

India-Serbia Bilateral Relations

Political Relations

India and Serbia (as part of former Yugoslavia) have traditionally enjoyed deep friendship, as co-founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. The deep bond of friendship continued in subsequent decades resulting in close and friendly ties between India and Serbia. In 2023, the two countries celebrated the 75th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. India gives principled support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and has not recognized Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Kosovo. India and Serbia share converging views on many global issues and support each other in international fora.

2. Hon'ble President of India Mrs. Droupadi Murmu paid a State Visit to Serbia from 07-09 June, 2023 at the invitation of H.E. Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia. This was her first visit to Europe, and the first-ever visit by a Head of State of either country. President was accompanied by Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, Minister of State for Rural Development, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, MP Mrs. Rama Devi, and an official delegation. Upon arrival, President paid floral tributes at the bust of Mahatma Gandhi in Belgrade. She interacted with the Indian community and friends of India. In her address, she highlighted the emergence of India as an economic power and the myriad of opportunities that it offers and called upon them to contribute positively towards strengthening India-Serbia relationship. After the Ceremonial Guard of Honour at the Serbia Palace on 8 June 2023, the President led the delegation-level talks and addressed a joint business event. Later, Dr. Vladimir Orlić, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia called on the President. She also laid a wreath at the 'Monument to the Unknown Hero', atop Mount Avala. During bilateral discussions, President Vučić was joined by eight Ministers (Defence; Agriculture; Culture; Health; Mining & Energy; Construction, Transport & Infrastructure; Trade; and Tourism & Youth) from his government. Discussions revolved around potential mutual engagements in sectors, including defence and military-tech cooperation, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, industrial cooperation, information technology, AI, and cultural cooperation, including film production and cinematography. The President met with the then Prime Minister of Serbia H.E. Ms. Ana Brnabić and discussed potential cooperation in trade, digitalization, cybersecurity, tourism, and culture.

3. In November 2023, President Aleksandar Vucic participated in the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit, in virtual format, which was hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In January 2024, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar met with Serbia's First Dy. Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mr. Ivica Dacic at Kampala, on the sidelines of the NAM summit.

4. In December 2024, Mr. Jitin Prasada, MOS for Electronics & IT led a 6-member delegation to attend the GPAI Summit in Belgrade. During the Summit, India transferred the GPAI chairmanship to Serbia. Mrs. Meenakshi Lekhi, MOS for External Affairs had visited Serbia during 11-12 October 2021. She led the Indian delegation as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister at the high level commemorative meeting to mark the 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement held at Belgrade. During her visit, MOS called on the President and the PM of Serbia. She also held meetings with Ministers of Defence, Trade & Culture besides holding detailed discussions with the Serbian Foreign Minister. The Cultural Exchange Program was signed during the visit.

5. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Serbia on 7-9 November 2019 and met the Serbian President and many other dignitaries including Speaker of National Assembly of Serbia; Defence Minister; First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In addition, EAM also met members of Indian community and Friends of India in Serbia (Serbians with strong business and cultural links with India). Cooperation in international forums, regular exchange of high level visits between India and Serbia, and further development of relations in economic and trade areas such as IT, Agriculture, Tourism, film production, Pharmaceuticals and Defence industry were identified as areas of cooperation. Agreement on Defence Cooperation between India and Serbia was signed during the visit. A full-page interview of EAM was also published in leading Serbian Politika. Earlier, Speaker, Lok Sabha led a parliamentary delegation to participate in 141st Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Belgrade on 12-18 October 2019. On the sidelines of the IPU Assembly, Speaker met Speaker of Serbian National Assembly, and Prime Minister of Serbia. Dr. Jitendra Singh, MOS (PMO) visited Serbia from 12-16 October, 2016 and met PM Aleksandar Vucic, Speaker Maja Gojkovic, First DPM & FM Ivica Dacic, DPM and Minister of Trade, Tourism & Telecommunications, Rasim Ljajic and Minister of Agriculture & Environmental Protection Branislav Nedimovic. MOU on Cooperation in the field of IT & Electronics was signed during the visit. Raksha Mantri Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman met Serbia's Defence Minister Mr. Aleksandar Vulin in April 2018 on the sidelines of the VII Moscow Conference on

International Security (MCIS 2018) to discuss the prospects of bilateral defence cooperation.

6. In a first in three decades, Vice President paid an official visit to Serbia during 14-16 September 2018 and met with President Aleksandar Vucic, the then Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and Ms. Maja Gojkovic, former Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia. Both sides expressed commitment to further build on long-standing friendly ties and to enhance cooperation in the areas of priority such as agriculture, food processing, defence manufacturing, S&T, IT, infrastructure, tourism and pharmaceuticals. The Vice President addressed the special session of the National Assembly of Serbia. On the occasion of 70th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations, Serbia Post and Department of Post of India jointly released commemorative stamps on Serbian scientist and inventor, Nikola Tesla and Swami Vivekananda. Vice President and Serbian President addressed the India-Serbia Business Forum where large number of Serbian companies and Indian business delegation took part. At the forum, bilateral cooperation in the area of agriculture, pharmacy, IT industry, tourism, education, etc, were discussed. Two agreements were signed during the visit : (a) Revised Air Services Agreement (b) Agreement on Cooperation in Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine.

