

## India-Suriname relations

May 2024

### Political relations

India enjoys close, warm and friendly relations with Suriname, reinforced by cultural and people to people contacts bridged by Indian Diaspora's arrival dating back to one and half century. Several high level visits have been exchanged since establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Suriname in 1976 with Indian Embassy opened in Paramaribo in 1977 and Surinamese Embassy in New Delhi in 2000.

President of India Mrs. Droupadi Murmu's maiden foreign visit to Suriname from 04-06<sup>th</sup> June 2023, upon the invitation of President Santokhi, marked a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between the two countries. She was State Guest at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Suriname. During her visit, President Murmu was bestowed with the prestigious 'Grand Order of the Chain of the Yellow Star', the highest civilian honor of Suriname, on 5th June 2023. During visit, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in the regulation of medical products, recognition of the Indian Pharmacopeia, and the formulation of a Joint Work plan for Agriculture and Allied Sectors for the period of 2023-2027 were signed.

Earlier, In January 2023 President Chandrikapersad Santokhi paid a successful visit to India at the invitation of PM Modi. He addressed the PBD Convention on 9<sup>th</sup> January and delivered a keynote address at the Madhya Pradesh Global Investors Summit 2023. In his meeting with PM Modi, discussions took place on a wide range of topics of bilateral interests. President Santokhi paid a visit to Somnath Temple in Gujarat and Shri Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain as well the Jamnagar Refinery and Petrochemicals complex. PM Modi and President Santokhi also interacted at COP26 in Glasgow.

Former President Ram Nath Kovind was warmly received by Suriname in June 2018, along with a distinguished delegation. This visit witnessed the signing of several MoUs that emphasized collaboration between electoral authorities, the National Archives, diplomatic institutes, the establishment of a Center of Excellence in ICT, and the Remunerative employment of dependents of the diplomatic personnel of the two countries.

Former Vice President of Suriname H.E Ashwin Adhin paid two visits to India – a private visit in March 2015 and again in January 2017 as special guest in the Youth PBD. On both occasions, he met with PM Modi. Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu met Mr. Ashwin Adhin on September 09, 2018, on the margins of World Hindu Congress in Chicago and discussed bilateral relations including trade, investment, developmental cooperation and people to people contacts between the two countries.

From 28-31 August 2022, an Indian Parliamentary delegation, headed by Shri Om Birla, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, consisted of esteemed Members of Parliament, including Smt Veena Devi (Lok Sabha), Shri Ravi Kishan (Lok Sabha), and Shri KR Suresh Reddy (Rajya Sabha) visited Suriname.

The External Affairs Minister of India (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar met with Ambassador Albert Ramdin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation during the India-COFCOR Meeting in Guyana on 21 April 2023 when India offered USD 1 million as grant assistance for SME projects and earlier at the 4<sup>th</sup> India-CARICOM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New York on 23 September 2022. FM Ramdin also virtually participated in Foreign Ministers' Voice of Global South Summit 2.0 on 17.11.2023 hosted by India. EAM had met with then FM Yldiz Pollack Beighle on the sidelines of the 73<sup>rd</sup> UNGA on 26 September 2018.

### **Commercial relations (Economic and Development Partnerships)**

India and Suriname have actively cooperated on development partnership and India has offered line of Credits (LOCs), Grants-in-Aid. A debt restructuring agreement was approved by the Indian side and signed by the Suriname side on 22 March 2023. Suriname side signed a "Dollar Credit Line Restructuring Agreement" with EXIM Bank of India. Two LoC agreements on EBS transmission line and maintenance of Chetak helicopters were signed, and an LOC of US \$ 20mn for ISA projects was also announced. India also extended four credit lines to Suriname for setting up water pumps, power transmission lines, crash fire tenders and coastal equipment. The following LoC projects have been completed: Setting up 161 kv electrical transmission line from Parana to Paramaribo in Suriname and supply of bulldozer, diesel engine, excavators, motor grader, trucks, cartridge, Water Supply Project, Purchase of Coastal Communication Network from BEL and Chetak Helicopters from HAL, Supply of ten crash fire tenders by BEML.

