

India-Seychelles Bilateral Relations

Historical background & Diplomatic Links

India's bilateral engagement with Seychelles has evolved over our historical contacts and continuous support to Seychelles for its security, even as our bilateral trade remains modest. Today, India-Seychelles relations are characterized by close friendship, understanding and cooperation. Diplomatic ties were established with Seychelles after its independence in 1976. It was in the year 1770 that a small group of five Indians landed in Seychelles as plantation workers along with seven African slaves and 15 French colonists, and were recorded as the first inhabitants of the Islands. During the British colonial period, Seychelles was governed from the Bombay Presidency for some time, with regular shipping links and flow of goods and essential commodities from India. These trade links facilitated migration of an Indian trading community looking for greener pastures having reached a saturation point in East Africa.

2. When Seychelles attained freedom on 29th June 1976, a contingent from the Indian Naval Ship, INS Nilgiri, took part in the Independence Day celebrations. The Indian Mission was established in 1979 in Victoria, with the High Commissioner based in Dar-es-Salaam and concurrently accredited to Seychelles. The first resident High Commissioner was appointed in 1987, while Seychelles opened its resident mission in New Delhi in early 2008.

Visits from India

3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit (10-11 March 2015) to Seychelles was the first Prime Ministerial level visit from India in 34 years. It was a highly successful visit with substantive outcomes: 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.

4. Previous visits from India include: 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 (July 2010); President Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil (2012).

5. An 8-member delegation led by Lok Sabha Speaker Hon. Sumitra Mahajan attended the 24th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC) hosted (8-13 Jan, 2018) by Seychelles.

Visits from Seychelles

6. President Danny Faure, visited India twice in 2018, in March 2018 to attend the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance and in June 2018 for a State Visit. In his former capacity as Vice President, attended the 14th edition of the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit held in New Delhi in February 2014.

7. Former President France Albert Rene visited India in 1980, 1986 and 1990. Thereafter, Vice-President James Alix Michel visited India in 1994, 1996 and 1999 and later as President in July 2005, June 2010, February 2011, February 2012 and August 2015. Vice President Vincent Meriton visited Chennai (11-14 February 2017) to inaugurate a wing in MIOT hospital, Chennai, where Government of Seychelles (GoS) sends their patients for medical treatment.

8. A 12-member Seychelles National Assembly delegation, led by Speaker Patrick Pillay, visited India from 9-13 August 2017. The delegation interacted with the Lok Sabha Speaker and also called on our President, PM and the Vice-President. Leader of the Opposition Hon'ble Wavel Ramkalawan visited India in January 2018 to participate in the PIO Parliamentarians Conference. Recently, Mr. Charles Bastienne, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries of Seychelles visited Hyderabad from October 23-23, 2018 on an official study tour and Minister for Health Jean Paul Adam visited India from 23-28 September 2019.

Bilateral Agreements/MOUs

9. Several bilateral agreements/MOUs have been signed between the two countries, notable among which are the following: Air Services Agreement (1981); Agreement on Tourism (1996); Trade Agreement (2000); Joint Business Council (2000); MOU on Healthcare (2003); MOU on Defence Cooperation (2003); MOU on Science and Technology (2003); Cultural Exchange Programme (2003-05); Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) (June 2010); MOU for setting up of an Information Technology Centre in Seychelles (February 2010); MOU on Police Research & Training (April-May 2012).

10. 4 MOUs/Agreements were signed during the State Visit of Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi to Seychelles in March 2015, including: Renewable Energy Cooperation; MOU for Cooperation in the field of Hydrography; Protocol on Sale

of Navigational Charts / Electronic Navigational Charts; Agreement on the Development of Facilities on Assumption Island.

11. During the State visit of the then President James Michel in August 2015, the following MOUs/ Agreements were signed: Bilateral Air Services Agreement; MoU for gifting a second Dornier Maritime Aircraft; Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA); MoU between ICAR and Seychelles Agricultural Agency for Cooperation in Agricultural Research and Education; Protocol on Framework of Cooperation in the field of Blue Economy.

12. During the 1st State Visit of President Danny Faure in June 2018, the following 6 agreements/ MOUs were signed: White Shipping data Agreement; MOU on cyber security (2018); MoU on Small Development Projects, MOU between the Foreign Service Institute India and the Department of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles; Cultural Exchange Program for the years 2018-2022; Twinning Agreement between the Corporation of the City of Panaji (Municipal Corporation) and the City of Victoria of the Republic of Seychelles.

Trade & Investment

13. Bilateral trade and commerce with Seychelles is rather modest, mostly due to absence of a direct shipping line between India and Seychelles. Presently, Seychelles' main items of import from India are rice, miscellaneous food products, cement, linen, cotton, vehicles & associated transport equipment, medicines, instruments and appliances for medical, surgical & dental use. India exported goods worth US\$ 84.49 million and imported goods worth US\$ 5.27 million from Seychelles during the financial year 2018-19.

