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INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS: A FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

BY



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“Pluralism and a commitment to the rule of law is an ancient Indian wisdom which Canada and India share. From these values, a modern partnership is ready to be born.”

-Prof. Thomas Axworthy, O.C., Former Chairman, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

India and Canada are bound by common values and mutual interests, besides the commitment of two nations to democracy, federalism, pluralism and entrepreneurial spirit. For them, while history is important, what counts is the future.

As the two countries redefine and strengthen the bilateral relations, they can start on the foundations of the robust education partnerships that exist between them. As nations, and through the unique *Shastri Indo Canadian Institute* founded in 1968, they have partnered to promote an understanding between the two nations through academic exchanges and research. Fifty universities and institutes from India and 40 from Canada are members of the Institute. Over 300 MOUs exist between Canadian and Indian higher education institutions for collaborative programmes. An MOU on High Education was signed in June 2010 and a bilateral Education Summit was held in Ottawa in June 2011. India is the second largest source of foreign students in Canada with over 31,665 (2013) Indian students studying in different Canadian universities. Given the interests of the two countries in the emerging disciplines of Studies on Ocean and Glaciers, there is an opportunity to explore a provision for joint study and research in these fields.

During the last few years, the attention of policy makers has turned to the forging of partnerships in food security, energy security, trade and investment matters, deepening of existing partnership in technology and higher education, and other emerging areas of cooperation. High-level exchange of visits between the two countries in these areas including those of Foreign Ministers, Ministers of Trade and Commerce, Minister of Natural Resources of Canada, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India, etc. have facilitated useful discussions and, in several cases, agreements in several areas.

Conditions are ripe for the two prime ministers to approve the text of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) when they meet later in April, 2015 to triple the bilateral trade. They may also consider having a Declaration of Intent on ongoing dialogue in areas where consensus has eluded so far.

A Forward Looking Partnership

The progress achieved so far in negotiations on CEPA between the two countries point to the unfolding of the relations that will be robust, enduring, and expanding. The completion of negotiations on CEPA could be a turning point for both countries to take *a new leap of cooperation*. Nonetheless, CEPA is not an end in itself, but a launching pad for a modern partnership that will involve more bilateral collaboration than ever before — not just at the federal level but also at the state, provincial and local levels, and between the private sectors and civil society of the two countries.

Indian Diaspora- A Sturdy Bridge

In building India-Canada partnership, Indo-Canadians have been active. Their success demonstrates the vitality of the Indian community, the value of Canada's open society, and the strength of what can be achieved when they work together in concert. The Indian community can be expected to increasingly play their catalytic and bridging role in the implementation of CEPA and beyond.

Current Agreements and Mechanisms for pursuing bilateral relations

India and Canada have signed several agreements including the Air Services Agreement, Extradition Treaty, Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, Agreement on Patents, Agreement on Cooperation in Agriculture, Agreement on Science and Technology and Environment Cooperation, Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, Social Security Agreement, and Audio-Visual Co-Production Agreement.

There are MOUs on: Cooperation in a) Energy, b) Space, c) Mining and Earth Sciences, d) Higher Education, e) Culture, f) Intelligent Transport Systems, g) Information and Communication Technologies, h) the Field of Petroleum & Natural Gas, i) Global Health Challenges, and j) Skill Development.

In addition, separate MOUs on Mines and Mineral Resources have been signed with the provinces of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. Department of Research & Development Organization (DRDO) have signed an MOU with York University for R&D in Early Warning and Advance Response Network (E-Warn). A Social Security Agreement has also been signed with the Government of Quebec.

Agreements on Foreign Investment Promotion Agreement (FIPA), and CEPA are currently under negotiation. The agreements would provide greater predictability and certainty for Canadian investors considering investment opportunities in India. Once CEPA and FIPA are concluded, it might be desirable to set up joint committees or working groups for overseeing their implementation.

At present, India and Canada pursue bilateral relations through the mechanisms of annual Foreign Office Consultations, Ministerial Level Strategic Dialogue, Ministerial Level Energy Dialogue, Joint Committee on Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, Trade Policy Consultations, Economic and Financial Sector Policy Dialogue, Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism, Science & Technology Committee, Environment Forum, Energy Forum, Steering Committee on Mining and Earth Sciences; and Joint Working Groups on Information and Communication Technologies, Education, Pulses, Plant Protection, Health, Agriculture and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary issues. The dialogues aim to strengthen the bilateral relationship and explore areas of deeper cooperation for both countries.

Priorities for India-Canada Partnership

Apart from the stunning current transformation of India, it is one of the largest source countries for economic immigration and for attracting new investors in Canada. Since 2009, Canada's Economic Agenda has been articulated in the Canadian Government's Economic Action Plan. The Economic Action Plan 2014 continues with the positive measures to help grow the economy and create jobs. The Action Plan along with the Global Market Action Plan (GMAP) released in November 2013 concentrates on core objectives within Canada's priority markets that include India. It identifies key opportunities of cooperation, investment in such sectors as agriculture and processed foods, automobiles, infrastructure and life sciences.

India-Canada relations in trade, investment and technology need to take into account India's ambitious development agenda, and how it can profit from Canada's strengths in areas such as mining, financial services, infrastructures etc. In this context, the leaders of two countries need to give guidelines to their officials in regard to areas for Canada-India partnerships that may realize concrete benefits for citizens of the two countries. The two leaders need to give specific directions to their officials in regard to ensuring implementation in a time bound manner of Agreements and MOUs signed over past several years.

Role of Civil Society and Private Sectors

In today's world, research institutes, NGOs and universities need to work with businesses and governments. When the leaders meet in April 2015, they are likely to discuss ways in which businesses, scientists and governments of the two countries can work together to build mutually beneficial partnerships. Nonetheless businesses and civil society have to recognize the limits of what the governments can do. Ultimately, it is for businesses to undertake the hard task of exploring and exploiting the opportunities.

India is a developing country and Canada could partner to assist India in its work to improve the quality, reliability and availability of basic services, especially for the poorest of the citizens. An immediate area of concrete support is the "Clean India" campaign, where private and civil society innovation, expertise and technology may be leveraged to improve sanitation and hygiene throughout India. Other fields in which India will appreciate Canadian cooperation are i) building of smart cities, ii) manufacturing, iii) health care, iv) skill development , v) expansion of facilities for higher education and creation of business opportunities in planned corridors such as KGPG (Krishna-Godavri-Prakasam –Guntur) corridor.

Global Partners and Global Partnerships

Canada and India remain committed to the larger effort to integrate South Asia and connect it with markets and people in Central and Southeast Asia. As global partners, the two countries are committed to enhancing homeland security by sharing intelligence, through counterterrorism and law-enforcement cooperation, while jointly working to maintain freedom of navigation and

lawful commerce across the seas. Collaboration in areas of health and medical care will help in tackling the toughest of challenges, and conquering diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and dengue. India and Canada need to expand their global partnership in working together to empower women, build capacity and improve food security in the SAARC region and Africa.

Ties between the two countries will help in promoting bilateral trade and investment. It will set the course of movement of significant capital and human resources, and promote both bilateral and global partnerships. The future beckons the two countries to move forward *together* for a better world. This is the central premise as well as objective of a defining partnership for the 21st century.

(The author is the former Secretary General of SAARC.)