

India-Sierra Leone Relations

Political relations:

The traditionally cordial bilateral relations of India and Sierra Leone were re-energised by the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Anand Sharma's visit to Sierra Leone in January 2009, representing the first high-level visit from India after a gap of ten years. The new thrust in relations was facilitated by a steady ministerial-level interaction between the two countries and an upswing in economic and commercial partnership over the past two years.

The former Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, Ms. Zainab Bangura, visited India in October 2008 at the invitation of the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Anand Sharma. The Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone participated in the Ministerial Meeting on "Harnessing the Positive Contribution of South-South Cooperation for Development of LDCs", held in New Delhi on 18-19 February, 2011.

A two member delegation led by Mr. Solomon S Thomas, Deputy Financial Secretary, Ministry of Finance, visited India on 22-23 November, 2011 and participated in the Conference on LOC held in New Delhi.

Two MPs from Sierra Leone, Hon. Mr. Legacy Sankoh and Hon. Mr. Jacob I. Koroma, visited India to participate in the 'Leaders of the Future' programme, held on 13-20 March 2012.

Mr. Oluniyi Robbin-Coker, Minister of Energy and Water Resources visited India to participate in the Global Ministerial level "International Seminar on Energy Access" held in New Delhi on 9-10 October, 2012.

Sierra Leone is a commonwealth member country. It was represented at the Commonwealth Games Delhi 2010 by its 48-member sports delegation, led by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.

The High Commission of India to Ghana is concurrently accredited to Sierra Leone with residence in Accra. The Honorary Consulate of India is functioning in Freetown since 1993.

Bilateral high-level visits and consultations, include the visit of former Defence Minister, George Fernandes in July 2000; the visit of Sierra Leonean Minister of Industry and Transport, Mr. A.E. Bangura to New Delhi in November 1998; the visit of a two-member Parliamentary delegation, led by the Speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament, to New Delhi in January 2003, and the visit of the then Foreign Minister Alhaji Momodu Koroma and Trade and Industry Minister Dr. Kadi Sesay to New Delhi on 6-9 November 2005 to participate in the CII Africa Conclave. Mr. Momodu

Koroma, the then Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone participated in a conference on 'International Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment – Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century' held in New Delhi on 29-30 January 2007. Mr. Joseph S. Sesay, Minister of Health and Mr. Francis Abdul Rahman Sankoh, Director of Livestocks, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry of Sierra Leone, participated in New Delhi Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza on 4-6 December 2007. The then Sierra Leonean Minister of Trade, Mr. A.P. Koroma, visited India in March, 2008.

Shri Sushil Kumar Modi, Dy. Chief Minister of Bihar, visited Sierra Leone to attend the "Sierra Leone Conference on Development and Transformation" held in Sierra Leone from 30 January to 1 February, 2012.

The deployment of the 4000-strong Indian military contingent in the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) – initially led by Brig. S.C. Joshi as the head of a 10-member Military Liaison Unit (attached to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Sierra Leone), and, thereafter, by Maj. Gen. V.K. Jetley as Force Commander of UNAMSIL, beginning Jan. 2000 – left a positive impact among the Sierra Leoneans. Indian troops were phased out in January, 2001.

Presidential & Parliamentary Elections

Incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma was re-elected as the President of Sierra Leone in the presidential elections held in November, 2012 and sworn in for a second term. The Sierra Leone People's Party's (SLPP) candidate, Retd. Brig. Julius Maada Bio, came in second with 37.4 percent. Bio denounced the election as riddled with fraud. In the parliamentary elections, held simultaneously with the presidential elections, the governing All People's Congress (APC) got 67 out of 124 seats, gaining eight more from the last Parliament. The main opposition SLPP got 42 seats, three down from last season. 12 of the total seats are meant for paramount chiefs from the provinces. The final results also confirmed the death of a third force in the country's politics, at least until the next election season, with the Peoples Movement for Democratic Change losing all its ten seats.

Commercial relations:

So far, Government of India has extended Lines of Credit worth US\$ 94.45 million to the Government of Sierra Leone for various development projects like Rehabilitation of Telecom Sector, Potable Water projects, Development of Commercial Agriculture, Solar Street Lighting Project etc.

According to available statistics, the total trade between the two countries stood at US\$ 60.97 million during 2010-11 and US\$ 101.03 million in 2011-12 with India's export to Sierra Leone at US\$ 86.23 million as against an import figure of

US\$ 4.80 million. Total bilateral trade in 2012-13 (April-September) registered US\$ 87.00 million.

Indian export basket is mostly comprised of drugs and pharmaceuticals, textile, eggs, and machine tools, while the major items of imports from Sierra Leone include ferrous waste and scrap, wood pulp, waste paper and small quantities of titanium ores.

There are about 20 Indian NRI/PIO trading companies, based in Sierra Leone, which run departmental stores; biscuit, candle making and agro-processing units, and supply food products and consumer durables in the country.

An Indian investment company, ABG Group and its Sierra Leonean partner, SLEMCO (Sierra Leone Exploration Mining Company) discovered significant bauxite deposits, estimated to be 321 mn MT, in 2011.

Bharti Airtel, after its acquisition of Zain Africa for US\$ 10.7 bn in 2010, has made an entry into Sierra Leone telecom sector, buying over Zain SL. In its assessment, the country offers promising prospects for growth.

During his visit, the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Anand Sharma, gifted 200 military barracks to Sierra Leone. These were erected by an Indian Public Sector Undertaking.

With a view to assisting Sierra Leone in its socio-economic development, India has extended concessional loans worth US\$ 74.45 mn for purchase of agricultural equipments, modernisation and expansion of Sierra Leone National Telecommunications Network (SIERRATEL), and for the restoration and rehabilitation of six potable water projects in Freetown. Another Line of Credit (LOC) of US\$ 20 million has been extended to ECOWAS Bank in June 2011 for Solar Street Lighting Project in Sierra Leone.

India gifted 29 packages of indelible ink in May, 2007 for Sierra Leone's presidential and parliamentary elections, held in September, 2007.

India supplied 40,000 tonnes of non-basmati rice to Sierra Leone in June 2008 to meet Sierra Leone's urgent requirements.

Under the ITEC program, 45 slots were allocated in 2011-12. The ITEC Rural Solar Electrification course, held at the Barefoot College of Tilonia, has been found to be particularly relevant. Some Sierra Leonean women, upon their return from the course, have successfully installed the solar system in their villages, providing inexpensive electricity to the rural households. Sierra Leone has been allotted 60 ITEC slots for 2012-13. India has also offered to set up one project viz., India-Africa Information and Communication Technology Centre in Sierra Leone under the India-Africa Forum Summit.

The Pan-African e-Network is functioning well. The Sierra Leone Learning Centre has signed an MoU with all five Indian participating university centres. 136 students, who were enrolled in various courses, offered by two centres, namely, Amity University and University of Madras, in the 2010 session, have completed their first semester. Furthermore, doctors, as well as medical and pharmacology students, have been regularly attending the tele-medicine programs and have found them to be beneficial.

Indian Community

There are around 540 Indian community members residing in Sierra Leone. There is a Hindu temple in Freetown. The Choitram Trust runs a charity hospital.

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