

## **India-Georgia Bilateral Brief**

### **Overview**

India recognized Georgia's independence on 26 December 1991 and established formal diplomatic relations on 28 September 1992. Presently, there is no Indian Resident Mission in Georgia. The Ambassador to Armenia with residence in Yerevan (Armenia) is concurrently accredited to Georgia. The Georgian side had first set up its Honorary Consulate in Delhi in 2005 which was upgraded to a full-fledged Embassy subsequently in 2009. The first Resident Georgian Ambassador arrived in New Delhi on 25 February 2010.

### **Historical Background**

2. There is enough literary and folklore-based evidence to suggest that links between India and Georgia and awareness of India in Georgia have existed from very early times of human civilization. Fables from India's Panchtantra are believed to have influenced the Georgian folk legends. Those links were further strengthened in medieval ages by missionaries, travelers, and traders. One of the main heroes in the epic Georgian masterpiece "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", by 12<sup>th</sup> century poet Shota Rustaveli, is an Indian Prince. Georgians are said to have served at the Mughal Courts and some of them are believed to have risen to the positions of Governors. The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's wife, Udaipuri Begum, was of Georgian origin. India has been the theme for the world famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian painter Niko Pirosmani's "Hunting in India". Several operas and plays about and originating from India have also been frequently staged and decorated by prominent Georgian artists

3. The body of the Queen St. Ketevan (who attained martyrdom in 1624 in Shiraz, and has since been elevated to Sainthood) is buried in St. Augustine Tower in Goa (where the Portuguese had managed to transfer her body). In September 2017, relics of Queen St. Ketevan were given on loan by ASI to Georgia for 6 months and extended for another 6 months. This was greatly appreciated by the Georgian Government and their Church. Later, they requested for a transfer of a part of the relics to Georgia permanently. On 09 July 2021, EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar, during his visit to Georgia, handed over a part of the relic as a gift to the people of Georgia.

### **Important visits**

4. EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar, visited Georgia from 09-10 July 2021. During his visit, he handed over a part of the relic of Queen St. Ketevan as a gift to the people of Georgia. He met FM David Zalkaliani, PM Irakli Garibashvili and President Salome Zourabichvili. A joint press statement was also issued. He also met members of Indian community.

5. MOS (ML), Smt. Meenakashi Lekhi, paid a visit to Georgia from 09-11 October 2022. During the visit, she met FM Darchiashvili, DFM Khvitiashvili, First Deputy Chairman of Parliament of Georgia, Mr. George Volski, Chairman of Friendship Group, Mr. Giorgi Amilakhvari and Chairperson of the Georgian Parliamentary Committee on Culture, Ms. Eliso Bolkvadze. Discussion on all aspects of bilateral relations were held.

6. During the Soviet era, Prime Minister Pt. Nehru visited Tbilisi in 1955; Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi visited Tbilisi (1976). Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Georgia (June 1978) as EAM.

7. **List of other important visits:**

- i. Shri Parvez Dewan, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, visited Tbilisi during 26-28 May 2012 to represent India at Georgia's first 'Day of Diaspora'.
- ii. JS [ERS], Shri Ajay Bisaria, visited Tbilisi in July 2013 for fourth round of Foreign Office Consultations.
- iii. Central Election Commissioner (CEC), Dr. Nasim Zaidi, visited Batumi in February 2015 to participate in an International Conference of Election Commissioners.
- iv. Chairperson of the Election Commission of Georgia, Ms. Tamar Zhvania, visited New Delhi in July 2015 and an MoU for Cooperation in the field of Election Management and Administration was signed.
- v. A three-member delegation from the Election Commission of India led by Election Commissioner, Shri O.P.Rawat, visited Georgia (Kakheti province) in February 2016 to participate in a multilateral event on electoral practices and related aspects.
- vi. Georgia's Deputy Economy Minister, Ketevan Bochorishvili, visited India to present the 'Film in Georgia' project to leading local directors, producers and film-production companies in April 2016.
- vii. A five-member delegation from India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) visited Tbilisi (Georgia) to conduct training at the Election Commission of Georgia in June 2016.
- viii. Secretary(West), Ms. Sujata Mehta, visited Georgia in July 2016 for the Inter-Governmental Commission and Foreign Office Consultations.
- ix. Minister of Civil Aviation, Shri Ashok Gajapathi Raju, visited Georgia in November 2016.
- x. Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister visited India in December 2016 and met with Minister of Civil Aviation, Shri Ashok Gajapathi Raju and Secretary(West), Ms. Sujata Mehta.
- xi. Georgian Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Mr. Giorgi Gakharia, visited India from in April 2017 and met Minister of Shipping, MOS (IC) for Tourism, MOS for Commerce and Industry, Railways Minister and Minister of Civil Aviation. An Air Services Agreement between India and Georgia was signed during the visit. A joint feasibility study was launched to sign a FTA between India and Georgia.
- xii. Election Commissioner, Shri Ashok Lavasa, visited Georgia from 28 February-1 March 2018 to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of Election Management Bodies on Technologies and Innovations in Citizens Engagement.