14. 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.

15. In pursuance of a MoU signed in September 2014, Air Seychelles launched thrice-weekly direct flights between Mahé and Mumbai on 2 December 2014. The direct air connectivity has boosted bilateral trade and investment, flow of tourist traffic and people-to-people contact. The frequency has increased to 6 flights a week from May 2019.

16. The Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA) has been signed during the Presidential visit to India in August 2015

Energy and Environment

17. Following the signing of the Blue Economy Protocol between India and Seychelles in August 2015, a roadmap charting out the framework of cooperation remains to be prepared on our part and implemented. Meanwhile, the two countries have been supportive of each other's position in the international fora on issues related to climate change. With the ratification of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement in September 2017, Seychelles has officially become one of the Founding Members of ISA.

18. In pursuance of the bilateral MOU on Renewable Energy Cooperation signed during PM's visit to Seychelles in March 2015, a 3-member delegation from Seychelles attended the first meeting of the Joint Working Group in February 2016 in New Delhi to chart out the roadmap of cooperation.

Cultural Relations

19. In June 2018, CEP was signed with Seychelles. To mark the friendship and goodwill between the two countries, President of Seychelles gifted two giant Aldabra tortoises to the Hyderabad Zoo.

20. With a significant presence of Indian Diaspora in Seychelles, cultural contacts between the two countries have been primarily community-driven with support from the two governments. At the initiative of prominent PIO associations in Seychelles, several Indian cultural troupes regularly visit Seychelles for performance.

Indian Community

21. History: India has an important link with Seychelles with the first small group of five Indians arriving in Seychelles in 1770. Beginning of the twentieth century onwards, there was a constant flow of Indians, mostly from Tamil Nadu/Puducherry and later from Gujarat, who came in as traders, labourers, construction workers and more recently as professionals.

22. The number of PIOs with Seychelles citizenship is estimated to be around 6000 (or 11% of the population), which is significant in a country with a total population of 96,000 (June 2017). The PIO community is visible in all walks of life and is well known for its professionalism and hard-work. They dominate the trading and construction sectors.

23. There are about 10,000 Indian citizens holding Gainful Employment Permits, who are mostly workers in the construction sector, shop assistants and a few professionals.

24. The prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award was conferred on Justice D. Karunakaran of the Supreme Court of Seychelles in 2015. He is the second recipient of the PBSA from Seychelles after Dr. V. Ramadoss in 2006.

Defence and Security Cooperation

25. 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 two Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft to Seychelles, first in 2013 and the second in June 2018. India gifted and installed six coastal surveillance radar systems in Seychelles in 2015 enabling better coastal security for Seychelles. A 45-member Indian Army team participated in the 8th India-Seychelles biennial joint military exercise "LAMITYE-8" conducted in Mahé (February 24 to March 3, 2018). INS Darshak carried out Hydrographic and Bathymetric survey of Port Victoria, Praslin and La Digue from 30th December 2019 to 18th January 2020.

Development Assistance

25. An important aspect of bilateral cooperation revolves around various development assistance programs extended to Seychelles under ITEC, ICCR and IAFS. Over 1% of the local population form part of ITEC alumni who have so far benefited from various training courses under the ITEC program. In the year 2018, a total of 90 civilian including 46 police personnel, and 75 military personnel have gone to India from Seychelles for training in different ITEC programs.

25. 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. Ten light vehicles including four TATA Safari Storme 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 gifted to Narcotics wing of Seychelles Police under a special grant of GOI in June 2018. India has agreed to construct Magistrate Court building next to Seychelles Supreme Court at a cost of USD 3.45 million and the foundation stone laying ceremony took

place on 28 September 2018. Government of India also gave a cash grant amounting to USD 3.5 Million for the Procurement of 71 buses and 6 light vehicles for Seychelles Public Transport Corporation (SPTC), USD 385,000 for the Procurement of 10 Ambulances project and USD 4,704,135 for the Restoration Project of CSRS Station in different islands all across Seychelles.

26. A second line of credit has been offered by India for the defense and maritime security cooperation of Seychelles for an amount of USD 100million. The second Dornier aircraft was handed over to the President of Seychelles, H.E. Mr. Danny Faure by the External Affairs, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, at the Indian Naval Air Station, New Delhi on 26 June 2018. The first Dornier was handed over to Seychelles in 2013.

27. At present, India is in the process of funding the construction of National Priority Projects of Seychelles including Attorney General's Office, Secretariat Building, Police Headquarters and a State of the art Convention Centre for Seychelles, all projects put together costing around USD 68 Million.

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