

**Embassy of India
Baku, Azerbaijan
India- Azerbaijan Bilateral Relations**

INDIA- AZERBAIJAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

India and Azerbaijan have friendly relations and growing bilateral cooperation based on civilizational linkages, cultural affinities and shared values of understanding and respect for other cultures.

Historical relations

2. The ‘Ateshgah’ fire temple in the vicinity of Baku is a fine example of the age-old historical relations and cultural exchanges between India and Azerbaijan. This 18th century monument, with a much older history, has wall inscriptions in Devanagiri and Gurmukhi, and is a surviving proof of the trade links and hospitality that Indian merchants on the Silk Route to Europe enjoyed in Azerbaijani cities such as Baku and Ganja.

3. During the period, Azerbaijan was a part of the erstwhile Soviet Union, India’s ties with Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic were primarily through Moscow. India’s Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, former President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (as Vice President in 1956) and former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (in 1961) visited the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

4. India recognized Azerbaijan as an independent country in Dec 1991 soon after it proclaimed its independence from the USSR formally in October 1991. Diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on 28 Feb 1992. The resident Indian Mission was opened in Baku in Mar 1999. Azerbaijan opened its resident Mission in New Delhi in Oct 2004.

Political Relations with India

5. India-Azerbaijan relations are friendly and growing. Former Vice President of India, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, visited Baku for the NAM Summit from 24-26 Oct 2019, accompanied by Hon’ble External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar. Former External Affairs Minister of India, Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, visited Azerbaijan on 4-6 Apr 2018 for attending the NAM Ministerial Conference and for a bilateral visit. Earlier, Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. M.J. Akbar, visited Baku (30 Nov - 01 Dec 2017) to attend Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. Finance Minister Mr. Arun Jaitley visited Baku in May 2015 to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors of Asian Development Bank. Hon’ble Prime Minister participated in the online NAM Summit on the theme “United against COVID-19” held at the initiative of Azerbaijani President, on 04 May 2020. Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Harshvardan, participated in the online meeting of NAM Health Ministers held on 20 May 2020 and on 27 May 2021 to discuss the COVID-19 preparedness. Minister of State for External Affairs Ms Meenakshi Lekhi participated in the Commemorative Meeting to mark the 60th Anniversary of NAM, held in Belgrade under Azerbaijani Chairmanship from 11-12 Oct 2021.

6. There have been several Ministerial level visits from Azerbaijan to India since 1991. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov paid a bilateral visit to India in May 2013. Deputy Minister of Economy, H.E. Sahid Mammadov, visited India to participate in the Vibrant Gujarat Summit from 16-19 Jan 2019. H.E. Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, visited Delhi to attend the 5th Inter-Governmental Commission on 11-12 Oct 2018. H.E. Mr. Samir Sharifov, Minister of Finance visited India on 21 Feb 2018. H.E. Mr. Kamaladdin Heydarov, Minister of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan participated in the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in New Delhi on 2-5 Nov 2016. H.E. Mr. Nagif Hamzayev,

Member of Parliament, visited India under ICCR's Distinguished Visitors' Programme in Aug 2019. Deputy Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Elnur Mammadov visited India on 28-29 Nov 2022 to take part in the Foreign Office Consultations with Secretary West.

Parliamentary Cooperation

7. Parliament of India and Milli Majlis (unicameral Parliament of Azerbaijan) have had inter-parliamentary contacts. A 20-member Indian Parliamentary delegation visited Baku on 6-10 Oct 2013 as Observers during the Presidential elections in Azerbaijan at the invitation of Azerbaijani Association for Civil Society Development. A joint Parliamentary delegation consisting three MPs visited Baku on 12-22 Sep 2018 to attend the 100th anniversary of Azerbaijani Parliament. Azerbaijan formed an Azerbaijan-India Working Group on Inter-Parliamentary Relations in May 2020 with H.E. Mr. Nagif Hamzayev, MP, as its Head.

Cooperation in Agriculture

8. The two countries have been exploring mutually beneficial cooperation in a number of areas, including agriculture. Department of Agricultural Research and Education of the Indian Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare deputed an expert on cotton to Azerbaijan from 27 Oct to 02 Nov 2019 to explore collaboration with Azerbaijan in cotton cultivation.

