conclusion of its mandate, UNMIBH was terminated on December 31, 2002.

3. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1995. While BiH opened its resident mission in Delhi in 1997, India is yet to open a resident mission in Sarajevo. Indian Ambassador in Budapest is concurrently accredited to Sarajevo. Bilateral relations have been low-key for a variety of reasons, including BiH's preoccupation with restoration of peace and stability in the aftermath of ethnic strife. BiH had also remained pre-occupied with establishing a closer partnership with NATO and the European Union, its key foreign policy objectives.

4. There has been limited exchange of high-level visits between the two countries. Shri Suresh P. Prabhu, Hon'ble Minister of Railways, visited BiH from 6-8 July 2016 as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister. This was the first ever visit by a Cabinet Minister from India in 20 years of establishment of diplomatic relations. A virtual interaction of EAM with BiH's Foreign Minister was cancelled by the BiH side at the last moment citing indisposition of their minister. An MoU on Cooperation between the Central Election Commission of BiH and Election Commission of India, was signed in January 2017. The signing of the Extradition Treaty is under consideration between the two countries. Other agreements proposed to BiH include, MOU on Setting up of two IT Centres in Mostar and Banja Luka; Agreement on Visa-free Travel for Diplomatic and Official Passport Holders. Foreign office consultations have been held sporadically. The 1st FOC was held on December 19, 2002 in Sarajevo and the 2nd round of FOCs was held in New Delhi on April 5, 2011. The Third FOC was held in Sarajevo on 21-22 April, 2014. Secretary (West) led the Indian delegation. There is a request of BiH to hold the next round of FOCs, which is under consideration of the Ministry.

5. Mission maintains a steady level of engagement on economic, culture, tourism and people-to-people contacts by participating in various events in BiH. The bilateral trade is in the vicinity of USD

80mn, with balance of trade in India's favour. Main reasons for low trade include lack of awareness of business potential, weak banking network between the two countries and lack of reliable credit facilities. Main items of Indian export to Bosnia are textiles, cotton, articles of iron and steel, glassware, organic chemicals, carpets and other textile floor coverings, motor vehicle accessories etc. Main items of Bosnian export to India are mineral fuels, inorganic chemicals, toys, sports equipment, wool etc.

6. Before the pandemic, Mission regularly participated in economic, political, educational or tourism related events in BiH. (e.g Sarajevo Tourism Festival , Scholarship Fair by University of Sarajevo, International Economic Fair in Mostar, Sarajevo Business Forum, Sarajevo Winter Festival etc.) ITEC programme and the utilization has also picked up recently. Mission also conducted International Day of Yoga in several cities. Busts of Gandhiji and Gurudev Tagore were unveiled in the city of Milici in 2018. In 2020, our outreaches have predominantly been online with Mission organizing IDY, Indian Film Festival and economic outreaches. The International day of Yoga 2021 was celebrated on June 20th in collaboration with the Bosnia- India Friendship Society at the National Museum in Sarajevo, which was attended by a large number of Yoga enthusiasts.

7. Like most other countries, BiH has also been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. The inherent weaknesses in the governance structure as well as paucity of resources and health infrastructure have made the situation more difficult. As of 28 June, 2021 there have been 204 984 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 9658 deaths. BiH ordered vaccine doses through the WHO-led COVAX programme, placed order from China's Sinopharm and from the Russian Sputnik V vaccines. Other than this, Bosnia also received vaccine donations from Serbia, China, Turkey, Malaysia and international assistance in the form of masks, medicines, medical equipment, PPEs, etc., has been received from China, Japan, Poland, Czech Republic, South Korea, Azerbaijan, Hungary, the USA, Croatia, EU, Malaysia, Qatar, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Germany and the UN.

8. About 8 Indians primarily working for Arcerlor Mittal mines and plant in Prijedor comprise the Indian community in Bosnia & Herzegovina. A Bosnia-India Friendship Society is active in Sarajevo since 2010 and a BiH – Indian Association has also come up in Mostar.

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