

India-Seychelles Relations - Political Relations

India-Seychelles relations have been characterised by close friendship, understanding and cooperation. Diplomatic ties were established with Seychelles after its independence in 1976, but the links date back even earlier. An Indian Mission was established in 1979 in Victoria with the High Commissioner based in Dar-es-Salaam concurrently accredited to Seychelles. The first resident Indian Mission to Seychelles was opened at Victoria in 1987, while Seychelles opened its resident mission in New Delhi in early 2008.

Bilateral Agreements

2. Several bilateral agreements/MOUs have been signed between the two countries, viz., Cultural Exchange Programme (2003-05); an Air Services Agreement (1981); an Agreement on Tourism (1996); a Trade Agreement (2000); a Joint Business Council (2000); MoUs on Healthcare, Defence and Science and Technology (2003); Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) (June 2010); MoU for setting up of an Information Technology Centre in Seychelles (Feb 2010); MoU on the stationing of an Indian Navy's Dornier aircraft in Seychelles (Feb 2011); MoU for supply of a new Dornier aircraft to Seychelles (Feb 2012); and an MoU for supply of a Coastal Surveillance Radar System to Seychelles (Feb 2012). An MoU on police research/training and MoU for cooperation in youth and sports affairs were signed during our President's visit to Seychelles in 2012.

3. During Indian PM Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Seychelles (Mar 2015), four agreements viz., (i) MoU on Renewable Energy Cooperation; (ii) MoU for Cooperation in the field of Hydrography; (iii) Protocol on Sale of Navigational Charts / Electronic Navigational Charts; and (iv) Agreement on the Development of facilities on Assumption Island were signed.

4. During Seychelles President James Alix Michel's State visit to India (25-27 Aug 2015), five agreements on bilateral air services, agricultural cooperation, blue economy, tax information Exchange and gifting of a second Dornier aircraft to Seychelles were signed.

Exchange of Visits

5. There has been a high level exchange of visits since Seychelles attained its independence. From Seychelles, the top leadership visited India regularly. President Albert Rene visited India in 1980, 1986 and 1990. President Michel visited India in 1994, 1996 and 1999 in the capacity as Vice President and in Jul 2005, Jun 2010, Feb 2011, Feb 2012 and as President in Aug 2015. During his State Visit in Aug 2015, he was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Transport Joel Morgan and Minister of Trade, Finance and Blue Economy Jean-Paul Adam. Foreign Minister Morgan represented President Michel at the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS III) (28-29 Oct 2015) in New Delhi. Agriculture & Fisheries Minister Wallace Cosgrow attended the India-Africa Agribusiness Forum (IAAF) in New Delhi (10-11 Feb), participated in the two-day deliberations and addressed the Ministerial session. Tourism and Culture Minister Alain St Ange led a delegation to Chennai and Bangalore (7-10 Jun 2016) to promote Seychelles as a tourism destination. India hosted (1 Feb 2016) the first strategy

meeting of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) in Mumbai. Foreign Minister Joel Morgan chaired this meeting. Agriculture & Fisheries Minister Wallace Cosgrove attended the India-Africa Agribusiness Forum (IAAF) in New Delhi (10-11 Feb 2016). Former President late Sir James Richard Mancham visited India from 29 Feb - 3 Mar 2016 to address the inaugural Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi. Vice President Vincent Meriton visited Chennai (11-14 Feb 2017) to inaugurate a wing in MIOT hospital, Chennai, where Government of Seychelles sends Seychellois patients for medical treatment. Dr. Peter Larose, Seychelles Minister of Finance, Trade and Economic Planning led a delegation to attend the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the African Development Bank Group (22-26 May) held in Ahmedabad. A 12-member Seychelles National Assembly delegation, led by the Speaker Mr Patrick Pillay, visited India from 9th to 13th Aug 2017. Dr. Peter Larose, Seychelles Minister of Finance, Trade and Economic Planning led a delegation to India to attend the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the African Development Bank Group (22-26 May) held in Ahmedabad.

6. From India - Past visits from India are: Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi (1976 & 1981); President Shri R. Venkataraman (1989); Vice-President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma (1991); Vice-President Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (2003); External Affairs Minister, Shri S.M.Krishna (July 2010); Defence Minister, Shri A.K. Antony (Jul 2010); President Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil (2012); Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (2015).

7. PM's visit (10-11 Mar 2015) was the first Prime Ministerial level visit from India to Seychelles in 34 years. It was a highly successful visit with substantive outcomes, including signing of four Agreements/MoUs, inauguration of the Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) Project, announcement of gifting of a second Dornier aircraft to Seychelles and 3-month gratis visa for Seychelles nationals for travel to India. Shri Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (Independent Charge) and Parliamentary Affairs, visited Seychelles from 4-7 Jul 2015 as PM's Special Envoy to personally hand over letters of invitation to the President and Foreign Minister of Seychelles for IAFS-III. Dr. Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge), visited Seychelles from 4-6 Oct 2015 in connection with the Festival of India IndiaFest 2015 and the 3rd Seychelles-India Day. Shri Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State (Defence) visited Seychelles (20-24 Mar 2016) and formally inaugurated the Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) project.

