

## **India – Republic of Gabon Relations**

### **Overview**

Like most countries of Africa, Gabon seeks to diversify its external relations beyond Europe and America, relationships that today are considered not “really equal”. On the contrary, South-South Cooperation is increasingly seen as mutually beneficial, devoid of interference in internal affairs and non-prescriptive.

India and Gabon have traditionally enjoyed warm and friendly relations dating back to the pre-independence era of Gabon. Gabonese embassy in India was established in New Delhi on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

### **Bilateral visits**

A table has been attached under **Annexure A**

### **MOUs/ Agreements**

1. During the bilateral visit of the then Foreign Minister of DRC, Mr. Pacome Moubelet Bouveya, to India in June 2017 (As mentioned in bilateral visits), a **Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations** was signed. The first ever India-Gabon FOC took place in New Delhi on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022.

2. During the visit of Hon’ble Vice President of India to Libreville on 30<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022, two MOUs were signed between India and Gabon

- MOU between SSIFS and Gabonese Ministry of Foreign Affairs for training of their diplomats. Vice President also announced training of 20 Gabonese diplomats this year at SSIFS.
- Agreement for establishing JCM was also signed.

## **Cooperation in multilateral forums**

Gabon has collaborated with India in international forums and regularly supported our candidatures whenever required. It was one among the first countries to sign and ratify the ISA framework agreement. Both India and Gabon supported each other's bid for non-permanent membership of UNSC (India (2021-22) & Gabon (2022-23)). Gabon also supported India during the International Law Commission's elections in November 2021, for which India's candidate was Dr. Bimal Patel. With respect to India's push for becoming a Permanent Member of UNSC, Gabon does not have any official stance.

## **Lines of Credit**

The implementation/utilization of the Lines of Credit have not seen much success in Gabon. In March 2007 GOI approved a Line of Credit of \$14.5 million for a housing project in Bikele near Libreville to construct 300 houses and 4 amenities. The project got stalled due to differences between the Government of Gabon and the Indian consortium engaged for the project on issues such as release of funds, grant of visa/residence permit to Indian workers, etc. Exim Bank had released US\$ 4.35 million for this project. The Government of Gabon has repaid the amount drawn and interest thereon.

GOI had extended another Line of Credit worth US\$ 67.19 million in 2011 to rehabilitate and upgrade the broadcasting facilities of Gabon. However, due to non-utilization of the LoC, it was finally annulled in December 2017. Currently, there is no active (live) LOC to Gabon.

## **Capacity Building Programme**

### **ITEC**

To date, **23 ITEC slots** have been utilized by Gabon.

### **ICCR**

With respect to ICCR scholarships, in last 5 years, 13 slots have been offered to Gabon. However, none have been utilized. No ICCR troupes have visited Gabon so far.

<b>FY</b>	<b>ICCR scholarships offered</b>	<b>Slots utilized</b>
2015-16	3	0
2016-17	3	0
2017-18	3	0
2018-19	3	0
2019-20	3	0
2020-21	3	0
2021-22	1	0

We need to discuss and develop a better and quicker way of exchanging information, publicizing and processing the applications, for full utilization of the GOI offers. *(Presently, when slots are announced, the Mission in Kinshasa issues a note verbal calling for applications. This is delivered to the Gabonese Embassy in Kinshasa which then forwards it to the Foreign Ministry in Gabon by bag which is sent every week. Thereafter, the Foreign Office in Gabon takes its own time in announcing the slots and forwarding the applications to the EoI, Kinshasa.)*

11 Gabonese diplomats participated in the 1st Special Course for Diplomats from Francophone Central & West African Countries held at FSI in October 2019. Mission has recently sent a Note Verbale to Gabonese Foreign Ministry to sign an MOU with SSIFS, for training of their diplomats.

In October 2022, one Gabonese diplomat participated in the 3-weeks **long 69<sup>th</sup> PCFD course** for Foreign Diplomats at SSIFS, New Delhi.

## **Other development projects**

In September 2018, GoI announced a grant aid of **USD one million** for Gabon's project for Strengthening climate information and early warning systems, under the India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

Gabon was among the first 15 African countries to implement the Pan African e-network project. Tele-education, Tele-medicine and VVIP connectivity have been set up in Libreville under this project. Hon'ble MOS V Muraleedharan and the then Gabon's Foreign Minister reviewed the finalization process the draft MOU on e-VBAB project during their virtual bilateral meet in Dec. 2020 (**Draft MOU not finalized yet**). (A note verbal on the e-VBAB along with the draft agreement for setting up the e-medicine and e-education centers was sent to the Gabonese Foreign Ministry and a response is awaited.)