7. From the Serbian side, President Aleksandar Vucic participated in the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit [Concluding Leaders' session] on 17.11.2023, hosted by Prime Minister Modi, in virtual format. Serbian Interior Minister Mr. Aleksandar Vulin visited New Delhi during 18-21 October 2022 and led the Serbian delegation to the 90th session of the INTERPOL General Assembly, organized by the CBI in New Delhi. Foreign Minister of Serbia Mr. Nikola Selakovic visited India in September 2021. President Aleksandar Vucic, as the then Prime Minister, visited India from 9-12 January, 2017 to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Summit where he held delegation level talks with the Hon'ble Prime Minister. Among other things, both sides agreed on the need to promote economic cooperation, especially in food production, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, defence industry, health, tourism and IT. Addressing the businesses in Ahmedabad and Mumbai, Mr. Vucic invited Indian investors and promised to provide the best possible business conditions for Indian companies in Serbia. First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Serbia Ivica Dacic visited India in May 2018 at EAM's invitation and held bilateral talks on various topics of mutual interest. He also called on the Vice President. A new comprehensive bilateral agreement on cooperation in the fields of culture, arts,

youth, sports and mass media was signed. Mr. Branislav Nedimovic, Serbian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry & Water Management led a delegation including agro processing companies to World Food India, New Delhi (3-5 November 2017) where Serbian companies exhibited frozen fruits, confectionery, dried fruits, etc. A 3-member Serbian Defence delegation visited the Aero-India show 2023 held at Bangalore from 13-17 Feb. 2023. A business delegation from Serbia, led by State Secretary Milan Čukić, visited Delhi from 14th to 17th February 2023 for enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries. The Serbian business delegation comprised around 20 businesspeople from 14 companies. On 15th February 2023, Serbia-India business forum was held, which was organized by the CII, New Delhi.

8. A Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between India and Yugoslavia was signed in June 1995. The 8th Foreign Office Consultations between India and Serbia was held on 03 February 2023 in New Delhi. The Consultations reviewed existing bilateral ties in various areas of cooperation such as economic relations, defence, science & technology, research & development, culture etc. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and the Post of Serbia jointly issued a postal stamp in December 2023, which carries the image of the Victor monument in Belgrade and the Statue of Unity in India.

9. **Agreements** : Existing agreements include : (i) Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) [2006] (ii) Trade Agreement (MFN status) [2006] (iii) Tourism Agreement [2004] (iv) MOU on Agricultural Cooperation [2009] (v) MOU on Cooperation in Science and Technology [2004] (vi) MOU on IT & Electronics [October 2016] (vii) MOU on Archives (Oct 2017) (viii) MOU on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Youth, Sports and Mass Media (2018) (ix) Revised Air Services Agreement [2018] (x) Agreement on Plant Quarantine and Plant Protection (2018) (xi) Agreement of Defence Cooperation (November 2019) (xii) Cultural Exchange Program (Oct. 2021) (xiii) MOU between Prasar Bharti & PINK TV Serbia (October 2022)

10. **Training:** The ITEC Programme was extended to Serbia in 2008 and since then 172 Serbian ITEC trainees have undergone training in India including in IT, telecommunications, WTO, English language, SMEs, management, finance, textiles, rural development, environment, yoga, etc. Serbia has been availing of Training of Diplomats under PCFD and so far 13 Serbian diplomats

have undertaken this training. Serbian military officers are also availing UN Peacekeeping training courses in India.

11. **Visa:** In order to align its visa policy with that of the EU, Serbia re-introduced visa for Indian nationals w.e.f. 1.1.2023 after withdrawing their earlier visa free facility which they had unilaterally started from September 2017. Serbian nationals are increasingly using e-visa facility to enter India.

Economic & Commercial Relations

12. As per data of the Serbian Statistical Office, total bilateral trade during Jan-Dec. 2024 stands at USD 405.5 million, compared to USD 383.6 million during the calendar year 2023. Exports to Serbia in 2024 [380 million US Dollars] represent an increase of about 7% compared to the USD 355 million in 2023. In 2022, bilateral trade amounted to 326.90 million US Dollars, compared to the USD 255.9 million in 2021. Indian-Serbian Chamber of Business and Commerce was also set up in Belgrade in January 2024.

