

4 CHAPTER

India and Belgium Relations

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Historical background of relations
- Areas of bilateral cooperation
- Analysis of bilateral visits

BASIC BACKGROUND

The relations between India and Belgium go back to the ancient times when India used to import chandelier and crystals from Belgium. During the colonial era, in the 18th century, the Ostend Company came to East and South India for the purpose of trade. A lot of Indians who fought the World War–II did the same on Belgium soil. In modern times, India and Belgium developed diplomatic relations in 1948. Recently, India has attached greater importance to Belgium due to growing economic concerns. This has also manifested in greater number of visits from both sides. In 2013, for the first time, the President of India visited Belgium. During the visit, the President of India inaugurated the Europhilia, an Indian cultural festival where India showcases its culture heritage. In 2013, the fest included 450 events in around a hundred venues. It gives Europe a deep insight of cultural diversity of India. The President of India also concluded a treaty on higher education. Both sides have decided to strengthen cooperation in research. There is a growing convergence of Indian and Belgian interests to promote academic innovation in the twenty first century.



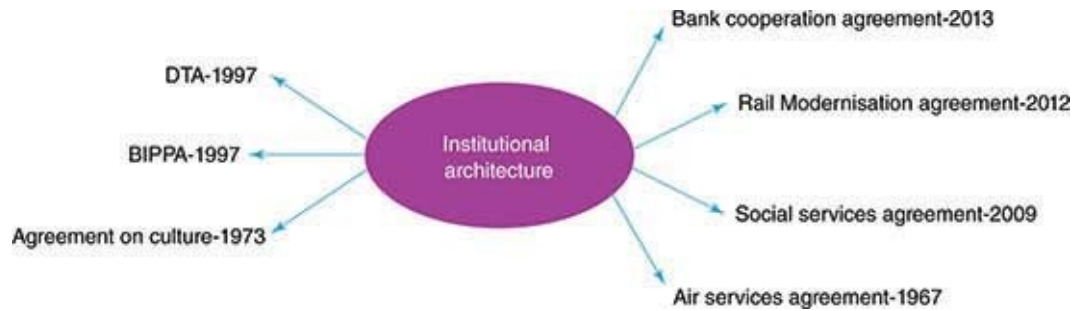
AREAS OF COOPERATION

Between Belgium and India, one of the biggest areas of cooperation is diamond trade. A lot of Indians are working in Antwerp are involved in the diamond industry. However, Indians, in recent times have made attempts to diversify. Belgium has enormous expertise in pharmacy, life sciences and infrastructure. All these three focus areas are those where India intends to explore future bilateral cooperation. India and Belgium also enjoy a unique education-based relationship and a lot of Indians prefer to go to Belgium for higher education.

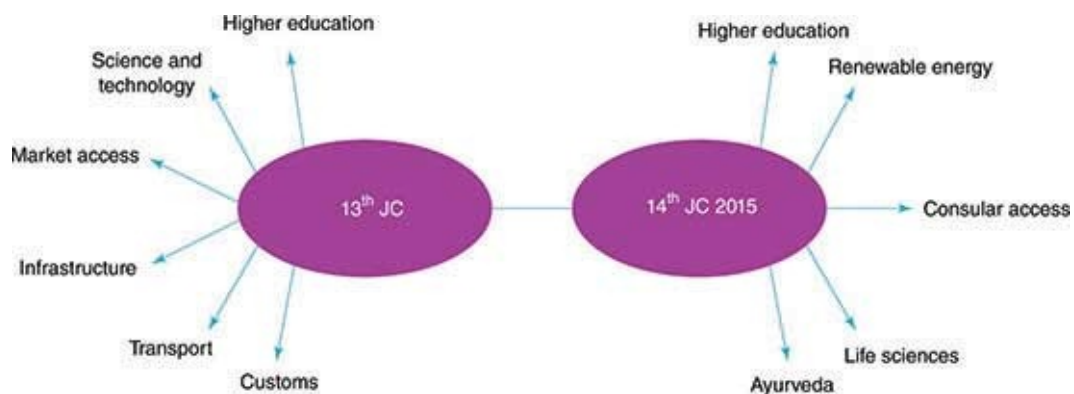


COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

The institutional architecture is as follows:



In 1997, India signed a bilateral investment treaty with Belgium known as the Luxembourg Economic Union. Since then there have been regular joint commission (JC) meets between India–Belgium Luxembourg Economic Union. The 13th JC meetings took place in Brussels while the 14th JC meeting happened in Delhi in September, 2015. In both the JC meets, the two sides decided to enhance cooperation in various areas. The diagram below clarifies this:



In 2015, India and Belgium signed an MOU for port officials training. As Indian businessmen are in Antwerp undertaking diamond business, Antwerp port authority will now organise training for officials of India in Mumbai.

India exports gems, chemicals, base metals and textiles while it imports machinery, plastics and diamonds from Belgium. Indian companies in IT, software and telecom have presence in Belgium while Belgium firms invested in engineering, mechanical appliances and steel manufacturing are present in India.

ANALYSIS OF PM'S VISIT TO BELGIUM—2016

In March 2016, the Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Belgium for an official state visit to as well as to attend the 13th EU–India Summit hosted by Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, and Jean Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission. As the visit happened just a few days after a terror strike in Belgium, the PM paid a tribute to the terror victims. He visited the Maalbeek metro station where a bomb had exploded a week before his arrival. In the subsequent meeting in Egmont palace, the PM discussed

the need for a comprehensive convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). He also discussed visa related issues and cooperation in infrastructure. India and Belgium agreed on a mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and an Extradition Treaty. The PM also highlighted the opportunities for Belgian business houses in India and encouraged them to commit FDI in defence, railway and food processing sectors in India. In the meeting with the Belgium Prime Minister Charles Michel, he held discussions on enhancing cooperation in IT, ports, education and tourism. As Belgium is home to around 1500 diamond firms, India's share is high in the diamond trade in Antwerp. Belgium and India are also both part of the Kimberly process began in 2000 as a negotiating platform of diamond producing states to ensure that rebel movements are not financed by diamond purchase. The participating nations have agreed to a certification scheme since 2003. The PM also concluded MOUs on institutionalisation of foreign policy consultation and renewable energy.



India–Belgium Cooperation

In 2006, Belgium PM Guy Verhofstadt visited India and concluded an MoU on Science and Technology. This was followed in 2011 by the establishment of a Joint commission on Science and Technology agreement leading to the subsequent positing of a framework for cooperation. It is interesting to note that space cooperation between India and Belgium has been going on since 1998 and 1998 itself ISRO had signed a MoU with Tech Space Aero. In 1998, Verhart, a software firm of Belgium, signed a contract with the ISRO for launching a 100kg PSLV-C-3, which was subsequently launched later. In 2016, during the Indian PM's visit to Belgium, he activated the optical infrared telescope in Devasthal in Nainital. This telescope was built as a with Belgium's Advanced Mechanical and Optical system.