

The Hague: Your gateway for global impact innovation through the Netherlands

Webinar transcript – 18 September



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01:00:27

Saskia Bruines: My name is Saskia Bruines, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of The Hague. I would have preferred to stand here in person in front of you. However, nevertheless, I am glad that I can still welcome you to The Hague, to Digital The Hague, I should say, not only because of this online event, but because The Hague is truly a digital city. The Internet and digital technology plays an increasingly important role in our lives. New digital technologies open, renew and change the world as we know it. These new developments make our lives easier, but also require new solutions, and as the International City of Peace and Justice, The Hague offers a unique network of organisations, companies, governments and knowledge institutions to secure safety not only in the physical world, but also in the digital world. In some 400 different organisations, more than thirty thousand people daily work together in The Hague to increase security around the globe with a particular focus on cyber security. There are also many Indian companies in our municipality active in emerging technologies like block chain or cyber security. As a result, you are part of that community, too. Therefore, it's an honour to introduce this Soft Landing Program and its platform that profiles the collaboration between The Hague and India. It started in 2015 with Karnataka and Telangana when we signed our first MoU, which Telangana and cyber security, followed by the signing of another MoU with Karnataka in 2016, and this collaboration enabled us to extend our focus to the exchange of technology and innovation on a broader scale with our neutral ecosystems successfully, I might say, as it has resulted in the organisations of joint returns, knowledge sharing and Indian start-ups, exploring the ecosystem in The Hague and vice versa. I had the honour to lead this trade mission to Karnataka and to Telangana in 2019, which led to the renewal of the MoU. With these renewals, the current relation will be taken to the next level by actively connecting the relevant institutions, institutions from the region and the other way around these four knowledge institutes, hubs and sectoral representatives that bring impacts to our societies. They were introduced to similar counterparts in India and as a result a relationship has formed. Moreover, in 2019, two Indian tech giants E-Mudhra and JKT technosoft decided to settle in The Hague for their European operations. Because of our leading position in cyber as a cyber hub in Europe, The Hague belongs to the top five fastest growing check-ups in Europe. Ladies and gentlemen, that was last year, which seems some of the current circumstances light years away, COVID-19 is impeding the traditional ways of pursuing the MoU. This crisis makes us realise that we must facilitate a transition to the new economy and entrepreneurship, show creativity and resilience when dealing with Corona, and so we must. Therefore, in collaboration with The Hague Business Agency and partners within our ecosystem, we have developed this Digital Soft Landing Program. This program is a new online instrument to prepare impact innovation start-ups for their expansion to Europe through The Hague. We focus on Indian start-ups because this initiative is initiated as a digital way to follow up on the MoU with Karnataka and Telangana. This Digital Soft Landing program is fully online, consisting of four steps to improve impact innovation, as explained already by Anesh, the first one to explore digital fact finding trip. The second one, adjust market readiness training, the third one to connect matchmaking. Last, but not least, the fourth to integrate ecosystem integration.

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The importance of this Soft Landing Program is that we try to activate and to improve our mission, our mission driven ecosystem, by attracting technology start-ups, which are bringing about impact. Due to the many challenges that Indian society faces, the country has brought expertise on impact innovations. There are social entrepreneurs in India, who come up with real solutions for real problems. They use emerging technologies to create a better and safer and a more just world. That's exactly what we strive for in The Hague. So let's join forces to learn from each other and inspire each other in order to improve from each other. The start-ups in this impact domain are great additions to the ecosystem, since they usually cover at least one sustainable development goal by using one of the key technologies like block chain or AI. The cross over on impact and innovation benefits the exact needs for which The Hague provides the ideal infrastructure to grow and develop further throughout the European markets. Moreover, our mission is to be the friendliest city for entrepreneurs in the Netherlands by 2030, and this ambition includes better preparation for starting entrepreneurs and this will help them realise their growth ambitions. Our Digital Soft Landing Program contributes to this mission of The Hague as a suggested a strategic gateway also for Indian companies. I hope that many Indian start-ups will join our digital soft landing program within the very near future and follow the already existing Indian tech giants in our ecosystem as well as Tech Mahindra. The Hague has turned out to be the ideal gateway to Europe and the Netherlands for Indian companies because of the city's strategic location within the realms of upcoming start-ups, presence of well-established tech cluster with local and international players. In addition, the city has a flourishing expat community, the second largest Indian diaspora in the European Union, a beautiful historical centre, state of the art business areas, nice housing and several international schools followed by universities, providing prestige to our city and all this when located at the sea with an 11 km long beach. So, ladies and gentlemen, this Digital Soft Landing Platform focuses on the mutual reinforcement of overlap between the strong elements of the Hague and India's expertise in the ecosystem. In a nutshell, we welcome you to The Hague, thank you so much.