9. Government of India sponsored the visits of Indian experts from Kudumbashree, a Kerala based NGO, to Azerbaijan for supporting a project by the Azerbaijan Rural Investment Project (AzRIP) of the Ministry of Agriculture for economic empowerment of women in Azerbaijan. The Kudumbashree team visited Azerbaijan from 10-20 Mar 2018 and from 6-17 Sep 2018 and conducted workshops in Masalli, Balakan and Lankaran regions of Azerbaijan.

Bilateral Agreements

10. India and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation in Jun 1998. The agreement to establish the India-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation was signed in Apr 2007. Air Service Agreement and a Protocol of Intergovernmental Commission were signed in Apr 2012. Agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) in Civil & Commercial Matters and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters and Extradition Treaty were signed in Apr 2013. A Protocol on Cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of India and Azerbaijan was signed in May 2013. A Protocol on Exchange of Instruments of Ratification of MLAT on Civil & Commercial Matters was signed on 29 Feb 2016. An Agreement on visa exemption regime for diplomatic, official and service passport holders and an MOU for cooperation between FSI and ADA were signed in Apr 2018. An MOU between ICAI and CAAR was signed on 16 Sep 2022. Negotiations are underway for Bilateral Investment Treaty, Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, and for cooperation in the areas of ICT, Health & Medicine, Youth & Sports, Agriculture, Gainful employment of dependents of diplomats & officials, renewable energy and Customs.

Economic and Commercial

11. Over the years, India's bilateral trade with Azerbaijan increased substantially from around US\$ 50 million in 2005 to US\$ 739 million in 2021. According to the Azerbaijani statistics, the bilateral trade further increased to US\$ 1.859 billion during Jan - Nov 2022 with an increase of 156.5% and India became Azerbaijan's fifth largest trade partner after Italy, Turkey, Russia and China. During the period, Azerbaijan's export to India was US\$ 1.662 billion with an increase of 179.9% and import from India was US\$ 197 million with an increase of 49.8% as compared to the same period of last year.

12. The important items of direct and indirect imports from India to Azerbaijan are rice, oxides of aluminium, smart phones, drugs, mobile phones, ceramic tiles and paving, granite, mechanical spades and excavators, self-propelled earth-moving and tunnelling machines, containing other antibiotics, agricultural tractors and forestry tractors, vaccines, black tea etc. The primary export from Azerbaijan to India is crude oil. Other items of export from Azerbaijan to India are iodine, oil coke, raw silk, acyclic ethers and lemonade.

13. ONGC Videsh Ltd invested more than US\$ 1.2 billion since Mar 2013 in development project of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (2.72%) oil field and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipe line (2.36%). Azerbaijani Investments in India was US\$ 57.6 million as of Nov 2022 by State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ). MD & CEO of ONGC Videsh visited Baku in Oct 2022 to participate in the 15th Verona Eurasia Economic Forum.

14. The Mission continued its market expansion and trade promotion activities by organising a number of webinars and B2B meetings in cooperation with various Export Promotion Councils and Chambers of Commerce in India and Azerbaijan, both in hybrid and physical modes during 2020-2022, to promote bilateral cooperation in diverse sectors including rice, pharmaceuticals, spices, ceramic tiles, engineering product, ready-made garments, telecommunications, engineering products, tea, cut flowers, tourism and medical tourism.

15. The 'Best of India - an Indian Product Trade Show' is organized in Baku by ANM Exhibitions in March and September every year with the participation of more than 60 companies. The last exhibition was organised in Sep 2022 in cooperation with FIEO, seeing great interest from the visitors. An exclusive Fashion Show presenting "Indian Creativity on Ramp" was also organised on 31 Aug 2022 at JW Marriott Absheron, Baku. The 'Great of India' Exhibition was organized in Baku in Dec 2022 with the participation of more than 30 companies.

16. Indian companies participated in 'Interfood Azerbaijan' Exhibition in May 2022, in the Oil and Gas exhibition in Jun 2022 and in Baku Build in Oct 2022. The Mission facilitated visit of 10 representatives of pharmaceutical companies as well as pharmaceutical regulatory bodies from Azerbaijan to participate at iPHEX-22 in Sep 2022 in Noida. The Mission promoted millets in the framework of International Year of Millets 2023, at Ayurveda Day in Oct 2022, at Indian Food Festival in Dec 2022 and at Great of India Exhibition in Dec 2022.

