

DAILY NATION

India and Kenya: Old friends, reliable partners

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By Ms. Suchitra Durai

Apa Saheb Pant, my illustrious predecessor, famously referred to India and Kenya as “next-shore neighbours”, underlining our maritime proximity and constant exchanges over millennia.

As two Indian Ocean littoral states, communities from both sides of the Bahari ya Hindi, the Bohras of western India and the East Africans (Siddhis), settled in each other’s lands centuries ago.

Migration of Indians to Kenya in the late 19th Century to build the Kenya-Uganda railway saw the migrants become part of the political, social and economic fabric of the country.

Makhan Singh, the region’s first trade union leader, freedom fighter Pio Gama Pinto and philanthropist Jeevanjee were well-known Indian leaders.

India’s freedom struggle is closely linked to Africa. Gandhiji’s Satyagraha movement was honed during his 21-year stay in South Africa.

DECOLONISATION

The independent India led the international community on decolonisation and against apartheid. For the Kapenguria Six trial, Prime Minister Nehru sent Diwan Chaman Lal, Indian lawyer and MP, to defend Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the others.

Several Hindi words are now part of Kiswahili: Duka, pesa, chapati, samosa...even harambee is said to be a take-off on the rallying cry of Indian railway workers, “Hara Hara Ambe!”

India has been one of Kenya’s largest trade partners. Its banks have operated in Kenya since 1953 while in 1950 Nairobi became Air India’s second overseas destination.

More than 60 major Indian firms have offices in Nairobi and factories. Tata and Airtel are household names. At \$3 billion, India is also the third-largest source of foreign direct

investment (FDI) into Kenya, said to create many jobs locally. India is extending concessional Lines of Credit (LoC) worth \$220 million.

POLITICAL INTERACTION

In the past few years, political interaction has been intense. PM Modi was in Kenya in July 2016 on a State visit while President Uhuru Kenyatta visited India in October 2015 for the third India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) and in January on a reciprocal State visit.

Many Kenyan patients have been treated in India, which Kenya desires to replicate and become a regional medical hub.

Like in India, cancer is a major cause of death in Kenya. Last year, India gifted a state-of-the-art telecobalt machine, the Bhabhatron, trained 20 oncologists and is working on defence medical cooperation.

Thousands of Kenyan officials have trained under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (Itec) programme in addition to 52 university scholarships offered every year and training for the military.

CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Our countries have a young population; we need to take advantage of our demographic dividend by giving the youth skills. We support President Uhuru Kenyatta's 'Big Four' plan and contribute in all areas.

Besides regular cultural exchanges, 60,000 Indian tourists visited Kenya last year, the third-largest foreign group.

August is a special month for the Indian people. As we mark the 72nd anniversary of Independence today, we are also celebrating 70 years of the Indian Mission in Nairobi.

Apa Saheb Pant, appointed by PM Nehru as India's Commissioner-General to then-British East African Protectorate, arrived by ship to Kenya in 1948.

Magical Kenya and Incredible India are, indeed, working to continue to prosper together.

Ms. Durai is the High Commissioner of India to Kenya.
