

## INDIA - ARMENIA RELATIONS

### Historical Background

According to literary evidence, Indian settlements in Armenia existed as early as 149 BC. Thomas Cana is said to be the first Armenian to have landed on the Malabar coast in 780 AD. Long before the Dutch and the English appeared in India, a few Armenian traders had come to Agra during the Mughal Empire. Emperor Akbar, highly appreciative of the commercial talents and integrity of the Armenians, granted them numerous privileges and considerable religious freedom as also an opportunity to serve in his empire in various capacities. By the Middle Ages, the Armenian towns of Artashat, Metsbin and Dvin had become important centres for barter trade with India which exported precious stones, herbs and textiles to Armenia, and obtained hides and dyes in return. The Armenian colony in India increased in size, wealth and importance throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They also entered Indian trade in varying relationships to the East India Company. The Armenians made some contributions in the areas of artisanship including gun-making and printing. The high level of education among the Calcutta Armenians enabled them to perform well in the legal profession as well. One of Emperor Akbar's queens has been mentioned to be an Armenian, called Mariam Zamani Begum. Indian classical singer Gohar Jaan, the first to be recorded on gramophone in 1902 was of Armenian origin. The Armenian language journal "Azdarar" published in Madras (Chennai) in 1794 was the first ever Armenian journal published anywhere in the world. A special Armenian postage stamp was issued in 1994 to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of "Azdarar". In 1773, Shahamir Shahamirian, a leading Armenian nationalist in Madras published his vision of a future Armenian nation, which is acknowledged by Armenians as an attempt to draft first ever Constitution of an independent Armenia. After India's independence, many Armenians migrated to Australia, USA and other places. The vestigial Armenian community in India is now mainly settled in Calcutta with sprinkling in Mumbai, Delhi, Agra and Chennai. There are Armenian churches and cemeteries in these places. The Holy Church of Nazareth, erected in 1707, repaired and embellished in 1734 is the biggest and the oldest Armenian Church in Calcutta; the 250th anniversary of this Church was celebrated On November 25, 1957. The Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy in Calcutta is a prestigious national institution of Armenians. Thanks to renewed people-to-people interaction in recent years, the marriages between Indians and Armenians are resulting in the emergence of a new Indo-Armenian community, albeit miniscule at the moment.

### Soviet Era

During the Soviet era, President Dr. S Radhakrishnan (September 1964) and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (June 1976) visited the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. After the breakup of the USSR, India recognized Armenia on December 26, 1991, three months after its declaration of independence. The Protocol on establishment of Diplomatic relations between India and Armenia was signed on 31 August 1992. India opened its Embassy in 2 Yerevan on 01 March 1999. Armenia, which had opened its Honorary Consulate in April 1994, established its Embassy in New Delhi in October 1999.

In contemporary times, India-Armenia political relations are marked by warmth and cordiality and also understanding and convergence of views on several issues of mutual interest including those with international dimensions.

### **Institutional Mechanisms/High Level Exchanges**

Bilateral dialogue between India and Armenia is conducted through the mechanisms of Foreign Office Consultations and Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological, Cultural and Educational Cooperation, and periodic high-level interactions. There have been two Presidential level visits from Armenia (in 1995 and 2003) and two visits at the level of Foreign Minister (2000 and 2010). Also the Secretary, National Security Council of Armenia visited India in March 2011. The Vice President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha led a Parliamentary delegation to Armenia in October 2005.

In conformity with the tradition of high-level exchanges, the Fifth Session of India-Armenia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific & Technological, Cultural and Educational Cooperation (IGC) was held in Yerevan on 31 October 2011. The IGC meeting provided an excellent opportunity to review the current state of ongoing cooperation in diverse fields such as trade and investment, science and technology, information and communication technology, civil aviation and tourism, health, development cooperation, etc. Agriculture, small and medium enterprises, and social and labour issues were identified as potential cooperation areas in future. A Program of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period 2012-15 was also signed on 01 November 2011.

Coinciding with the IGC meeting, Foreign Office Consultations between India and Armenia were also held in Yerevan on 01 November, 2011. The two sides discussed issues of mutual concern and exchanged views on many international and multilateral issues. The Armenian side reiterated its support for G-4 Model for UNSC expansion in both Permanent and Non-Permanent categories of Seats and also reaffirmed support for India's candidature for Permanent Seat in the expanded UNSC. The Indian side reiterated that it supports the principle of resolution of conflicts through peaceful negotiations.

### **Bilateral Agreements**

India and Armenia signed a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation on 14 December 1995 in New Delhi. In addition, there are over 30 Agreements/MoUs covering diverse areas of possible cooperation such as trade & commerce, culture, tourism, education, defense, science & technology, information technology, double tax avoidance, academic cooperation between institutes and Think Tanks.

