Europe India Chamber of Commerce

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EICC all set to host Trade and Investment Summit in Brussels

The Europe India Chamber of Commerce will be hosting the Trade and Investment Partnership Summit (**TIPS**) 2014 which will take place on 20-21 November 2014 in the Hotel Sheraton in Brussels. The summit is dedicated to fostering bilateral trade, investment and economic relations between European Union and India around the theme "**EU-India Strategic Partnership: Beyond the Lost Decade: What will it take for European and Indian Businesses to make it Work"**, and will be a milestone in our chamber's efforts to strengthen the EU-India partnership. As you are aware, the TIPS 2014 is being organized in partnership with **Eurochambres / EBTC** and in collaboration with **Indian Chamber of Commerce** and **The Friends of Europe**. More than 175 participants have already registered for the Summit.

The TIPS 2014 will discuss strategies for promoting SMEs in EU-India economic cooperation; entrepreneurial spirit of Indian CEOs to help India face the challenges of change; putting Clean-Tech and Green Growth at the heart of development strategies; emerging trends in renewable energy; strengthening dialogue and consultation mechanism on the Intellectual Property Rights Protection in India; emerging business opportunities and EU-India cooperation in the higher education in India; discussing the challenges of Urbanization through infrastructure development; EU-India Free Trade Negotiation; harnessing intellectual capital of Indian Diaspora for creating better understanding in business and culture. The Summit will make comprehensive overview on the strategic fundamentals of India-EU bilateral relationship in content and context and will suggest ways to give it a strategic dimension through a full spectrum of industry leaders, policy makers, senior executives in the corporate sector and representatives of the European Commission and trade bodies.

The Summit will take place in the background of several important developments - a decade of Strategic Partnership Agreement between EU and India and commemoration of the10th anniversary of the Chamber. For over 10 years, the Europe India Chamber of Commerce has achieved tremendous goals in promoting trade and economic relations between European Union and India as a leading proactive force in Europe. We are proud of the impact we have made on the EU-India relations, as well as the opportunity we provide to our members to stay informed, network and promote commerce through our many programme, events and activities. With Indian companies increasingly going global, the role of the EICC increases in nurturing the trade cooperation between Indian and European business leaders.

The European Union is still facing a crisis of legitimacy which is evidenced in a decline in support for the EU among citizens in pretty much every member country. The hot phase of Euro crisis may be over but the zone will limp on for years with low growth and high unemployment unless further action is taken on issues such as cleaning of the bank balance sheets, loosening of the monetary policy with more free market reforms, etc. However, the global economy and financial markets are in best shape since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008. Europe is not progressing as desired but no one talks about Eurozone break up or collapse of the Euro any more. The Eurozone is a massive market for businesses from India and the other major world economic powers and as Indian economy is integrated with the Euro zone through trade and finance channels, the crisis in the Eurozone has dampened demand for Indian exports. The debt crisis has also had its impact on capital flows into India both in the form of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investment (FII). However, over the past few months concerns about the global meltdown have receded. The US and EU economy are clearly performing better than a year ago and even though European fiscal issues are still being resolved, the panic situation seems to be behind us. National governments of the countries in the European Union, and heads of European central banks are taking necessary steps to ably support their economies. If the health of India's economy has been a cause for concern for some time there is a need for some bold and difficult decisions involving full-on reform and liberalization of the economy, and we hope that the new government will undertake confidence-building measures and bridge the credibility deficit. Irrespective of the fluid nature of circumstances, both globally and domestically, India needs a decisive government as the next decade will be crucial for the country.

EICC Summits and conferences in the past have been addressed by EU Commissioners and Vice Presidents, Ministers from the Government of India, Ministers from Government of Belgium, powerful Members of the European Parliament, business leaders from India and Europe. EICC speaks for multilateral rule based trading system and improvement in European and Indian competitiveness and is realizing its mission through high level strategic dialogue and debate in which trade and economic issues are intensively discussed. Also, as part of our lobby activities in Brussels where the Chamber is headquartered, we help Indian companies and industries who are subject to strong and stringent EU regulations in making their voice heard as we help them in policy level liaising and interventions at the highest levels of government and business.

