

India - Trinidad & Tobago Relations

Historical Perspective: Relationship between India and Trinidad & Tobago goes back to 30 May 1845 when the first ship 'Fatel Razack' carrying 225 Indian indentured workers reached the shores of Trinidad, then a British colony. Their numbers increased with subsequent arrival of more ships from India. The descendents of those indentured workers, now in their fifth generation, form nearly 42% of the total population constituting an integral part of the economic, political and social fabric of the country. The presence of a substantial population of Indian origin (the largest ethnic group) has contributed immensely to close bilateral relations between the two countries.

Visit of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar to India in January 2012 : Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar (KPB) paid a State visit to India from 5-14 January 2012. PMKPB was accompanied by a high level delegation comprising 7 Cabinet Ministers and a 160-member strong delegation from the private and public sectors besides representatives from tertiary institutions and PSUs. During the visit a number of agreements and MOUs were signed. She was also Chief Guest at PBD 2012 in Jaipur and was conferred with the PBSA.

Visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Trinidad & Tobago : Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh led a high level delegation for CHOGM Summit in November 2009.

Recent visits: During the last two years there have been several bilateral Ministerial/official level visits from India. Important among them are visit of a 3-member delegation led by Shri R. Swaminathan, Special Secretary (AMS & CPV) for bilateral talks (June 2015); a 2-member delegation from delegation from AYUSH in the context of bilateral cooperation in the field of medicinal plants (April 2014); a 3-member senior official delegation led by Hon'ble Minister of Culture, Smt. Chandresh Kumari Katoch (October- November 2013); a high level 5-member senior official delegation led by Hon'ble Minister of State for Women and Child Development (Independent Charge), Mrs. Krishna Tirath visited Trinidad & Tobago (May-June 2013); Hon'ble Minister of State for Health & Family Planning (AYUSH), Shri S. Gandhiselvan (October 2012) in the context of bilateral cooperation in the area of traditional medicine.

From the T&T side important visits include visit of a 4-member delegation led by Minister of the People and social Development Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh (June 2013 as well as February 2014); a 3-member delegation participated at the 6th World Ayurveda Congress (Nov 2014); a 3-member delegation participated at the Global Research and Development Summit (Nov 2014); a 4-member delegation led by Mr. Winston Peter "Gypsy", Minister for Community Development (January – February 2013) to attend the Surajkund Crafts Mela.

Parliamentary Exchanges : The Parliamentarians of India and Trinidad & Tobago have traditionally enjoyed close relations. A 6-member delegation led by Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Smt. Meira Kumar visited T&T in January 2012 to attend the Commonwealth Speakers & Presiding Officers Conference (CSPOC). The T&T Parliamentarians returned the visit in March 2012 when a 7-Member Parliamentary delegation jointly led by President of the Senate, Timothy Hamel-Smith and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon'ble Wade Mark

visited India. During the visit an Indo-T&T Parliamentary Friendship Association was formed whose Indian co-chair is Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, MP.

Important Bilateral Agreements and MoUs: Over the years the two countries have signed several agreements and MoUs laying down the foundation for bilateral cooperation in diverse areas. These include Cooperation in Science and Technology (1985); Cultural Cooperation Agreement (1987); Technical Cooperation (1997); Trade Agreement (1997); Agriculture, Research and Education (1997); Development of Small Scale Industries in T&T (1997); Foreign Office Consultations (1997); Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (February 1999); MOU for Cooperation in Low Cost Housing (1999); Inter-Governmental Commission Agreement on Political, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (2003); Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement [BIPPA] (2007); MoU and a Work-Plan in Agriculture Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs (2011); the Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA) (2012); Technical Cooperation Agreement (on Education) (2012); Programme of Cultural Exchanges (for the years 2012-2014) (2012); MoU on co-operation in the field of Traditional Medicine (2012); MoU between ICCR and the University of West Indies (UWI) for establishment of Chairs of Hindi & Indian Studies (2012); MoU between Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences and UWI on setting up a Chair of Ayurveda in the University of West Indies (2012); MoU between National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) of India and the University of the West Indies (National Herbarium and Department of Life Sciences, T&T) on cooperation in the field of Medicinal Plants (April 2014); and MoU between the Foreign Service Institute, MEA and the Institute of International Relations, University of the West Indies on mutual cooperation (June 2015).

Joint Commission Meeting (JCM): The first meeting of the India-T&T Joint Commission Meeting was held in New Delhi in November 2011. The T&T delegation was led by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan and the Indian side was led by EAM Shri S.M. Krishna. Areas of discussion included Science & Technology, air transport, agriculture, SMEs, education, healthcare, tech. co-operation, energy and trade. The next JCM is due to be held in Port of Spain.

Participation in PBD and PBSAs: PM Kamla Persad Bissessar attended PBD 2012 in Jaipur as Chief Guest and was conferred with the PBSA. Senior Minister in the PM's office Dr. Lenny Saith attended PBD 2010 in Delhi and received Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award [PBSA]. In 2008 PBD, National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) was awarded PBSA. Prime Minister Basdeo Panday also attended the PBD as official delegate in 2005 (Mumbai) and 2008(Delhi). In 2005, he received the PBSA. In January 2006, Minister of Petroleum Dr. Lenny Saith attended official delegate the PBD celebrations in 2007 in Hyderabad as official delegate.

