

India - Madagascar Relations

Brief History

Strategically located in the south western Indian Ocean and astride the Mozambique Channel, Madagascar (587,041 km²) is the fourth largest island in the world, between a fifth and a sixth the size of India. Its population (estimated currently over 20 million) is growing rapidly at approximately 2.8 % p.a. One of the world's centres of 'mega biodiversity' with unique floral and faunal species, Madagascar has lost much of its forests wealth due to poaching, illegal logging, burning of wood for charcoal and slash and burn practices. Soil erosion and decreasing fertility are serious problems. Madagascar is rich in mineral resources including Graphite, Chrome, hydrocarbons, ilmenite, nickel, gold, oil, tar sands, uranium, precious and semi-precious stones and hardwoods. Madagascar suffers from Indian Ocean cyclones virtually every year. The climate of the country is moderate in interior and tropical in coastal areas. Rich in unrealized agricultural potential, it remains amongst the poorest countries in the world; nearly three fourths of Malagasy live below the poverty line. The agriculture's contribution to its GDP is approx 29%. The GDP for the year 2011 has been estimated at \$ 10.2 billion and GDP per capita has been estimated at \$ 481.

There are about 20,000 persons of Indian origin in Madagascar, including approximately 2,500 Indian passport holders. Persons of Chinese origin number around 50,000. The Madagascar's population is predominantly of mixed Asian and African origin. Research has suggested that the Indonesian seafarers arrived roughly first century AD via India. People with Asian features are predominantly found in the central highlands population, the Merina and the Betsileo; the coastal people are more of African origin.

Historical background: adventurers, missionaries and colonists

As per the history, Arabs arrived here in 7th century AD and established trade post. Portuguese were the first among the Europeans to sight this island, followed by Dutch, British, French adventurers and even American pirates who were raiding as far as the Malabar coast from bases in southeastern Madagascar. This period also saw the rise of regional kingdoms such as the *Sakalava* in the west, the *Betsileo* and the *Merina* in the central highlands and the *Betsimisaraka* in the eastern seaboard. By the early 19th Century, the *Merina* had emerged as the dominant tribe under two great unifiers, Andrianampoinimerina and Radama I. The British established strong relations with the latter and protestant missionary influence in Madagascar grew. Brick making and the Roman script were the two great British missionary contributions to modern Madagascar. Britain lost interest in Madagascar after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and in 1890 recognised French ascendancy in Madagascar in return for French acknowledgement of the British hold over Zanzibar. In 1896, Madagascar became a French colony till independence on 26 June, 1960. En route to freedom, Madagascar witnessed some fighting between Allied and Vichy French forces during World War II and one bloody nationalist uprising, in 1947, in the suppression of which over 50,000 Malagasy were killed.

The Malagasy language is of Malayo-Polynesian origin and is widely spoken in the whole island with variation in dialect from region to region. French is widely used among the educated class of population.

Philibert Tsiranana 1960-72

A social democrat on paper, Madagascar's first President, Philibert Tsiranana did little to diminish French control over the Malagasy economy and government. In foreign affairs, he maintained good relations with the apartheid regime in South Africa, with Taiwan, with South Vietnam and with Israel and kept Madagascar out of NAM. The US NASA set up a satellite tracking station near Antananarivo.

Madagascar under Didier Ratsiraka 1972-2002

Tsiranana was brought down in 1972 by student protests and replaced by his armed forces Chief, General Ramanantsoa whose Foreign Minister, Didier Ratsiraka, a naval commander who had served as a defence attaché in the Malagasy Embassy in Paris, began to radically change Madagascar's foreign policy orientation.

