

India-Madagascar Relations

Political Relations

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 and ranks among the world's poorest countries and is extremely biologically diverse, with thousands of unique species of flora and fauna. However, 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. Its population, currently estimated over 20 million, is growing rapidly at approximately 2.8 % p.a.

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

Since January 2009, Madagascar has been in the throes of a political crisis. The turmoil was generated by change of power led by Andry Rajoelina through street movement and army dissent against President Marc Ravalomanana who was subsequently forced into exile in March 2009. Andry Rajoelina took the title of the President of the High Authority of the Transition (HAT). This was rejected by the international community.

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 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, which are now scheduled between May and July 2013.

Due to non-recognition of present regime by the international community, 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. Recently, Mr. Pierrot J. Rajaonarivelo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, led a delegation to India to participate in the Council of Ministers Meeting of Indian Ocean Rim- Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) held on 02 November 2012 in Gurgaon. During the visit, he also met Hon'ble Minister of State for Commerce & Industry. However, India is actively engaged in training Malagasy people in capacity building and other high skilled/technical fields, courses which are offered through ITEC and India Africa Forum Summit. This gesture of India has been widely acclaimed and appreciated by the local population.

Commercial Relations

Madagascar has shown tendency for political instability and declining economic trends over the past few decades. Since early 2009, the political crisis has led to a decline in economic growth. The global financial turmoil has also impacted in a negative manner on the export-oriented activities of the country. The economic and social situation remains extremely fragile as the path to recovery is linked to aid and external factors. Rich in unrealized agricultural potential, it remains amongst the poorest countries in the world. Nearly three fourths of Malagasy live below the poverty line.

Madagascar is rich in mineral resources including Graphite, Chrome, hydrocarbons, ilmenite, nickel, gold, oil, tar sands, uranium, precious and semi-precious stones and hardwoods.

The Trade relation between India and Madagascar has been steadily growing. The major items of import from Madagascar by India are precious and semi-precious stones, cloves, clove leave oil, black pepper, iron scrap, coffee, shellfish, cinnamon, chromite and electrical. The import from Madagascar to India during the year 2011-12 was to the tune of US\$ 80.11 million and during the year 2012-13 (April to Sep) was to the tune of US\$ 43.33 million. India's exports were US\$123.63 million during 2011-12 and US\$ 77.45 during the year 2012-13 (April to Sep.)

Petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, machine and appliances, textiles, steel for construction, sugar and cement have been the main imports from India by Madagascar. There was no import of petroleum products from India in 2010 in view of cost factor. The trade figures of 2010 were low because of stoppage of investment in mining sector and related machinery and equipments following the coup d'état of March 2009 in Madagascar.

Indian Community

There are about 20,000 persons of India origin in Madagascar, including approx 2500 Indian passport holders. Most of them are in the trading. The role played by the Indian community in economic development of Madagascar is highly appreciated even at the highest level. Some of the Indians are very influential and their contribution to the total GDP of Madagascar has also been substantial. The Indian Diaspora has been playing significant role in promoting Indian culture and traditional values while living in a foreign land.

Cultural Relations

Following the on-going political crisis, there has not been significant exchange of cultural visits between the two countries. However, local cable operators are showing several Indian TV channels.

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