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 centers 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 17th 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 200th 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. In recent years, a new Indo-Armenian community, albeit miniscule at the moment, is emerging as a result of marriages between Indians and Armenians.

Soviet Era

During the Soviet era, President Dr. S Radhakrishnan (Sept 1964) and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (June 1976) visited the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. After the breakup of the USSR, India recognized Armenia on 26th Dec. 1991, three months after its declaration of independence. The Protocol on the establishment of Diplomatic Relations between India and Armenia was signed on 31 August 1992. India opened its Embassy in 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 (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological, Cultural and Educational Cooperation, and periodic high-level interactions. The Fifth India-Armenia IGC Session and Foreign Office Consultations were held in Yerevan on 31st Oct. and 1st Nov. 2011 respectively. The IGC session 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. During Foreign Office Consultations, 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.

There have been two Presidential level visits from Armenia (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,

**Bilateral Agreements**

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

**India’s Developmental Assistance**

From time to time, India has been extending assistance to Armenia. For example, India donated USD 2.2 million in cash and USD 1.1 million relief supplies after the catastrophic earthquake in Gyumri in 1988 including the visit of an Indian medical team for relief work; provided humanitarian assistance in the form of two consignments of medicines for the persons affected by the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (1994-95); gifted 750 MT of wheat and 250 MT of rice following summer 2000 drought in Armenia, gifted 300 tractors from India in 2006 under a Government of India grant of US$ 5 million announced in 2003; set up 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 and was inaugurated on 7th Nov. 2011;
extended assistance of US$ 215,000 for the restoration of a dilapidated school building in Lori region; extended technical and in-kind assistance for Armenia’s Census 2011 including the training of experts from Armenia’s National Statistical Service in Feb. 2011 with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India engaged with Census India 2011; and extended assistance in the conduct of a study to determine the feasibility of establishing a public-private partnership project in telemedicine.

India’s developmental assistance to Armenia also includes human resource development and capacity building; this is implemented through Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme. ITEC programme is an ongoing programme and during 2012-13, 45 ITEC slots have been allotted for Armenia for short and medium term courses which are extremely popular amongst Government and Public Sector officials.

In 2012, two IT trainers were deputed to the Centre for Excellence in Yerevan for a period of six months (Nov. 2011- May 2012) with the objective of training the Armenian IT trainers. A project to create/upgrade computer labs in 72 schools (19 schools in urban and semi-urban areas and 53 schools in rural areas) in Tavush Region at a total cost of Rs. 2.8 crore (over half a million US dollars) has successfully been completed. The Project will benefit over 14,000 students and around 500 teachers in the region.

**Cultural Cooperation**

India-Armenia Agreement on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Education, Tourism, Sports and Mass Media signed in Dec. 1995 provides the framework for cultural exchanges. In terms of the MoU signed between ICCR and Yerevan State Linguistic University (Brusov) on 11 Nov. 2009 in Yerevan, a Centre for Hindi Language and Literature has been established at YSLU. In view of popular interest in Hindi, the Embassy has made arrangements for Hindi classes in Ijevan, located at a distance of 130 km. from the capital in the Tavush Province. The 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 and food are very popular in Armenia.

A group of young Indian and Armenian nationals formed an India-Armenia Friendship Group on the Facebook (in Aug 2009) and on 28 July 2011 registered the ‘Indo-Armenian Friendship’ as an NGO in Armenia.

ICCR’s Short-term Chair of Contemporary Indian Studies at Yerevan State University established in terms of an MoU signed in July 2011 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.

An abridged version of Ramayana in Armenian language was brought out by the Mission in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of Armenia. The translation in Armenian language was done by an Armenian national who studied Hindi at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan in Agra and paintings for the book by and Armenian artist. A 5-member ICCR-sponsored Bharatnatyam Dance Group led by Ms. Revathi Ramachandra visited
Armenia from 28th September till 2nd October 2012 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Armenia. The Group gave three dance recitals – two in Yerevan and one in Gyumri. On Mission’s recommendation, four prominent Armenian painters (Messers Suren Khorenyan, Anatoli Avetyan, Vardan Avetyan and Vladimir Simonyan) of Armenian Union of Painters visited India (Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Varanasi, Chennai) from 6th to 21st November 2012 to do on-the-spot paintings of various locations in India. Armenian painters were accompanied by Ms. Marine Papyan, Project Coordinator/Interpreter. ICCR provided accommodation, transport, air fares, etc. for visits to various locations in India for Armenian painters.

Indian Community

The Indian community in Armenia consists largely of over 450 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.

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. An MoU exists between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and the Armenian business delegation by the Union of Manufacturers & Businessmen (Employers) of Armenia. The MoU signed on 31 October 2011 in Yerevan envisages establishment of a Joint Business Council which is expected to serve as a platform for enhanced business interaction between the private sectors of the two countries. Bilateral trade grew from US $ 16.5 million in 2005 to US $ 71.72 million 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 (NSS)]. According to NSS, Armenia imported goods from India worth USD 29.94 million in 2011 through third countries. During the first eleven months (Jan-Nov) of 2012, bilateral trade stood at US$ 63.30 million with India’s exports to Armenia at US$ 61.85 million and India’s imports from Armenia at US$ 1.45 million. As in 2011, Armenia again imported goods from India worth USD 25 million during the first eleven months of 2012 through third countries.

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