

BILATERAL BRIEF

India-Azerbaijan Relations

India and Azerbaijan have friendly relations and growing bilateral cooperation based on civilizational linkages, cultural affinities and shared values of understanding and respect for other cultures.

Historical relations

2. The 'Ateshgah' fire temple in the vicinity of Baku is a fine example of the age-old historical relations and cultural exchanges between India and Azerbaijan. This 18th century monument, with a much older history, has wall inscriptions *in Devanagiri* and *Gurmukhi*, and is a surviving proof of the trade links and hospitality that Indian merchants on the Silk Route to Europe enjoyed in Azerbaijani cities such as Baku and Ganja.

3. During the period Azerbaijan was a part of the erstwhile Soviet Union, India's ties with Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic were primarily through Moscow. India's Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, former President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (as Vice President in 1956) and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1961) visited the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

4. India recognized Azerbaijan as an independent country in December 1991 soon after it proclaimed its independence from the USSR formally in October 1991. Diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on 28 February 1992. The resident Indian mission was opened in Baku in March 1999. Azerbaijan opened its resident mission in New Delhi in October 2004.

Political Relations with India

5. India-Azerbaijan relations are growing and both sides desire closer engagement and cooperation. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov paid a bilateral visit to India in May 2013. External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, visited Azerbaijan on 4-6 April 2018 for attending the NAM Ministerial Conference and for the bilateral visit. It was the first ever visit by EAM to Azerbaijan. During the visit, EAM had bilateral talks with Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyrov and a detailed meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, in which the discussed different areas of cooperation. Earlier, Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri M.J. Akbar, visited Baku (30 Nov-01 Dec 2017) to attend Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley visited Baku in May, 2015 accompanied by a Finance Ministry delegation to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors of Asian Development Bank (ADB).

6. In previous decades, other note-worthy visits from India were the visits of Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia, MoS for Commerce & Industry for 2nd Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) meeting in Baku (April, 2012), Shri Ajay Maken, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports with a youth delegation (June, 2012) to participate in the first "Great Silk Way" International Youth Congress and Festival; Shri Kapil Sibal, Minister for Communications and IT (November 3-4, 2012) to

participate in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyer in 2005 and 2007 representing the INC at Yeni Azerbaijan Party (ruling party of Azerbaijan) seminar and that of MOS (Commerce), Shri Jairam Ramesh in April 2007, with a multi-sectoral delegation. He called on President Ilham Aliyev.

7. There have been several Ministerial level visits from Azerbaijan to India since 1991. Deputy Minister of Economy, Sahid Mammadov, visited India to participate in the Vibrant Gujarat Summit-2019 from 16-19 January, 2019. Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, visited Delhi to attend the 5th Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on 11-12 October 2018. Mr. Samir Sharifov, Minister of Finance visited India on 21 February 2018 and met with Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley to solicit India's support for their candidature for hosting IMF/ World Bank meetings in Baku in 2021. Mr. Kamaladdin Heydarov, Minister of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan participated in the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held at New Delhi on 2-5 November, 2016.

Parliamentary Cooperation

8. The Parliament of India and Milli Majlis (unicameral Parliament of Azerbaijan) have had inter-parliamentary contacts supported by their respective Parliamentary Friendship Groups. A 20-member Indian Parliamentary delegation visited Baku on 6-10 October 2013 as Observers during the Presidential elections in Azerbaijan at the invitation of Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan. A joint Parliamentary delegation consisting of three Members of Parliament visited Baku on 12-22 Sept 2018 to attend the 100th anniversary of Azerbaijani Parliament.

Bilateral Agreements

9. India and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation in June, 1998. The agreement to establish the India-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation was signed in April 2007. Air Service Agreement and a Protocol of Intergovernmental Commission were signed in April 2012. Agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) in Civil & Commercial Matters and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters and Extradition Treaty were signed in April 2013. A Protocol on Cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of India and Azerbaijan was signed in May 2013. A Protocol on Exchange of Instruments of Ratification of MLAT on Civil & Commercial Matters was signed on 29 February 2016. An Agreement on visa exemption regime for diplomatic, official and service passport holders and an MOU for cooperation between FSI and ADA were signed during the visit of EAM to Baku in April 2018. Negotiations are underway for Bilateral Investment Treaty, Double Taxation avoidance, Transfer of Sentenced Persons and for cooperation in the areas of ICT, Health, Tourism and Culture.

Cultural exchanges:

10. The cultural exchanges over ages between Azerbaijan and India have led to close cultural affinity and shared traditions. World renowned Azerbaijani poet

Nizami Ganjavi had a profound influence on eminent Indian poets like Amir Khusrau. In recent past, the famous Azerbaijani artist late Rashid Behbudov, a noted tenor who switched to singing popular Azeri songs in European classical tradition was a close friend of late Raj Kapoor. Indian intellectuals like Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore are well known in Azerbaijan and his Birth Anniversary is regularly celebrated by local organizations. A Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) was signed between India and Azerbaijan on 12 October 2018 during the 5th IGC held in New Delhi.

11. Indian cinema continues to have a large following and Azeri language TV channels screen Hindi films periodically, including the new Bollywood cinema as well as the older movies of Raj Kapoor, Amitabh Bachhan, Mithun Chakraborty, Hema Malini, etc. Indian music and dance groups sponsored by the Indian Council of Cultural relations (ICCR) regularly participate in music and dance festivals in Azerbaijan. Yoga is immensely popular in Azerbaijan and the International Day of Yoga on 21 June is attended by several Yoga practitioners and enthusiasts from Azerbaijan with much enthusiasm.

Cooperation in Education

12. Under the Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, the Government of India offers a number of fully-paid training courses to professionals from Azerbaijan every year. This year, 22 ITEC slots are allotted to Azerbaijan. India also provides one scholar slot every year to Azerbaijani students under the General Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). A Hindi teaching Center has been functioning in the Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL) since October 2010 with support from the ICCR which has deployed a Hindi Chair at the Center. An India Centre is also functioning in the Institute of Literature of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS).

2017 - 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations

13. Year 2017 was observed as India- Azerbaijan Friendship Year to mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Azerbaijan. Several cultural events were organized in association with India Association Azerbaijan to mark the year.

Cultural Events:

14. Embassy of India has been organizing cultural events to promote Indian culture, songs and dances in Azerbaijan. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) sends cultural troupes to perform in Azerbaijan. Since 2015, Embassy has been celebrating the International Day of Yoga by organizing several yoga-related events. As part of the ongoing celebrations of the 15th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Embassy organized many events, which include painting exhibition Mahatma Gandhi in association with the Azerbaijan Artists Union, seminars etc. Similarly, Embassy has been organizing many events as part of the celebrations of the 55th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Indian Community:

15. The Indian community in Azerbaijan comprises of about 1300 persons, including professionals employed with international companies in the oil and gas

sectors, businessmen engaged in commodities trading, catering and restaurant business and construction workers on short-term contracts. There are three Indian associations, viz., Indian Association Azerbaijan (IAA), Baku Malayalee Association (BMA) and Tamil Sangam, which work in close association with the Embassy of India in Baku. They regularly hold social events to celebrate major Indian festivals and events. The Indian community which is in the 4th/5th place in Azerbaijan, in terms of numerical strength, is very active both professionally and socially and has integrated well with the local population.

May 2019
