

## **India - Panama Relations**

### **Political**

India-Panama connection is oldest in the Central American region, dating back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when groups of Indians came to Panama to work on the construction of Panama railways and later the Panama Canal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Panama is the first country in Central America where India has a resident Mission. Panama also has a Mission in New Delhi.

### **Visits**

There have been relatively few visits between India and Panama. Shri Rao Inderjit Singh, MOS (EA) represented GOI in the inaugural ceremony of President Martin Torrijos on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004. Shri T.R. Baalu, Minister of Shipping & Highways visited Panama in November 2004. Samuel Lewis Navarro, First Vice President and Foreign Minister of Panama visited India in November 2005 and again in June 2008 to attend the second India-SICA Foreign Ministers' meeting. Alberto Vallarino, Panamanian Minister of Economy and Finance visited India in November 2010 during the World Economic Forum meeting in New Delhi. A 20-member Indian Parliamentary delegation led by Smt. Meira Kumar, Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha visited Panama from April 14-21, 2011 to participate in the 124<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly. Shri E. Ahamed, MOS (EA) visited Panama during May 3-5, 2011. An 18-member Indian official delegation led by Shri J.M. Mauskar, Special Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests visited Panama to attend the UN Climate Change meetings on September 29-October 7, 2011. Dr. Ruben Berrocal, Panamanian Secretary for Science, Technology and Innovation paid a visit to India during December 3-8, 2011.

### **Bilateral Agreements**

Several agreements such as for Cultural and Educational co-operation, Foreign Office Consultations, mutual cooperation between the Foreign Service Institutes of MEA and the Diplomatic Academy (of the Ministry of External Relations) of Panama, Ministry of Agriculture of India and the Ministry of Agricultural Development of Panama for Cooperation in the Field of Agricultural Research and Education, have been signed with Panama. After inauguration of the new administration of President Ricardo Martinelli on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009, Government of Panama has announced that those nationals, including Indians nationals, having visa for USA, any country of EU, Canada or Australia and that has been used at least one time to enter the issuing country, will be granted tourism visa for Panama on arrival.

### **Trade and Economic**

The main items of India's exports to Panama include textiles; automobiles and accessories; articles of iron and steel; plastic products; pharmaceuticals; tobacco products; rubber products; furniture items; and electrical and electronic equipments, etc. The main items of India's imports from Panama include mineral

fuels, oils, products and waxes; ships, boats and floating structures; and teak and other wood and wooden articles, etc.

### **India-Panama trade (including with Colon Free Trade Zone of Panama)**

<b>Particular</b>	<b>Trade (in million US\$)</b>		
	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>
Import from Panama	136.47	366.67	188.51
Export to Panama	177.42	149.24	215.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>313.89</b>	<b>515.91</b>	<b>403.51</b>

Source: Ministry of Commerce of India, Colon Free Zone

A business delegation consisting of nine engineering companies sponsored by Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC) and led by Shri Anup Wadhawan, Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce and EEPC Chairman visited Panama on August 31 – September 2, 2011. The delegation met Panamanian Minister of Commerce and Industry and Vice-Minister of Economy and Finance. Business to business meetings and a Buyer-Seller Meet were also organized at Panama Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture. It was revealed that in addition to opportunities in the area of free trade zone, Panama also offered significant opportunities in the areas of IT / BPOs, infrastructure (hydro-power and civil construction) and manufacturing sector.

An Indian infrastructure company, Gammon India Ltd. invested US\$ 1.83 billion in May 2011 with the approval of RBI in a joint venture company in Panama called M/S Campo Puma Oriente S.A. for investment in the fields of agriculture, constructions, infrastructure, resorts, etc.

An 8-member delegation sponsored by EEPC visited Panama in March 2011 and held successful BSM in Panama. The delegation also met Vice Minister of Commerce and Industry and had fruitful discussions.

In March 2011, 51 Indian companies had successful participation in EXPOCOMER, the largest annual international trade exhibition held in Panama City. TEXPROCIL sponsored a 6-member delegation which also visited in March 2011 Colon Free Zone and held successful BSM and individual meetings.

A 9-member Plexcouncil sponsored trade delegation visited Panama and held a successful Buyer - Seller Meet in Colon in March 2008. Similarly, a 8-member Chemical & Allied Products Export Promotion Council [CAPEXIL]-sponsored trade delegation visited Panama in April 2008 and held a highly successful Buyer - Seller Meet in Panama and individual meetings in Colon.

Mumbai-based Indian company, viz., “Rane Elastomer Processors” won the US \$2.3 million contract to supply rubber fenders to Panama Canal authorities in 2009. They had competed against the US and Chinese companies.

Government of India [GOI] donated 18 Bajaj three-wheelers to Panama in October 2005. GOI established an IT Training Centre in Panama in August 2006 for training Panamanian students and trainers. More than 1100 persons were trained at the Centre. Infosys, Iflex have provided software solutions for banking operations of leading banks in Panama. Two prominent tour operators from Panama participated in the Tourism Workshop for LAC region organized at New Delhi in April 2006. One journalist from La Prensa newspaper visited India at the invitation of XP Division in April 2007. Following wider dissemination of the Market Survey on “Opportunities for Indian Exporters in the Colon Free Zone” [*conducted by the Mission in April 2007*], several trade Promotion Councils have evinced keen interest in organizing trade missions to Panama. A 7-member delegation sponsored by Electronics and Computer Software EPC visited Panama in October 2007. A 9-member Plexconcil and a 8-member Capexil delegation had visited in March and April 2008 and had successful interaction / BSMs in Colon Free Zone and Panama City. A business journalist from ‘El Siglo’ newspaper visited the Handicrafts and Gifts Fair held in New Delhi, in 2010.

### **Culture**

To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Nobel-laureate Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, an eight-member ICCR sponsored dance troupe led by Dr. Sonal Mansingh performed “NAYIKAA” in September 2011. Another ICCR sponsored 15-member Odissi dance group led by Ms. Sutapa Talukdar performed ‘Shyama’ in October 2011 at the most prestigious National Theatre.

### **India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)**

Government of India has offered 12 ITEC slots for 2011-12 which were fully utilised.

### **Indian Community**

As per Panamanian sources and records, there are about 15,000 PIOs and NRIs in Panama constituting the largest concentration of overseas Indians in Central America. The Indian community is mostly involved in wholesale and retail trade. The community is considered as one of the well to do and law-abiding communities. Indian community has people, predominantly from Gujarat and Sindh regions.

### **March 2012**

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