## **Institutional mechanisms**

### **Foreign Office Consultations (FOC)**

8. Bilateral dialogue between India and Georgia is conducted through the mechanism of Foreign Office Consultations and Inter-Governmental Commission. The 6<sup>th</sup> FOC was held in Tbilisi on 06 July 2022. The Indian side was led by Secretary (West), Shri Sanjay Verma, while the Georgian side was led by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Alexandar Khvitisashvili.

9. The 5<sup>th</sup> FOC was held in a virtual format on 08 December 2020. The Indian side was led by Additional Secretary (Europe), Shri Dammu Ravi, while the Georgian side was led by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Alexandar Khvitsiashvili. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> round of FOCs were held in December 2004 in Tbilisi and in March 2010 in New Delhi respectively. The 3<sup>rd</sup> round was held on 15-16 July 2013 in Tbilisi. The Indian side was led by Joint Secretary (ERS), Shri Ajay Bisaria, and the Georgian side by Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. David Jalagania. The 4<sup>th</sup> FOC were held in Tbilisi from 25-26 July, 2016. The Indian delegation was led by Secretary(West), Ms. Sujata Mehta.

### **Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC)**

10. The 1<sup>st</sup> session of the Inter-Governmental Commission was held in Delhi on 29 April 2014 at the Secretary [West] Shri Dinkar Khullar/ DFM Jalagania level. The IGC Session was followed by a Business Forum at FICCI at which presentations were made on trade and investment opportunities that exist in each country. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was signed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> IGC was held in Tbilisi from 25-26 July, 2016. The Indian delegation was led by Secretary(West), Ms. Sujata Mehta. The 3<sup>rd</sup> IGC was held in New Delhi on 14 September 2017. The Indian delegation was led by Secretary (West), Mrs. Ruchi Ghanashyam. The Georgian delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. David Jalagania.

### **Cooperation at International Organizations**

11. Georgia has supported India at the UN and has voted in our favour at other multilateral fora. Recently, they supported our candidature to ICAO, UNESCO, IMO, ACABQ and also our candidature for Non-permanent membership of UNSC. In return, Georgia expects our explicit recognition of its territorial integrity after two of its autonomous regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, broke away and declared independence in 2008. They also seek our vote in favour of its resolution in UNGA on the status of IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the voting on this resolution in the UNGA, India has been abstaining.

### **Trade and Economic Relations**

12. The trade figures for the last 5 years are as follows:

*All figures in million USD*

	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
<b>Indian Export</b>	110.40	82.77	99.32	163.91	265.31
<b>Indian Import</b>	22.18	11.40	86.90	196.64	167.04
<b>Total</b>	132.58	94.17	186.22	360.55	432.35

*Source: DGCI&S, Kolkata*

As may be seen, the bilateral trade and economic engagement have shown an uptick from 2021 onwards. However, it is still below potential. The top 5 export commodities from India are: bovine meat, rice, tobacco, medicines and polycetals (used for plastic manufacturing). While the top 5 import commodities are: aluminum waste and scrap, petroleum coke, copper waste and scrap, unwrought lead and petroleum oil (other than crude). Connectivity remains the major challenge for promotion of trade.

The Poti port in the Black Sea is the only sea connectivity available currently. Indigo has started a direct flight between Delhi and Tbilisi since August 2023. The flight is operated twice a week.

13. India and Georgia had launched the FTA Feasibility Study in April 2017. It was completed in January 2019. However, the first round of FTA negotiations are yet to take place.

### **Bilateral Investment**

14. In 2022, Indian investment in Georgia was 5.24 million USD. Steel, infrastructure, agriculture and service sectors are among few sectors of large Indian investments. Major Indian investors are Tata Power, Geo Steel and Jindal Petroleum. Jindal Petroleum Ltd. is an Indian company conducting oil and gas exploration and production works in Georgia on five licence blocks through the off-shore subsidiary Jindal Petroleum Georgia Limited since 2009. While Geo Steel LLC is one of the largest direct foreign industrial investments in Georgia. It is a joint venture of JSW Steel Netherlands BV (wholly owned by JSW, India) and Georgian Steel Group Holding Ltd (GSGHL).