In 2015-16, the Ministry of External Affairs, India (MEA) sanctioned grants totaling \$ 3,11,567.21 for the upgrading of the S' Lands Hospital morgue in Paramaribo. The \$ 1,69,400/- grant by MEA was also provided to the Institute for Natural Resources and Engineering Studies (NATIN) of Suriname. General V.K. Singh handed over a cheque of \$150,000 to the Government of Suriname as humanitarian assistance for the rehabilitation of victims of the devastating flood in Suriname, in 2017. In 2017, the Suriname government received grants of \$29,988/- for school-going children and \$37,250 for annual Christmas celebrations with senior citizens. Two small grant projects for community development and women entrepreneurship were announced during the visit of the President of India in June 2018, including a Craft Market place at Paramaribo for US\$ 175,602 and US\$ 109,800 for 200 computers for students. The first lady of India donated \$10,000 to Mytyl School (special needs school) as charity. In August 2018, the Indian government provided cash assistance of \$50,000 to the Government of Suriname for flood victims. In September 2019, PM Modi announced a \$1 million grant for each CariCom member-State for community development projects under the India-UNDP Fund. Under this grant, project "Enhance early warning service delivery to communities of Suriname in order to build their resilience to flooding due to excess rainfall" at cost of USD .25 million is under implementation and other two projects repair of a swimming pool and stadium (\$400,000) and construction of a building for CEIT (\$350,000) has also been approved under India-UNDP fund and will be implemented. Under the USD 1mn Grant for SME Sector by supplying Machinery from India, announced by our EAM during his India-COFCOR meeting in Guyana- Suriname side has submitted three proposals in the field- 1) A passion fruit packaging unit, 2) A Rice Husk Processing Unit in the rice farming District of Nickerie 3) The Production of High-Quality Cassava Flour for mainly the bread industry. The guidelines for the said grant are still evolving and will be implemented after finding a suitable project for implementation.

The Government of India has approved 19 projects under five Quick Impact

Projects. The umbrella agreement on QIP was signed on 10.03.2023 and individual MoUs for each of the five priority projects were signed on 17.03.2023. Each project has the monetary ceiling of USD 50,000. Another MoU has also been subsequently signed during President Murmu's visit. Four QIPs are under implementation; 'Promoting recreational activities for the society in Nickerie by rehabilitating the DC Roblesplein', 'Supporting ICT education of TVET secondary schools in Suriname by upgrading IT Equipment at the Educational Classroom of NATIN', 'Supporting various sports facilities in Suriname by setting up a synthetic jogging track at Lelydorp in the District of Wanica', 'Sustainable Support of a chemical teaching laboratory at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FWNW) of the Anton de Kom University of Suriname (AdeKUS) by amplification of the electrical network and purchase of relevant supplies'.

India provided lifesaving drugs and protective gear worth USD 100,000 to Suriname as Covid 19 relief grant and also, 50000 doses of Covid vaccines in March 2021. Essential medicines worth over USD 600,000 has also been provided to Suriname in August 2023.

Trade and economic links between India and Suriname are modest. Indian export to Suriname consists of boilers, machinery, iron & steel, electrical machinery & equipment, sound recorders, pharmaceutical products, textiles, vehicles, coffee, tea and spices, rubber, paper, tobacco, organic chemicals, furniture, carpets, ceramic products, footwear and printed books; Indian import consists of wood, aluminum, textiles, herbal products, garments, spices, and electrical machinery. Bilateral trade figures for the last five years are as follows:

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Export to Suriname (US\$ Million)</b>	<b>Import from Suriname (US\$ Million)</b>	<b>Total Bilateral Trade (US\$ Million)</b>
2019-2020	31.12	55.07	86.19
2020-2021	17.12	34.14	51.26
2021-2022	17.36	31.93	49.29
2022-2023	12.23	48.89	61.12
2023-2024	29.25	22.60	51.85

A number of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with the aim of promoting bilateral trade between India and Suriname. On March 9, 2018, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Suriname India Chamber of Commerce (SICCI) signed an agreement to enhance bilateral trade and economic relations. A new Memorandum of Understanding was signed on November 5, 2018, by the SICCI and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). In August 2022, the Bureau of Indian Standards and the Suriname Standards Bureau signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen their mutual trade and expertise sharing in the areas of standards and conformity assessment activities.

### **Cultural relations**

Indian Cultural Centre in Suriname was opened in 1978 for promoting Indian cultural practices, Hindi language, Kathak, Yoga and classical music. India provided

