

India-Belize Relations

Belize—formerly British Honduras—is the only English-speaking country in Central America, and a member of the Commonwealth. Otherwise a small country with a diversified population of just over 3 lakh, located on the Caribbean Sea, with Mexico in the north and Guatemala on the west, Belize gained independence on 21 September 1981.

Political: Notwithstanding the distance, India and Belize enjoy friendly, warm, and cordial relations. Belize traditionally supports India on most issues, in the UN and other multilateral fora, and vice versa. India has extended cooperation to Belize as disaster relief and for development, which in recent years has been by way of gift of Bajaj 3-wheelers, medicines, cricket sets, and currently offers of a line of credit of US\$10 million and of an IT centre. In addition, several Belizean proposals for Indian cooperation are under mutual consultation process. India also provides 11 training slots annually to Belize under the ITEC Programme, and a couple of ICCR scholarships.

Belize as a member of SICA (System of Integration in Central America) has yet another forum for a regular dialogue with India, for strengthening and expanding relations between India, and Belize and other Central American countries. The Dialogue covers cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including UN reform, anti-terrorism, climate change, nuclear disarmament, food and energy security, trade promotion, and disaster management.

Bilateral visits at political and senior levels help promote these ties:

- Philip Zuniga, President, Senate, attended a Parliamentary Conference in Delhi in September 2007
- Sujan Chakraborty, MP, visited Belize for a Commonwealth Parliamentary study on environment, in February/March 2007
- John Birchman Saldivar, Minister for Sports and Governance, visited India for the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, in October 2010.

The Indian Embassy in Mexico is also India's non-resident High Commission to Belize. Leading business personalities represent each other in the two capitals as Honorary Consuls General.

Economic & Commercial: Bilateral trade is understandably limited, ranging in recent years up to US\$20 million. Indian exports are mainly textiles, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods, and imports primary products and agricultural produce. Certain sectors of the Belizean economy such as tourism, fishery and food processing offer good potential for Indian investors. The pharmaceuticals sector may also be of interest to Indian companies based in Latin America to expand their distribution network to Belize.

Cultural: ICCR's cultural troupes visit Belize on a regular basis and are popular, among both Indian and other communities.

Indian Community: Belize has up to 1,000-strong Indian business community, mainly Sindhis, that migrated there from India in the recent decades, and constitute a valuable link between Belize and India. There is also an "East Indian" community, over 10,000 strong, migrating to Belize from the Caribbean over a period of time, who are totally assimilated with the local society, but have evinced interest to re-discover their lost Indian roots, through the 'KnowIndia Programme', 'Tracing the Roots' facility, and exposure to various Indian cultural programmes and activities.

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