India-Trinidad and Tobago Relations

Historical Perspective: The relationship between India and Trinidad & Tobago started on 30 May 1845 when the first ship ‘Fatel Razack’ carrying 225 adult Indians 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 population are 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 greatly to bilateral relations between the two countries.

Visit of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar to India in January 2012:

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar 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. These included the Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA); a Technical Cooperation Agreement (on Education), Programme of Cultural Exchanges (for the years 2012-2014); MoU on co-operation in the field of Traditional Medicine and for setting up a Chair of Ayurveda in the University of West Indies. 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 Hon’ble Minister of State for Health & Family Planning (AYUSH), Shri S. Gandhiselvan (16-21 October 2012) in the context of bilateral cooperation in the area of traditional medicine; 6-member delegation led by Shri Anil Kumar, Secretary, Department of AYUSH (November 2011); 3-member delegation led by Ms. Sangita Gairola, Secretary, Ministry of Culture; delegation from Ministry of Tourism (June 2011); 2-member delegation led by Dr. S. Ayappan, Secretary (DARE) & DG, ICCR (October 2011).

From the T&T side important visits include visit of a 4-member delegation led by Mr. Winston Peter “Gypsy”, Minister for Community Development (January – February 2013) to attend the Surajkund Crafts Mela; Dr. Bhoendradatt Tiwarie, Minister of Planning & Sustainable Development (November 2012); Mr. Winston Dookeran, Minister of Finance (December 2011); Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan; and delegation led by Dr. Rupert Griffith, Minister of Tourism.
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 from 7-12 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.

Existing Agreements and MoUs: Apart from 5 Agreements/MoUs signed during the T&T Prime Minister’s State visit to India few had been signed between India and T&T as far back as in 1985, viz. Cooperation in Science and Technology (1985); Cultural Cooperation Agreement (1987). A number of Agreements were also signed during the State of Visit of Prime Minister Basdeo Pandey to India in 1997 which include Technical Cooperation; Trade (according MFN status for each other’s products); Agriculture, Research and Education; Development of Small Scale Industries in T&T; Foreign Office Consultations; and Agreement between NSIC and Small Business Development Company of Trinidad and between CII and T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce. During the State visit of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s to T&T in February 1999, the two countries signed a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DYAA); and MOU for Cooperation in Low Cost Housing. Other agreements signed are Inter-Governmental Commission Agreement on Political, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (2003); Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement [BIPPA] (2007); MoU between the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago [UTT] (2009); MoU and a Work-Plan in Agriculture Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs (2011); MoU between ICCR and the University of West Indies for establishment of Chairs of Hindi & Indian Studies (2012).

Joint Commission Meeting (JCM): The first meeting of the India-T&T Joint Consultative Meeting was held in New Delhi 28-29 November 2011. The T&T delegation was led by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications and the Indian side was led by EAM Sh. S.M. Krishna. Areas of discussion included Science & Technology, air transport, agriculture, SMEs, education, healthcare, tech. co-operation, energy and trade.

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 the 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.

**Visit of University of West Indies (UWI) Team:** A 16-member UWI team visited India on a 3-week ‘Discover India Programme’ under the guidance of Prof. Kapil Kumar, the Indian Chair for Contemporary Indian Studies in UWI. UWI will accord 3 course credits to the participants for their participation in the visit as part of their course requirements. This would be an annual affair.

**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, etc. The Indian Alumni Association of Trinidad & Tobago (IAATT) which constitutes scholars and other professions who have either studied or trained in India.

**Economic & Commercial Relations:** Bilateral trade between India and Trinidad & Tobago during 2011-12 amounted to US$287.72 million. India’s exports to T&T during the year were US$82.46 million and T&T’s exports were US$205.25 million. The India’s export basket to T&T comprised of Petroleum-crude & products, drugs & pharmaceuticals, iron & steel, garments, rice, other food stuff including spices, IT services, auto components, machinery & transport equipment, plastic products, cosmetics, organic/inorganic chemicals, electronic goods, transport equipment, non-ferrous metals, gems & jewelry, silk, sports goods, chemicals, paints, footwear, carpets, and leather goods etc. The products exported by T&T to India include petroleum products, scrap metals, wood and wood products, asphalt, chemicals and LNG. 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.

**Indian Community:** The Non-Resident Indian Community in Trinidad and Tobago constitute about 500 families (1500 persons) who are engaged in business, teaching, medicine and other professions. The Mission is in close contact with the Diaspora and has been actively promoting various schemes of the Government of India meant for them such as PIO Cards and 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 Trinidad and Tobago and other concurrently accredited countries.

**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 18 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. Two Hindi Samman (Awards) are given every year, one on Hindi Day and the other on World Hindi Day. Besides, proficiency certificates are awarded to meritorious students who excel in various departments of Hindi learning. A Chair of Hindi in UWI has set tone for Hindi in the UWI at a higher level and has been instrumental in organizing various Hindi related workshops and conferences, World Hindi Conference, international Hindi conference, Hindi Kavi Samellan. 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.

**TOBAGO:** The first-ever business delegation from the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) led by Secretary of Finance & Enterprise Development Dr. Anselm London went on a two-week mission to China, Japan and India to seek business opportunities from 7 to 21 April 2010. The Mission sought business and investment opportunities for joint venture in development and management of its IT Centre as well as collaboration in development of micro, small and medium enterprise industries in Tobago. THA signed a MoU on cooperation headquarters in New Delhi in 2010.

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