

## **India-Philippines Relations**

India and the Philippines formally established diplomatic relations on 26 November, 1949, shortly after both countries gained independence [Philippines in 1946 and India in 1947]. Sixty years of diplomatic relations was celebrated in 2009.

The relations between the two countries have been cordial and muted. Though high-level political visits took place between both sides, in the years before India embarked on its 'Look East policy', these were few and far in between. It would be fair to say that despite several shared values and commonalities, such as anti-colonialism, South-South cooperation, a strong democratic polity, an independent judiciary and press, and the wide use of the English language, relations between the two countries were relatively unexplored and reflected a lack of informed knowledge about one another.

India's 'Look East policy' is a priority pillar of its foreign policy and has resulted in intensified relations with countries in the region, both bilaterally and as a regional grouping. Coupled with current developments in the Philippines, the stage appears to set for a dramatic change in bilateral relations, covering the broad canvas of consultations and cooperation on matters related to foreign policy, security, defence, trade, tourism and people-to-people relations, and culture. Furthermore, ASEAN-India relations will positively impact on bilateral relations, especially with accelerated impetus given to trade and investment.

**Political, Security and Defence:** Following the visits of the Philippines Vice President Diosdado Macapagal in 1961 and the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1981, the 'Look East policy' resulted in increased frequency of high-level contacts and saw visits by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh [2007], Presidents R. Venkatraman [1991] and Abdul Kalam [2006], Cabinet Ministers and other political dignitaries from India. Similarly, from the Philippines, there have been visits by Presidents Fidel Ramos [1997] and Gloria Arroyo [2007], Cabinet Ministers and other high level political dignitaries. The East Asia Summit has also provided an excellent platform for regular meetings between leaders from both countries, the most recent being in November 2012 at the Summit in Cambodia. The Vice President of the Philippines Mr. Jejomar C. Binay is leading a high-powered delegation to India in December 2012, in connection with the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit and would be accompanied by the Foreign Minister Mr Albert del Rozario.

Foreign policy and security dialogue meetings between the two countries have been taking place regularly and the next meeting would be held in New Delhi in February 2013. The first Joint Commission between the two countries, at the level of Foreign Ministers, took place in New Delhi in March 2011. The Philippines supported India's candidature for the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for the term 2011-12 and there is regular consultation

between delegations of both countries in the UN and other multilateral fora. Several Foreign Service officers from the Philippines attend the ASEAN diplomats' course that is held at the Foreign Service Institute in India.

Indian navy and coast guard ships regularly visit the Philippines. The participation of officers of the armed forces of both countries in various specialized training courses in each other's countries has intensified as have visits by National Defence College delegations. INTELLEX meetings have contributed towards sharing and exchanging information on a range of sensitive issues. In recognition of the need to further strengthen defence cooperation, the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee was constituted and had its first meeting in Manila in January 2012.

**Trade and Commerce:** Economic relations have been relatively slow and uneven. However, a number of growth drivers suggest a major and continued fillip in two-way trade and investment. First, the impact of the India-ASEAN FTA in Goods is already being strongly felt with current two-way trade at \$79.4 billion and growing. However, the India-Philippines trade has, so far, been muted in comparison and at around \$1.4 billion. There is business confidence that this will change, especially after the India-ASEAN Trade in Services and Investment Agreements are signed later this year. Second, the remarkable performance of the Philippines economy coupled with the historic Framework Agreement the Philippines government has entered into with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, ending four decades of unrest that left 150,000 dead, could open up considerable business opportunities in the Philippines. Third, the current global economic slowdown and the crisis in the Eurozone opens opportunities for invigorated participation in new and unexplored markets.

Various Joint Working Groups have been set up and their meetings, particularly the JWG on Trade and Investment, on Agriculture, on Health and on Tourism are expected to identify new growth and partnership areas between government and industry in both countries and contribute towards enhanced two-way growth in trade and investment.

**ITEC:** Philippines is one of the beneficiaries of programmes under ITEC and Colombo Plan. In 2011-12, 35 slots under ITEC and 15 slots under the Colombo Plan have been allocated to the Philippines.

**Culture:** Following the signing of the Cultural Exchange Programme between both countries, exchange visits by cultural troupes has intensified. The calendar of events envisages regular and various cultural performances in the Philippines from India, covering performing and visual arts, but also seminars and conferences in Universities and other centres of academic learning to help create a more informed understanding of India. Visits by journalists and other media personnel from the Philippines has seen a rise and a Youth Dialogue Forum has

recently opened with the visit of over 25 young Filipinos to India as part of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit.

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