While the Opening of the Summit on 20 November evening will be addressed by the high representatives of the Indian Government, Government of Belgium, Eurochambres/EBTC, European Commission, the business sessions on 21st November will be opened by the noted economist and thinker Lord Meghnad Desai, Professor Emeritus of Economics at London School of Economics.

During the Opening of the Summit on 20 November evening, the EICC will release its publication: **India in Belgium**.

Friends of Europe will organize a policy insight debate titled: **India: Looking East; Linking West** on the 21st November during the business sessions of the Summit. European Union officials and member state policymakers, business and international organisation representatives, academics, social partners and international press from EU member states will especially attend the debate.

India to receive over 12% of global remittances in 2014, says World Bank

India will account for 12.19 per cent, or $71 billion of overall global remittances of an estimated $582 billion this year, and also retain its top spot among developing countries with a 16.32 per cent share of an expected $435 billion in remittances during the year. India, with the world's largest number of emigrants at 14 million, will also remain in the top spot this year, attracting about $71 billion in remittances, the World Bank said in its latest issue of the `Migration and Development Brief', released on 7 October.

India with projected inflows of $71 billion, lead China that is expected to receive $64 billion in the global remittances rankings in 2014. Other large recipients are the Philippines ($28 billion), Mexico ($24 billion), Nigeria ($21 billion), Egypt ($18 billion), Pakistan ($17 billion), Bangladesh ($15 billion), Vietnam ($11 billion) and Ukraine ($9 billion). In terms of GDP share in 2013, the top recipients of remittances were Tajikistan (42 per cent), Kyrgyz Republic (32 per cent), Nepal (29 per cent), Moldova (25 per cent), Lesotho and Samoa (24 per cent each), Armenia and Haiti (both 21 per cent), the Gambia (20 per cent) and Liberia (18 per cent).

Officially recorded remittances to developing countries are expected to reach $435 billion this year, an increase of five per cent over 2013, the World Bank has said, adding that this year's growth rate is substantially faster than the 3.4 per cent growth recorded in 2013.

Remittances to developing countries, driven largely by remittances to Asia and Latin America, will continue climbing in the medium term, reaching an estimated $454 billion in 2015, the bank noted. Global remittances, including those to high-income countries, are estimated at $582 billion this year, rising to $608 billion next year. "Remittances to developing countries grew this year by five per cent. Remittance inflows provided stable cover for substantial parts of the import bill for such countries as Egypt, Pakistan, Haiti, Honduras, and Nepal," said Kaushik Basu, senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank Group. "In addition, India and the Philippines benefit from having migrants with the most diverse destination spread, thereby creating buffers against regional shocks," he added.

While remittances to the South Asia region are increasing more robustly this year, accelerating from slower growth in 2013, flows to India, the region's largest remittance recipient, will grow modestly by 1.5 per cent in 2014. The expansion is being led by flows from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, where skilled and unskilled workers are finding renewed job opportunities. As a result, the growth rate of remittances to the region is expected to more than double this year to 5.5 per cent (from 2.7 per cent in 2013), boosting volumes to $117 billion in 2014 and rising further to $123 billion in 2015, it said. In a special analysis on forced migration, the brief notes that forced migration due to conflict is at its highest level since World War II, affecting more than 51 million people.

An additional 22 million people have been forced to move due to natural disasters, bringing the total affected by forced migration to at least 73 million. "Despite the encouraging outlook for remittance flows, the circumstances of many migrants are troubling. With so many people on the move against their will and many others undertaking desperate and dangerous journeys, it is clear that more effort is needed to make migration safer and cheaper by exploring economically viable policy options," said Dilip Ratha, Lead Economist, Migration and Remittances, at the World Bank's Development Prospects Group and Head of the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD). Forced migration is typically viewed as a humanitarian issue but affects growth, employment and public spending for both origin and destination countries. The issue needs to be examined also through a development lens, says the brief. Forced migration is a major challenge in several regions.

