

Embassy of India Panama

India - Panama Bilateral Relations

Political: India-Panama relations are the oldest in the Central American region, dating back to the middle of the 19th Century when groups of Indians came to Panama to work on the construction of Panama Railways and later the Panama Canal in the early 20th Century. The diplomatic relations between India and Panama were established in 1962. Panama has a Resident Mission in New Delhi and has recently designated a new position of Consul General, Mumbai for providing better and expedited visa-issuance facilities for Indian businessmen and tourists. India enjoys warm and cordial political relations with Panama.

Architecture of Interaction: Our bilateral relations have got a fillip recently due to the high profile visit of Honble Vice President of India (HVP), Shri M Venkaiah Naidu to Panama from 8 to 10 May 2018. He was accompanied by a high level delegation. Both sides explored the possibilities of increasing cultural exchanges, strengthening cooperation in the field of development partnership, promotion of tourism etc. HVP announced that the Parliamentarians of India and Panama will interact with each other under the Parliamentary Friendship Group which extends to the entire Latin American region. During the visit, two agreements were signed - an Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Agricultural Research and Education and a Visa Exemption Agreement for Diplomatic and Official Passport holders. Panama also welcomed our proposal for setting up a Telemetry, Tracking and Tele Command (TTC) Earth Station in Panama for supporting operations of Geostationary Communication and Meteorological Satellites of the Indian Space and Research Organization (ISRO) and negotiations are underway between ISRO and Panama authorities on the matter. Two LOCs were also announced : (a) Setting up of a Center for Biodiversity & Drug Discovery for US\$10 million, and (b) setting up of a Center for Technology & Innovation for US\$15 million.

In October 2018, Panama announced that the National Immigration Service will grant a stamped visa with multiple entries and exits for up to five years, according to the verification criteria by officials, to nationals of five countries, including India. India has been identified by President Varela's government as an important player in Panama's Falcon Policy announced in Feb 2018 – under which Panama seeks to intensify bilateral ties with those countries in the Middle East and Asia with which optimal bilateral engagement has still not been realized despite there being tangible potential. Panama has, by and large, been supportive of India's candidatures in all international forums. It supported India on its candidature for ITU, ECOSOC, UNHRC, ICAO, etc. Panama has also supported India's candidature for non-permanent seat of the UNSC. It is however ambivalent on support to G-4, as also on its position on UNSC reforms. No express endorsement of India's position in this regard has been formally articulated.

Bilateral Visits: Joint Secretary(LAC), Shri Ashok Das, visited Panama on 30 Nov.-1 Dec, 2016, and held meetings with the former Vice Minister of External Relations, Mr. Luis Miguel Hincapie, former Director General of Foreign Policy, Ms. Nicole Wong, and also with former National Director for Investments, Ms. Essie Mastellari, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and former Deputy Administrator, Panama Canal Authority, Mr. Manuel Benitez. Discussions covered several bilateral, regional and global issues. Shri Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Commerce and Industry visited Panama from October 31 – November 2, 2017. He led a FIEO business delegation to Panama and held a meeting with the then President of Panama, Mr. Juan Carlos Varela. CIM also held meetings with Mr. Augusto Arosemena, Minister of Commerce & Industries and Mr. Ramon Arosemena, Minister of Public Works. An MoU was signed between the Panamanian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (CCIAP) and FIEO.

From the Panamanian side, Mr. Luis Miguel Hincapie, former Vice Foreign Minister of Panama led the Panamanian delegation to New Delhi for holding the first round of India-Panama Foreign Office Consultations on 11th Sep 2018. Former Vice President & Foreign Minister Mrs. Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado also had a meeting with EAM on the sidelines of UNGA in Sept. 2018. Ms. Maria Luisa Navarro, former Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and Multilateral Cooperation, led the Panamanian delegation to participate in the Women's Economic Forum, 2016, held in New Delhi. During the visit, Ms. Navarro met MOS(VKS) and held discussions on various aspects of our bilateral relations. The visit, although meant mainly for participation in the World Women's Forum, lent an impetus to the enhancement of bilateral engagement. Mr. Jorge Barakat Pitty, Minister for Maritime Affairs, visited India from in March 2015. He held meetings with Secretary (Shipping) and MoS for Shipping.

Bilateral Agreements: Cooperation in Maritime Transportation and Port Development Agreement has been approved by both sides and the Agreement can be signed on a suitable occasion in the near future. Agreements in the field of establishment of Telemetry, Tracking and Tele command Earth Station of ISRO in Panama, Cultural Exchange, Traditional Medicines and Homeopathy are few of the other agreements that are under consideration between the two countries. As per the MoU signed between Ministries of Agriculture of both countries, the Work Plan for the years 2018-19 in the field of Agricultural Research and Education was signed on 9 May 2018 in Panama. Visa Exemption Agreement for Diplomatic & Official Passport holders was also signed on 9 May 2018.

Trade and Economic Relations: India-Panama trade in US Dollar million (including with Colon Free Trade Zone of Panama in 2018-19 was US\$ 266.14(Exports to Panama being US\$ 227.26million while Imports from Panama were US\$ 38.88million). The main items of India's exports to Panama consist of: automobiles and accessories; textiles; pharmaceuticals; articles of iron and steel; plastic products, tobacco products; rubber products; furniture items; electrical and electronic equipment, etc. The Main items imported from Panama include ships, boats and floating structures, teak and other wood; mineral fuels, oils and waxes; metal scrap and raw cashew.

