

## **Brief on India - Bulgaria Relations**

### **Bilateral Political Relations**

Relations between India and Bulgaria are longstanding, warm and friendly. The two countries, which happen to be ancient civilizations, are proud of their glorious cultural heritage. People to people contacts and cultural links between the two countries pre-date the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1954 and there are traces of contacts between the peoples of the two countries as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD.

Despite political changes witnessed by the two countries in the last six decades, India and Bulgaria, as two independent nation-States have developed a close, cordial and multi-dimensional relationship. The multi-faceted relationship has flourished based on continuity and mutual understanding and has progressively evolved into a binding friendship.

High-level bilateral visits include that by President Ram Nath Kovind (2018), Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (2003), Vice President Krishan Kant (2000), President S. D. Sharma (1994), Vice President R. Venkataraman (1985), PM Indira Gandhi (1981), President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy (1980), President V.V. Giri (1976), PM Indira Gandhi (1967) and Vice-President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1954); and From the Bulgarian side, their Presidents - Mr. Petar Stoyanov in 1998 and Mr. Todor Zhivkov (1976 & 1983); and Prime Ministers – Mr. Sergei Stanishev in 2007 and Mr. Stanko Todorov (1974, & 1980).

Honourable President of India H.E. Mr. Ram Nath Kovind, accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Savita Kovind, paid a State Visit to Bulgaria at the invitation of Bulgarian President Rumen Radev from 4-6 September 2018. This was the first high level visit from India to Bulgaria after 15 years. His delegation included Mr. Parshottam Rupala, Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Members of Parliament Mr. Sunil Kumar Singh and Mr. Ram Shakal, Secretary to President Mr. Sanjay Kothari, Secretary (West) Mrs. Ruchi Ghanashyam, and other senior government officials. 5 MoUs/documents on cooperation in the field of investment, science & technology, civil nuclear energy, tourism and establishment of Hindi Chair at Sofia University were signed during the visit.

External Affairs Minister of India (EAM), Smt. Sushma Swaraj paid an official visit to Bulgaria on 16-17 February 2019. The visit was a follow-up visit to the State Visit of the President of India to Bulgaria in September 2018. During the visit, EAM met Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria H.E. Ms. Ekaterina Zaharieva. The two foreign ministers discussed bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. They agreed that bilateral economic cooperation is at a good standing, but much more could be done to improve it including in areas such as economy, science & technology, education and agriculture. EAM said that she had a very fruitful meeting with her Bulgarian counterpart and she hoped that it would deliver positive results and would be in the focus of both countries future interactions.

Honourable Minister of State for Textiles Shri Ajay Tamta visited Bulgaria on 8-11 May 2018. During his meeting with the Bulgarian Minister of economy both sides comprehensively reviewed the possibilities for strengthening bilateral trade and economic cooperation, exploring possibilities of collaboration in the field of textiles including joint production and sourcing of cotton, silk and raw materials from India. Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Labour & Employment, Shri B. Dattatreya, led an Indian delegation for the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Labour & Employment Ministers' Conference held in Sofia on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2015.

From the Bulgarian side key visits in the last decade include Bulgarian Dy PM and Foreign Minister, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin in February 2009, Bulgarian Economy & Energy Minister Delyan Dobrev in October 2012 for the 17<sup>th</sup> JCM; Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Mr. Kristian Vigenin in November 2013 for the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Tourism Minister Nikolina Angelkova in November 2015 and that of the Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Economy Mr. Alexander Manolev in March 2018 for the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi on 6 March 2018 and to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of "India-Europe 29 Business Forum" (IE29BF). H.E. Ms. Mariyana Nikolova, Deputy PM for Economic and Demographic Policy of Bulgaria paid a visit to India from 19-21 November 2019. She was accompanied by H.E. Mr. Velik Zanchev, Deputy Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications and H.E. Mr. Lyuben Kanchev, Deputy Minister of Tourism. During her visit, she met EAM, CIM and MOS(I/C) Tourism. She also led the most high powered delegation to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of India Europe 29 Business Forum held in New Delhi on 20-21 November 2020.