In developing Europe and Central Asia, 1 million people in Ukraine have been displaced, while the high-income countries of Europe are receiving record numbers of asylum seekers. Applications to the entire region rose to over 480,000, an increase of 68 per cent from 2009. Pakistan and Iran top the world list of refugee host countries, as millions of people from neighboring Afghanistan remain displaced after more than 35 years of conflict.

At the end of 2013, nine out of 10 refugees were being hosted in developing countries. The war in Syria has displaced half the country's population, with 3 million refugees crossing borders and 6.5 million people displaced internally. Most Syrian refugees have fled to neighboring Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, joining millions of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees already there. In 2014, Syrians overtook Afghans as the second largest refugee group, outnumbered only by Palestinian refugees.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, internal conflict (including renewed instability in South Sudan and Boko Haram activities in Nigeria) together with persistent drought in the Horn of Africa, are resulting in increased forced migration in the region.

Prime Minister Modi backs up `Make in India' with labour reforms

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 16th October unveiled a string of labour reforms, including measures to end 'inspector raj', asserting that ease of doing business is "essential" to ensure 'Make-in-India' campaign is successful.

The reform measures announced by the prime minister are a combination of five main schemes, which include a dedicated `Shram Suvidha' portal, an all-new `random inspection scheme', universal account number for all employees, `Apprentice Protsahan Yojana' and a revamped `Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana'. Under the dedicated `Shram Suvidha Portal,' the government will allot labour identification number (LIN) to nearly 6 lakh units and these units will be allowed to file online compliance for 16 out of 44 labour laws.

The random inspection scheme will enable use of technology to eliminate human discretion in selection of units for inspection, while making uploading of inspection reports within 72 hours of inspection mandatory, the prime minister said. A computerised list of inspections will be generated randomly on predetermined objective criteria and complaints-based inspection will also be determined centrally, based on data and evidence.

There will also be provision of an emergency list for inspection of serious cases. "We have replaced 16 forms (which factory owners had to fill) with one form, which is available online. Now computer draw will decide which inspector (labour) will go for inspection to which factory and he will have to upload his report online in 72 hours. "These facilities are what I call minimum government, maximum governance. I have been hearing about 'inspector raj' since childhood," Modi said while inaugurating the 'Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Shramev Jayate Karyakram' organised by the labour ministry.

The universal account number will enable 41.7 million employees to have their provident fund account portable, hassle-free and universally accessible. He said he is keen that the Rs27,000 crore lying unclaimed in PF accounts are given back to their claimants, arguing that if mobile subscribers get connectivity everywhere they go, why cannot migrating labour force continue to get PF benefits. "I have to give back this money to the poor. This Rs27,000 crore belongs to the poor," he said even as he took a dig at this critics for questioning his vision. Under the 'Apprentice Protsahan Yojana', manufacturing units and other establishments will be reimbursed 50 per cent of the stipend paid to apprentices during first two years of their training. At present, there are 2.82 lakh apprentices undergoing training against 4.9 lakh seats. An initiative to revamp the apprenticeship scheme has been undertaken and the particular scheme will support one lakh apprentices during the period up to March 2017.

The government also proposes to introduce a 'Smart Card' for workers in the unorganised sector seeded with details of two more social security schemes under a revamped Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana. Speaking on the occasion, labour minister Narendra Singh Tomar termed these initiatives as bold steps in achieving the prime minister's vision of 'minimum government and maximum governance', emphasising that all actions of the ministry are geared to bring about greater transparency and speed in the system. Tomar said three bills had already been introduced in Parliament with the vision to harness India's demographic dividend, and facilitate ease of doing business in the country. "It is envisaged that the Apprentice Act, upon implementation, will increase the number of apprentices to over 23 lakh," he said. Modi also reached out to 4.2 lakh ITI students through SMS as he greeted the achievers with ITI degrees in various fields, hailing the undergraduate technical course.

