

## **India – Czech Republic Relations**

India's trade and cultural relations with Czech Republic have a long history. In the medieval ages the Kingdom of Bohemia (now a part of Czech Republic) traded with India. There are records stating that precious goods including Indian spices were brought to Czechoslovakia from east through marine and land routes as early as 9th and 10th centuries. During the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Charles University in Prague, the second oldest university in Central Europe, had many Sanskrit scholars.

Relations between the two countries continued to strengthen in coming centuries with frequent exchange of visits by academicians, artists, businessmen and political leaders. By making the knowledge of India available and accessible, the scholars in the Czech Republic are continuing the long tradition of the founders of Czech Indology, dating back to the period before and particularly after the creation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. The comprehensive process of learning about India and of establishing contacts between Czechoslovakia and India was facilitated and accelerated by frequent visits of prominent Indian scholars, journalists, politicians and artists in Prague and other cities of Czechoslovakia. The increase in bilateral trade created even more possibilities for establishing interpersonal contacts, especially after the Czechoslovak Consulate was opened in Bombay in 1920 and later in Calcutta. Thus, a way opened for a group of people, joined not only by professional interests, but also mutual sympathies and friendships, to come together.

India's relations with the former Czechoslovakia, and with the Czech Republic, have always been warm and friendly. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore visited Czechoslovakia in 1921 and 1926. A bust of Tagore is installed in an exclusive residential area in Prague named after Tagore. The Indian leader, who visited Czechoslovakia the most times between 1933 and 1938 was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. He founded the Indo-Czech Association in Prague in 1934 and met Edvard Benes several times as Foreign Minister and President. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi visited Prague in 1938, and subsequently influenced the strong condemnation of the 1938 Munich Pact by the Indian nationalist movement.

Diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia were established on November 18, 1947. Former Indian Presidents Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Giani Zail Singh and R. Venkataraman visited Czechoslovakia in 1965, 1983 and 1988 respectively. Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru paid a visit in 1955, as did PM Smt. Indira Gandhi in August 1972 and Rajiv Gandhi in August 1986. Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier made the first high level contact after the Velvet Revolution in November 1990. Indian Minister of State for External Affairs R.L. Bhatia was the first non-European Minister to visit the Czech Republic following the dissolution of CSFR.

### **High Level Exchanges:**

High level visits have been maintained after the Czech Republic came into existence after the peaceful bifurcation of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993 into Czech Republic and Slovakia after a political transition in 1989, which is also popularly known as the Velvet Revolution.

**From the Indian side:** President Shankar Dayal Sharma visited in October 1996.; Shri Omar Abdullah, Minister of State for External Affairs visited in February 2002; Shri Balasaheb Vikhe Patil, Minister of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises in September 2002; Shri Anant Geete, Minister of Power in June 2003; Shri George Fernandes, Defence Minister in October 2003; Shri Digvijay Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs in September 2003; Shri Kamal Nath, Minister of Commerce & Industry and Minister of State for External Affairs Shri Anand Sharma visited Czech Republic in September, 2008. Minister for External Affairs Shri S.M. Krishna visited the Czech Republic in June 2009. Vice President Shri M. Hamid Ansari, in June 2010; Air Chief Marshal P.V. Naik, Chairman, Chiefs of Staffs Committee in November 2010 and Shri Sriprakash Jaiswal, Minister of Coal in June 2011; Commerce, Industry & Textiles Minister Shri Anand Sharma, 9-12 September 2012 and Minister of State for External Affairs Smt. Preneet Kaur in October-November 2012. Minister of Railways, Shri. Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu, visited the Czech Republic during 20-23 October 2016.

**From the Czech side:** President Vaclav Havel visited India in February 1994 (He received two prestigious Indian awards (i) Indira Gandhi Peace Prize (during his State Visit in February 1994) and (ii) Mahatma Gandhi Peace Prize in January, 2004); Prime Minister Milos Zeman in March 2001; President Vaclav Klaus paid a State Visit to India in November 2005. Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek visited India in January 2006. During recent period, Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg visited India in 2007. Czech Minister of Industry and Trade Martin Riman visited India in November, 2008. President of the Senate of Czech Parliament Mr. Milan Stech in May 2011; Mr. Martin Kocourek, Minister of Trade and Industry led a trade delegation to India in October 2011. Foreign Minister Jan Kohout and Minister for Culture Jiří Balvín visited India in November 2013. He was accompanied by a trade delegation consisting of 25 Czech companies. Minister of Industry and Trade Mr. Jan Mladek visited from 28-30 January 2015 to attend 10<sup>th</sup> Session of Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation. Mr. Martin Stropnický visited New Delhi and Bengaluru in February 2015 in connection with the AERO India show. MOS (VKS) met the Foreign Minister of Czech Republic Lubomír Zaoralek on the sidelines of GLOBSEC 2016 Forum on 16 April 2016. Czech parliament delegation led by Karel Schwarzenberg, chairman of the Foreign Affairs of Committee of the Czech Parliament visited India from April 24-30, 2016.