01:08:49

Aditya Putta, Venture Sourcing Lead, World Startup: Thank you very much, Deputy Mayor Saskia. I am just being told that over 50 percent of the attendees indicated that they want to expand their business to The Hague. So this is a good time to adapt to digital and still continue doing what you're doing. Thank you very much.

Next up, I'd like to ask His Excellency Martin van den Berg, who is the Dutch Ambassador to India. I have been following the work of his team in India. They have been organising hundreds of webinars and conferences and delegations in the past three or four months. Really kudos to your team with Rubbin, Luisa, Akanksha, China and the rest of the rest of your team. How you're continuing to help entrepreneurs in these times is very inspiring. That's something that we all would like to learn from. His Excellency, please take it over from me.

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Martin van den Berg, Ambassador of the Netherlands: Thank you so much. I think today we are all going digital. So this is really the way to move forward and I am happily surprised what is possible through a virtual world. It is apparent that a lot of connectivity and connections are taking place. So it is really very inspiring for me. It is really very nice to join this event, to be part of this program. I was born and raised in The Hague. So I know by my own experience what a wonderful city The Hague is, wonderful to live in, to work in an innovative city. I also know by my own experience, it's extremely an honour welcoming people from all over the world and especially also people and companies from from India. So it's really nice to be part of this this great program. I think if you look to the Dutch economy, if you have to characterise Dutch economy, I think there are two very important dimensions. First one is the openness of the economy, the openness of the society. The other dimension is the innovation part, innovativeness of the Dutch economy. I think we should look to how the government is positioned worldwide. Perhaps we are even the most globalised economy in the world. Referring to innovation, for example, we have a third place on the 2019 Global Innovation Index. It just illustrates how very innovative we are. I believe it's also essential for us and for me.

01:11:31

Martin van den Berg: I think new technologies and new companies are in a way, the oxygen for an economy, for society. I believe that this is also the reason why we as the Netherlands offer a very open, a very innovative society. Also there are so many companies from all over the world, so many technology institutions from all over the world are based in the Netherlands and are using the Netherlands as a platform, as their base for European activities, and especially after the Brexit. You will see that is happening more than ever. I think also, if you look back to the history of the Netherlands and India, I think the first Dutch people came many years ago to India. So we really share a very, very long history. We therefore have very close ties, whether it's in economics, as so many Indian companies are based in the Netherlands, I'm sure you know a lot about it. Also there are a lot of students from India going to the Netherlands, one of the Dutch universities is based here in India. We have a lot of heritage. We had a wonderful state visit last year. Connections and football players are active at hockey. Of course, field hockey. There are famous cricket players right now, which are very connected to the Netherlands, although I don't think we should ever play against India as such because we are not even near to the quality of the Indian team. It's always fantastic to see IPL matches here in India. I think there is a very strong connection between India and the Netherlands and also between which was, I think, illustrated by the wonderful visit. I also think that we all face enormous challenges today with how to deal with the current situation. On the other hand, I think it also gives opportunities which should not be wasted in the crisis. I think of it, and I hope COVID will really increase alertness within societies to address all the challenges that we have, whether it's in health care and climate. That's how governments will really take this as an opportunity. Innovations are very, very keen to address all those challenges and I think not only in India, where there are really natural innovation partners. We also see very close collaboration on innovations, but also very much connecting innovations to the challenge in society that the Sustainable Development Goals are really key, core in our bilateral relationship. It's really the Netherlands and India. We really tried to make an impact together in the world dealing with all kinds of challenges, and I think that the partnership is going very well. It has been mentioned that we have a lot of activities, hundreds of visits, digital missions.

