



## **Vice President's Visit to Latin America and Caribbean Region**

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In India's efforts to reach out to all regions of the world and strengthen its relations, it has, over the past few years, been working towards engaging with the nations of the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. India is stepping up engagement with the region, which is growing in importance for India's energy security (The LAC region accounts for around 20% of India's oil imports) and also offers a huge market for Indian products and services. (India is the leading exporter of pharma products to the region.)<sup>1</sup>

Over the last few years, India's relations with the LAC region, both in terms of political engagement, as well as trade and commercial engagement, have intensified. A beginning was made with the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Brazil in July 2014. His meeting with South American leaders on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit was followed by his visit to Mexico in 2016. These meetings between the Prime Minister and leaders from the region have been sustained through frequent interactions at other multilateral forums as well. The momentum was carried forward with the visit of Vice President of India Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu to three nations in the region. Vice President Naidu visited Guatemala, Panama and Peru from 06-11 May 2018. It was his first official overseas visit, and he was accompanied by a high-level delegation which included Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Mr. Jasvantsinh Sumanbahi Bhabhor, four Members of Parliament and senior officers of the Government of India.<sup>2</sup>

### **Vice President's visit to Latin America and the Caribbean Region**

In his remarks to the media, Vice President Naidu stated, "This is my first official overseas visit as Vice President of India. The fact that it begins with three countries in Latin America shows the importance India attaches to its relations with the region..."<sup>3</sup>

## Guatemala

Map 1: Guatemala and Panama



Source: Google Maps

The visit by Vice President Naidu to the Republic of Guatemala (06-08 May 2018), was the first ever visit of an Indian Vice President to the Central American nation. During his visit, Vice President Naidu had bilateral meetings with his counterpart Mr. Jafeth Cabrera. In an effort to strengthen bilateral relations further, they agreed to explore cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy, environmental conservation, culture, education, agriculture and trade and investments. India has been stressing on the need for sustainable development and has made a commitment by ratifying the Paris Climate Change Agreement. It has set ambitious targets of using renewable energy to fuel its economic growth<sup>4</sup>. Estimates indicate that India's solar potential is greater than 10,000 GW and its wind potential could be higher than 2,000 GW.<sup>5</sup> India has set up the International Solar Alliance (ISA), in an effort to boost both sustainable development projects as well as arrest climate change. India invited Guatemala to join the ISA. Vice President Naidu also stated that India was ready to assist Guatemala through South- South Cooperation initiatives. In this regard, the two sides agreed to implement proposals on solar energy technologies in Guatemala. These promote women's empowerment through their training in use of renewable energy and hence promote use of clean energy. India also agreed to Guatemala's request to supply solar panels for its airports.

The two leaders also called on the business communities in the two countries to take advantage of the pro-business climate in both nations and help increase trade and investment. In this regard, India reaffirmed its interests in strengthening its dialogues with regional

organisations such as CEALC and SICA.<sup>6</sup> The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a regional bloc of Latin American and Caribbean States. It has thirty three countries as member states.<sup>7</sup> The Central American Integration System (SICA) was set up in 1991 as the revived institutional framework for Regional Integration in Central America. SICA members are: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize and the Dominican Republic. The System includes a group of Regional and Extra regional Observers. The Regional Observers are: México, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, the United States of America, Ecuador, Uruguay and Colombia. The Extra regional Observers are: China (Taiwan), Spain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Australia, South Korea, France, The Holy See, the United Kingdom, the European Union, New Zealand, Morocco, Qatar, Turkey, Order of Malta and Serbia. Presently, Haiti is in the process of incorporation as Regional Observer.<sup>8</sup>

Guatemala's geographical location in Central America could help India strengthen its economic engagement with other nations of the region as well as Mexico and the United States in the north. India and Guatemala could cooperate in the future to use the latter's unique ecosystems which includes a large number of endemic species for traditional medicines in both India and Guatemala.