A Vocational Training Centre was to be set up in Gabon, under the Plan of Action agreed with the African Union following the first India Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi in April 2008. There has been no progress on this.

**Mahatma Gandhi Convention Center** – GoI proposed for setting up MGCC in Gabon. In January 2019, Government of Gabon conveyed its approval for the Concept and Design of the MGCC. Further action is pending with MEA. Due to COVID-19, MEA has decided in April 2021 to put on hold all pending MGCC projects.

## **Indian Investments**

Over the last two decades, many Indian companies have invested in Gabon.

(i) Oil India Ltd. [OIL], in partnership with Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL), is conducting oil exploration in the Shakti Block, which has an area of 3761 sq km. The block is located 150 to 180 km southeast of Libreville the capital city of Gabon. OIL is on Phase II of exploration which is projected to continue till 2020/23. While oil has been discovered, the offshore and onshore blocks on the western and south-western side are said to be more productive and possibilities of acquiring blocks in those areas could be considered in the future. As

on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021 the consortium has invested \$157 million in Gabon.

(ii) In 2010, Bharti Airtel acquired Zain Communications Network.

(iii) Around 54 Indian companies are said to be operating out of the Special Economic Zone NKOK.

(iv) Greenply Gabon SA has invested around \$20-25 million in wood processing and wooden products manufacturing (especially veneer sheets manufacturing, one of the biggest producers). It will also soon be investing in new Special Industrial Zone (ZIS) Ikolo, which was created in June 2021, for wood industry.

(v) Alpha Centauri Mining SA has also major investments in mining with over USD 20 millions. (Based in Gabon but owner is Indian citizen)

(vi) La Sante Pharmaceutique SA has invested around USD 35 millions in Pharmaceuticals industry. (Its parent company is Indian).

(vii) Nouvelle Gabon Mining has around USD 50 million in Manganese mining (Gabonese company but has Indian chairman).

Besides these companies, there are many smaller companies working in sectors like wholesale and retail of FMCG products, metal recycling, logistics, transportation of goods etc, having investments of less than \$2 million.

Majority of the Indian companies are working in veneer manufacturing. Gabon has become an attractive investment destination for the wood industry, in recent years. In November 2021, Govt. of Gabon and GSEZ SA relating to the development and operation of a new Special Investment Zone (ZIS) of Ikolo (created to bring investments in wood related industry), situated in Moyen-Ogooué province. Indian company Greenply Middle East (majority shareholder in Greenply Gabon) became the first investor in the zone after it signed an agreement with the Gabonese State in that regard.

It has also been seeking Indian investments in various fields including Ammonia-Urea Fertilizer Project; Manganese; and Wood Industry.

Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilizers Ltd. (**RCF**) visited Gabon in 2018. MOIL was considering investment in the manganese sector in Gabon. A MOIL delegation led by a Joint Secretary level officer visited Gabon from 25-30 November 2018 to explore the possibility of acquiring manganese ore mines. Nouveau Gabon Mining SA (NGM) was looking to disinvest and equity participation from MOIL. However, the plan for disinvestment was dropped in April 2020 by the NGM.

Gabon has also been trying to attract Indian investments in Railways, to connect mining regions and SEZ with port. Few years ago, a detailed feasibility study was done by RITES for one of the proposed routes.

### **Trade Relations**

Gabon has large oil reserves, mineral and other natural resources. It is the world's second largest producer of manganese. There is a lot of potential for bilateral cooperation. India's commodity giant, 3F Oil Palm Agrotech Ltd was reportedly planning in 2016 to invest \$200 million on a giant palm oil project in Gabon.

In August 2022, the Indian Economic and Trade Organization and the Gabonese Embassy in India launched the **India-Gabon Business Council** in New Delhi to accelerate the bilateral trade relations.