yearly grant worth US \$29500/- for promotion of Hindi in Suriname through Suriname Hindi Parishad until 2019. A 12-member ICCR-sponsored Bhangra Group performed on November 26 & 27, 2017 on the occasion of Deepavali and Independence Day of Suriname and a four member musical group led by Radhika Chopra sponsored by ICCR during the period May 27–June 07, 2018, participated in the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Indian arrival in Suriname. A Ramlila group from Ayodhya Research Institute visited Paramaribo in July-August 2018 and held several performances across Suriname; During 2019 ICCR sponsored six member Rajasthani folk group led by Gazi Khan visited Suriname from February 16-20; an eight-member Qawwali group led by Mohammad Ahmad Warsi visited Suriname from March 17-22, 2019 on the occasion of Holi/Phagwa festival and held several performances; a Ramlila Group from Suriname participated in the Kumbh Mela 2019 sponsored by the Ayodhya Research Institute. As part of the Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora (PCTD) initiative, The Mission celebrated the 8<sup>th</sup> Ayurveda Day on November 10, 2023, in Saramacca, Suriname, under the theme "Ayurveda for everyone every day," or "आयुर्वेद आरोग्य के लिए है।" The Surinamese President, cabinet ministers, speakers, and the government of the Republic of Suriname joined forces with the Indian Embassy to inaugurate an Ayurvedic Health Center and a Medicinal Plants Garden Project at Proeftuin Dirkshoop in the District of Saramacca. Dr.

An MoU on Traditional Systems of Medicine was signed in January 2020. International Day of Yoga (IDY) is also celebrated with enthusiasm and huge participation including the cabinet ministers and President.

A 75-week celebration of 75 years of India's independence named Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) was observed with a series of events culminating in a mega event on 15th August 2022 with the President of Suriname as the Chief Guest. An ICCR sponsored, 10 Member Kathak group led by Rani Khanam was in Suriname from 01-06 June 2023. In addition to other performances in various events commemorating the 150 years of Indian arrival in Suriname, the group performed with the President of India and the President of Suriname as Chief Guests on 5 June 2023 at the Independence Square Paramaribo in the main event for the Celebrations of 150 years of Indian Arrival in Suriname. Hindu organizations in Suriname also organized various ceremonies to commemorate the Pran Pratishtha ceremony held at the temple in Ayodhya city of India in Feb, 2024. India supports the partner countries through its fully funded Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) courses. As a friendly country to India, Suriname is one of the largest beneficiaries in ITEC and several candidates have benefited from these courses. On 30 March 2024, 59<sup>th</sup> ITEC day was celebrated along with Holi festival and a dance group led by Mr. Bhola Pandey also performed in 3 different districts and received huge audience from Suriname.

## **Indian community**

India takes pride in the fact that in spite of the vast geographical distance, different time zones and cultural differences between their adopted countries and their country of origin, the Indian diaspora, which currently constitutes over 27% of Suriname's population of about 6.2 lakhs (and some 50 Sindhi families), arrived in Suriname 151 years ago, never disconnected themselves with their roots. While fully assimilating with the local culture, they continued to cherish, uphold and pass down from one generation to another traditions, rites and rituals, cuisine, language, folklore etc. and have made significant contribution in all spheres to the sustainable development of Suriname. It is gratifying to note that Suriname has also the distinction of the most prominent foreign country in the

world in the field of promotion of Hindi language. Recognizing the Suriname as a Hindi language supportive country, a few Hindi speakers of the country has also been conferred world Hindi award for their work in promoting Hindi. In 2023, the deputy chairman of the National Assembly Dr. Dew Sharman received World Hindi award. There are currently 14 sitting PIO Members of Parliament, five PIO Ministers, Vice President of Suriname and Governor of Central Bank are also PIOs. The electronic travel authorisation system (eTVA) for Suriname has been implemented and vice versa. Both India and Suriname have implemented the MoU on waiver of visa for official and diplomatic passport holders. Due to the presence of large diaspora in Suriname, a large of OCI cards are issued. Recognizing the large diaspora in Suriname, OCI facility has also been made available upto 6<sup>th</sup> generation of PIOs.

Suriname, as an ITEC partner country, has made use of over 500 ITEC slots. For the financial year 2022-2023, Suriname was allocated 42 ITEC slots and one ICCR Scholarship slot. Furthermore, in June 2019, two senior officers from Suriname participated in a specialized training program for CariCom mid-level/senior customs officers through ITEC. Additionally, more than 200 Surinamese diaspora have benefited from various programs and scholarships offered by the Government of India, including 164 Surinamese individuals through the Know India Programme, 26 through the Special Know India Programme for middle-aged diaspora, one through the SPDC scholarship for pharmacy in 2018-19, two who joined the Agra Hindi Sansthan in 2019, and three who pursued postgraduate/undergraduate courses under ICCR/AYUSH scholarship.

### **Useful Resources**

**Website:** <https://www.indembassysuriname.gov.in/>

**Facebook pages:** <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInSuriname/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/iccr.suriname>

**Twitter:** <https://x.com/indembsur?lang=en>

**Youtube:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoj4U\\_ST86i5GvkwL8mbHA/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoj4U_ST86i5GvkwL8mbHA/videos)