### **Important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements**

The two countries have signed agreements on Tourism; Avoidance of Double Taxation; Combating Organized Crime, International Terrorism and Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics and Psychotropic substances; Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations; Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement; Air Services Agreement; Defence Cooperation; Science and Technology; Extradition; Cooperation in Youth Affairs and Sports; Information Technologies; Economic Cooperation; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Civil and Commercial Matters; Treaty on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons; Protocol for Amending the Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investment; Protocol of Intent on Labour Relations; Employment and Social Security; Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development; abolition of visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports; Programme of Cooperation in the field of Science & Technology, Programme of Cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine and Programme for Cooperation in the Fields of Science, Education and Culture, Civil Nuclear Cooperation etc. Tourism, Investment, Establishment of Hindi Chair at Sofia University etc.

### **Bilateral Commercial and Economic Relations**

Bilateral trade between the two countries is on the rise, but there is a lot of scope for expanding the trade basket. There are great complementarities in IT, biotechnology, agriculture sector, food processing industry, hospitality and entertainment

sectors. The following table shows India's trade with Bulgaria during the last five years:

Year	India's Exports to Bulgaria (in US\$ millions)	India's Imports from Bulgaria (in US\$ millions)	Total Bilateral Trade (in US\$ million)
2013-2014	168.10	93.65	261.75
2014-2015	266.45	103.66	370.11
2015-2016	145.53	93.72	239.26
2016-2017	239.53	182.22	421.75
2017-2018	173.24	141.94	315.18
2018-2019	212.43	125.66	338.09
2019-2020 (upto January, 2020)	134.88	127.41	262.29

*(Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, New Delhi)*

Major items of Indian exports to Bulgaria are organic chemicals; unmanufactured tobacco; medicaments; electric parts; wool; paving blocks, slabs, bricks; polymers of propylene; ferro-alloys.

Major items of Bulgarian exports to India are laboratory instruments & apparatus; animal feeding preparations; kraft paper; radio-broadcasting apparatus; aluminium waste & scrap; machinery for working rubber or plastics; copper waste & scrap; engines & motors.

### **Tourism**

Tourism is an area, which holds prospects for both the countries. Bulgaria, with its beautiful mountains, the Black-Sea coast boasting of cities like Varna and Burgas, has become an attractive destination for Bollywood film Industry too. In July 2006, Member of Parliament and film actor Shri Vinod Khanna visited Bulgaria for shooting of his film 'Godfather'. Several big banner movies like "Bahubali", "Dilwale" starring Shah Rukh Khan & Kajol and Ajay Devgan's "Shivaay" were extensively shot at various locations in Bulgaria. Recently Telugu Movie "Aganathavasi" and Bollywood film "Bhramashtra" starring Amitabh Bachchan, Ranbeer Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, were shot at various locations in Bulgaria. President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind requested Bulgarian President Mr. Rumen Radev during his State Visit to drop in on the sets of the movie. Indian films have helped in popularizing Bulgaria as an interesting tourist destination among the Indian public. Noted film director Rohit Shetty and his team

who have been instrumental in bringing several Bollywood productions to Bulgaria participated in the Flag hoisting function on Independence Day this year, and was one of the recipients of Certificates of Appreciation awarded to various stakeholders who had been instrumental in taking the India-Bulgaria relationship forward. Maintaining the Indian entertainment industry's continued interest in Bulgaria, the adventure-based TV reality show "Khatron Ke Khiladi" was shot in Sofia in August and September 2019.

### **Cultural Relations and people to people contacts**

While the interest of Bulgaria in India existed since many centuries, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Rakovski expressed support and sympathy for the people of India on the occasion of the India's First War of Independence in 1857.

Indian culture has enjoyed considerable popularity in Bulgaria right from the days of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Bulgaria in 1926 which was an important milestone in developing literary relationship between the two countries. Indian classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishadas, Bhagvat Gita and Panchatantra as also the modern authors like Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand and Amrita Pritam are very popular among Bulgarians. Some of the eminent Bulgarian poets like Hristo Botev, Hristo Smyrensky and Nikola Vaptsarov have also been widely translated to Indian languages.

Indian culture enjoys considerable popularity in Bulgaria. In modern times, right from the days when Rabindranath Tagore was awarded Nobel Prize in 1913 and his visit to Bulgaria in 1926, Indian culture has been well received which is evident by the popularity of not only the Indian classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagvat Gita* and *Panchatantra* but also such well-known modern Indian authors like Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand and Amrita Pritam. Some of the eminent Bulgarian poets like Hristo Botev, Hristo Smyrensky and Nikola Vaptsarov have also been widely translated in to Indian languages. So far, we have signed 17 Cultural Exchange Programmes and the last one was signed in New Delhi in March 2018 for the period 2018-20.