On multilateral issues, the two nations stated that they support the need for a reformed and expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The two nations also agreed to support each other's candidature for the non-permanent membership to the UNSC. (Guatemala will support India candidature for UNSC membership for 2021-22, and India will do the same for Guatemala in 2031-32). They also expressed their support to each other to fight the menace of terrorism. During the visit, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, and the Ministry of External Affairs of India through their respective Foreign Service Institutes will work towards stronger diplomatic cooperation.

Vice President Naidu and Members of Parliament also visited the Guatemalan Parliament and had a meeting with the Speaker of the House during which they discussed issues of common interest including democracy and legislation, with the purpose of expanding the ties of friendship between Guatemala and India in the parliamentary ambit.<sup>9</sup> India will also support the training of English language teachers in the Central American nation.

### ***Panama***

On his second stop, Vice President Naidu visited Panama (08-10 May 2018). [This was the first visit by any Vice President of India to Panama] In an unprecedented gesture, the visit was upgraded and the President of the Republic of Panama Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodrigues led the talks. The two leaders expressed satisfaction with the status of the bilateral relations, marked by a spirit of solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect. They exchanged views on the current political and economic situation of their respective countries. On the economic side, President Varela invited investments in IT, agriculture, cold storage, pharmaceuticals and textile sectors from India. He also spoke about India's participation in biotechnology, innovation and space

cooperation with Panama.<sup>10</sup> India could explore the idea of setting up more IT centres in Central America. These centres have been successful and there is a demand from the countries of the region for more. They also held discussions to increase cooperation in intelligence sharing and to cooperate in tackling the dangers of human trafficking. The two sides reaffirmed their firm condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agreed to strengthen cooperation and support to each other, in combating terrorism, in international fora.<sup>11</sup>

Panama welcomed India's proposal for setting up a Telemetry, Tracking and Tele Command (TTC) Earth station in Panama for supporting operations of geostationary communication and meteorological satellites of the Indian Space & Research Organization (ISRO), which could guide research and analysis by Panamanian experts in the fields of agriculture, meteorology, disaster management and climate change. Vice President Naidu invited Panama to become part of the ISA to further boost renewable energy cooperation.<sup>12</sup> The leaders reiterated the commitment of their respective Governments towards the principles of democratic values, respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms that are essential to securing the well-being and the social and economic development of the global population in an environment of peace, social justice and equity. The two sides agreed to continue consultations and cooperation on issues of common interest in UN and other multilateral fora such as the World Trade Organization. An MoU for Exemption of Visa for Diplomatic, Official and Consular Passport Holders was signed. A Work Plan for implementing the existing MoU between the Ministry of Agriculture of India and the Ministry of Agriculture Development of Panama for Cooperation in the Field of Agricultural Research and Education was also signed.<sup>13</sup>

In the economic sector, Vice President Naidu highlighted India's e-visa facilitation to promote business, trade and more people to people contacts. Vice President Naidu thanked the Government of Panama for the recent measures taken towards facilitating issue of visas to Indian businessmen and other visitors wishing to visit Panama.<sup>14</sup> The Government of the Republic of Panama in April 2018 adopted new immigration measures to continue boosting tourism, trade and investment with the economies of Europe and emerging countries. By Executive Decree, Panama lifted immigration restrictions for citizens who hold a Schengen visa or current residence in the European Union; and approved the flexibilization of visas for the citizens of India.<sup>15</sup> Panama wants to strengthen its relations with India and it is hoped that Indian business would be able to take advantage of the new visa facilitation processes. The Panama Canal, ports located at the Canal's Atlantic and Pacific outlets, and the free zone, will continue to dominate the trade in the region in the near future. India-Panama trade in US Dollar million (including with Colon Free Trade Zone of Panama) was US \$ 135.73m (2016-17).<sup>16</sup>