Defence and Security Cooperation

8. India and Seychelles have an elaborate architecture of defence and security cooperation that has deepened over the years with the growing piracy menace and other economic offences in the strategic Indian Ocean region. In pursuance of the MOU on Hydrography signed during the Prime Minister's visit in Mar 2015, Indian Naval Ship INS Darshak visited Seychelles from 5 Nov to 19 Dec 2015 to conduct hydrographic survey of Victoria Port and adjoining areas. Two patrol boats PS Topaz and PS Constant were gifted by India to Seychelles in 2005 and 2014 respectively. Indian Coast Guard's Fast Interceptor Boat C-405 (rechristened 'PB Hermes') was gifted to Seychelles in 2016. India gifted one Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft to Seychelles in 2013 and the second promised Dornier aircraft would be delivered to Seychelles

in June 2018. India gifted and installed six coastal surveillance radar systems in Seychelles in 2015 enabling better coastal security for Seychelles.

10. A 45-member Indian Army team participated in the 7th India-Seychelles biennial joint military exercise “LAMITYE-7” conducted in Mahé (15-28 Feb 2016). These bilateral exercises are being held in Seychelles since 2001. Continuing the historic tradition since 1976, INS Sunayna, an offshore patrol ship, visited Seychelles (26-30 June 2017) for participating in the Seychelles National Day Parade on 29 June 2017. A Naval Band and a Marching Contingent from visiting INS Tarkash (27-29 Oct 2017) participated at the Seychelles Kreole Festival held from 21-31 October 2017. INS Mumbai visited (17- 27 Nov 2017) Victoria to undertake bi-annual EEZ and anti-narcotics patrol for Seychelles. During the patrol, officials from the Anti-Narcotics Bureau of the Seychelles Police Force, Seychelles Fishing Authority and Maritime Police were onboard INS Mumbai.

Development Assistance

11. An important aspect of bilateral cooperation revolves around various development assistance programmes extended to Seychelles under ITEC and IAFS. Over 1% of the local population (about 1000) form part of ITEC alumni who have so far benefited from various training courses under the ITEC programme. IT Centre for Excellence, set up in Victoria with GOI assistance was inaugurated at Mont Fleuri, Mahé in April 2011. Lines of Credit have been extended since early 1980s. During the Presidential visit in 2012, an LOC of US\$ 50 Million and a Grant of US\$ 25 Million were announced. By 2017, almost all of this grant has been utilised by the Government of Seychelles in procuring buses, medicines, medical equipment, police uniform, IT equipment, stationery, police vehicles, etc. Seychelles Health Care Agency (HCA) signed (28 Nov 2017) an agreement with HLL Infra Tech Services Ltd for purchase of medical equipment worth USD 2.71 million under GOI USD 25 million grant, including anaesthesia units, neonatal ventilators, patient monitors, ultrasound scanners, dental chairs, bet sets etc. from HITES. Ten light vehicles including four TATA Safari Strome and 6 TATA Zest cars worth USD 183,000 were gifted (28 Nov 2017) to the Seychelles People’s Defence Forces (SPDF) under a special grant. Ten more TATA vehicles worth USD 250,000 are being gifted to Narcotics wing of Seychelles Police under a special grant of GOI. India has agreed to construct Magistrate Court building next to Seychelles Supreme Court at a cost of US\$ 3.3 million.

Commercial Relations

12. Though bilateral trade and commerce with Seychelles is rather modest, there exists significant scope for enhancing cooperation in this field. Presently, Seychelles’ main items of import from India are rice, miscellaneous food products, cement, linen, cotton, vehicles and associated transport equipments, medicines, instruments and appliances for medical, surgical & dental use. As per data provided by Government of Seychelles, India exported goods worth USD 101.16 million and imported goods worth USD 0.548 million from Seychelles during the period January to October 2017.

13. In October 2017, Seychelles import from India was 2.94% of Seychelles’ total imports from other countries. India stood at 8th position by way of exports to Seychelles. Seychelles

export to India was 0.42% of Seychelles' total exports to other countries. Among the Indian companies present in Seychelles, Bank of Baroda has been maintaining a successful overseas branch in Victoria since 1978. In the private sector, M/s Bharti Airtel Telecom group has invested over US\$ 25 million in setting up the AirTel mobile telephone and internet services in Seychelles since 1998. TATA has supplied most of the fleet of buses for Seychelles to ply in Mahé and Praslin.

