

India-Belgium: Cementing
Stronger Bilateral Ties **P. 16**

Belgium: A Gourmet Tour
for Taste Buds **P. 24**

Is Social Media making
us angry? **P. 42**

DIPLMACY & BEYOND **PLUS**



BELGIUM

ROYAL COUPLE'S INDIA VISIT





Vice President meeting with King Philippe of Belgium in New Delhi (November 07, 2017)

India-Belgium Cementing Stronger Bilateral Ties

By Sheetal Sharma

India and Belgium enjoy a warm and cordial relationship for almost seven decades now. The diplomatic relations between both the countries were established in 1948 after India gained independence from the British. The year 2017, marks the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two nations. Based on the common areas of interest and set of values such as commitment to rule of law, federalism, respect for human rights, cultural diversity and vibrant democracies, both India and Belgium have strong bilateral relations.

Belgium is one of the influential and prosperous member states of the

The year 2017, marks the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two nations.

European Union. It has a well-developed infrastructure, a strong and high-tech export-oriented economy where 75 percent of the economy is contributed by the services sector.

One can see a convergence of areas of interest and future prospects between India and Belgium. Belgium has supported India on many of its political and strategic objectives. It has positively supported and welcomed India's aspirations to become a member of the four multilateral export control regimes, namely:

The Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls for conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies.

The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), for the control of nuclear-related technology.

The Australia Group (AG) for control of chemical and biological technology that could be weaponized.

The Missile Technology Control Regime for the control of rockets and other aerial vehicles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction. Belgium has also supported India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and the NSG waiver in 2008.

The bilateral relations between the two nations have been maintained by a number of high-level visits made from both the sides.

The most recent being the visit made by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the month of March 2016. This was his first official visit to Belgium after assuming the office. The visit to Belgium was significant as it included two separate visits and two separate summit meetings scheduled in the space of one day. The first meeting was the Prime Minister's first bilateral summit meeting with Belgium and the second was the 13th India-EU Summit meeting. The PM in his press statement during the visit reiterated that India and Belgium share a long history of friendship. He said "A hundred years ago, more than 130,000 soldiers from India fought in the First World War alongside your countrymen on Belgian soil. More than 9,000 Indian soldiers made the supreme sacrifice... Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of India-Belgium diplomatic ties. To celebrate this important milestone in our friendship, we look forward to welcoming His Majesty King Philippe of Belgium in India next year... A system of bilateral foreign policy consultations would recommend concrete ways to upgrade our partnership".

India-Belgium: Trade and economic relations

The trade and economic relations between India and Belgium are strong. Belgium is India's most important trading partners in the EU and the second largest trading partner after Germany. India is Belgium's second largest export destination after the United States outside of the EU. Most of this is the trade in diamonds. In fact, more than 80 percent of our trade is the diamond trade. The bilateral trade

The trade and economic relations between India and Belgium are strong. Belgium is India's most important trading partners in the EU and the second largest trading partner after Germany.

during January-September 2015 stood at €9.14 Billion. Of this, India's export to Belgium was €3.19 Billion and import was €5.95 Billion. The major exports from India to Belgium in 2015 were in the sectors of gems and jewelry (€1.45 billion), chemicals and chemical products (€370 million) and textiles (€315 million). The major import of India from Belgium in January-September 2015 were gems and jewelry (€4.76 billion), chemicals and chemical products (€259 million), machinery and engineering products (€246 million) and plastic and articles (€228 million).

Trade in gems, jewelry, precious stones, and metals constitute around 82.9 percent of bilateral trade (2013). India's IT & Telecom sector is well represented and operating smoothly in Belgium. Several Indian companies in the IT and software sectors have established their base in Belgium to cater to the Belgian as well as European markets. As per the data released by the National Bank of Belgium, Indian companies had invested €80 million in Belgium in 2014. Besides, the IT and Software sector, a large number of Indian companies are operating in the chemicals sector. These companies have also established offices/warehousing facilities in Belgium, particularly near the port city of Antwerp. It is worth noting that, almost 84 percent of the world's rough diamonds pass through Antwerp in Belgium. Antwerp is today the world's largest diamond trading center with a turnover of over \$54 billion and Indian traders own a large part of this diamond trade.

On the other hand, Belgian business interests in India cover dredging, chemicals, engineering goods, banking and finance, electronics and software, fertilizers, and biotechnology. Belgium has several other competencies, which are of interest to India, such as port logistics, infrastructure, renewables, pharmaceuticals, chemicals etc.

The cumulative FDI inflows from Belgium into India between April 2000 and September 2015 amounted to \$855.30 million making Belgium the 22nd most important investor in India. The 14th Joint Economic Commission (JCM) meeting between India and BLEU (Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union)

took place on 28-29 September 2015 in New Delhi. Both sides discussed ways to enhance cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, life sciences, Ayurveda, consular access and higher education. This indicates that both the nations are keen to establish and deepen the already existing relations in the unconventional areas as well. There is an on-going cooperation between Ministry of Shipping of India and the Antwerp Port Authority of Belgium in the field of training. A MoU was signed between India and Antwerp Port on 12th February 2015 to enable Antwerp Port to organize training for Indian officials in Mumbai. The MoU is valid for five years.

The cooperation between the two countries is just not restricted to areas of trade and commerce. An important framework agreement for cooperation in the field of Science and Technology was signed during the visit of the Belgian PM to India in November 2006, which had established India-Belgium Joint Committee on S&T. A large number of MoUs related to cooperation and mutual

assistance in the field of space technology, renewable energy, health and education, have been signed between the two nations. Along with these thrust areas both the nations have been making sincere efforts to maintain close relations and identify the ways to deepen and enhance cooperation in areas such as transport, infrastructure development, consular access, health, higher education, skill development, science & technology, market access, customs facilitation and measures to diversify bilateral trade.

As per the estimates, there are around 18,000 Indians living in Belgium. A good percentage of Indians work as IT professionals, and around 800 Indian students are pursuing various degree courses in Universities. In the field of education, ICCR has sponsored Chairs in the University of Ghent (since 1988, Hindi Chair) and at the University of Leuven (since 2013, Contemporary Indian Studies). Approximately, 2,500 NRIs/PIOs are based in Antwerp, mainly involved in the diamond trade. Despite being a small number the Indian diaspora is vibrant



and a large number of cultural festivals celebrating Indian culture, music, dance, and food are organized regularly.

An Indian Memorial Pillar was reinstalled alongside Menin Gate in Ypres on 12 March 2011. This pillar was installed in order to commemorate the sacrifice made by Indian soldiers in Flanders fields/ Western Front during World War I, at the place where the annual Armistice Day celebrations take place on 11 November. Belgium also invited India to participate in the centenary events to commemorate WW I being held between during 2014-2018. The commemoration also included Indian Army Memorial Concert at Knokke Heist in Belgium on 11 November 2015.

To conclude, India is one of the most vibrant economies in the world registering more than 7 percent growth consistently since last decade and has tremendous potential for growth in future as well

due to its demographic and geographical advantages. A combination of expertise and capabilities of Belgium and potential of growth in India can deliver dividends for both the nations. There is a lot of scope for both the nations to co-operate and associate with each other on the flagship development initiatives launched by Modi led NDA government such as Start-Up India, Skill India, Digital India, Swaach Bharat, Smart City Projects and Make in India. Both the countries seem to be keen to further widen and deepen the areas in which they are cooperating and are exploring potential areas for future association in different areas and sectors like political, security, trade, investment, energy, and environment. India and Belgium are both functioning democracies, they can cooperate and collaborate with each other to achieve goals of sustainable development.