Besides the ITI students, about 10 million EPFO subscribers also got SMSes regarding portability through UAN and about 6.50 lakh establishments and 1,800 inspectors got SMSes about Unified Labour Portal which, the government believes will make for a transparent and accountable Labour Inspection Scheme. The Prime Minister said that this event is different from other launches as the message has reached to the stakeholders at the same time. Stressing that the government functions on trust and not doubt, he said that this was the vision behind his government's decision allowing self certification of documents by enterprising youths, who had to run from pillar to post earlier to get their documents attested by officials. "Those who ask what is Modi's vision won't be able to see this because the power of their spectacles has gone up just looking for a vision," he said. Exhorting people to accord respect to labour and consider labourers as 'Shramyogi', he said that society can develop only if the dignity and honour of labour is restored in social life vis-a-vis other white collared jobs. Modi made a strong pitch for understanding and appreciating labour issues through the perspective of the labourers, so that they could be resolved with compassion.

India to become $2-trillion economy this year

India is poised to become a $2-trillion economy this year, with its GDP crossing $3 trillion after five years in 2019, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected in its latest World Economic Outlook.

According to IMF, India's economic ranking would rise to the world's seventh-largest from being the tenth-largest currently, as measured on "current prices" basis in US dollar terms, in 2019.

It projects the country's economy to emerge the seventh-largest in 2019 with a value estimated at $3.18 trillion, surpassing the economies of Russia, Brazil and Italy. The IMF estimates the Brazilian economy to be worth $2.89 trillion and the Russian and Italian economies at $2.59 trillion and $2.45 trillion, respectively.

Indian economy in 2013 was valued by the IMF at $1.88 billion, which would expand to $2.05 trillion this year. It's GDP growth has been below 5 per cent in the past two financial years.

The IMF projects the United States to remain the world's largest economy in 2019 at $22.15 trillion, up from $17.42 trillion in 2014, with China trailing at $15.52 trillion, up from $10.35 trillion.

"India has recovered from its relative slump; thanks in part to effective policies and a renewal of confidence, growth is expected once again to exceed five per cent," as per latest IMF World Economic Outlook report.

India home to 2nd largest proportion of highly paid expats: HSBC

India is home to the second largest proportion of high-earning expatriates in the world after China and ahead of countries like Switzerland, Russia and Hong Kong, says a HSBC survey.

According to the seventh Expat Explorer survey commissioned by HSBC Expat, 18 per cent of expats working in India draw a salary of USD 250,000 or more every year while in China 29 per cent expats earn a similar annual salary.

The proportion of expats drawing similar salaries is 17 per cent in Switzerland and 16 per cent each in Russia and Hong Kong.

"India as a country offers exciting career opportunities for expatriates who have the right skill-set and global experience," HSBC India Head of Retail Banking and Wealth Management, Sanjiv Sud said.

"With robust GDP growth projections, multinationals setting up shops here and Indian corporates hiring overseas talent to lead their businesses, the country will continue to offer lucrative career prospects to expatriates," Sud added.

Expats in India also report greater savings on everyday expenses and have substantial disposable income when compared to their home countries, the survey says.

Expats in India spend less on utilities (43 per cent), groceries (42 per cent), clothing (42 per cent), healthcare (41 per cent), housing (40 per cent) and household goods (40 per cent), the survey revealed.

"Expatriates enjoy a better lifestyle in India as the operational and commodity costs are substantially lower compared to the West. This helps them save money for the future and also have substantial disposable income," Sud said.

A sector-wise analysis shows that new-age sectors such as telecommunication, information technology and Internet account for 21 per cent of total expats working in India, followed by construction and engineering (19 per cent). Among all, 23 per cent of expats working in India are from United Kingdom, followed by the United States (14 per cent) and Japan and Canada at 7 per cent each.

Age profiles of expats working in India is fairly spread with 50 per cent of them in the age bracket of 35-54 years and 43 per cent in the range of 18-34 years, the survey said.

In the overall list, Switzerland was ranked as the number one country by expats looking for a well-balanced, high-quality lifestyle, followed by Singapore, China, Germany and Bahrain while India stood 9th in the list.

Lower living costs and good perks for families make India an increasingly attractive expat destination, the survey said. Expats ranked India 6th in terms of raising children, ahead of Canada at 8th position and China at 12th. New Zealand topped the chart in this segment.

The Expat Explorer survey, conducted by YouGov covered nearly 9,300 expats from around the world who shared their views on quality of life, financial well-being and ease of raising a family abroad.

Indian economy to grow by 6.4 pct: World Bank

Indian economy, which accounts for 80 per cent of South Asia's output, is set to grow by 6.4 per cent in 2015-16 as against 5.6 per cent in 2014-15, the World Bank has said.

With economic activity buoyed by expectations from the new elected government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "India is benefiting from a "Modi dividend"," the Bank said in its twice-a-year South Asia Economic Focus report recently..

Over the next year or so economic growth should be supported by the recovering US economy that would provide a market for Indian merchandise and service exports, it said.

"The outlook over the next years for South Asia indicates broad economic stability and a pick-up in growth with potential risks concentrated on the fiscal and structural reform side," said Martin Rama, Chief Economist for South Asia at the World Bank.

"Future growth will increasingly depend on strong investment and export performance," he added.

Private investment is expected to pick up thanks to the government's business orientation, and declining oil prices should boost private sector competitiveness.

But economic reforms will be needed for India to achieve its full long-term growth potential, the report argued.

The report said the region's economy will expand by a real 6 per cent in 2015 and by 6.4 per cent in 2016 compared to 5.4 per cent this year, potentially making it the second fastest growing region in the world after East Asia and the Pacific.

Other countries in the region are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Bank said India's long-term growth potential remains high due to favourable demographics, relatively high savings, and policies and efforts to improve skills and education, facilitate domestic market integration and incentivize manufacturing activities.

In the medium term, with the economy still below potential and reforms on a gradualist path, growth is expected to accelerate from 5.6 per cent in 2015 to 6.4 per cent and 7 per cent in 2016 and 2017.

Inflation is expected to decline with monetary policy switching to inflation targeting while the current account deficit is expected to widen somewhat as import demand and capital inflows rise.

Fiscal consolidation is expected to continue with stronger revenue mobilisation, while the oil subsidy burden could decline to 0.6 per cent of GDP if benign global crude prices persist, it said.

Supply chain delays and uncertainty are a major yet under-appreciated constraint to manufacturing growth and competitiveness in India, it said.

EICC Chairman Geoffrey Van Orden elected to Chair European Parliament's India Delegation

The European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with India on 16 October elected British Member of European Parliament (MEP) Geoffrey Van Orden as its new chairman. The Delegation also elected another British MEP of Indian origin, Neena Gill, as first vice-chair and Cora van Nieuwenhuizen from the Netherlands as second vice-chair. The Delegation has 24 members and 22 substitute members.

Speaking to IANS Mr. Van Orden said "I think relations between the European Union and India are vitally important and will be of increasing importance over the coming years and therefore I regard as great honour and privilege to be chairman of the Delegation,".

Mr Van Orden has a long association with India and has met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a number of occasions when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Mr Van Orden commented: “As we see the growth of autocratic power in many parts of the world, our relationship with the world’s largest democracy must be very high on our priorities. Fortunately, I have a long and very happy association with India going back to my days as a British Army Officer when I was fortunate to attend the Indian Defence Services Staff College. I lived there with my young family and our love of India stems from those days. I have maintained strong connections and friendships ever since. Most recently I have been Chairman of the Europe-India Chamber of Commerce.

“India has particularly strong links with my own country, the United Kingdom, and British Prime Minister David Cameron has placed emphasis on improving Britain’s strategic and trading position with India. Many European countries, not least Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Poland and the Netherlands, are seeking to enhance their relations with India”.

“I know how much importance Prime Minister Modi attaches to accelerating the pace of Indian economic growth and social reform and the relationship with Europe will be a vital part of this. We have an excellent Delegation which includes members from across the political spectrum and from some 16 countries. Naturally there will be differing perspectives on many issues. I shall now work hard with our national governments, with the EU institutions, with representatives of the Government of India, and with chambers of commerce, trade associations, and NGOs to give a fresh, positive impulse to the relationship between Europe and India.”

"I am very optimistic that under the new premiership of Mr. Modi, we will see progress in these relations," he added.

"I am very delighted and pleased to return to the European Parliament. I have an opportunity to renew my longstanding relationship with India," Gill said.

"We have got a lot of work to do in terms of trying to see how we can step up relations between the EU, the European Parliament and India. With the new Modi government in India we are very keen to engage with them," she said.