## **Economical Relations**

Since 2012, bilateral trade amounted to more than one billion U.S. dollars. The bilateral trade turnover was USD 1208 million in 2015 with the balance slightly in India's favour (India's exports - USD 667 million and India's imports USD 541 million). Indian exports in road vehicles, electrical machinery, power generation machinery and equipment, organic chemicals, footwear, textiles, iron and steel and metals have shown steady growth.

Indian companies have invested in Czech Republic in sectors like IT, vehicles, tea, textile, pharmaceutical, auto-components. Indian companies like Infosys, Ashok Leyland, Tata Tea, Alok Industries, Spentex Industries, Motherson Sumi Systems Limited, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, Lloyd Group, Lloyd Electric and Engineering Ltd., PMP Components Ltd. have made investment in Czech Republic. Following on the original investments of Skoda Auto, Skoda Power and Tatra, there are a number of new and prospective Czech investment projects in India in the machinery, transportation, power and automotive sectors.

A Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement was signed in October 1998. During the visit of Vice President of India in June 2010, a Social Security Agreement between India and Czech Republic and Protocol on Amendments to BIPPA Agreement as well as Agreement on Economic Cooperation were also signed. India has proposed to renegotiate the BIPPA agreement, which is under the consideration of Czech Republic. Direct civil aviation links existed till 1991 with a direct Czech Airlines flight to Mumbai (An Air India flight touched Prague till 1971). A Bilateral Air Service Agreement was signed in 1997.

### **Scientific and Cultural Cooperation**

An agreement for cooperation in culture, education and science was concluded in 1996 during the visit of President Shanker Dayal Sharma. Czech educational institutions – particularly technical universities and medical colleges – are interested in exchange programmes with counterpart Indian institutions; they would also like to attract more of the Indian students who go abroad for graduate and post-graduate studies. There is ongoing cooperation in educational and scientific exchanges. Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Czech Academy of Sciences (CzAS) have an agreement of cooperation. CzAS also has an agreement for cooperation with Indian National Science Academy (INSA).

Indology has a very old tradition in Prague, starting with the establishment of a Chair in Sanskrit in the prestigious Charles University in 1850. Czechoslovakia's first Consul in Bombay in 1920 was an Indologist, Otakar Pertold. The period between the two World Wars witnessed a very rapid expansion in Indian studies under the guidance of Vincenc Lesny, who was a personal friend of Rabindranath Tagore.

The Institute of Indian Studies at the Charles University has many students being imparted education in Indian languages (mainly Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi and Bengali), literature, history and culture. The Oriental Institute which was set up in 1922 under the auspices of the Czech Academy of Sciences has a long tradition of research in Indian languages, literature, history, culture, politics, etc. Noted Czech Indologist, Prof. Dusan Zbavitel, who has translated 60 Sanskrit works, including the Upanishads, was conferred a Padma Bhushan in January 2006 for his contribution to Indology in the Czech Republic. 5 ITEC scholarships are offered to Czech students for professional courses in India.

The Indian community in the Czech Republic is about 1800-strong. Some of them are Czech nationals and have married locals, while others are on long-term resident permits or permanent residence permits. Many are professionals working with multinational companies like Arcelor Mittal, Citibank, IBM, Honeywell, Microsoft and DHL. Indian companies like Infosys, and Avia Ashok Leyland have also employed Indian professionals. There are about 200 Indian students studying medicine, engineering and science in various Czech universities and the number is increasing every year. There are several informal associations of Indians / people of Indian origin, who occasionally organise functions on the occasion of Diwali/Holi, in cooperation with the Embassy. Some Indians are also engaged in small time business/retail trading.

The Indian Cultural Centre established in early 2011 is functioning from the chancery to promote and propagate the Indian cultural activities like screening of movies, delivering lectures, organising the performing art events by local talent and artists from India and other countries from the multipurpose hall of the chancery. In addition, the multipurpose hall is used for Indian classical dance classes for Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Bollywood dance and yoga classes by providing the space to the local experienced dancer and yoga teachers.

### **Useful Resources:**

Embassy of India, Prague website:

<http://www.india.cz/>

Embassy of India, Prague Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/EOIPRAGUE>

India Global- AIR FM Gold Program featuring India and Czech Republic Relations:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKtRjl0A6ik>

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