Civil Aviation & Tourism

14. In pursuance of an MoU signed in Sep 2014, Air Seychelles started with thrice-weekly direct flights between Mahé and Mumbai on 2 Dec 2014 and subsequently increased the frequency to five flights a week. The direct air connectivity has boosted bilateral trade and investment, flow of tourist traffic and people-to-people contact. According to the latest statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics of Seychelles, India has emerged at the 9th top tourist market for Seychelles. The number of Indian tourists visiting Seychelles increased to 11,182 (until Nov 2017) from 8,985 in 2016 and 6,406 in 2015, registering an increase of 24%.

Cultural Relations

15. Cultural cooperation between India and Seychelles has always been significant. The landmark cultural events were the five editions of the Seychelles-India Day held in Victoria in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 respectively. SID is the biggest cultural event in Seychelles with the highest attendance of people. The Indian Association of Seychelles (IAS) organized the '5th' Seychelles India Day from 6-8 October, 2017 in association with the High Commission of India, Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture. The Indian Association and another association Tamil Mandram regularly organize more cultural events.

16. The 3rd International Day of Yoga 2017 (IDY2017) in Seychelles was celebrated by the High Commission of India in June 2017. Nearly 1200 persons including Ministers, Members of National Assembly, senior officials of Government of Seychelles, members of the diplomatic corps and the public enthusiastically participated. A colourful and informative souvenir on IDY2017 was formally released by the dignitaries. For the celebration of 70th Anniversary of India's Independence, an 8-member Kathak troupe led by Ms. Tripti Sanwal performed on 22nd August, 2017 at the International Conference Centre of Seychelles (ICCS) Auditorium in Victoria, Seychelles.

17. To mark the 'Gandhi Jayanti' (2 October) in Seychelles, the High Commission organized a series of activities, including a special screening (1 Oct) of Richard Attenborough's acclaimed film Gandhi (1982) at Deepam Theatre in Mahé. Vice President Vincent Meriton, Minister for Employment, Immigration & Civil Status Mrs. Myriam Telemaque, other dignitaries and prominent members of Indian community paid (2 Oct) floral tributes to the Gandhi statue at the Chancery premises. This was followed by a panel discussion on "Gandhi's Life and Message: Universal Impact of Social, Political and Economic ideas of Mahatma Gandhi in the Modern world" held at ICCS Conference Room.

18. A 7-member Bharatanatyam group visited Seychelles (23-26 Oct 2017) to participate in the Kreol Festival celebrations. The group performed at the Kreol Village (24 Oct 2017) and at the ICCS (25 Oct 2017) auditorium. At the invitation of Ministry of Seychelles Ministry of Culture, an ICCR sponsored 10-member Thayambaka group from Kerala visited (26-31 Oct 2017) Seychelles to participate in the Kreol Festival celebrations in addition to the Marching contingent and Naval Band from INS Tarkash. The Thayambaka group performed with their traditional Chenda Melam drum playing and took part in the Carnival parade.

20. Commemorating (31 Oct) the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 'Rashtriya Ekta Diwas' was observed by the Mission. On the day, screening of a documentary film on the life of Sardar Patel and a photo exhibition was arranged at the Vivekananda Hall which was attended by Indian expatriates and PIOs.

21. As part of *Bienale Sese!* (Biennial of Contemporary Arts), National Arts Council of Seychelles in association with the High Commission organized a highly acclaimed egg art exhibition 'Eggstrodinaire' (17-22 Nov 2017) by sculptor Mrs. Farah Sayeed at the Vivekananda Yoga Hall. Two artistes from India, Ms. Gunjan Tyagi (Jury for the competitors), Mrs. Arti Zaveri (sculpture, painting & site-specific art works) also participated at the Byenal Sese!. Artist Zaveri won (25 Nov) Seychelles' 'Prominent International Artist Award'.

Indian Community

22. India has an important link with Seychelles in the form of Indian nationals being the earliest inhabitants of this island, mostly from Tamil Nadu and later from Gujarat, who came as traders, labourers, construction workers and more recently as professionals. The number of Indian origin persons is more than 10,000 which is significant in a country having total population of 96,000 (June 2017). In addition, there are 11,000 Indian citizens holding Gainful Employment Permits, who are mostly workers in construction sector, shop assistants and a few professionals. The PIO community is visible in all walks of life and is well known for its professionalism and hard-work. Most of the retail business including grocery stores and supermarkets are owned by the Tamil PIO community, while the real estate business and construction industry are dominated by the Gujarati PIO community. A Hindu temple, Lord Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple, built in 1992 is a major tourist attraction in Victoria. The Indian community celebrates all Indian festivals every year besides organizing various cultural events, talk shows, music concerts etc. The prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award has been conferred to two PIOs from Seychelles — Dr. V. Ramadoss in 2006 and Justice D. Karunakaran in 2015.

Useful Resources:

Website of High Commission of India: <http://www.hciseychelles.com>

Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInSeychelles/>

Twitter: www.twitter.com/hci_seychelles