13. Major Indian investments and present collaboration of Indian & Serbian companies are : Embassy Group has developed an IT Park in Indjija (Serbia) ; Chennai based TAFE exporting tractors to Serbia for over six decades acquired strategic asset of Serbian IMT ; CG Group India has invested Euro 9m in a noodle factory in Ruma; Mahindra and Sonalika have assembly lines through local partners; A UAE-based Indian company Mulk Holdings (Alubond Europe) has invested USD 20m in Serbia for manufacturing aluminum panels; and Himalaya Herbals, Panacea Biotec, HiMedia Laboratories, etc have local representatives. In November 2021, Motherson Sumi of India opened its second factory in Serbia. New facility produces parts for the interiors of luxury cars such as Porsche, Audi and BMW etc. Euro 38 million have been invested. The other Serbian facility PKC Wiring Systems, a Finnish company was acquired by Motherson in 2017. Both companies put together have investment of about Euro 65 million and provide employment to about 4500 people. In 2022, PKC Wiring Systems doo, a member of the international Motherson Group, opened a part factory where 900 people would be employed in Pozarevac. This is the company's third facility in Serbia – it employs 3,826 workers in the factory in Smederevo and 286 in Cuprija. In 2023, the Indian producer of electronics for the automotive industry Sona Comstar announced that an agreement has been made on acquisition of 54% of the Serbian tech company Novelic for Euro 40.5 million.

14. Joint Economic Committee (JEC): The India-Serbia JEC was established under the Agreement on Trade & Economic Cooperation signed on 7th Feb 2006. Three such meetings have been held so far.

Cultural Relations

15. Serbian people have lot of interest in Indian culture and Mission has been taking initiatives to enhance and deepen its activities. There is also a lot of interest in Serbia on Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore visited Serbia in 1926 and gave two lectures in the Belgrade University. Serbia has two streets named after Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru with the busts of the two leaders. The streets were named in 1970s and the busts of the leaders installed in late 1990s (Pt. Nehru) & 2007 (Mahatma Gandhi), on the occasion of declaration of 2nd October as the International Day of Non-violence. Serbia co-sponsored India's Resolutions at UN for declaring October 2 as International Day of Non-violence and June 21 as International Day of Yoga.

16. Serbia participated very actively in celebrating 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Government of Serbia hosted Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter Smt Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee for her visit to Serbia in April 2019. Serbian government translated her book "Reflection of an Extraordinary Era" into Serbian language and published it in Serbia. Serbia Post released a commemorative stamp on Mahatma Gandhi. City of Belgrade co-organized tree plantation and cycling events. Twelve Serbian schools across the country hosted Ambassador of a talk on Gandhiji and his ideals. In commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Embassy of India, in association of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), organized a *Bharatnatyam* dance performance in Belgrade on 5 August 2019.

17. As part of the celebrations to mark the 75 years of India's independence, the Embassy collaborated with the Department of Posts, Serbia for issue of a stamp on the theme of "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav". The Serbian Post released the special stamp in Belgrade on 27 December 2022 in the presence of the former Ambassador of India Mr. Sanjiv Kohli and the Serbian First Dy. Prime Minister & Foreign Minister Mr. Ivica Dacic. The Embassy launched Sanskrit learning app "Little Guru" in April 2021. As part of India @ 75 celebrations, a Talk on Tagore's visit (in 1926) to Belgrade was organized at the University of Belgrade in May

2021. Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, in his monthly address (Mann in Baat) to the nation on 26.12.2021, lauded the efforts of Serbian author Dr. Momir Nikic who has written a Sanskrit-Serbian dictionary.

18. To mark the 75th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, a jubilee stamp was issued jointly by the Serbian Foreign Ministry and Serbia Post in December 2023 as a token of friendship between the two countries. The image on the postal stamp is of the Victor monument in Belgrade and the Statue of Unity, India.

19. On behalf of the Prasar Bharati, the Ambassador of India signed an MoU with the PINK TV Serbia in October 2022 for mutual cooperation between the two media organizations.

20. Yoga, Ayurveda and Homeopathy are recognized in Serbian law. International Day of Yoga (IDY) has been celebrated every year in the major cities of Serbia. Most recently, the Embassy celebrated the 10th International Day of Yoga on 22 June 2024 under the Victor Monument at Historical Kalemegdan Fortress, Belgrade overlooking the confluence of the rivers Danube and Sava. The Vidya Yoga Foundation, Mohanji Peace Centre and Isha Foundation assisted the Embassy in this celebration. Overall, the IDY 2024 was celebrated across Serbia at 17 locations in 16 cities. Around 900 Yoga enthusiasts participated in these events.

21. Indian film shootings have commenced in Serbia. First India-Serbia joint production 'Dev Bhoomi' by renowned Serbian Director Goran Paskaljevic was shot in Uttarakhand with Indian starcast. Shooting of Indian films in Serbia has a new trend in recent years and Serbia has emerged as a new major film destination for Indian film makers.

22. Indian community in Serbia is quite small, numbering around 10,000.

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