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**Ministry of External Affairs**  
Government of India



## Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Belgium (March 30, 2016)

[March 30, 2016](#)

### **Bilateral relations**

The Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, and the Prime Minister of Belgium, Mr. Charles Michel met in Brussels on 30 March, 2016.

The Leaders expressed deep shock and anguish at the dastardly terrorist attacks in Brussels last week and condemned them in the strongest possible terms. They reaffirmed their belief that no issue or cause can justify dreadful and indiscriminate acts of violence against innocent people. They agreed that the growing menace of terrorism knows no boundaries and its root causes and manifestations must be tackled through united efforts by the international community. Underlining that terror cannot defeat freedom and liberty, the leaders reiterated that these fundamental values have always strengthened our shared resolve to fight against such inhuman acts of terror. On behalf of India, a nation confronted with terrorism for decades, Prime Minister Modi expressed solidarity with Belgium in this tragic hour and offered heartfelt condolences for the loss of several lives and prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured.

Noting that diplomatic relations between India and Belgium were instituted in 1947, the Leaders welcomed the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Belgium in 2017 as an occasion to commemorate and commit to further strengthening of bilateral relations.

They looked forward to a State Visit to India in 2017 by His Majesty King Philippe of Belgium as a key event in the commemoration.

Lauding the vital role played by, and the supreme sacrifice made by more than 9,000 Indian troops in Flanders fields, Belgium, during the First World War, the two Prime Ministers recalled India's participation in the inaugural commemorative events held at Nieuwpoort and Ypres in Belgium in October 2014 and welcomed the ongoing commemorative celebrations underway till 2018.

Both leaders acknowledged the growing convergence of views on regional and international issues and committed to work together in close partnership on a range of issues of mutual interest. In this context, the Prime Ministers welcomed the inception of an institutionalized political dialogue between India and Belgium.

Prime Minister Michel reiterated the support of Belgium for India to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. India and Belgium underlined their shared interest in strengthening global non-proliferation objectives. In this regard, Belgium welcomes India's aspiration to become a member of the four multilateral export control regimes, namely, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Missile Technology Control Regime, Australia Group and Wassenaar Arrangement. India and Belgium agreed to work together for India to become a member of these regimes.

Taking note of the federal structure in both countries, the two Leaders encouraged mutually beneficial partnerships and cooperation, including at the level of the States and the Union Territories of India, the Regions and Communities of Belgium.

### **Security Cooperation**

Condemning the terrorist attacks that have taken place across the world recently, the two Prime Ministers agreed that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is an attack on fundamental values and freedoms. They agreed that enhanced bilateral and international cooperation is necessary to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism, including early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and strict compliance with all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions designating terrorists and terrorist groups. The two Leaders also resolved to work together to drive forward international efforts in forums like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Recognising the urgent need to disrupt terrorist networks and their financing channels, eliminate terrorist safe havens, training infrastructure and cross-border movement of terrorists, the two Prime Ministers underlined the need for all countries to effectively

deal with terrorism emanating from their territory or territories under their control. Both sides reiterated that there should be zero tolerance for terrorism-related activities including those that are sponsored by state actors and entities and where terrorism is used as an instrument of state policy.

Reaffirming that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group, India and Belgium resolved to work together to better understand the phenomenon of radicalization, and counter the misuse of religion by groups and countries for inciting hatred and violent extremism or perpetrating terrorist acts. Agreeing to facilitate regular exchanges of civil society to promote the values of peace, tolerance and inclusion, the two Leaders reaffirmed their shared conviction that the values of humanism will prevail in countering the divisive propaganda of hatred and intolerance espoused by the forces of extremism and terrorism.

Recognizing the need for enhanced cooperation in criminal matters, they committed to begin negotiations on bilateral agreements for Mutual Legal Assistance, Extradition and Transfer of Sentenced Persons at an early date.

