

India-Belize Relations

Belize—formerly British Honduras—is the only English-speaking country in Central America, and a member of the Commonwealth having gained independence on 21 September 1981. It is a relatively small country with a diversified population of just over three hundred thousand people, located on the Caribbean Sea, with Mexico in the north and Guatemala on the west. Notwithstanding the distance, India and Belize enjoy friendly, warm, and cordial relations. Belize traditionally supports India on most issues, in the UN and other multilateral fora, and vice versa. India has extended assistance to Belize in a number of areas, including by way of disaster relief and for development.

Political:

As a member of SICA (System of Integration in Central America), Belize also engages India as part of the expanding dialogue and cooperation between India and Central American countries. The Dialogue covers cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including UN reform, anti-terrorism, climate change, nuclear disarmament, food and energy security, trade promotion, and disaster management.

Leading business personalities represent each other in the two capitals as Honorary Consuls General.

Bilateral visits at political and senior levels help promote ties between India and Belize. Some recent exchanges are:

- Mr. Philip Zuniga, President, Senate, attended a Parliamentary Conference in Delhi in September 2007
- Mr. Sujan Chakraborty, MP, visited Belize for a Commonwealth Parliamentary study on environment, in February/March 2007
- Mr. John Birchman Saldivar, Minister for Sports and Governance, visited India for the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, in October 2010.
- Mr. Kamal Nath, Minister of Urban Development, visited Belize for the Board Meeting of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in May 2012.

Economic & Commercial:

Bilateral trade is limited, ranging in recent years up to US\$20 million. Indian exports are mainly textiles, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods, and imports primary products and agricultural produce. Certain sectors of the Belizean economy such as tourism, fishery and food processing offer good potential for Indian investors. The pharmaceuticals sector may also be of interest to Indian companies based in Latin America to expand their distribution network to Belize.

A Belize Indian Merchants Association (BIMA) representing over 1000 Indians/PIOs/OCIs, is operative in the Corozal Free Trade Zone.

In recent years, India has gifted Bajaj 3-wheelers, medicines and cricket sets for the youth. India has also offered a line of credit of US\$10 million to Belize under the India-SICA assistance programme. India has also deputed a senior police officer to Belize under the ITEC programme to act as Adviser to the Belize Police Commissioner from January 2013 till January 2014. Besides, India has gifted a computer laboratory to the prestigious St. John's College in Belize.

India and Belize signed a Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA) on 18 September 2013 in Belmopan.

Cultural:

ICCR's cultural troupes visit Belize from time to time and are popular, among both Indian and other communities. India provides 11 training slots annually to Belize under the ITEC Programme, and two ICCR scholarships.

Indian Community:

Belize has an up to 1200-strong Indian community, including some medical students. The community consists of mainly Sindhis, who migrated there from India and elsewhere in recent decades, and its members are mostly into business. They constitute a valuable link between Belize and India. There is also an "East Indian" community, over 7,000 strong, that migrated to Belize from the Caribbean over a period of time, and who are totally assimilated with the local society; they remain keen though to re-discover their lost Indian roots and to maintain certain Indian cultural traditions including through the 'Know India Programme', 'Study India Programme', 'Tracing the Roots' facility, and exposure to various Indian cultural programmes and activities.

Consular:

Indian nationals require visa to visit Belize, which can be obtained from their Hon. Consul in New Delhi.

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