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We would really like to increase and to continue on our very good relationship which you will witness with the world start up, we have organised many webinars in the Dutch innovation like biotech medtech and are really looking forward to intensify those. Even it's in the short run only on a virtual basis. I know, as I said before, from my own situation and personal situation, The Hague is a very, very welcoming city for people from all over the world and definitely for companies. It is a very innovative city and I think the Soft Landing Program is just a wonderful illustration of how we are really welcoming new companies and helping them to expand, to invest, to grow, to start business and to use The Hague as a hub for European activities. I'm very happy to witness launching of this program, wishing everybody a wonderful day, very interactive, very collaborative. I think and I will hope it will lead to many more interactions and connections between The Hague and India, between the Netherlands and India, and that we really can make a big impact on the society of today. Thank you so much.

01:16:00

Aditya Putta: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. Very well said, never waste a crisis. Wow. Very, eloquently put. Also, the rumbling from the ambassadors team is also very much active in the chat. So if you would like to get in touch with the ambassadors team, please reach out. The Ambassador also mentioned about the long history both of the countries share between India and the Netherlands.

01:16:31

Aditya Putta: I'd actually like to share a link here in the chat to everybody. These are actually books written by our next speaker, who is the Indian Ambassador to the Netherlands. His Excellency has written books about India and the Netherlands, past, present and the future, and also about what can the Dutch, what can we learn from the Dutch in rebuilding Kerala post the 2008 floods? His Excellency, please. I'm very much looking forward to hearing from you.

01:17:10

Venu Rajamony, Ambassador of India to the Netherlands: In particular, thank you for the pitch for my two books, which I have outlined here in the Netherlands, according to everyone here in the Netherlands. Good afternoon to all in India. It is truly a pleasure to join this mini conference being organised by The Hague Business Agency and various partners. I would like to compliment the city government of The Hague, The Hague Business Agency and all for having organised this excellent conference. I think the fact that you have drawn such a huge participation from India is truly commendable. It is equally important. I think I heard it being mentioned that this is the first such mini conference being organised by The Hague Business Agency. It is wonderful that you have chosen India as the main target audience for this conference. I think the Digital Soft Landing Programme, launched by the Hague Business Agency is excellent. It is a wonderful opportunity for Indian businesses to explore the city of The Hague and throughout the city of The Hague, all of Europe, for future investments, for future business collaboration and partnerships. I would urge the participants to make the best use of this facility. I would also request them to disseminate knowledge about this to their collaborators and their peers and on my behalf on behalf of the Embassy of India. Let me say that we would be very happy to closely work with The Hague Business Agency in taking this Soft Landing Program forward to my Indian friends. I would like to say that every year we have seen a steady growth in the number of companies coming into the city of The Hague. We work very closely with the municipality of The Hague on a number of issues, including attracting new businesses into The Hague.

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We have also worked with them on various trips that they have made to India. This mini conference as a follow-up to those e-mails is also an excellent idea, which we strongly complement the city government for, as well as being the Indian government who are concerned. We see no conflict of interest whatsoever between the Dutch government and its various agencies. As in India, we are all of one mind in the need to strengthen our economic partnership, to take on our relations, whether it be in terms of investments and therefore trade to new heights. We would like to see more and more Indian companies come here to the Netherlands. We would like to see more and more Dutch companies come to India and so on. Most important of all, I think we would love to see more and more start-ups here. We would like to see start-ups in India collaborating with Dutch start-ups to find solutions for the challenges that confront Europe that come from the Netherlands and India, as well as the whole world. Due to the fact that India is a country known for social entrepreneurs, it is a country known for impact innovators just as much as the Netherlands. It has in particular significant strengths in the field of cyber security because of the corporate situation, business as well as governance is increasingly turning digital. All contacts are becoming more and more digital than any time before. This brings in a heightened need for cyber security. In all these aspects, I think it is a wonderful partner for Indian businesses. I strongly urge each one of you, who are participating in this program to take advantage of this Soft Landing Program and I can assure you that the Embassy of India is with you. My colleagues will also post e-mails on the chat and you can reach us through our website and our social media. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have in addition to the Indian embassy here in the Netherlands. Ladies and gentlemen, let me just keep it brief. This is an opportunity to talk to all of you. Let me give a brief overview of the start-up ecosystem, as all of you know, has affected businesses, has disrupted businesses. In some ways for start-ups, there have been opportunities. However many start-ups are also struggling and are finding it difficult to make both ends meet because of that small scale and because of the disruption that has happened in the economy. India has the third largest start-up ecosystem in the world, with year-on-year annual growth estimated at 12 to 15%.