Both sides agreed to expedite ongoing discussions for finalization of MoUs for strengthening cooperation in the fields of Exchange of Tax Information, Economic Cooperation, Maritime Cooperation, Air Services, Traditional Medicines, Culture, and Space. As the largest democracy in the world, the Indian side expressed keenness in deepening bilateral engagement at

the Parliamentary level between both countries. Exchanges and interaction in this regard would be facilitated under the umbrella of the India-Latin American Parliamentary Friendship Group.<sup>17</sup>

In his address to the students of the University of Panama and Panamanian diplomats, he stressed the need to achieve the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also alluded to the growing threats from “...cyber security, terrorism, nuclear and chemical warfare and other such scourges, which threaten our existence.” He further stated, “Another, silent but serious challenge, which seems to have got out of control, is the mounting inequality and disparity in the distribution of wealth and economic and social opportunities in different parts of the world.” He pointed out that these social problems and perceptions of exploitation cause unrest among the people. He said, “We need to have a governance system that puts the people at the centre. We need to have multilateral processes and decision-making systems that are responsive, just and fair. In the world order we want, the power and responsibilities are shared, opinions and voices are respected and wealth and earth’s resources are shared. We should ensure that the multilateral forums are not dominated or influenced by a few powers and communities.”<sup>18</sup>

## ***Peru***

Map 2: Peru



Source: Google Maps



Vice President Naidu ended his three nation visit to LAC region with a visit to the Republic of Peru (10-12 May 2018). This was the first visit of any Indian Vice President to Peru. (President K. R. Narayanan had visited Peru in 1998). The two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations and discussed a wide range of regional and international issues of mutual interest. Both sides welcomed the results of the first Joint Commission Meeting held in June 2017 between India and Peru, and reiterated their commitment to work together and identify new areas of Bilateral Technical Cooperation. The two nations are working towards an early conclusion of the Comprehensive Trade Agreement that covers goods, services and investments. The bilateral trade between the nations increased to \$1.77 billion in 2016-17 from \$1.52 billion in the previous fiscal.<sup>19</sup> With the finalization of a free trade deal, Peruvian exports to India are expected to increase by 12 percent. Most prominently, Peru is rich in natural resources that India needs. Peru is the world's sixth largest producer of gold, second largest producer of silver, and the third largest producer of copper, tin, zinc, and lead.<sup>20</sup> India's heavy industries and technological capability, including the IT sector, would enable the partnership to be mutually beneficial.<sup>21</sup> Peru's interest in enhancing bilateral ties with India is bolstered by Peru's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) membership. India's interest in the South American nation is to enhance relations with one of the fastest growing economies of the region. During the delegation level talks, the Peruvian Prime Minister Mr. Cesar Villanueva Bardales, leading a delegation of four ministers and senior officials noted that India is acknowledged as a leader in the pharma sector and Peru could take benefit of the same and suggested Indian Pharma companies set up generic medicines production facilities in Peru. The Peruvian delegation agreed to consider suggestion of the Indian delegation to facilitate the registration of Indian pharma companies for supply of medicines.<sup>22</sup>

India also expressed a desire to work closely with the Pacific Alliance particularly with respect to trade facilitation, investment, and to examine prospects of Alliance-wide arrangements. Both sides agreed to cooperate in exploring ways and means to strengthen the India-Pacific Alliance relationship. The Pacific Alliance is an economic and political bloc made up of Peru, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. The bloc's stated purpose was to "gradually move towards the free movement of goods, services, capital and people."<sup>23</sup>

During the visit, Peru welcomed India's proposal to send experts to extend the work being done by the India-Peru Centre for Excellence in Information Technology. The centre has been a success in its efforts to train and educate the youth in Peru for the IT market place. India stressed on the need for bilateral cooperation in the renewable energy sector. Both Parties, are founding member of the ISA. With the view of working together to promote bilateral technical cooperation in new and renewable energy on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity, an agreement between the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Energy and Mining of the Republic of Peru on Cooperation in New and Renewable Energy was signed during the visit.<sup>24</sup>

