

India - Trinidad & Tobago – Bilateral Relations

Historical Perspective: Relationship between India and Trinidad & Tobago goes back to 30 May 1845 when the first ship 'Fattel 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.

VVIP visits:

Visit of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar to India : 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. 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 held in Port of Spain in November 2009.

Other high level 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 Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Shri Ram Vilas Paswan (October 2016); a 3-member delegation led by 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); and a 3-member senior official delegation led by Hon'ble Minister of Culture, Smt. Chandresh Kumari Katoch (October- November 2013). 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 (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); and 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. In the past two years two MoUs between the two countries were signed. These include 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. The next JCM is due to be held in Port of Spain. During the visit of Hon'ble Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Shri Ram Vilas Paswan to T&T in October 2016, the issue of holding of JCM was strongly taken up with T&T Foreign Minister Dennis Moses and it was agreed to hold the next JCM at the earliest.

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.

Economic & Commercial Relations: The Trade Agreement signed between India and T&T in January 1997 accords Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to each other. Bilateral trade between India and T&T 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. 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.

The High Commission set up a 'Booth' from 24th to 29th October first time at Divali Nagar to provide first-hand information with informative material relating to Visa, OCI, KIP, ITEC and business opportunities in India as well as various programmes for visiting India. A specially

designed flyer containing all information was printed and distributed to the visitors along with tourist materials provided by India Tourism. Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, who was on official visit to T&T, visited the High Commission's Booth; he highly appreciated the High Commission for the brilliant idea to outreach the T&T nationals with all requisite information at a most suitable venue. Over 8000 visitors visited the booth and about 2500 registered themselves.

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. Presently we are providing 25 slots under ITEC programme. In 2014-15, twenty scholars availed the facilities, seven in 2015-16 and three up to December 2016. Over 500 citizens of T&T have benefited from various ITEC courses mostly related to IT and Communications; Standardization and Quality Assurance, Manpower Research and HRD skills etc. 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 completion of his term. In 2013-14 and 2014-15 four students were awarded ICCR scholarships. In 2014, fifteen participants visited India under Know India Programme, seven in 2015, and sixteen upto December 2016.

Culture: T&T distinguishes itself by the fact that it comprises different races and ethnicity which co-exist harmoniously. The national population comprises people from India, China, Europe, Syria/Lebanon and South America. It is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. 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. It promotes bilateral cultural cooperation primarily in the field of arts and culture, both at Government and NGO levels, through its cultural and teaching activities by the India-based teachers in Indian classical music and dance. Presently the Institute has two India-based teachers in Vocal and Tabla, one local classical dance teacher in Kathak and a local Yoga teacher to give Yoga classes over the weekend. Besides, through its outreach centres, MGICC promotes teaching of music and dance in collaboration with several socio-cultural and educational institutions and conducts programmes and classes with a view to promoting greater awareness of India's composite cultural heritage. 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 including Ayurveda Scholarships. The existing Cultural Exchange Programme, which was signed for three years in January 2012, is up for renewal.

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. These chairs have helped considerably in creating awareness on India's cultural and civilizational values amongst the younger generation in the country.

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. Hindi Samman (Awards) are 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. 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. 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.

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. The Government of India has approved e-Tourist Visa for T&T citizens.

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 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.

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 in 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 in MSME with NSIC in New Delhi in January 2010. The MoU is up for renewal.

Useful Resources:

Website: <http://www.hcipos.in>

Facebook link: India in Trinidad and Tobago

Twitter link: @IndiainTandT

5th December, 2016