

## India-Belgium Bilateral Relations

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.

**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 Europalia-India Cultural festival jointly with the King of Belgians. During the visit five MoUs were signed between Belgian and Indian Universities.

There have been regular **Ministerial level** interactions between the two countries. These include visits by: Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal, from 17-18 June 2022 to launch the EU-India FTA negotiations; Minister of Railways, Communications and Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw on 16 June 2022 to visit the headquarters of imec (international research & development organization, active in the fields of nano-electronics and digital technologies) at Leuven; 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; and MoS for External Affairs Gen (Retd) V K Singh in October 2014 for WW I centenary commemoration.

#### 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. Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda and Telecom** visited India from 6-7 February, 2017.

**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 17th India-BLEU JCM was held virtually on 16 September 2021.

The focus of our bilateral relations has traditionally been on trade and investment. India is Belgium's 14th largest export destination and India is the 16th largest importer to Belgium.

India is Belgium's seventh largest export destination outside the EU and the sixth largest trade partner outside the EU. Trade in diamonds dominates our bilateral trade.

Total trade between Belgium and India in 2021 totaled € 12.3 billion, of which Indian exports amounted to € 6.1 billion and imports to € 6.2 billion. Major export items to Belgium are

Precious metals & stones, chemicals, and Base metals. Key import items from Belgium are Precious metals & stones, chemicals, and Machinery & Equipments.

FDI flows from Belgium to India from April 2000 to March 2022 stood at \$ 2.556 Billion.

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. The 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Joint Working Group on Renewable Energy was held virtually on 28 Oct 2021. An **MoU for cooperation in the field of ICT** was signed on 7 November 2017 during the Royal Mission to India. The 1<sup>st</sup> 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**

**Around 764 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.

## **CULTURE**

India and Belgium have a Cultural Agreement in place since 1973. An MoU was signed between ICCR and BOZAR (Center for Fine Arts – Brussels) for cooperation in the field of culture on 4 Feb, 2021.

On the 151<sup>st</sup> Birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a statue of Rashtrapita was inaugurated by the Governor and Mayor of Antwerp in the presence of the Ambassador of India in October 2020. The statue is installed in front of the Antwerp Courthouse, a prominent legal and architectural landmark of Belgium. The statue is a gift to the city by the Indian Government.

There is another bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the office complex of the Governor of the Antwerp province since January 2013.

A bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was inaugurated at the Literary Garden 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.

### **INDIAN DIASPORA**

According to the latest estimates, there are **around 24,732 members of the Indian Diaspora in Belgium** – of these, 14286 are Non-Resident Indians (NRI) which includes around **764** Indian students & around **2000** IT Professionals, and around 10446 are Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

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September 2022