Peru also expressed support for India's candidature for a reformed and expanded UNSC. Both sides emphasized the need for reforms in UNSC and serious discussions on text-based negotiations at the Intergovernmental Negotiations. Peru, as a current non-permanent member of the Security Council, stressed promotion of shared values of multiculturalism and strengthening of peace keeping operations. Both sides supported the call to condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestation and stressed that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. They emphasized that there should be zero tolerance against terrorism.<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Vice President Naidu's first official visit to three Latin American countries is an indication of the importance of the region for India. It was part of an effort to address India's "high-level contact deficit"<sup>26</sup> with the region. It is hoped that the visit, which was followed by President Ram Nath Kovind visit to Suriname and Cuba from June 19 to 24 2018 and Prime Minister Modi's planned visit to the region later this year (2018) when Argentina hosts the G20 summit, will boost bilateral relations with the countries of the region. The visit was to strengthen institutional mechanisms for political interactions, multilateral matters, trade and commerce and investments along with increased cooperation in the field of information technology, capacity building, traditional medicines, space, and culture. India and the nations of the region could also explore the strengths as against requirements to determine areas of possible defence cooperation. India could explore the possibility of sending more military attaches to its embassies in the region. India could also engage in officer training programmes where by officers from the armed forces of India and the nations of the LAC region could train in each other's academies. With India's increasing interest in the Indo-Pacific, naval ships could make friendly port calls to the region. India and the countries of the region could cooperate in addressing the threats from narcotic trafficking.

The countries of the region provide India with opportunities to engage with the United States and other countries of the region as a result of the various regional integration mechanisms and free trade agreements.

The countries of the LAC region and India are growing economies and want sustainable economies. This makes it important for them to deepen their relations in the economic and political arena and also improve cultural ties and people to people contacts. A common factor that binds them all together is their objective – which is to improve the quality of life of its citizens.

India seeks to engage with the countries of the region both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. These visits are an affirmative statement of intent by India that it wants to enhance its mutual cooperation with the region for mutual benefit.

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*Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Visit of Vice President of India to Panama ( May 8-10, 2018),” [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29888/Visit\\_of\\_Vice\\_President\\_of\\_India\\_to\\_Panama\\_\\_May\\_810\\_2018](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29888/Visit_of_Vice_President_of_India_to_Panama__May_810_2018), Accessed on 03 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Remarks to Media by Vice President during visit to Panama (May 9, 2018),” [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29887/Remarks\\_to\\_Media\\_by\\_Vice\\_President\\_during\\_visit\\_to\\_Panama\\_May\\_9\\_2018](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29887/Remarks_to_Media_by_Vice_President_during_visit_to_Panama_May_9_2018), Accessed on 03 July 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The Government of India has enhanced its aspirations multifold – amending them from 20 GW of solar power (by 2022) to 100 GW (by 2019) and from an additional 15 GW of wind power (during 2012-17) to an additional 40 GW (by 2019). Figures have been taken from Report on India’s Renewable Electricity Roadmap 2030 available at [http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document\\_publication/RE\\_Roadmap\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document_publication/RE_Roadmap_ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Press Statement on the visit of Vice President to Guatemala,” [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29872/Joint\\_Press\\_Statement\\_on\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Vice\\_President\\_to\\_Guatemala](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29872/Joint_Press_Statement_on_the_visit_of_Vice_President_to_Guatemala), Accessed on 03 July 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC),” <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/celac-august-2012.pdf>, Accessed on 11 July 2018.

<sup>8</sup> SICA, “SICA in Brief,” [http://www.sica.int/sica/sica\\_breve\\_en.aspx](http://www.sica.int/sica/sica_breve_en.aspx), Accessed on 10 July 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Press Statement on the visit of Vice President to Guatemala,” [http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29872/Joint\\_Press\\_Statement\\_on\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Vice\\_President\\_to\\_Guatemala](http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29872/Joint_Press_Statement_on_the_visit_of_Vice_President_to_Guatemala), Accessed on 03 July 2018.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

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