15. In March 2022, Indian company, KEC International Limited, won the prestigious tender for construction of of 103 Km long Overhead Transmission Lines between Tskaltubo-Akhaltsikhe.

16. Tata Power has invested about USD 166 million jointly with other European partners in a 187 MW Shuakhevi Hydro Power Project (HPP) in western Georgia. It is the largest hydropower plant to be built in Georgia over the past 50 years and the total cost of project exceeded USD 420 million. The construction of the plant started in the fall of 2013 and completed in 2017. The completion ceremony was presided by the then PM of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili. It is also the first hydropower project in Georgia to have been certified by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to reduce carbon emissions. It will generate about 470 GWh of clean energy while lowering greenhouse gases emissions by more than 2,00,000 tonnes per year. The power generated by the project is being exclusively sold within Georgia throughout the winter, which is a period of energy deficiency.

17. Apart from this, there are individual investors from India, mostly from Punjab (around 150), who have acquired agricultural land for cultivation in Georgia at an average of 10 hectares per investor.

### **ITEC & ICCR Scholarships**

18. Georgian nationals visit India for various short term courses under ITEC scholarships. 20 ITEC slots are being offered to Georgia. ICCR Scholarships are also offered to Georgian nationals to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Indian Universities. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (KHS) offers scholarships to study Hindi in India. An ICCR Chair of Contemporary Indian Studies was established at the Tbilisi State University (TSU) where Prof. R L Hangloo from India taught for one year (2011-12). The Chair is no longer in existence.

### **Cultural Cooperation**

19. Agreement between India and Georgia on Cooperation in the fields of Culture, Education, Science, Sports and Youth was signed in March 2010. The agreement expired in March 2020. The new agreement is under consideration.

20. A group of Georgian artists comprising dancers and singers performed at the 'Annual Surajkund Mela' [1-15 February 2015] in Haryana. 39 members of Georgian National Ballet-Sukhishvili group participated in Synergy-An International Cultural Festival held in India from 5-20 September 2017.

21. The group led by Padam Sri Pratibha Prahlad gave a Bharatnatyam dance performance in Tbilisi on 14 October 2017. Manjari Chaturvedi gave a Sufi Kathak dance performance in Tbilisi on 1 November 2017.

22. A 'Gandhi Foundation Georgia' was launched in Tbilisi on 30 June 2014 at the Institute of Multi Task Diplomacy in Tbilisi with the cooperation of the Gandhi Foundation, India. A seminar dedicated to 'Non-violence' and 'Jan Satyagraha' was organized by this Institute in which representatives of Canadian and Indian Gandhi Foundations gave lectures. The Foundation has also opened its branch in the second important city of Batumi and has been actively involved in organizing various programmes propagating Gandhi's philosophy of 'Truth and Non-Violence' in Georgia. A Gandhi Conference on non-violence was organized by the Gandhi Foundation from 25-30 July 2016 (ICCR contributed USD 10,000 for this Conference). Non Violence Day was celebrated on 02 October 2019 in Tsonori, Georgia. 'Gandhi' film was screened in Tbilisi on 29 January 2020.

23. Bollywood films are very popular in Georgia. Raj Kapoor is a household name. Recently, the Georgian government launched an incentive programme offering a 20% cash rebate on qualified expenses incurred for film shooting in Georgia. This has resulted in many Indian films been filmed in Georgia (e.g. Race 3, Pyar ka Punch Nama etc.)

24. Indian Mission celebrated the 550<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji in November 2019 at Gurudwara in Kakheti Region of Georgia. For the first time, Mission celebrated the Republic Day in Georgia by organizing a Reception on 28 January 2020. The International Day of Yoga has been regularly celebrated in June in Tbilisi.

25. On 09 July 2021, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar during his visit to Georgia, handed over a part of the holy relic of St. Queen Ketevan as a gift to the people of Georgia. The relics were discovered in 2005 at Goa's St. Augustine Church.

26. On 10 July 2021, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar along with FM David Zalkaliani, inaugurated the statue of Mahatma Gandhi (presented by ICCR) in a prominent park in Tbilisi.

### **Indian Community**

27. The Indian Community in Georgia is around 9,000 which consists mostly of students. The number of students is around 11000 who are enrolled in various medical institutions. Medical students from Ukraine have also come and joined medical colleges in Georgia.

28. There is a sizeable Indian community mostly from Punjab. In recent years, many Indians have brought investment from Gulf countries and started mid-size businesses such as restaurants, hotels, etc. in Georgia. The Indian Mission receives regular consular issues regarding their visas, deportations etc. The influx of Indian tourists to Georgia has increased gradually over the past few years.

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**October 2023**

