

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 High Commissioner was placed in Victoria in 1987, while Seychelles opened its resident mission in New Delhi in early 2008.

Bilateral Agreements

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 April-May 2012.

During Prime Minister's visit (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.

President James Alix Michel of Seychelles paid a State Visit to India from 25-27 August 2015. During this visit, 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

There have been high level exchange of visits since Seychelles attained its independence.

From Seychelles – Top leaders from Seychelles visited India regularly. Former President Albert Rene visited India in 1980, 1986 and 1990. President James Michel visited India in 1994, 1996 and 1999 in the capacity as Vice President and in July 2005, June 2010, February 2011, February 2012 and August 2015 as President. During his State Visit in August 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) held on 28-29 October 2015 in New Delhi.

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 (July 2010); President Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil (2012); Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (2015).

PM's visit (10-11 March 2015) was the first Prime Ministerial level visit from India to Seychelles in 34 years. Former PM Smt. Indira Gandhi had visited Seychelles in 1976 and 1981. It was a highly successful visit with substantive outcomes, which included *inter alia* 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. The highlight was a public address by PM at an indoor stadium to an audience of over 4000 including several Seychelles dignitaries and members of the Indian community.

Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (Independent Charge) and Parliamentary Affairs Shri Rajiv Pratap Rudy visited Seychelles from 4-7 July 2015 as PM's Special Envoy to personally hand over letters of invitation to the President and Foreign Minister of Seychelles for IAFS-III. Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge) Dr. Mahesh Sharma visited Seychelles from 4-6 October 2015 in connection with the Festival of India "*IndiaFest 2015*" and the 3rd Seychelles India Day.

Defence and Security Cooperation

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. The bilateral cooperation in this area has manifested across a wide spectrum ranging from maritime security, anti-piracy operations, air surveillance, training and capacity building. During the years 2014 and 2015, notable areas of cooperation are summarised below:

- The past two years witnessed further deepening of India-Seychelles defence and security cooperation, focusing in particular on maritime safety and surveillance of the extensive Exclusive Economic Zone of Seychelles. An important feature of the cooperation was the visits by Indian Naval and Coast Guard ships to Seychelles with specific assignments. INS Trishul, visited Seychelles from 29 April to 7 May 2014 as part of its mission to carry out EEZ surveillance. Six months later, INS Sukanya visited Seychelles from 23 October 2014 to November 2014 on a scheduled maritime patrolling visit, during which it conducted EEZ surveillance in the southern waters of Seychelles archipelago. INS Teg made a port call in Victoria in the last week of June 2015 coinciding with the celebrations to mark the Seychelles National Day on 29 June 2015. INS Teg conducted EEZ surveillance of the southern waters of Seychelles around the far-flung outer islands from 30 June to 6 July 2015. Three training ships from India (INS Tir, INS Sujata and ICGS Varuna) visited Seychelles from 1-13 October 2015 for conducting EEZ surveillance and bilateral exercises. In pursuance of the MOU on Hydrography signed during the Prime Minister's visit in March 2015, INS Darshak visited Seychelles from 5 November to 19 December 2015 to conduct hydrographic survey of Victoria Port and adjoining areas.
- An Indian naval ship, INS Tarasa, was gifted to Seychelles on 7 November 2014 to augment surveillance and patrolling of Seychelles waters that covers an extensive EEZ of over 1.3 million sq. kms. The Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy Admiral RK. Dhowan visited Seychelles for the formal handing-over ceremony in the presence of President James Michel. The ship was rechristened 'PS Constant' upon induction into the fleet of Seychelles Coast Guard. This is the second Indian naval ship gifted to Seychelles after PS Topaz in 2006. Coinciding with the handing over of INS Tarasa and the visit by the Chief of Naval Staff, three Indian naval ships from the Western Fleet, INS Deepak, INS Mumbai and INS Talwar, made port calls in Victoria from 6-9 November 2014.

- Earlier, in June 2014, the Seychelles Peoples' Defence Forces (SPDF) received a donation of two military vehicles from the Government of India.
- As part of the bilateral defence and security cooperation, capacity building programmes were organized under ITEC for SPDF in India, ITEC deputationists were deployed with SPDF, including as Military Adviser, Maritime Security Adviser, Medical Adviser and Naval Adviser (Technical). A 5-member Indian Afloat Support Team has been deployed with the Seychelles Coast Guard with effect from June 2015. A 8 member Dornier Maritime Aviation Expert Team has been deployed in Seychelles with effect from August 2015.