### **Trade and Economic Relations**

The level of bilateral trade and investments remains below potential though some growth has been registered in recent years. Indian exports consist of foodstuffs (meat), electrical equipment, cut and polished diamonds, optical equipment, plastics, pharmaceuticals and other chemical goods and cars, while Armenia's exports include non-ferrous metals, raw-rubber, books and textiles. "Best of India" – the periodic

Exhibition-cum-Sale of Indian consumer goods organized in Yerevan in the recent past by private sector with support from the Government of India received tremendous response in Armenia and contributed in popularizing Indian consumer goods and enhanced bilateral trade volumes. Bilateral trade grew from US \$ 16.5 million in 2005 to US \$ 71.72 million till in 2011 (India's exports to Armenia: US\$ 68.74 million and Armenia's exports to India: US\$ 2.98 million). [Source: [National](#) Statistical Service of Armenia] Under the MoU signed on 31 October 2011 in Yerevan between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and the Armenian business delegation by the Union of Manufacturers & Businessmen (Employers) of Armenia, it has been agreed to establish a Joint Business Council which is expected to serve as a platform for enhanced business interaction between the private sectors of the two countries.

### **India's Developmental Assistance**

India has extended assistance to Armenia in the past from time to time. Following the catastrophic earthquake in Soviet Armenia in 1988, USD 2.2 million cash and USD 1.1 million relief supplies were donated by India. An Indian medical team also visited Armenia for relief work. In 1994-95, India donated two consignments of medicines as humanitarian assistance to Armenia for the persons affected by the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the summer 2000 drought in Armenia, India gifted 750 MT of wheat and 250 MT of rice to Armenia in February 2002. In October 2003, India announced a grant of USD 5 million against which 300 tractors from India were supplied to Armenia in December 2006. India's current developmental assistance to Armenia includes human resource development and capacity building; this is implemented through Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme. ITEC programme is an ongoing programme under which every year on average 35 slots are earmarked for Armenia for short and medium term courses which are extremely popular amongst Government and Public Sector officials. During 2011-12, the allotted 35 slots were exhausted by October 2011. The Government of India allotted an additional 10 slots taking the total to 45 during the period 2011-12. For 2012-13, the Government of India has sanctioned 45 ITEC slots for Armenia.

During 2009-2010, India contributed US \$ 215,000/- for the restoration of a dilapidated school building in a relatively remote rural area. In addition, India in collaboration with Armenian authorities provided assistance for the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Information and Communication Technology in Yerevan at a cost of Rs. 7.56 crores (US \$ 1.67 million). The Centre is the only hi-tech institution in the region equipped with a made-in-India Super Computer – PARAM. The Centre was jointly inaugurated on 07 November 2011 by Armenian Prime Minister and Indian Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology. Under this assistance program, two IT trainers were provided at the Centre for a period of six months (November 2011-May 2012) with the objective of training the Armenian IT trainers, etc.

India agreed to extend Technical and In-Kind support for Armenia's Census 2011. A team of experts from Armenia's National Statistical Service underwent a training programme in India in February 2011 to share the experience of the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India engaged with Census India 2011. The project has since completed. Another important project completed with the assistance of the Government of India in 2011 related to a study to determine the

feasibility of establishing a public-private partnership project in telemedicine. Under Government of India development assistance, a project to create/upgrade computer labs in 72 schools in Tavush Province is currently under process.

### **Cultural Cooperation**

India-Armenia Agreement on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Education, Tourism, Sports and Mass Media signed in December 1995 provides the framework for cultural exchanges. In accordance with the MoU signed between ICCR and Yerevan State Linguistic University "Brusov" (YSLU) on 11 November 2009 in Yerevan, a Centre for Hindi Language and Literature has been established at YSLU. In view of popular interest in Hindi, the Embassy of India has made arrangements for Hindi classes in Ijevan, located at a distance of 130 km. from the capital in the Tavush Province, and known as another hub for educational institutes. The Indian Embassy also supports the teaching of Hindi at the Yerevan Institute of Humanities. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra, provides scholarships for Armenians to learn Hindi in India. The ICCR has earmarked two scholarships for Armenia under General Cultural Scholarship Scheme for pursuing university education in India. These scholarships are much appreciated by Armenians many of whom have availed of them. Indian films are very popular in Armenia; so is the Indian food. There is one exclusively Indian restaurant in Yerevan.

In August 2009, a group of young Indian and Armenian nationals took initiative to form a group on the Facebook of like-minded people called India-Armenia Friendship Group with the intention to provide a platform for interaction to Indians living in Armenia and Armenians living in India which would help in bridging the gap that has been created in the course of history and to bring them closer to each other. On 28 July 2011, this group registered the 'Indo-Armenian Friendship' as an NGO in Armenia.

In July 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed to establish an ICCR's Short-term Chair of Contemporary Indian Studies at Yerevan State University. The Chair became operational with the arrival of Prof. Smritikumar Sarkar in end February 2012. Prof. Sarkar stayed at the Yerevan State University till end May 2012.

### **Indian Community**

The Indian community in Armenia consists largely of over 400 students pursuing medical education at Yerevan State Medical University, which currently is the only University permitted by the Ministry of Education of Armenia to teach medicine through English medium. The Indian community otherwise is miniscule comprised of about a dozen Indian/PIO professionals working for multinational companies/UN organizations. No incident of racial, communal or ethnic violence against Indian community has come to notice.

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