
India – The Holy See Relations

Diplomatic relations between India and The Holy See were established in 1948. In 2023, India and the Holy See celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The Holy See has a Nunciature (Embassy) in New Delhi, headed by a Nuncio (Ambassador). India's Ambassador to Austria, resident in Vienna, is concurrently accredited to the Holy See.

2. India has the second largest Catholic population in Asia dating from Apostolic times. A large number of Indians have joined various Roman Catholic Orders and many occupy high positions within the Catholic Church including in Rome. India and Indians have a positive image in the world Catholic community.

3. To commemorate 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a major event was organized on 1st October 2019 on Fraternal Love and non-violence for global harmony and Peace at Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City.

Papal Visits to India

4. The Holy See has always acknowledged the importance of India, both in global and Asian terms. There have been three Papal visits to India. Pope Paul VI visited Mumbai in 1964 to attend the International Eucharistic Congress. Pope John Paul II came to India in February 1986 and visited different parts of India, including Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata and met the Indian leadership. Pope John Paul II paid a State Visit to India from 5-7 November 1999. He met Hon'ble Rashtrapatiji, Vice President and Prime Minister. During the visit, he presided over the concluding celebrations of the Special Assembly of Synod of Bishops of Asia. He also signed and released the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. [The Special Assembly of Synod of Bishops of Asia was held at the Vatican from 19 April to 14 May 1998, and concluding celebrations were held in New Delhi].

High-level Visits from India

5. Hon'ble Rashtrapatiji, Smt. Droupadi Murmu attended the State Funeral of Pope Francis on 26 April 2025. She was accompanied by a delegation comprising Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs, Shri Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Minority Affairs, Shri George Kurian and Deputy Speaker of Goa Legislative Assembly, Shri Joshua De Souza. She also paid homage to him on 25th April by placing a wreath at St. Peter's Basilica .

6. An Indian delegation led by Shri Harivansh, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha attended the solemn ceremony of the Inauguration of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV on 18

May 2025. He was accompanied by Sh. Yanthungo Patton, Deputy Chief Minister, Nagaland. The Indian delegation also had an audience with Pope Leo XIV.

7. PM met Pope Francis on the sidelines of the G-7 Summit held in Apulia, Italy in June 2024 . PM interacted with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of the State of the Holy See in New York during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2024.

8. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, along with External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Vatican city, on the sidelines of G-20 Summit in Rome on 30 October 2021. PM was received by Pope Francis and had a private audience with him.

9. Several Indian dignitaries from time to time have called on the Pope in the Vatican. PM Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru during his visit to Italy in July 1955; PM Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1981 during her visit to Italy and PM Shri I.K. Gujral in September 1997, and PM Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in June 2000 during an official visit to Italy. Vice President, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat attended the ceremony on the demise of Pope John Paul II in April 2005.

Ministerial Level Visits from India

10. EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj called on Pope Francis during her visit to Vatican for Canonization Ceremony of Mother Teresa on 5 September 2016, along with Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Minister for Food Processing Industries and Justice Kurian Joseph, Judge of Supreme Court of India.

11. Shri P.C. Thomas, Minister of State (MoS) for Law & Justice, led a delegation to the Vatican on the occasion of the beatification of Mother Teresa on 19 October 2003.

12. Shri Oscar Fernandes, MoS for Programme Implementation and Statistics attended the ceremony for inauguration of Pontificate of H.H. Pope Benedict XVI on 24 April 2005. Shri Oscar Fernandes, MoS (IC) for Labour and Employment, accompanied by an official delegation, visited the Vatican from 10-13 October 2008 to participate in the Canonization ceremony of Sister Alphonsa on 12 October 2008.

13. A delegation led by Prof. K.V. Thomas, MoS for Food and Public Distribution visited Vatican from 17-19 February 2012 to participate in the Ceremony on the creation of Archbishop George Alencherry of Syro-Malabar Church as Cardinal at the Vatican. A delegation led by Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, visited the Vatican on 24 November 2012 to attend the Investiture Ceremony of Major Archbishop Mar Baselios Cleemis, Head of the Syro-Malankara Church as Cardinal at the Vatican.

14. India was represented by Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, at inauguration of the Pontificate of Pope Francis on 19th March 2013. On 27 April 2014, a high level delegation led by Shri Oscar Fernandes, Minister of Road Transport & Highways,

represented India at the Canonisation Ceremony of Pope John Paul II and Good Pope John (Pope John XXIII) at the Vatican. The delegation also included Prof. K.V. Thomas, MoS for Food, and Justice Cyriac Joseph, Member of NHRC. They had an audience with Pope Francis at the end of the ceremonies.

15. Prof. P.J. Kurien led the Indian delegation, which included Ministers from the Kerala State Government, for the canonization of the two Indian Saints – Blessed Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Blessed Sister Euphrasia on 23 November 2014 in the Vatican.

16. Indian delegation led by Shri V. Muraleedharan, MoS for External Affairs visited the Vatican City from 12-13 October 2019 to attend the Canonization Ceremony of Blessed Sister Mariam Thresia Chiramel Mankidiyan of India. The delegation also included Shri Shyam Kumar, Minister of Forest and Environment, Horticulture and Soil Conservations and Mahud and Town Planning, Government of Manipur.

17. A delegation led by Shri George Kurian, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, visited Vatican to participate in the Ceremony for creation of Monsignor George Jacob Koovakad as Cardinal, on 07 December 2024.

Mother Teresa

18. After passing away of Mother Teresa, the Pope took forward the process of verification leading eventually to the beatification of Mother Teresa, one of the fastest in history as a gesture of goodwill and recognition of the work she did in India. The Pope beatified Mother Teresa on 19 October 2003 in the presence of an estimated gathering of over 325,000 people.

20. On 15 March 2016 Pope Francis decreed that Mother Teresa be canonized – conferred Sainthood. Pope Francis canonized Mother Teresa in a mass at the Vatican on 4 September 2016. EAM, Smt. Sushma Swaraj led the 11-member official Indian delegation for the Canonization Ceremony. Three state level delegations including delegations from West Bengal & Delhi led by the Chief Ministers and a Ministerial delegation from Kerala and a delegation from the Indian National Congress Party also attended the event. Hundreds of Missionaries of Charity sisters attended the event, along with 13 Heads of State and Government. Mother Teresa's canonization is an important milestone for the Church and for Indo-Vatican relations, as well as for the community in India. During the visit, EAM called on Pope Francis.

Christianity in India

21. Christianity is India's third-largest religion, with approximately 27.8 million followers, constituting 2.3% of India's population (According to 2011 census). There are over 19.9 million Catholics in India, which represents around 1.55% of the total population and the Catholic

church is the largest Christian church within India. Christianity was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who visited Muziris in Tamilakam in AD 52. Christians are in majority in four Indian states, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Christians make significant percentages of population in Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Puducherry, Sikkim and Manipur.

Updated in July 2026