In 1972, Ratsiraka visited the USSR, the Peoples Republic of China and the DPRK. Following this, Madagascar exploited Sino-Soviet differences; the USSR supplied weapons, including MiG 21 fighters. The PRC did much the same, also rebuilding the road linking Antananarivo to Toamasina, establishing several hospitals and the country's main stadium. Both the USSR and China built large Embassies in Antananarivo as symbols of their rival might. In 1973, Madagascar broke relations with Israel, Taiwan and South Africa and attended the Algiers Non-Aligned Summit as an entrant into the non-aligned movement. In that year, it left the African Franc zone and French firms began to quit. In 1975 France vacated the major naval base at Diego Suarez (present Antsiranana) but Madagascar's regime was careful in not leasing it for Soviet use. The regime began a process of 'Malagasyisation', a sort of cultural and linguistic decolonization. In 1975 NASA was asked to close down its satellite tracking station, following which the US withdrew its Ambassador. Supreme leader by now, Didier Ratsiraka openly flaunted his socialist credentials and aspired for equality of status for himself as a third world leader. This also set the time for an upswing in India-Madagascar political relations

By 1989, cracks began to appear and till early 1993, when Prof Albert Zafy was elected President, Madagascar went through bouts of instability complete with police firings, student and popular protests and, for a period in 1992, even an economic blockade of the capital by Ratsiraka loyalists. This was to repeat itself a decade later. Zafy lasted three years till his impeachment in July, 1996. Ratsiraka returned from exile in France to win another election, becoming President in February, 1997.

The political crisis of 2001-2003 and the advent of Marc Ravalomanana

Years of lip service to socialism under Ratsiraka ended with the aftermath of the Presidential elections of December 2001. In these elections, neither of the lead candidates, Ratsiraka or the then Mayor of Antananarivo and leading Malagasy businessman Marc

Ravalomanana, secured the necessary 50+% majority to win outrightly as per the Malagasy constitution. On 6 May, 2002, Mr. Ravalomanana declared himself the winner at a public ceremony organized by his supporters and legitimized by a Constitutional Court whose

composition he had changed. As violence continued, OAU Heads of State meeting in Addis Ababa on June 21, 2002 recommended Madagascar's seat be kept vacant at that forum. The Presidency, however, remained disputed until Ratsiraka fled into exile in France on July 5, 2002. India decided to await a OAU decision set to be taken at the Maputo African Union summit. As seen above, however, well before Maputo that saw Madagascar resuming its seat, several countries, including several African countries, particularly Mauritius (which Mr. Ravalomanana visited in December 2002) were transacting with Madagascar and with Mr. Marc Ravalomanana as its President.

In the Presidential elections held in Madagascar again on 3rd December, 2006 following expiry of President's term, President Marc Ravalomanana was re-elected with an overwhelming majority winning 54.79% of total votes cast. His nearest rival former President of National Assembly Mr. Jean Lahiriniko could secure only 11.65% of the votes cast. President Ravalomanana was sworn in as President for the second term on 19 January 2007 by President of the Malagasy High Constitutional Court at a public ceremony which was among others attended by President of Comoros, PM of Mauritius, Foreign Minister of Seychelles and representatives of US, Japan and European Union.

Reviving the Malagasy economy the main foreign policy priority

After the end of 2002 political crisis, President Ravalomanana moved rapidly to revive his country's economy, which enjoyed 4-5% growth between 1997-2001 but was devastated by the events of December 2001 - May 2002 (GDP growth was negative 12.5% in 2002). Madagascar's economy was opened for foreign investments in mining, infrastructure, oil and gas, power, health and education. To achieve these ends, Madagascar under Ravalomanana sought good relations with all countries, particularly major donors. The World Bank and the European Union enjoyed privileged status as the main donors with the US, France, the African Development Bank and even the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa playing ancillary roles.

The President announced an ambitious five year Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) in 2007 to expedite the development of Madagascar. Some bold initiatives and reforms had been undertaken to create investment friendly climate in the country steps had also been taken to bring about good governance, decentralization and transparency in the government system. As a result a number of foreign companies including the ones from India such as Tatas, Lakshmi Mittal, ESSAR, Jindals etc. had opted to look for investment opportunities in Madagascar. Some Indian companies opened their offices in Antananarivo.