Cora van Nieuwenhuizen said "it is an honor to be elected as the vice-chair for the Delegation with India because India is very important in the world right now especially as an economic force". The young Dutch MEP said she has not visited India as yet but now she was looking forward to visit the country.

Sunil Prasad, secretary general of EICC said that Van Orden's appointment "promises to help strengthen the crucial EU-India relationship as India and EU need a meaningful, constructive and in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations as well as on international and regional issues of common interest". Prasad hoped that Van Orden's knowledge about India, coupled with substantial political skills of actively promoting public diplomacy would fuel his outreach with the Indian Parliament.

Van Orden lived in India 30 years ago and is a frequent visitor to the country.

Former Chairman of EICC MEP Deva is the new chair of EP-Korea delegation

EICC has the distinct honour of having its outgoing Chairman MEP Geoffrey Van Orden being elected to Chair the India delegation and the former EICC Chairman MEP Nirj Deva officially confirmed as the new Chairman of the European Parliament’s Delegation for relations with the Korean Peninsula. In relation to his appointment Mr Deva said:

“This is a very important time where we find ourselves at the cusp where anything is possible. Here in the European Institutions we have witnessed a number of positive developments in the last few weeks especially in relation to our dialogue with North Korea and I am confident that in this present moment there a number of things the EU can do as an interlocutor in this conflict externally to the framework provided under the six party talks”.

Mr Deva who is also the Vice President of the European Parliament's International Development Committee said: "In relation to North Korea, issues such as food security, human rights, humanitarian assistance and the development of a stable political dialogue are all on the table and as Members of this Delegation we have a unique opportunity for engagement with the North Koreans with regards to these issues".

Created at the beginning of the 6th Parliamentary term in 2004, the Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula covers relations with both the Republic of Korea (RoK, South) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North). Today the delegation is comprised of 10 Members of European Parliament and aims to enhance relations and maintain communication channels with both countries under its framework.

Mr Deva's appointment comes at very crucial time especially with regards to recent developments between the EU and North Korea, including the visit of Kang Sok Ju the Secretary and Director of the Korean Workers' Party International Affairs Department who in recent weeks visited Brussels and met with senior EU officials, and Nirj Deva. Mr Kang's visit was later followed up by the visit of the Honourable Hak Bong Hyon, the North Korean Ambassador to the United Kingdom who also met with Mr Deva in Brussels and discussed the willingness of the North Korean administration to re-open the human rights dialogue with the EU.

EU relations with South Korea are governed mainly under two key agreements including The EU-South Korea Framework Agreement (FA) (2010) which addresses a wide range of topics, including non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human rights, cooperation in the fight against terrorism, climate change, energy security and development assistance; and The EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (2011) which is aimed at integrating the European and Korean economies and removing barriers to trade between the two partners.

Mr. Deva was the founding Chairman of the EICC.

Former EICC Chairman MEP Dr. Christian Ehler has also served as the Chair of the delegation with Korea.

India, US to set up Investment Initiative

India and the United States have agreed to establish an investment initiative to facilitate investment in India by American institutional investors and corporate entities.

The Indo-US Investment Initiative will focus on deepening capital markets, especially debt markets, to support the long-term financing of infrastructure in India, says a joint statement issued after the talks between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Eyeing a five-fold increase in bilateral trade from about $100 billion now, the two sides have committed to working together to facilitate greater investment in both directions, to open new Indian sectors to private investment, and to address impediments to growth.

In response to the Prime Minister's "Smart Cities" initiative, the United States has welcomed India's offer to American industry to be lead partner in developing smart cities in Allahabad, Ajmer and Vishakhapatnam.

The US Department of Commerce will conduct a series roundtable discussions with other US Government agencies and industry groups with their Indian counterparts to identify actionable solutions and plans to design and implement novel infrastructure platforms for new Indian smart cities, said a fact sheet issued by the State Department.

It was also announced that the United States and India would partner on the Digital India initiative, with the goal of enhancing digital infrastructure, deploying e-governance and e-services, and digitally empowering India's citizens.