There are a sizeable numbers of Bulgarians who are extremely close and friendly towards India. There are several institutions / organizations connected with India which are involved in promoting Indian culture, music and dance, Ayurveda, Yoga etc. There is an Indology Department in Sofia University. Two schools are named after the former PM Indira Gandhi, a secondary school in Lyulin District of Sofia and a Kindergarten in *Pravets*. There is an Indira Gandhi Street, a Jawaharlal Nehru Boulevard and an Indira Gandhi monument in Lyulin Municipality of Sofia. Indira Gandhi Secondary School, Lyulin also houses a bust of former PM Indira Gandhi. President Ram Nath Kovind and President Radev unveiled a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Sofia's South Park on 6 September 2018 during the visit of Indian President to Bulgaria. The statue was conceived and created by the eminent Bulgarian sculptor Ivan Rusev.

As a part of the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures, Sofia University has an Indology Department, which, since 1983, has been conducting courses at graduation

and post-graduation levels. One of the lecture halls in the Indology department is named Rabindranath Tagore Hall. There is a visiting chair for a Professor of Hindi from India at the Indology Department of Sofia University and similarly in the Delhi / Jamia Milia Islamia Universities for a Professor of Bulgarian language. Students from Indology Department of Sofia University are also sent to Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra to learn Hindi language every year on a one-year scholarship given by the Government of India.

There are several friendship societies involved in spread and propagation of Indian culture through organization of cultural activities with support from the Indian Embassy. Friends of India Club was founded in 1991 and has members from all fields of life: writers, scholars, diplomats, artists, journalists, and musicians. The Club with the help of Embassy brings out "*Svetilnik*" magazine annually which covers different aspects of Indian culture and society and organises cultural activities regularly. The special 20<sup>th</sup> edition of *Svetilnik* was presented to President Shri Ram Nath Kovind during his State visit to Bulgaria in September 2018.

The East-West Indological Foundation was established in 1997. The main objective of the Foundation is to promote the implementation of Indology in diverse ways and at different levels, supporting cultural troupes from India and organizing cultural shows in Bulgaria. Namaste Bulgaria, Devam Foundation, Association India, Bulgaria are also involved in promoting Indian culture by organizing Indian film festivals, cultural shows and supporting India related events from time to time. A number of cultural/educational events are organized by the Embassy in cooperation with these friendship societies/cultural organisations.

Mission actively organizes a number of high profile cultural events. Important events organized during recent times were, an ICCR-sponsored Kathkali dance performance led by Shri Rajashekharan Madhava Kurup during 5 International Yoga Day celebrations in Sofia, Plovdiv and Pernik in June 2019, screening of Indian movies – 'Gandhi Lives' and a Bollywood film in the MENAR Film Festival held in Sofia in January 2019 and 'The Spirit of Freedom' and "Mooknayak" and a Bollywood film in January 2020. Festival of India in Varna and Diwali Carnival in October 2018; Nada Yoga/Dhrupad performance by Padamshree Gundecha Brothers in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna from 19-24 June 2018 and again in June 2019 when they visited and held recitals in Sofia; Dr. Ragini Makkhar & Naadyog Group – Indore, India won the World Cup of Folklore held in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria as part of the XXII Stara Planina Fest "Balkan Folk 2018" from 10 – 20 May 2018; photo exhibition 'Apna Apna Bharat', organized at Sofia University on 25 September 2017 by the alumni of the Indology Department of Sofia University; performance by an 11-member ICCR sponsored Ras Garba troupe from Gujarat in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas from 15 – 25 August 2017; a national conference titled "India in Bulgarian Scholarships" held at Bulgarian Academy of Social Sciences on 15-16 June 2017 in collaboration with Friends of India Club; a sitar recital by Ustad Irshad Khan (nephew of Ustad Vilayat Khan) in Sofia on 31 March 2017; and a Bharatnatyam dance performance by Ms. Anjana Rajan in June, 2016, etc. All the events were very well attended and were widely covered in the local print and electronic media

Indian Embassy annually organizes ITEC Day reception with the participation of ITEC alumni from Bulgaria and Macedonia. At this event, participants of PCFD courses of FSI and scholars, who have attended Hindi course at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra are also invited. The last ITEC Day event was held at Embassy Residence on 11th October 2019. To promote and propagate Hindi language, Vishwa Hindi Diwas is celebrated annually at Sofia in cooperation with local cultural organizations and the Indology Department of Sofia University. A well-attended cultural event to mark Vishwa Hindi Diwas was organised in Sofia on 10 January 2019, while Hindi Diwas was celebrated in the Embassy on 13 September 2019.

