

## **India-Georgia Relations**

### **Historical Background**

There is enough literary and folklore-based evidence to suggest that links between India and Georgia and awareness of India in Georgia have existed from very early times of human civilization. Fables from India's Panchtantra are believed to have influenced the Georgian folk legends. Those links were further strengthened in medieval ages by missionaries, travelers, and traders. Georgians are said to have served at the Mughal Courts and some of them are believed to have risen to the positions of Governors. The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's wife Udaipuri Begum was of Georgian origin. Archeological investigations are at hand in pursuance of the Georgian conviction that the body of their Queen St. Ketevan (who attained martyrdom in 1624 in Shiraz, and has since been elevated to Sainthood) is buried in St. Augustine Tower in Goa (where the Portuguese had managed to transfer her body).

### **Soviet Era**

During the Soviet era, Prime Minister Pt. Nehru visited Tbilisi in 1955 (when he was welcomed in Hindi by the renowned Georgian Indologist and Sanskrit scholar Georgi Akhvledani); Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi visited Tbilisi in the summer of 1976. Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Georgia in June 1978 as Foreign Minister.

### **Post-Soviet/ Contemporary Period**

Recognition of Georgia and Establishment of Diplomatic Relations following the declaration of independence by Georgia in the wake of the disintegration of the USSR, India recognized Georgia on 26th December 1991. Formal diplomatic relations were established on 28th September 1992. At present we do not have a Resident Mission in Georgia. Our Ambassador to Armenia with residence in Yerevan (Armenia) is concurrently accredited to Georgia. The First Resident Ambassador of Georgia to India arrived in New Delhi on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

### **Institutional Mechanisms**

Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations was concluded on 11th May 2000; it was signed by the Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagarishvili and EAM Mr. Jaswant Singh and provides for regular consultations at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and other agreed levels on international, regional and bilateral issues of mutual interest. India and Georgia are in the process of establishing Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation which would create a framework for cooperation in diverse areas. There are no irritants in our bilateral relations, which are marked by broad understanding on issues of mutual interest.

### **India's Development Assistance**

In December 1994, India had gifted medicines and relief supplies worth Rs. 0.5 million for refugees and displaced persons from Abkhazia. India's assistance to Georgia at present is mainly in the field of Human Resource Development. India offers (i) Training slots (20 on average) every year under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC); the slots were increased to 25 for 2011-12 in view of high demand and utilization; (ii) Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Scholarships to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Indian Universities; and (iii) Kendriya Hindi Sansthan scholarships to study Hindi in India. In addition, an ICCR Chair of Contemporary Indian Studies has been established at the Tbilisi State University (TSU). The Chair became operational with the arrival of Prof. R L Hangloo in October 2011. For 2012-13, the Government of India has enhanced the number of ITEC Slots for Georgia to 25.

### **Indian Community**

The Indian community is comprised of businessmen, workers, etc.; their number jumped considerably in 2012 and according to rough estimates, around 2000-3000 Indian nationals are now resident in Georgia. This figure also includes about 300 Indian nationals working for Indian companies which have business operations in Georgia. Traditionally, Indian students have been coming to Georgia to study Medicine at the Tbilisi State Medical University; their numbers have been between 500 and 550 on average. Beginning from early 2010, a large number of Indian school leavers arrived in Georgia to pursue several short and medium term professional courses of duration of less than one year at Georgian Polytechnics under the false hope and promises that attractive jobs and PR status will be available as soon as they complete these courses. Appropriate measures including an advisory on the website of the Ministry of External Affairs have been taken to apprise the prospective Indian nationals of the ground realities. No incident of ethnic/racial violence against the Indian community has come to notice. Indian films and food are popular in Georgia; there are two Indian Restaurants in Tbilisi. Interest in learning Hindi is palpable. The India-Georgia Cultural Association 'Bharatqis' engaged in promoting Indian culture; it is coordinating Hindi classes in Tbilisi for which the Government of India is extending the required support.

### **Bilateral Visits**

Mr. Parvez Dewan, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, visited Tbilisi during 26-28 May 2012 and represented India at Georgia's first 'Day of Diaspora'

### **Trade and Economic Relations**

Bilateral trade between the two countries is relatively small though it showed a steady increase from US \$ 42.41 million during 2004-05 to US \$ 115.39 million in 2006-07. Thereafter, bilateral trade registered a decline to US \$ 103.72 million during 2007-08 and further to US \$ 88.96 million during 2008-09. With the onset of global financial crisis in late 2008, bilateral trade further declined in 2009-10 to US \$ 66 million. [Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India]. In 2011, bilateral trade stood at US\$ 74.62 million [Source: National Statistics Office, Georgia] thus showing a 13 per cent growth over the previous year.

Balance of trade is in favour of India. The main commodity of Georgian exports to India is the ferrous waste and scrap, whereas meat and meat products are India's main items of exports. According to Geostat, Georgia, the total bilateral trade between India and Georgia in 2012 was at USD 88.81 million, registering 19.5 per cent increase over 2011. India's exports to Georgia stood at USD 73.87 million and imports at USD 14.94 million.

In the past, the Indian private sector organized "Best of India" the periodic Exhibition-cum-Sale of Indian consumer goods in Tbilisi with support from the Government of India; this contributed to bilateral trade volumes and also helped in popularizing Indian consumer goods. In 2012, an Indian company in Tbilisi - Little India LLC - organized similar exhibition titled "Little India Exhibition" in Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi. These expositions attracted large crowd and enthusiastic response in Georgia. An Indian Food Festival at Hotel Radisson in Tbilisi organized in collaboration with Indian Chef Sanjiv Kapoor of "Khana Khazana" fame attracted very good response.

As regards investments from India into Georgia, from a meager amount of US\$ 29,000 in 2005, investments from India into Georgia went touched US\$ 26 million by end November 2011 [Source: National Statistics Office, Georgia]. For instance, JSW Steel Netherlands BV (wholly owned by JSW India, together with the Georgian Steel Group Holding Limited has set up a plant for converting metal scraps into reinforced steel bars; the plant was inaugurated by Georgian President in November 2009. Another Indian company - Continental Construction - has, in partnership with British and Georgian firms, have established a company - Trans Electrica - to construct a hydro power plant in Georgia. Individual investors from India have acquired agricultural land for cultivation in Georgia. Escorts have appointed a distributor in Tbilisi for their products including tractors. In 2012, a total investment of US\$ 6.13 million in Georgia was made up to the third quarter of 2012 by Indian companies as against US\$ 16.26 million during 2011. The figures for the fourth quarter of 2012 are yet to be made available.

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