### **Economic cooperation**

The two Prime Ministers welcomed the robust bilateral economic engagement between the two countries and took positive note of Belgium being India's second largest trade partner in goods in the EU and India being Belgium's second largest export destination outside the EU. Recognizing the importance of the diamond sector in bilateral trade and the ongoing cooperation in the framework of the Kimberley Process, they resolved to further consolidate this mutually beneficial partnership. They committed to further strengthening the economic engagement by diversifying the bilateral trade basket and expanding investment ties.

The Leaders recognized the key role of the services sector in the two economies, and encouraged partnerships between services sector industries particularly in the areas of Information Technology, Biotechnology, Pharmaceuticals and Renewable Energy. They acknowledged the valuable contributions made by skilled workers to the service sectors of the two economies and the importance of smooth movement of skilled personnel in the framework of people to people exchanges. The Leaders recognized the importance of global cross-border transfer of information by electronic means for business purposes and resolved to address regulatory issues

They agreed on the need to tap into the full potential of the EU-India strategic partnership and looked forward to the resumption of negotiations on the India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement on mutually-agreed terms.

The two Leaders discussed the various flagship development initiatives launched by the Government of India and agreed to explore enhanced cooperation in these areas, especially the Smart Cities and the Clean Ganga programmes including the management of water resources in the Ganga River basin.

The Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction, the presence of more than 160 Belgian companies in India and around 80 Indian companies in Belgium. They encouraged businesses on both sides to take advantage of the growing trade and investment opportunities, especially in sectors with mutual complementarities like ports, railways, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, information technology, health, research and innovation.

Noting the vibrant passenger traffic between the two countries and recognizing the need for direct passenger flights, the two Prime Ministers hoped that efforts will be undertaken to maintain air connectivity between Belgium and India either through direct flight or through code-share operations.

The two Prime Ministers welcomed the conclusion of the amending protocol that makes the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) more comprehensive and contemporary.

### **Energy, Ports and Information Technology**

The two Prime Ministers welcomed the progress under the MoU on renewable energy between the competent Belgian authorities at federal and regional levels and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy of India, and the inaugural meeting of the Joint Working Group on 14 March 2016 identifying smart cities, waste to energy, small wind turbines, water purification technologies involving renewable energy and zero emission buildings as priority areas for joint collaboration.

The Leaders took positive note of the active cooperation in Science & Technology under the intergovernmental agreement between India's Department of Science & Technology and the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office, and looked forward to continued cooperation in this regard. They welcomed the technical activation of an optical infrared telescope in Devasthal in India, jointly developed by ARIES (Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences) of India and the Belgian company AMOS (Advanced Mechanical and Optical Systems) as a concrete demonstration of successful collaboration. The two leaders also welcomed the upcoming signature of the finalized Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Biotechnology of India and the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO) for cooperation in the field of Biotechnology.

Noting the longstanding cooperation between the two countries in the Ports sector, they welcomed the imminent extension of the agreement between the Government of Flanders and the Ministry of Shipping for another two years, as well as the ongoing collaboration between the Port of Antwerp and the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust to develop a Joint Training Center under the MoU signed in February 2015.

They also welcomed the ongoing negotiations to cooperate in the area of Information Communication Technology and Electronics (ICT&E) across a broad spectrum of domains including e-Governance/mobile Governance, cybersecurity, institutional framework between major research institutions, education and training in ICT and looked forward to early conclusion of an agreement.

## People to people ties

Affirming the importance of cooperation in the field of education, the two Prime Ministers welcomed the numerous projects in collaborative research, student mobility and exchange of faculty between higher educational institutions of Belgium and India. They looked forward to further strengthening of the academic engagement between institutions on both sides.

Noting that 40,000 Belgian tourists visit India every year and Belgium receives about 60,000 Indian tourists every year, the two Leaders welcomed the e-Tourist visa facility extended by India to Belgian nationals to promote tourism. They welcomed the upcoming signature of the agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Flanders on cooperation in the field of tourism.

Welcoming the envisaged adoption of the India-EU Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility and underscoring the importance of the growing people to people exchanges between India and Belgium, the Prime Ministers encouraged efforts to ensure easier mobility of people on both sides.

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