The two sides have tasked the US-India Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Working Group to finalise details of cooperation by the upcoming India-US Technology Summit in November in New Delhi.

On the infrastructure front, the two sides have agreed to establish an Infrastructure Collaboration Platform that will include mechanisms to identify and clarify critical infrastructure needs of India, provide a single Government of India point of contact for coordinating across ministries, and work with US and Indian industry to facilitate a substantial increase in American industry participation in the execution of infrastructure projects in several sectors -- power, water, sanitation, transportation, safety and smart cities.

Senior officials from the US Commerce Department are to lead two trade missions to India in 2015 focused on infrastructure opportunities in India.

In his address to the US India Business Council before departing for New Delhi, the Prime Minister invited American corporates to establish and expand their base in India, take advantage of an economy that is poised to grow fast. He assured American investors that in a matter of six months, he would implement all necessary things to boost the ease of doing business in India.

Indian biotech industry on the cusp of a new era

India's biotechnology industry is on the cusp of entering a new era as it already has many of the necessities required to grow its bio economy such as a talented and enthusiastic scientific workforce, a top biotech industry leadership has said.

"In 2012, Indian industry and government leaders set an ambitious yet attainable goal of growing the nation's bio economy to more than $100 billion by 2025," Jim Greenwood, CEO Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) said. "BIO believes that the Indian biotechnology industry is on the cusp of entering a new era when it can provide significant economic growth and development to the people of India and around the world," he said.

It needs only to address some fundamental areas of policy and regulation, and take steps towards creating an environment that encourages, not discourages, investment by innovators. "Because we see the potential that can result from collaborating with our Indian partners, BIO and the Association of Biotechnology-Led Enterprises produced a comprehensive road map for the nation's biotechnology industry, in which we identify major areas that require Prime Minister Modi's attention," Greenwood said.

"Without developing a pro-innovation environment, the Indian biotechnology industry will not be able to achieve its high potential and the world will not benefit from what could be the Asia Pacific region's dominant biotech hub," he said.

European Union reaches consensus on climate change targets

European Union leaders have reached a deal on a comprehensive package of climate targets, including a binding 40 per cent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the level of 1990 by 2030.

They also agreed at a summit in Brussels to increase the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU to at least 27 per cent and to boost energy efficiency by 27 per cent.

These targets, which are not binding, "will be achieved while fully respecting the member states' freedom to determine their energy mix," they said in a joint statement after the meet.

"Individual member states are free to set their own higher national targets," the statement said.

The breakthrough in the 28-nation bloc's tough negotiations on its climate targets came after a compromise was reached with Poland, which strongly rejected attempts to set binding targets to reduce carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions.

Poland and some other east European members of the EU, which are heavily dependent on coal for power generation, expressed fears that their economies will be hit by the Union's climate goals and demanded compensation in lieu from the supranational body.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Holland, who are at the forefront of efforts to reach a binding agreement on climate targets, held a separate meeting with Poland's new Prime Minister Eva Kopacz and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy before joining the other EU leaders for the opening session of their two-day summit.

Under pressure from Britain and Poland, the EU leaders scaled down their energy efficiency goal to 27 per cent from 30 per cent as envisaged originally.

Merkel, who hailed the agreement as an "important step forward," said it would enable the EU to play a decisive role in international efforts to combat global warming.

EU's climate targets posed "no problems or burden" for Germany, she told a news conference.

Rompuy, who hosted the summit, said the climate and energy deal "sets Europe on an ambitious, yet cost-effective climate and energy path."

It will allow Europe to take a "positive message, a message of commitment," to the international climate negotiations, especially to the UN conference in Paris at the end of next year.

It is also a "timely decision" in the context of the current conflict in Ukraine and turmoil in the Middle East.

These developments have highlighted how urgent it is for Europe to reduce its energy dependency, Rompuy said.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said the EU is doubling its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by raising its goal from a 20 per cent cut set for 2020 to 40 per cent by 2030.

"This is indeed a very ambitious, but achievable target," he said.

The EU's climate and energy deal will give a boost to Europe's competitiveness by keeping the bloc on the path towards a low carbon economy and green growth, with the necessary financial support and solidarity, he said.
