

Bilateral Relations: India-The Bahamas

Overview

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas has been one of the High Commission of India, Kingston's concurrently accredited countries since August 2004. The Bahamas had attained its independence from British on July 10, 1973. It is now a fully self-governing member of the Commonwealth nations and a member of the United Nations, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of the American States (OAS). It is a parliamentary democratic country with bicameral house and holds regular elections. The last election to the Bahamian Parliament was held in May 2017 and next election is due in May 2022. As a Commonwealth country, its political and legal traditions closely follow those of the United Kingdom. The British Queen continues to be the "Titular" Head of the State and is represented in Bahamas by an appointed Governor-General. The present Governor General Sir Cornelius A. Smith has been appointed on 28th June 2019 for a five-year term.

Convergence of views on various important contemporary issues, shared concerns, aspirations and excellent cooperation at various multilateral fora has largely shaped and dominated India-Bahamas bilateral relations. Both India and the Bahamas are members of NAM, G-77, WIPO, WTO (Observer), the United Nations and its various subsidiary bodies. With democratic governance, respect for rule of law and rights of their people, both share similar aspirations for accelerated economic growth.

The Bahamas has consistently supported Indian candidatures, unilaterally or reciprocally, to various UN and other International bodies. Bahamas is sensitive to India's concerns on International Terrorism and supports Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) proposed by India. The Bahamas position is largely in sync with our position in various trade developments and other global issues. Bahamas is not only sensitive and supportive of our aspirations to play a commensurate global role, including in the UN Security Council, but also expects India to play a much larger role in Bahamas and the Caribbean region. Being members of the Commonwealth nations, various meetings under its auspices such as Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), etc. have provided opportunities for bilateral meetings on the side-line.

Political Relations

In October 1985, Late Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi visited Nassau for CHOGM in The Bahamas. The other exchange of visits includes visit of Secretary (West) in September 2005 to The Bahamas for the Foreign Office Consultations; visit of MOS (PMO) Shri Prithviraj Chauhan to The Bahamas on 23-26 May 2006 for participation in the Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Conference and the visit of The Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs and Public Service Frederick Mitchell with a business delegation to India in January 2006;.

In June 2015 HRD Minister Smt. Smriti Irani visited the Bahamas to participate in the 19th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers meeting in Nassau. The Bahamian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration visited India during April 22-30, 2016, leading a large delegation comprising both private and public sector representatives of 22 members. Minister of Law and Justice and ICT Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad attended the Commonwealth Law Minister's Conference in Nassau on 16-19 October 2017 along with a delegation comprising Secretary, Law Ministry, Additional Secretary, DeiTY, etc.

The Bahamas is not a member of the IPU and the Parliamentary exchanges/ interactions at the CPA level being limited; there is a deficit of bilateral Parliamentary exchanges.

The Bahamas has appointed an Honorary Consul (Shri Ashish Saraf) in India in October 2006 and since then he continues to be their Honorary Consul based in New Delhi. However, the Bahamas government has now appointed their Non-resident High Commissioner, Mr. Jason Lowel Mortimer who is based out of Nassau in the Bahamas.

Bilateral Trade and Commercial Relations

Bilateral trade between India and The Bahamas has been fluctuating due to several factors including distance constraint, small market size of Bahamas and poor connectivity both by air and sea. However, both countries have had significant trade over recent years. The highest recorded total trade between the two countries was US\$ 2.8 billion in 2012-13. The items mostly traded includes minerals, chemicals, ships and aircrafts.

Year (Apr-Mar)	India's Exports (US\$ in millions)	India's Imports (US\$ in millions)	Total (US\$ in millions)
2013-14	228.03	494.21	722.24
2014-15	123.50	0.67	124.17
2015-16	11.96	77.23	89.19
2016-17	5.93	258.82	264.75

2017-18	8.07	40.26	48.33
2018-19	6.06	39.21	45.37
2019-20 (Apr-Dec)	6.06	13.74	19.80

(Source: Ministry of Commerce-Export Import Data bank)

Major Exports: India's exports to the Bahamas comprise of mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes; inorganic chemicals' organic or inorganic compounds of precious metals, of rare-earth metals, plastic and articles thereof; miscellaneous chemical products.

Major Imports: India's imports from the Bahamas includes ships, boats and floating structures, mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes.

India has signed the Bilateral Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA) on 11 February 2011 and it has since entered into force.

India made a modest contribution of medicines worth US\$ 50,000/- as relief in the aftermath of devastation caused by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. India had donated an amount of US\$ 1 million as a disaster relief fund towards recently devastated Hurricane Dorian in two major islands of Bahamas and a cheque was handed over by HC Sevala Naik to Hon'ble PM of Bahamas Mr. Hubert Minnis in a ceremony held in Nassau on 16th September 2019.

Of late, the 5 ITEC slots offered are being increasingly utilized. A Bahamian Foreign Service Officer also attended the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi in March 2011, one in 2016, and one in 2018. Two more diplomats deployed at CARICOM secretariat have attended their training at FSI in November 2017.

For the first time, Mission, had hosted India's National Day Reception in Nassau in January 2018 for which Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs was the Chief Guest and this tradition of hosting Republic Day reception was continued in 2019 and 2020 as well. The Bahamas government had initially announced in April 2018 that Visa will be issued to Indian travellers to Bahamas on arrival but in November 2018, the government further modified and now no visa is required for Indian entering Bahamas for the first 90 days provided, they have at least one of the visas from four countries namely US, Canada, EU or UK. This is a major development in our relations with Bahamas given the fact that they do not have resident mission in India and obtaining its visa through UK High Commission prior to travel to Bahamas was a painful process. In addition to this

development, An agreement for waiver of visa for holders of Diplomatic and Official passports was signed on 29th November 2018 which has entered into force on January 23, 2020. This is another milestone in our relations.

Cultural and Indian Community

Small size of Indian community, small size of the market and lack of direct connectivity with India has supported the local business community in the Bahamas to import products of Indian origin through their network in the US/UK because of close proximity and economic and efficient shipping arrangements. The Bahamian economy's contraction in the aftermath of recent global financial crisis, which, among others, slowed down the in-flow of tourism and also impacted on the volume of bilateral trade. The State Bank of India and the Bank of Baroda had their resident branches for a long time in Nassau for offshore banking. However, both Banks have now discontinued operations due to poor performance.

Relations between India and The Bahamas have traditionally been friendly and cordial, reinforced by a small Indian community of 300 comprising mostly professionals (Doctors) and businesspersons, who have integrated in the Bahamian mainstream and have distinguished themselves.

In the absence of any Cultural Exchange Agreement, the cultural interaction is rather limited. There is neither any Bahamian student studying in India nor any Indian student in the Bahamas.

.....

31 January 2020