India-Madagascar Relations

India has had maritime links with Madagascar for several centuries and visits to Madagascar and settlements of Indian merchants in Madagascar date at least to the late

eighteenth century. The late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century witnessed a steady increase in the number of persons from India in Madagascar and persons of Indian origin began to play a significant role in business.

India opened a Consulate General in Antananarivo in 1954. Upon Madagascar gaining independence in 1960, it was upgraded to an Embassy. India and Madagascar enjoy cordial bilateral relations. Both the countries have similarity of views on international and regional issues.

Government of India's concessional credit of US\$ 25 million to Madagascar for raising productivity of rice and setting up of fertilizer plant has enhanced India's image in Madagascar. Malagasy Minister of Agriculture signed an agreement in this regard in New Delhi in 2008 with EXIM Bank of India.

The role played by the Indian community in economic development of Madagascar is highly appreciated even at the highest level. Due to non-recognition of present regime by the international community including India, the aid for developmental projects (except humanitarian) remains suspended to Madagascar. The bilateral cooperation also remains suspended. Therefore, no high level visits to this country have taken place since 2009.

However, India is actively engaged in training Malagasy people in capacity building and other high skilled/technical fields, courses for which are offered through ITEC and India Africa Forum Summit. This gesture of India has been widely acclaimed by the local population who looks at India as their role model.

Current internal situation

While Ravalomanana's government won plaudits from foreign friends and lenders for good governance including judicial reforms and control over corruption, there were persisting questions over the President's seeming inability to keep his presidential and business personae separate. There had been reports that his company Tiko Group did not pay any custom duties and other taxes. Government transport was being misused. There were reprisals against competitors of Tiko. Consequently, some businessmen from Malagasy, French and Indian community left Madagascar. Some opponents had been imprisoned.

Opposition parties led by the Mayor of Antananarivo Andry Rajoelina had launched a campaign for the removal of President Ravalomanana. They leveled allegations of misrule and corruption against him. It had been said that the President was a dictator and that he had no tolerance for dissenting views. The President was also being blamed for signing a secret deal with the South Korea Company 'Daewoo' for giving away 1.3 million hectares of agricultural land free of charge on 99 years' lease for growing corn and exporting the same to South Korea for producing bio-diesel.

There were violent protests against the President on January 26, 27 and 28, 2009, in which President's business establishments around the country were looted and burnt by the mob. A sizeable population from Antananarivo and coastal areas was siding with the Mayor of the capital. The violence continued until President Ravalomanana was ousted in a coup d'état by the

army on March 17, 2009. He took shelter in South Africa. The army handed over power to Mr. Andry Rajoelina the following day. Rajoelina's official installation ceremony on 21 March, 2009 was boycotted by the Diplomatic Corps based in Madagascar.

The African Union and the SADC criticized the coup d'état. Later on, the AU suspended Madagascar from its primary membership. The European Union refused to recognize the new government. The UNSG Ban Ki-moon also deplored the political developments in Madagascar. SADC nominated the former President of Mozambique Mr. Joaquim Chissano as a mediator to resolve the Malagasy crisis. Unfortunately, the political stalemate is still continuing despite hectic negotiations.

On September 17, 2011 representatives of most of Madagascar's major political factions signed a "Roadmap for ending the Crisis in Madagascar" brokered by Southern African Development Community (SADC) which aimed at ending the long political crisis through the formation of an inclusive and consensual interim government that would prepare the country for elections. However, the chances of ending the crisis have received a boost with the appointment of new Prime Minister Jean Omer Beirziky and establishment of a national unity transition government in November 2011, yet the darkness in the tunnel still persists. Political instability tends to go hand-in-hand with economic instability and regression in Madagascar. The need of the hour is reconciliation for a nation that faces acute environmental risks and severe socio-economic problems. Incidentally, recognition of Malagasy regime by the international community would depend on the implementation of September 17 Roadmap.

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