Both India and Panama, are among the few fastest growing economies in the world. Panama has witnessed rapid economic growth of 7.5 % in 2010, 10.6% in 2011, 10.5% in 2012 and 5.6% in 2017 & 18. Panama's GDP(nominal) was 66.03 billion USD (2018); GDP (per Capita): 15,877 USD; GDP Growth rate: 4.6%. We need to work closely to realize the vast untapped potential for a vibrant commercial relationship. The bilateral trade turnover of US\$ 266.14 mn in 2018-19 does not reflect the dynamism of our economies. Overseas direct investment from India to Panama in 2017-18 was US\$ 10.98 million.

There is tremendous scope for intensifying our trade and investment partnership in the IT, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles and apparels, infrastructure and energy sectors. During the visit of the Vice President of India, the Minister of Commerce of Panama proposed establishment of R&D centers in the City of Knowledge by Indian Pharma companies. Panama also invited Indian companies to invest in the Colon Free Zone.

Mission organized a successful visit of Pharmexcil to Panama in 2016, in collaboration with Panama's Ministries of Commerce and Industry, External Relations, and Health, as well as the private sector. Expocomer, one of the largest expositions in Central America, organized by the Panamanian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture(CCIAP) in March annually, has witnessed India's substantial participation in the last few years. The Synthetic & Rayon Textiles Export Promotion Council of India(SRTEPC) led a delegation of textile companies for participation while the Plastics Export Promotion Council of India (PLEXCONCIL) organized a participation of about 13 companies in 2017. India-LAC conclaves are organized regularly to enhance trade, identify new and strengthen the existing areas.

Culture:

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of the Art of Living Foundation visited Panama last year as well as this year, after a gap of 12 years. He was received in 2018 by Rafael Pino Pinto, Governor of Panama Province, who presented him a parchment as "distinguished guest of the Province of Panama" for his quality as humanitarian leader and peace ambassador. He visited Panama again in August 2019 when he addressed and interacted with a large cross section of the Panamanian society.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shri Kailash Satyarthi visited Panama in Feb 2017, at the invitation of the First Lady of Panama, who had visited India in Dec 2016 for participation in the "Laureates and Leaders for Children: Summit 2016.

The International Day of Yoga celebrations: The Embassy organized the five annual celebrations of International Days of Yoga from 2015 till 2019, at the prestigious venues of Parque Omar and City of Knowledge in cooperation with local Yoga institutes and Yoga practitioners. The events were supported by the Offices of the First Lady, the Mayor of Panama, and the National Cultural institute of Panama (INAC).

An ICCR sponsored Rajasthani Dance Troupe of 8 members, led by Bundu Khan Langa, presented a highly appreciated programme of Rajasthani Folk Dances and Songs on July 23rd and 24th, 2015 at the Teatro Anita Villalaz, in Casco Viejo, Panama City.

In connection with the celebration of **150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi**, Gandhiji's famous Bhajan "Vaishnav Jan To" was recorded by a famous Panamanian singer Ms. Patricia Vileg and the same was uploaded on social media.

Mr. Amando Durante, Scientist from Panama travelled to India and participated in the **Kumbh Mela** in February 2019.

The Embassy brought out a Special Supplement "India – Land of Dreams & Fantasy" during the past three years, to mark the Independence Day on 15th August, 2018 highlighting India's economic achievements and its vibrant culture.

India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) : Under India-SICA cooperation, India had set up an IT Centre of Excellence in the City of Knowledge in August 2006 and after operating it successfully for about two years, it was handed over to the Panamanian

authorities in July 2008. The IT Centre was later upgraded in 2015 at the request of Panamanian authorities. Four Indian APTECH Experts trained 25 Panamanian trainers under a three month programme, which culminated on 17th Feb 2016. For the year 2018-19, 25 ITEC slots were allocated to Panama, out of which only 14 seats were utilized

Dr. Carlos Ríos Martínez, a Panamanian scientist at INDICASAT (AIP) was awarded the NAM S&T Centre Research Training Fellowship for Developing Country Scientists (RTF-DCS) for 2015-16. He worked at the the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, Hyderabad from March–Sep, 2016. Mr. Rodney Delgado Serrano underwent an 8 week Nano Satellite Assembly and Integration training (UNNATI) at the UR Rao Satellite Centre, Bengaluru from January to March 2019.

During the meeting of Panama's former Foreign Minister Mrs. Isabel de Saint Mala de Alvarado with our EAM on the sidelines of the 73rd UNGA sessions in Sep 2018, Panama's Foreign Minister highlighted the idea of "science diplomacy" wherein it was conveyed that Panama is keen to take advantage of India's technical and scientific knowledge. EAM highlighted India's interest in strengthening bilateral relations in the areas of trade, culture, shipping and science; and for exploring business opportunities with Panama, taking advantage of the platform and connectivity it provides with the rest of the region.

Indian Community: It is estimated that there are around 15,000 PIOs and NRIs (mostly Gujaratis and Sindhis) in Panama. The Sindhi community is mostly engaged in wholesale / retail trade and micro-credit business. The community is financially well-settled and has contributed to the Panamanian society. There are several places of Indian worship in Panama – a Hindu Temple, a Gurudwara, and two Mosques in Panama City, and another Hindu Temple in Colon.

Sept. 2019