17. Azerbaijan is an important player in INSTC route connecting India with Russia & Europe through Azerbaijan & Iran. Mission coordinated Azerbaijan's participation at the 'Chabahar Day' on the margins of the Maritime Indian Summit on 04 Mar 2021. The Mission organized a virtual Seminar on India-Azerbaijan cooperation in transportation sector under INSTC together with FICCI in Jun 2021. The first train carrying thirty two 40-ft containers from Finland to Mumbai on INSTC route, traveled through Azerbaijan in Jun 2021.

18. Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) started direct flights between Delhi and Baku twice a week w.e.f. 09 Aug 2022. With 9,400 Indian tourists visited Azerbaijan in Oct 2022, India became the fourth largest source of tourists in Azerbaijan.

Cooperation in capacity building and education

19. Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, the Government of India offers about 30 fully-paid training courses to Azerbaijani officials every year. During the period of pandemic, these training programmes were switched to online mode and more than 200 Azerbaijani scholars attended e-ITEC programmes. India also provides scholar slots to Azerbaijani students under the General Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). Azerbaijani diplomats are also trained under the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) in India. A Hindi teaching Center with the support of ICCR functioned at the Azerbaijan University

of Languages (AUL) between October 2010 and November 2019. An India Centre is also functioning in the Institute of Literature of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS).

Cultural Cooperation:

20. The cultural exchanges over ages between Azerbaijan and India have led to close cultural affinity and shared traditions. World renowned Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi had a profound influence on eminent Indian poets like Amir Khusrau. In recent past, the famous Azerbaijani artist late Rashid Behbudov, a noted tenor who switched to singing popular Azeri songs in European classical tradition was a close friend of late Raj Kapoor. Indian intellectuals like Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore are well known in Azerbaijan. A Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) was signed between India and Azerbaijan in October 2018.

21. The Embassy has been organizing cultural events to promote Indian culture, cuisine, movies, songs and dances in Azerbaijan. Yoga is immensely popular in Azerbaijan. Since 2015, the Embassy has been celebrating the International Day of Yoga (IDY) in June every year by organizing several yoga-related events. IDY 2022 was celebrated by organising a number of Yoga events including at Velodrome, Gobustan, Guba, Ateshgah, Yanardag, Lankaran, Icherisheher and Chancery. With the support of ICCR, the Mission engaged a local Yoga teacher and has started regular Yoga classes at Chancery.

22. An Azerbaijan based Indian citizen, Dr. Rajani Chandra D'Mello was conferred Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award - 2021 for her work in the field of medicine. Embassy also organized events as part of the celebrations of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji and 160th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore.

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM)

23. As part of the ongoing celebrations of AKAM on the 75th anniversary of Indian independence, Mission organised several events in coordination with various Azerbaijani institutes and Indian diaspora associations in Azerbaijan. The major events include tree plantation, Indian food festival, Mahatma Gandhi jayanti, Ambedkar jayanti, Patel Jayanti, blood donation drive, showcase of textiles heritage of India, national days, rangoli competition, kite festival, Diwali festival, pilav festival, rice and tea tasting events, teachers day, Hindi day, ITEC Day, Ayurveda Day, Constitution Day, Pravasi Bhartiye Divas, International Women's Day, Holi festival, Bollywood dance performances, interaction with Sadhguru, tourism promotion events, Indian fashion show, Marvelous Indian Culture, Veer Baal Divas and screening of Indian movies at multiplex.

Indian Community:

24. The Indian community in Azerbaijan comprises of more than 1400 people, including professionals employed with international companies in the oil and gas sectors, businessmen engaged in commodities trading, catering and restaurant business and construction workers on short-term contracts. There are four Indian associations in Azerbaijan, viz., Indian Association Azerbaijan (IAA), Baku Malayalee Association (BMA), Baku Tamil Sangam and Azerbaijan Telugu Association (ATA), which work in close association with the Embassy. They regularly hold social events to celebrate major Indian festivals and events. The Indian community is very active both professionally and socially and has integrated well with the local population.

Source: Embassy of India, Azerbaijan Web site Jan 2023.