

'Luxembourg and India Have Become Strong Partners and Have Built Excellent Relations'

Jean Claude, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to India, on the importance of India-Luxembourg relations

Mr Jean Claude Kugener is the Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to India and is co-accredited to the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Mr Kugener presented his letters of credence to the President of the Republic of India, Ram Nath Kovind, at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 20 September 2018.

Before his posting to India, he served as the Deputy Head of Mission of Luxembourg in London

from 2014 to 2018. He also served as the Deputy Head of Mission and Consul at the Luxembourg Embassy in Moscow from 2010 and 2014, and was the Deputy Head of Mission in Berlin from 2005 to 2010. Mr. Kugener joined the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in 2000 as the Head for the Middle East & North Africa and was subsequently the Head of Latin America & the Caribbean at the Department for Political Affairs until September 2005. From 2002 to 2005, he was also the Assistant Chief of Protocol for State and Official Visits.

Ambassador Kugener studied in Paris, Oxford and Berlin and obtained a European Master's in Management from the European School of Management. He also has a General Academic Studies Degree in Economics and Management from the University of Law in Nancy, France.

Ambassador Kugener fluently speaks Luxembourgish, French, German and English. His interests include travelling, art, music, and reading. In an interview with **Manu Shankar** of *Business Digest*, he talks about ways to improve bilateral trade relations.

Edited excerpts from the interview

What has been your experience as the Ambassador of Luxembourg to India?

Since my arrival in India exactly a year ago, I have been working together with my colleagues at the Embassy and our fine network of Honorary Consuls to strengthen the cordial bilateral relations between India and Luxembourg. During this year, we celebrated 70 years of diplomatic relations, which were signed on 1 July 1948. Over the decades, Luxembourg and India have become strong partners and have built excellent relations. Among the many high-level visits, allow me to cite but a few, the State Visit of the President and Mrs Narayanan to Luxembourg from 14-16 September 1998, the visit of the late Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj to Luxembourg on 19-20 June 2018 and the many ministerial visits to India of the members of the Luxembourg Government since the opening of our Embassy in 2002. It has been my privilege to continue building on the excellent relations with India through my multiple exchanges with the members of the Government in Delhi but also in the regions during my travels. Since my arrival in Delhi on 3 September 2018, I first met our striving business community, the many Luxembourg companies present in India and the Luxembourg related Indian companies in order to contribute to the strengthening of the economic and trade links in areas such as steel, finance, ICT, start-ups etc.

The Foreign Direct Investment from Luxembourg to India between April 2000 and March 2019 amounted to USD 2.776 billion making it the 16th largest

Jean Claude Kugener, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

investor in India. How can we improve upon those numbers?

Luxembourg and India have always had extensive relations in terms of trade and investments. On 5 November 1929, Luxembourg opened its first vice-consulate in Bombay. Steel had been at the forefront as Luxembourg had one of the most important steel industries in Europe in the 19th century. Luxembourg ranks among the top largest investors in India in terms of Foreign Direct Investment according to the latest official statistics, which also explains the large presence of our companies active in India. The Luxembourg companies Paul Wurth and Ceratizit have been contributing in the "Making in India" for over two decades now. Paul Wurth, since its creation in 1870 has developed into a global engineering company and has engineered and built, among its many projects over the country, the largest Coke Oven Plant in Asia at the Tata Steel BSL plant in Meramandali. Ceratizit, based in West Bengal, which has been developing and producing sophisticated hard material cutting and wear protection solutions, is extending its presence in India with its other two production sites in Bengaluru. The world's largest steel producer Arcelor-Mittal is headquartered in Luxembourg since the merger in 2006 and many Indians are working at its sites in Luxembourg.

Another company, Amer-Sil, through its joint venture with the Indian partner Ketex, is based in Kharagpur and specialises in producing industrial lead acid battery components. It is also one of the largest manufacturers of tubular bags and technical textiles in India and among the leaders in the country. The Luxembourg headquartered and world-leading satellite operator Société Européenne de Satellites (SES) currently provides satellite capacity into India via ISRO using 5 geostationary satellites and helps to fast-track "Digital India".

Two weeks ago, I visited in Pune IEE a world leader in vehicle safety, automation and electrification, and its partner Quanzen, who produce seat belt sensors with a large presence in the Indian automotive market. The

company will be ready to assist India with the implementation of its new directive to make it mandatory to wear seat belts. Let me finally highlight the example of Boson Energy, which develops clean and small-scale first-mile waste-to energy solutions that extract a maximum of energy from municipal solid waste and other mixed wastes using the next generation of Advanced Thermal Treatment. Boson Energy is indeed the only solid waste company in the world selected for the first round of Environmental Technology Verification by the National Mission for the Clean Ganga Project. The numbers as you rightly say are bound to go up.

We are in the 71st year of diplomatic relations between India and Luxembourg. How do you foresee the road ahead for India-Luxembourg ties?

A number of bilateral agreements in various sectors including steel technologies, social security and air services among others have been signed. We are currently reinforcing some or launching new MoUs including those with the various Indian Institutes of Technologies with which the University of Luxembourg cooperates and which helps to strengthen the people-to-people bonds. The facts talk for themselves with a 36% increase in business and tourist visa applications in 2018 compared to 2017 and a staggering increase of 22% of the Indian community living and working in the Grand Duchy last year. Luxembourg is often seen as a hub for setting up a company's European or Global Headquarters, primarily due to its central location as well as cosmopolitan population, which speaks fluently French, German and English besides our Mother tongue Luxembourgish. There are many ways to further strengthen our cooperation and let me highlight as an example the many Indian IT companies that have established themselves in Luxembourg over the past decades with offices of Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Quantum Business Advisory, Syncordis, to name but a few. Today, Luxembourg presents excellent opportunities for start-ups in India from various

specialised fields like AI, Cybersecurity, Blockchain and E-Commerce/E-Payment and Space Resources.

In the era of deglobalisation, what according to you is the role of bilateral and multilateral trade?

Luxembourg remains a strong supporter of multilateralism and I can only support all efforts to strengthen our trade relations with India at the bilateral and multilateral level. To complete the picture, let me point out as well that Luxembourg has been a WTO member since it commenced on 1 January 1995 and a member of GATT since its creation in 1948. In the recent history, Luxembourg was the first non-Asian country to become a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015. On 12-13 July 2019, the Luxembourg Government hosted the 4th Annual Meeting, the first outside of Asia with a special focus on "Cooperation and Connectivity".

How do you see FICCI helping in furthering the India-Luxembourg relationship?

FICCI being a Pan India Chamber and an industrial body indeed has an important role in the trade and commercial promotion and engagement between our countries. I wish to mention the participation of Luxembourg as one of the 12 Partner Countries at the 5th Bengal Global Business Summit in Kolkata at the beginning of the year, where FICCI was a partner and where we received an overwhelming response during our Country presentation and had excellent contacts and B2B exchanges at our Pavilion. It was my first summit with 6 Luxembourg companies attending and a huge success for them, which generated a lot of business interest amongst the Indian business community and on social media.

Finally, let me point out that I had a few highly interesting discussions with the management of FICCI since my arrival in India, among them my fruitful meeting with the president Sandip Somany mid-May where we discussed a number of highly interesting ways of cooperation, the first among them being this interview, for which I am very thankful. ■