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Issue Brief

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

Growing India-Belarus Cooperation

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The President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko arrived in India on a two-day visit from September 11-12, 2017. The invitation for this visit was extended by the President of India to the President of Belarus. This was the third visit to India by any Belarusian head of state. The earlier two visits took place in September 1997 and April 2007. However, this visit was particularly important as both India and Belarus are celebrating 25 years of the establishment of their diplomatic relations.¹

During his visit, President Alexander Lukashenko held meetings with the President of India Ram Nath Kovind, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu, Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and above all, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi.



The joint statement issued following the talks between Prime Minister

Modi and President Lukashenko, started with an expressed intention of the two countries to move into an active phase of intensifying cooperation and move towards strategic partnership. The two countries stressed that there is a need to reform the United Nations, and in particular, the United Nations Security Council, to make it more representative of contemporary realities. In this regard, Belarus announced its strong support to India's candidature for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council. Both the leaders condemned any form of terrorism and extremism and affirmed their support for an early adoption of the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. The two leaders stressed the importance of improving regional connectivity to realise the full potential of trade. While referring to International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials set up at Hyderabad in 1993 with Belarusian support, the two leaders declared mutual interest in the advanced technology exchange. Importance of education and skills for economic development was also stressed and the two sides welcomed the first meeting of the joint working group on education. It was also noted

¹ "India, Belarus to explore new avenues for cooperation", *The Indian Express*, September 11, 2017 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-belarus-to-explore-new-avenues-for-cooperation-4838325/>

that Belarus is a partner country in Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, and so far, some 300 Belarusian nationals have been trained in India. The two countries also pledged to promote people to people contacts and facilitate business community.²

Apart from meeting with Modi and the joint statement, India and Belarus also signed 10 MoUs in different fields that included oil and gas sector, vocational training, sports, agriculture and cooperation in science and technology.³ The two countries also agreed to encourage joint development and manufacturing in defence sector under “make in India” initiative.⁴ India and Belarus also released a postage stamp to mark 25 years of their diplomatic relations.

Traditionally, India's relations with Belarus have always been cordial and warm. India was the first country to recognise Belarus as an independent country in 1991. Bilateral trade between the two countries in 2016 amounted to US\$ 402 million. Cooperation in science and technology and defence is an important aspect of India-Belarus bilateral relations.⁵ In an interview that was published in "*The Hindu*", President Alexander Lukashenko explained the importance of India for his country. He made it clear that India was a top priority for Belarus along with China and Russia, and by having friendly relations with these three nuclear powers, no one could ever think that Belarus is an isolated country.⁶ The recent visit is further expected to bring the two countries closer. But despite close and cordial relations with India, Belarus or any other country in the world should not and cannot ignore the fact that India's record of fulfilling its promises made to the world body (United Nations) is bleak, and thus the question of India becoming a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council does not merit a debate.

² See full text of the joint statement on the website of Embassy of India, Minsk, Belarus at <http://www.indembminsk.in/newsdetail.php?id=226>

³ "India, Belarus sign ten pacts to expand cooperation", *The Hindu*, September 12, 2017 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-belarus-sign-10-pacts-to-expand-cooperation/article19671464.ece>

⁴ "India, Belarus sign ten pacts, to expand military cooperation", *Outlook*, September 12, 2017 at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-belarus-sign-10-pacts-to-expand-military-cooperation/301591>

⁵ India-Belarus Relations, Embassy of India, Minsk, Belarus at <http://www.indembminsk.in/eoi.php?id=Bilateral>

⁶ "India is top priority for Belarus", *The Hindu*, September 28, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/ampquotIndia-is-top-priority-for-Belarusampquot/article14750152.ece>