

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, though the full potential is yet to be realized. 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 have been relatively unexplored and reflects 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 intensification in bilateral relations, covering the broad canvas of consultations and cooperation on matters related to foreign policy, security, defence, trade, tourism, people-to-people relations and culture. Furthermore, strengthened 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 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 led a high-powered delegation to India in December 2012, in connection with the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit. He was accompanied by the Foreign Minister Mr. Albert del Rosario. Hon'ble Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Smt. Krishna Tirath led the 3-member Indian delegation to Manila from 26-28 September, 2013, and gave a presentation on "Bridging Gender Gaps in India" at the Asian Development Bank. Hon'ble External Affairs Minister visited Manila from 21-23 October, 2013 for the second Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation. He delivered the inaugural lecture at the Foreign Service Institute of Department of Foreign Affairs of 'Rizal-Nehru Memorial lecture series' and has announced a disaster relief assistance of US\$ 100,000 to the Philippines Government for rehabilitation of earthquake victims in Philippines. Hon'ble Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs for Policy Mr. Evan P. Garcia led the Philippines delegation to India for the ASEM FMM11 meeting from 10 -13 November, 2013. Shri H.S. Brahma, Hon'ble Election Commissioner of India, visited Philippines from 11-15 November, 2013 to attend the Association of Asian Election Authorities [AAEA] Executive Board Meeting in Boracay.

Government of India has sent an Indian air force flight with relief material for the victims of super typhoon 'Haiyan, which struck Philippines on November 7-8, 2013.

Foreign Policy Consultations and Security Dialogue meetings between the two countries have been taking place regularly and the last meeting was held in New Delhi in February 2013. Two rounds of Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation had been held between the two countries, at the level of Foreign Ministers. The last one was held in Manila on October 21-22, 2013. 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 and hold consultations with their counterparts. A flotilla of four Indian ships from the Eastern Fleet, namely INS Shakti, INS Satupura, INS Ranjit and INS Kirch visited Manila on a goodwill visit from 12-16 June, 2013. 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, including the first ever NDC visit from the Philippines to India this year. INTELLEX meetings have contributed towards sharing and exchanging information on a range of sensitive issues; the last INTELLEX meeting took place in New Delhi in February 2013. 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. A delegation from the College of Defence Management visited Philippines from 27 October to 2 November, 2013.

Following the tragic loss of life, livelihood and property as a result of typhoon Pablo/Bopha, which struck southern Philippines in December last year, the Government of India provided disaster relief assistance of \$200,000 to the Philippines Government.

Trade and Commerce: Economic relations have been relatively slow and uneven to date. However, a number of growth drivers suggest a major and sustained 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 \$82 billion and growing. However, the India-Philippines trade has, so far, been muted in comparison and at around \$1.6 billion. There is business confidence that this will change, especially after the India-ASEAN Trade in Services and Protection of Investment Agreements, which was signed in December last 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. First quarter GDP growth rate in the Philippines has been 7.8 percent and the second quarter is expected to grow faster. Third, the current global economic slowdown and the crisis in the Eurozone open opportunities for invigorated participation in new and unexplored markets. The Philippines is embarking on a series infrastructural projects, which are likely to be of interest to Indian business and industry. Furthermore, President Aquino's 'Universal Health' policy opens the way for a more invigorated partnership with the drugs and pharma sector in India, particularly with regard to generics for the provision of quality medicines at affordable prices. The identification of complementarities, rather than competition, particularly in the IT sector could see heightened collaborations for third country intervention. The Philippines-India Business Council, under the Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry is also being recast to make it more effective and to respond to the opportunities that are credibly anticipated.

Various Joint Working Groups [JWG] 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. Additionally, consultations on science and technology, renewable energy, defence, and other areas are also expected to have their flow-on impact. The first meeting of India-Philippines Joint Working Group on Renewable Energy took place in New Delhi on 11 July 2013.

ITEC: Philippines is one of the beneficiaries of programmes under ITEC and Colombo Plan. For 2013-14, 30 slots under ITEC and 15 slots under the Colombo Plan have been allocated to the Philippines. There are separate slots provided for training of defence personnel. So far almost a thousand Filipino nationals have benefited under these schemes, covering a wide range of technical courses, such as rural development, agriculture, renewable energy, small scale industries, banking, finance and management, quality control and marketing, planning and public administration, textiles, parliamentary studies and legislative practices, computer software, water resources management, defence, etc.

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 under the students' visit programme from ASEAN countries from 17-26 November, 2013. A five-member group sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) of renowned Dhrupad vocalists, Gundecha Brothers, visited Philippines from 29 September to 2 October, 2013. An 8-member cultural troupe, Rondalla Ensemble participated from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) of Philippines in the Grand Finale of IIC Experience organised by the India International Centre in New Delhi from 17-24 October 2013.

Several universities in the Philippines, such as, the University of Santo Tomas, the University of the Philippines, the University of the Visayas, Adamson University, the University of Mindanao and others have opened special 'India chapters' in their prestigious libraries, which houses collection of books on India [gifted through the Public Diplomacy division of the Ministry of External Affairs]. A bust of Mother Teresa is being installed in the University of Santo Tomas and has been gifted by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Hon'ble EAM delivered the inaugural lecture at the Foreign Service Institute of Department of Foreign Affairs of 'Rizal-Nehru Memorial lecture series'.

Indian Community: There is a sizeable Indian community in the Philippines which is estimated to be around 70,000 (a conservative estimate), comprising mostly Punjabis and Sindhis. While the Sindhi community is primarily engaged in trading, and some manufacturing, most of the Punjabis are involved in micro-financing or informal money lending to the poor strata of Philippines society. A

small but very respectable community of Christian priests, nuns and religious scholars from India also lives and works in the Philippines. Around 1000 Indian professionals are also serving in multilateral organizations such as the Asian Development Bank and International Rice Research Institute, and multinational companies. There is small but growing Indian student community in the Philippines. Indian students constitute more than 45% of the students at the premier Asian Institute of Management. There are also about 600 Indian students at the Davao Medical Science Foundation, Mindanao. Other students are pursuing studies in the fields of Medicine, Information Technology, Nursing, Christian Theology and Divinity, Church Music, among others. In the last two years lots of Indian students have come to obtain Commercial Pilot License from the flying schools in the Philippines.

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