The Embassy organized events to mark the first International Day of Yoga (IDY) on 21 June 2015 in 9 Bulgarian cities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Svilengrad, Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Veliko Turnovo, Gabrovo and Pernik, in cooperation with important Yoga centers and various Indophile organizations of Bulgaria. The 2<sup>nd</sup> IDY was celebrated in Bulgaria on 21 June, 2016. The 3<sup>rd</sup> IDY was organized in Bulgaria on 24 June 2017 across 27 cities in Bulgaria. The 4<sup>th</sup> IDY was celebrated across 36 cities in Bulgaria on 24 June 2018. The Hon'ble Vice President of Bulgaria, Her Excellency Madame Iliana Iotova graced the International Yoga Day celebrations in Sofia as Chief Guest. The 5<sup>th</sup> IDY was celebrated in Bulgaria in record 43 cities and the celebrations began with a spectacular Yoga flash session at the iconic Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia. The event in Sofia was held at the prestigious National Palace of Culture on 16 June 2019. Dr. Nigyar Dzhafer, Vice President of the National Assembly (Parliament) and Mr. Ognyan Gerdzhiyov, former President of the National Assembly & Prime Minister graced the occasion as the Chief Guests. Prominent celebrity guests included Mr. Nikolay Sirakov, Member of Parliament, Ms. Aleksandra Jekova, Olympic Champion, Ms. Dessislava Bakarjieva, Actress and Mrs. Dyana Dafova, Singer. Swami Jyotirmaya of the Art of Living did a special guided Yoga session which was attended by MPs, Ambassadors and senior government officials. All the IDY events in Bulgaria were attended by more than 15,000 persons and were extensively covered in print and electronic media

To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Embassy organized a series of events, most notably a flagship event entitled "Celebrating 150 years of the Mahatma: A Tribute by Bulgarians to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi" at the prestigious Oborishte 5 Gallery in Sofia on the eve of Gandhiji's birthday. The event showcased artwork including paintings, sculptures and 3D images by 20 eminent Bulgarian artists and sculptors specially created for the event in an exhibition titled "Mahatma Gandhi – The Vigour of Truth". A special commemorative stamp on Mahatma Gandhi along with a first day cover, were released on the occasion by Ambassador Pooja Kapur along with the Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Transport, IT and Communications Ms. Andreana Atanasova and Mr. Deyan Duneshki, CEO of Bulgarian Post. The event also included musical tributes to the Father of the Nation and Satyavarta talks by eminent Bulgarians. In addition, events were held in Varna, Blagoevgrad, Plovdiv, etc.

The Embassy of India organised three special events to commemorate the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji in November 2019. These included a public event at Svetiya Nedelya Square on Gurburab with langar and a Bhangra flash mob. A flagship event at the Chancery on 12 November with Gurbani Kirtan and discourses on Guru Nanak Devji by Pradhans and Ragis of the Namdhari Sangat

was organised at the Chancery and a programme of lectures by eminent academicians on Guru Nanak Devji and Sikhism was organised at the Indology Department of Sofia University.

A number of events were held as part of 'Constitution Day and Campaign on Citizens' Duties' Mr. Lozan Panov, President (Chief Justice) of the Supreme Court of Cassation delivered the keynote address at Constitution Day celebrations at the Embassy on 26 November 2019. Mounting of a permanent exhibition on the 'Making of Indian Constitution', sharing of a video bytes, screening of documentaries and a social media campaign on the Indian Constitution, etc. were part of the celebrations.

### **Indian Community**

The Indian community is small numbering around 700 who are mostly professionals working for companies or self employed in small businesses. There are around 300 Indian students mostly studying medicine in universities in Sofia, Pleven, Plovdiv, Varna and Stara Zagora.

### **Air - Links with India**

There are no direct air-links between India and Bulgaria. Indirect connections are through Vienna, Frankfurt, London, Moscow, Istanbul and Doha.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India Sofia Website:

<http://www.indembsofia.org>

Embassy of India Sofia FaceBook Page:

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

Embassy of India Sofia Twitter Page:

<https://twitter.com/IndiaInBulgaria>

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