

## **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 Indian Mission to Seychelles was opened at 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.

During Seychelles President James Alix Michel's State visit to India (25-27 Aug 2015), 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. President Albert Rene visited India in 1980, 1986 and 1990. President 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 as President in August 2015. During his State Visit in Aug 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 3<sup>rd</sup> India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS III) (28-29 Oct 2015) in New Delhi. Agriculture & Fisheries Minister Wallace Cosgrow attended the India-Africa Agribusiness Forum (IAAF) in New Delhi (10-11 Feb), participating in the two-day deliberations and addressing the Ministerial session. Tourism and Culture Minister Alain St Ange led a delegation to Chennai and Bangalore (7-10 Jun) to promote Seychelles as a tourism destination. India hosted (1 Feb) the first

strategy meeting the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) in Mumbai. Foreign Minister Joel Morgan chaired this meeting.

**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 Mar 2015) was the first Prime Ministerial level visit from India to Seychelles in 34 years. It was a highly successful visit with substantive outcomes, including 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.

Shri Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (Independent Charge) and Parliamentary Affairs, visited Seychelles from 4-7 Jul 2015 as PM's Special Envoy to personally hand over letters of invitation to the President and Foreign Minister of Seychelles for IAFS-III. Dr. Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge), visited Seychelles from 4-6 Oct 2015 in connection with the Festival of India "*IndiaFest 2015*" and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seychelles India Day. Shri Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State (Defence) visited Seychelles (20-24 Mar 2016) and formally inaugurated the Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) project along with the Seychelles Foreign Minister Joel Morgan.

### **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 2015-16, defence and security cooperation focussed in particular on maritime safety and surveillance of the extensive Exclusive Economic Zone of Seychelles:

- In pursuance of the MOU on Hydrography signed during the Prime Minister's visit in March 2015, INS Darshak visited Seychelles from 5 Nov to 19 Dec 2015 to conduct hydrographic survey of Victoria Port and adjoining areas.
- INS Sunayna (5-7 Jan 2016) carried out EEX surveillance for Seychelles and on its return, towed Seychelles vessel PS Topaz to India for participation at the International Fleet review at Visakhapatnam followed by refit at Visakhapatnam Naval dockyard.
- An Indian Fast Interceptor Boat C-405 (rechristened 'PB Hermes') was gifted to Seychelles in January 2016. The gifting of the boat was announced by PM during President Michel's visit to India in August 2015.
- ICGS Samarth (13-22 Jan 2016) escorted the fast patrol craft C-405 to Seychelles.
- Indian Naval aircraft P8I arrived in Seychelles (20-23 Mar 2016) for carrying out EEZ surveillance for Seychelles

- INS Trikand (26 Jun-1 Jul 2016) for participation in National Day celebrations of Seychelles
- Three frontline warships of the Western Fleet, INS Kolkata, INS Trikand and INS Aditya visited (26-28 Aug 16) Seychelles as part of its two-month deployment in the Southern Indian Ocean under the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) mission.
- Indian Naval Ship Shardul, a landing craft, visited Port Victoria (23 Nov to 3 Dec 2016) for undertaking surveillance of Seychelles EEZ.
- A 45-member Indian Army team participated in the 7<sup>th</sup> India-Seychelles biennial joint military exercise "LAMITYE-7" conducted in Mahé (15-28 Feb 2016). These bilateral exercises are being held in Seychelles since 2001.

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). An 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 visit of the President to Seychelles in 2012, India announced US\$ 50 million as Line of Credit and US\$ 25 million as grant to the Government of Seychelles. A major portion of the US\$ 25 million grant has been utilised by the Government of Seychelles in procuring buses, medicines, medical equipment, police uniform, IT equipments, stationery, etc. 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 2015 was US\$ 40.38 million, while total exports to India in 2015 was minimal.

Among the Indian companies present in Seychelles, Bank of Baroda has been present in Victoria since 1978 and its local branch is running profitably. M/s. Bharti Airtel Telecom group, has so far invested over US\$25 million and set up the Airtel Seychelles mobile telephone and internet services since 1998. TELCO has supplied most of the buses for public transport in Seychelles.

In pursuance of a MoU signed in September 2014, Air Seychelles launched thrice-weekly direct flights between Mahé and Mumbai on 2 Dec 2014 (frequency increased to five flights a week from Jan 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 four editions of the Seychelles India Day held in Victoria in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 respectively organised by the Indian Association of Seychelles jointly with the Seychelles Ministry of Tourism & Culture and the Indian High Commission. Seychelles-India Day 2016 was jointly organized by the Mission, Seychelles Ministry of Tourism & Culture and the Indian Association of Seychelles (14-16 Oct). Govt of Seychelles has declared the day as a "National Event." A commemorative stamp featuring a Hindu temple tower in Victoria was released to mark the occasion. At the inaugural ceremony (14 Oct), the High Commissioner presented the Indian Association of Seychelles a cheque equivalent to INR 20 lakhs granted by Ministry of Culture, GoI. The decision to install a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Victoria and to name a street as Mahatma Gandhi Avenue was announced by the Tourism & Culture Minister Alain St. Ange. Other highlights were - highly acclaimed performances by an ICCR-sponsored contemporary dance troupe Anveshana, a Food Festival and culinary workshop at a 5-star resort, and a Gala Night of performances by several top artistes from India, including popular singers Udit Narain and Sunidhi Chauhan.

The 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar was celebrated in Seychelles on 14 Apr 2016 with a well-attended film screening and seminar on the theme "Babasaheb Ambedkar - Conscience-keeper of Modern India.

On 19 June 2016, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Day of Yoga was celebrated in Seychelles. Events included a mass yoga session at the iconic Palais des Sports indoor stadium, a photo exhibition and yoga demonstration by an expert flown in from India. The response was overwhelming with about 1000 people (1% of the total population of Seychelles) turning up at the venue of the mass yoga session, including several Ministers, dignitaries and celebrities.

## **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, labourers, 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 Indian community in this country is well known for their professionalism and hard work.

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>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInSeychelles>