

INDIA AND MEXICO: CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - South America

[More from the author](#)

On August 1, 2020, India and Mexico ushered in the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Mexico was the first country in Latin America to establish diplomatic relations with India in 1950. Despite the vast geographical distance that separates them, the two countries share certain commonalities. Both are democracies, diverse societies and share similar development priorities. This view is echoed by Octavio Paz, Nobel Laureate and former Mexican Ambassador to India, “From the beginning, everything that I saw inadvertently evoked forgotten images of Mexico. The strangeness of India brought to mind that other strangeness: my own country”.¹

Over the years, Mexico and India have developed a warm and cordial relationship. In 2007, the two countries upgraded their bilateral relations to a “Privileged Partnership”. In 2016, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Mexico, the two countries decided to develop a roadmap to upgrade their relationship to a “Strategic Partnership”.² This was followed by an exchange of visits at the ministerial level, including a visit to India by Mexican Minister of Energy Rocio Nahle and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Julián Ventura Valero. Earlier this month, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Mexican Deputy Foreign Minister Valero exchanged views on several issues including the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the need to further expand the bilateral relations.³

The 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations provides an opportunity to enhance cooperation in four key areas, which are discussed below:

Mexico is currently India’s largest trading partner in Latin America. In 2018-19, it accounted for almost a quarter of India’s trade with the region. At the same time, India is currently Mexico’s ninth-most important global trading partner. The last decade has seen a spurt in trade between the two countries, which has grown from around \$5 billion in 2015-16 to \$9.4 billion in 2018-19.⁴ Crude oil dominates India’s imports from Mexico. It also imports electrical goods and machinery, electronic equipment and auto parts. India’s exports to Mexico comprise mainly of vehicles, organic chemicals, aluminium products, iron and steel, and ceramic products. Indian companies have so far invested around \$3 billion in Mexico.⁵

The rise in trade and investment follows Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Mexico in 2016. It can also be attributed to the immense significance of Mexico as a gateway to both North and Latin America. A large number of Indian information technology (IT) and pharmaceutical companies have set up joint ventures in Mexico. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a surge in cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector. In July 2020, Indian pharma company Zydus Cadila received approval from the Mexican regulatory authority for clinical trials of the biological therapy ‘Pegylated Interferon alpha-2b’ for treatment of COVID-19 with a research organisation based in the country.⁶ Other potential areas of economic cooperation are agriculture, biotechnology and energy.

Mexico could be a key partner in the Indian energy security as crude oil is a major component of Indian imports from the country. According to the United States (US) Energy Information Administration, Mexico is one of the largest producers of petroleum and other derivatives in the

world – fourth in the Americas after the US, Canada and Brazil. Mexico is also rich in non-fossil energy sources including solar, wind and geothermal energy. Global commitments towards climate change mitigation and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions are pushing countries the world over to move away from fossil fuel to cleaner fuels. A recent report from McKinsey suggests that Mexico has the potential to become a world leader in clean energy.⁷ It may prove fruitful for India to expand cooperation with Mexico in the renewables sector, particularly in solar energy.

In recent years, Mexico has shown interest in developing closer ties with African countries. Unlike India, which shares a historical and structured relationship with Africa, Mexican contact with the continent, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, has been limited. Mexico's commercial and diplomatic footprint on the continent is small. It has eight embassies in Africa – Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa.⁸ However, looking at the economic progress in Africa in recent decades, Mexico has shown interest in expanding diplomatic presence there.⁹ In 2019, Deputy Foreign Minister Ventura visited Ethiopia, South Africa and Ghana to further deepen the relations.¹⁰ On its part, India has initiated triangular development cooperation with like-minded countries such as Japan, the US and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Africa. India could consider sharing experiences with Mexico and also future collaboration in select African countries.

Mexico and India have had different viewpoints on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation. However, during Prime Minister Modi's 2016 visit, Mexico pledged support for India's bid to be part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).¹¹ This was primarily in recognition of India's commitment to the international agenda of disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. While the NSG membership still alludes India, the Prime Minister's visit helped in tempering Mexico's concerns on the issue.

Similarly, the two countries have differences on the issue of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms. Mexico has been a member of the United for Consensus (UfC) group that, unlike India and the Group of Four members (Japan, Germany and Brazil), opposes the expansion of permanent membership in the UNSC. The UfC had, instead, called for the expansion of non-permanent membership in the UNSC. However, both India and Mexico are non-permanent members of the Security Council for the period 2021-2022. This is a good opportunity for both countries to set aside their differences on global governance issues, and work closely on areas of mutual interest. For instance, New Delhi and Mexico City share common concern over growing traditional and non-traditional security challenges, particularly the rise of global terrorism. They can jointly push for an effective response to international terrorism, reforming the multilateral system, and the adoption of a comprehensive approach to promoting international peace and security.

The increased contact between India and Mexico also has immense potential for enhancing commercial relations between the two countries. The 70th anniversary thus provides the impetus for both countries to further deepen their partnership.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or of the Government of India.

END