Promotion of Ayurveda and traditional Indian medicines: In order to promote and disseminate information on Ayurveda and traditional Indian medicines, an AYUSH Information Centre, sponsored by Department of AYUSH, was opened in the High Commission by Hon. Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Local Government. The Centre was dedicated to the people of Trinidad & Tobago by Hon'ble Minister of State for Health & Family Planning, Shri S. Gandhiselvan in October 2012.

Establishment of Forums under auspices of the Mission : The '**Forum of Indian Nationals in T&T**' (FINTT) was launched on 17 September 2011. FINTT is intended to bring together all Indian professionals living in T&T in an effort to carry out humanitarian work. The '**Know India Youth-Trinidad & Tobago**' (KIYTT) was formed in October 2011 in order to have better interaction among the participants in the Know India Programme (KIP) in T&T as an Overseas Indian Youth Club (OIYC) Chapter of MOIA. KIYTT carries out activities such as organizing cultural programmes, talk shows on TV channels, highlighting developments in different sectors in India and community activities. **Indian Alumni Association of Trinidad & Tobago (IAATT)** which constitutes scholars and other professions who have either studied or trained in India.

Economic & Commercial Relations: The Trade Agreement signed between India and T&T in January 1997 accords Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to each other. Though it has been static around \$100 million for years, bilateral trade has increased to US\$233.9 million (India's exports to T&T were US\$165.48 and T&T's exports were US\$68.42) during 2014-15. Based on its economically influential role in the region and supported by regional and bilateral preferential trade agreements, T&T provides good opportunities to exporters from India to access the Caribbean region and beyond. There is potential for growth of bilateral trades in textiles, garments, pharmaceuticals, energy, machinery and petro-chemicals, agriculture, IT and Film & Music Industry.

Indian Assistance to T&T: GOI assistance to T&T includes training under ITEC Programme, deputation of experts, Know India Programme for Diaspora youth and cultural & other scholarships for T&T nationals by ICCR. Facilities under ITEC programme were extended to T&T in late 60s. Following the visit of PM KPB to India in January 2012, the GOI increased the number of annual training slots for T&T nationals. Presently we are providing 35 slots. In 2013-14, thirty six scholars availed the facilities and in 2014-15 twenty scholars. We have also deputed experts in the fields of coconut and rice farming. Dr. G.J.N. Rao, Rice Production Expert, who joined the T&T Ministry of Food Production on 25 August 2014 on deputation for a period of one year, has since left after completing his term. In 2014-15, one student and three in 2012-13 were awarded ICCR scholarships. In 2013, seventeen participants visited India under Know India Programme, fifteen in 2014 and seven up to August 2015. Ninety nine young members of Diaspora have visited India under this programme so far.

Culture: The Mission has been engaged in active cultural diplomacy through its Cultural Wing, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Cultural Cooperation (MGICC), which was set up in January 1997 under a Bilateral Cultural Exchange Programme. MGICC is administered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) under the overall control of the High Commission. The primary objective of MGICC is to promote and sustain Indian culture and to develop goodwill among the people of T&T and India. Regular classes are conducted by India-based and local teachers in Indian classical music and dance in several centres in Trinidad as well as Tobago. Presently the Institute has one India-based teacher in vocal music & Tabla, two local classical dance teachers in Kathak and Bharatnatyam and a local Yoga teacher to give Yoga classes over the weekend. High Commission is also running Hindi classes in 7 different venues. The Institute has also been organizing a variety of cultural events like exhibitions, music and dance programmes, the monthly 'Kala Sandhya', lectures and workshops etc. MGICC also offers annual scholarships under ICCR's General Cultural Scholarship Scheme.

Chairs: The Mission in collaborative relationship with the University of West Indies set up three Chairs viz. (i) Hindi; (ii) Contemporary Indian Studies; and (iii) Ayurveda.

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Promotion of Hindi: Hindi teaching activities have assumed important proportions as interest in Hindi has grown in the local population. The prominent presence of Hindi in the local media, both radio and television, has added to the interest and there is a marked growth in the desire among local population cutting across gender, age and ethnicity to acquire proficiency in Hindi. The Mission, in keeping up with this, organizes Hindi classes in various parts of the country. These have been going on over the last 20 years and have been systematized recently. The Mission has also been cooperating with various cultural bodies through grants and dissemination of Hindi reading materials and software. Hindi Samman (award) is given every year on Hindi Day/World Hindi Day. Besides, proficiency certificates are awarded to meritorious students who excel in various departments of Hindi learning. Besides, regular workshops are conducted by local Hindi teachers on the methodology and technique of language learning in consonance with Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra. Books and teaching materials are also distributed to teachers. Various local Hindi teaching institutions have collaborated with the Mission in promoting Hindi.

Indian Community: The Non-Resident Indian Community in Trinidad and Tobago constitute about 600 families (1800 persons) who are engaged in business, teaching, medicine and other professions. The Mission is in close contact with the Indian Diaspora (about 42% of the total population of T&T) and has been actively promoting various schemes of the Government of India meant for them such as OCI scheme, Know India Programme (KIP), Tracing the Roots Programme, Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award. The Mission Provides regular and prompt consular service to the Non-resident Indian community residing in T&T and other concurrently accredited countries.

Visa waiver for Indian nationals: The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has waived visa requirement for Indian nationals visiting T&T for tourism and business purposes for a period of three months. Proposal for e-Tourist Visa for T&T citizens is under consideration in India.

Useful Resources:

High Commission of India, Port of Spain Website:
<http://www.hcipo.in/>

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