Development Assistance

India has been extending generous assistance since early 1980s to Seychelles under ITEC programme in the civilian, defence and other fields and around 1000 Seychellois have so far benefited from various training courses under the programme. During the Presidential visit to Seychelles in 2012, India announced US\$ 50 million as Line of Credit and US\$ 25 million as grant to the Government of Seychelles. India has also been providing Seychelles with development assistance in the form of financial aid as well as material assistance. Seychelles Hospital is connected with major hospitals in India under Pan-African satellite tele-medicine system. IT Centre for Excellence, set up in Victoria with GOI assistance was inaugurated in April 2011.

Commercial Relations

Though the economic and commercial cooperation at the moment is small, 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. The total imports from India in 2014 was US\$ 43.80 million, while total exports to India in 2014 was only US\$ 0.023 million.

Among Indian companies present in Seychelles, Bank of Baroda has been maintaining a successful overseas branch in Victoria since 1978 and is doing a profitable business. A major private investment from an Indian company has been that of M/s. Bharti Airtel Telecom group, which has invested over US\$25 million and set up the Airtel mobile telephone and internet services in Seychelles since 1998. TATA has so far supplied most of the fleet of buses for Seychelles to ply between its capital city Victoria and other regions of Mahé Island.

In pursuance of an MoU signed in September 2014, Air Seychelles launched thrice-weekly direct flights between Mahé and Mumbai on 2 December 2014 (frequency increased to five flights a week from January 2016). The direct air connectivity has the potential to increase bilateral trade and investment, flow of tourist traffic and people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

Cultural Relations

Cultural cooperation between India and Seychelles has always been significant. Among the bilateral cultural exchanges, landmark events were the three editions of the Seychelles India Day held in Victoria in 2013, 2014, 2015 respectively organised by the Indian Association of Seychelles jointly with the Seychelles Ministry of Tourism & Culture and the Indian High Commission. A Festival of India "*IndiaFest 2015*", organised in Seychelles in October 2015 coinciding with the 3rd Seychelles India Day, was a huge success. MOS for Culture (Independent Charge) Dr. Mahesh Sharma visited Seychelles

from 4-6 October 2015 in connection with the Festival of India and the 3rd Seychelles India Day. He attended several events related to *IndiaFest 2015* including an exclusive “India Evening”, during which the title of Cultural Ambassador of Seychelles was conferred on music maestro AR Rahman. The highlight of the Festival was the sand art creations by Sudarsan Pattnaik, besides spectacular performances by dance troupes and artistes specially flown in from India.

To mark the friendship and goodwill between the two countries, President Michel gifted two giant Aldabra tortoises to the Alipore Zoo in Kolkata in October 2014 to replace a similar tortoise of Seychelles origin at the Zoo that died in March 2006.

On 21 June 2015, the 1st International Day of Yoga was celebrated in Seychelles. Events included a mass yoga session in the morning, inauguration of a weeklong exhibition on Yoga and a seminar-cum-yoga demonstration. To mark the occasion, a plaque was unveiled at the High Commission premises dedicating its Vivekananda Yoga Club to the people Seychelles.

Indian Army’s Motorcycle Riders Display Team “Shwet Ashwa” participated in the Seychelles National Day Celebration (29 June 2015). Indian men and women national volleyball teams also visited Seychelles for an international tournament organized coinciding with the Seychelles National Day.

Indian Community

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, labours, construction workers and more recently as professionals. The number of Indian nationals including PIOs is 10,000 which is significant in a country having total population of 91,000. A Hindu temple, Lord Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple, built in 1992 is a major tourist attraction in Victoria. The Indian community celebrates Holi, Janmashtami, Dusshera and Diwali every year besides organizing various cultural events, talk shows, music concerts etc. The Indian community also spearheads the organising of the annual India-Seychelles Day every October. The Indian community is visible in all walks of life in Seychelles, particularly in trading. Virtually all the shops in this country are owned by the Tamil community. A large portion of the real estate business and the construction industry is controlled by the Gujarati community.

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:

High Commission of India to Seychelles website:

<http://www.hciseyelles.com>

High Commission of India to Seychelles Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/hcimahe>

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