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Venu Rajamony: In 2018, we had about 50000 start-ups, out of hundred to 9300 hundred technology led start-ups, 1300 new start-ups were started in 2019 alone, meaning there are 2 to 3 start-ups evolving every day in India. About 30000 start-ups are officially recognised by our Ministry for Promotion of industry and Investment and being supported in whatever manner possible by the government, according to a survey conducted by NASSCOM. The technology industry body for the software industry in India as a result of COVID, 9 out of 10 start-ups have registered a decline in revenue, and a little over a third have unfortunately been forced to halt their operations. However, we believe that this is a temporary decline and that they will be able to revive as the Indian economy and the global economy revives next year. The bright spots in the start-up sector have been in the tech business and education due to going digital in a very big way. 14% of businesses in tech have reported an increase in revenue. Business to business start-ups have also seen less revenue drops in tech, received fresh investments in India of around USD, one point one billion in 2020, which is the highest ever and has really lead to four times higher compared to last year. Despite the current crisis, a number of start-ups have continued to raise money, raised investments from within the country as well as abroad and online education company Unacademic has raised 110 million dollars in February

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and closed a new round of 150 million in September. We believe India, with its large consumer market and Internet market with about 130 million users, is a huge opportunity for companies from around the world as well as companies in India. The high penetration of low cost for the Internet has opened up many avenues and doors for new business opportunities. We in the embassy here have also focused on trying to expand our collaboration in the tech field in the field of start-ups. Just yesterday, I was participating in a global dialogue on Next-Generation Agriculture. The Netherlands was a partner country with a number of new ideas relating to start-ups which are possible in the field of agriculture, for example, through and liberalisation of agricultural equipment, or by extensive use of sensors in agriculture. In a country as large as India, where agriculture still has not reached the high technology levels of the Netherlands, the health sector, which is impacted across the world, is an area where there are major opportunities for collaborations in terms of start-ups. The fintech sector is another sector where we see a lot of promise. Everyone across the world is moving towards digital and contactless delivery of financial services and that's where the opportunities lie. So there is need for greater and greater cyber security as well as fraud prevention when it comes to fintech. In short, tech, in a country like India, which is grossly under insured, provides a major opportunity. The life insurance penetration in India is only 2,7% of the population and non-life is less than 1% of the pension. Space is also a major sector of opportunity for fintech start-up developers. We hope that this Digital Soft Landing Program, which is being launched by the city of The Hague will help businesses gain strength, understanding and knowledge. We hope the efforts of the Dutch government and the Indian government will jointly strengthen and will improve our economic relations, which consequently will lead to more and more Indian start-ups working closely, start-ups to provide solutions that bring benefit as well as economic growth to the people of both countries. Thank you very much and have a great conference.

01:26:52

Aditya Putta: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador, for spreading the positive vibes and also for giving the impression of what is happening in India, but also highlighting the areas which we should further export to collaborate. Also, it was very interesting to hear 2 to 3 start-ups are born every day. Very impressive. We look forward to continuing working with you together with The Hague Business Agency and the other partners. Let's help entrepreneurs from India expand to the Netherlands and the other way around. Let's continue helping people. Thank you very much.

01:27:52

Aditya Putta: I'm also being told we have over 50 percent of the audience are from start-ups, 10 percent are from the government, nearly 10 percent are scientists and researchers, and nearly 10 percent are from corporate.

01:29:29

Aditya Putta: I would like to once again thank all of our speakers. Deputy Mayor, Saskia Bruines and His Excellency Martin van den Berg and His Excellency Venu Rajamony, I thank you very much for taking part on behalf of this webinar. Thank you. See you soon.