#### Exports from India

Engineering goods (\$21.2 million) (2) Meat, Dairy and Poultry products (\$7.5 million) (3) Organic and Inorganic chemical (\$5.7 million) (4) Plastic & Linoleum (\$3.8 million) (5) Cotton yarn/Fabric/Made up/Handloom products (\$2.7 million) (6) Drugs & Pharmaceuticals (\$1.6 million)

Imports from Gabon (1) Mineral fuel, Mineral Oil & Product of their distillation; Bituminous Substances; Mineral waxes (\$671.81 million) (2) Ores, slag, and ash (\$269.37 million), (3) Wood and articles of wood; Wood charcoal (\$80.53)

(US\$ million)

<b>Year</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>FY 2023-24 (April - July)</b>
<b>Exports</b>	55.17	45.55	58.70	53	80	27.69
<b>Imports</b>	456.01	138.40	405.46	1070	398	112.49

<b>Total Trade</b>	511.18	183.94	464.17	1123	480	140
--------------------	--------	--------	--------	------	-----	-----

(Source: Department of Commerce, GoI)

## Development following Military Coup in Gabon

On August 30, 2023, following the Presidential elections, senior members of Republican Guard and National Army, headed by General Brice Oligui Nguema, head of the Republican Guard mounted a bloodless military coup. General Brice has been unanimously nominated as the President of the transitional government of Gabon and is tasked with leading the country for transition period culminating in Presidential elections.

This is a major event in Gabonese history, as it brought end to the 56-year-old rule of Bongo family. While the overall situation remains peaceful, there have been reports of notices being sent to Indian, Chinese, Malasian et companies in NKOK SEZ for their lack of adherence to labour laws, tax and custom regulations etc. The NKOK SEZ represents 40% of the total exports of Gabon, with wood exports being the major export amounting to 930 million Euros.

Several Indian workers/ business owners have been detained at gun point and called in for questioning. Mission is closely monitoring the situation as it evolves.

The new regime also **brought back the visa requirement** for the nationals of G20 countries (including India), which was earlier lifted by the Bongo regime in 2023. So as things stand, Indian nationals will require visa to travel to Gabon, for and or all purposes.

## COVID-19 and Bilateral relations

There were no donations of COVID-19 medicines or vaccines to Gabon. No evacuation flight was organized, as part of Vande Bharat Mission, for evacuation of Indians from Gabon. However, two chartered flights were organized privately, in 2020, for evacuation of around 300 Indians from Libreville.

With regards to the mutual recognition of vaccine certificates, Gabonese Foreign Ministry recently, in April 2022, stated that the Indian vaccines are recognized in Gabon and asked for a sample of Indian vaccination certificates. Mission has already forwarded the same to the Gabonese Foreign Ministry.

### **People to people ties**

There are around 1000-1200 Indians living in Gabon; most of them are floating population, engaged mainly in infrastructure projects, trading, export of timber and metal scrap, mining of manganese, travel and tours etc. India also extends e-Visa facility to the Gabonese nationals (holding ordinary passports). Another way for the Gabonese people to apply for Indian visa is through the Honorary Consul General's office, who then sends the request to the Embassy of India, Kinshasa via courier. Indian representative in Gabon is an Honorary Consul General, Mr. John Rupchandani, appointed by MEA in 2004.

On the occasion of the 74<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India, a Gujarati Folk Dance Group, **Kalpath**, visited Libreville on **January 31, 2023** (after its tour to DRC and Republic of Congo) and performed in the presence of around 200 people from Indian diaspora, and local Gabonese authorities.

### **Annexure - A**

#### **Gabon to India**

<b>Date of Visit</b>	<b>Dignitary who visited</b>	<b>Purpose/Outcome</b>
26-30th October 2015	President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Led a delegation for 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit New Delhi</li> <li>2. In his meeting with Prime Minister Modi during the visit, President Ondimba described Gabon as a promising country in Africa and a gateway to that continent and called for</li> </ol>



		greater Indian investments. He requested for opening an Indian Mission in Libreville and for a high-level visit from India. He also proposed that Air India consider flying to Gabon.
March 2018	President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba	Visited New Delhi for the International Solar Alliance Meet and met Prime Minister on the sidelines.
2017 June	Then Foreign Minister Pacome Moubelet Bouveya	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bilateral Visit</li> <li>2. He held a meeting with EAM. The entire gamut of bilateral relations and international issues of mutual concern including cross-border terrorism, climate change was discussed. The focus of the Gabonese side was to invite Indian investments in Gabon in agriculture, information technology, construction and mining. He also invited EAM to visit Gabon. During the visit, a <b>Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations</b> was also signed. No FOC has been held as yet</li> </ol>
November 2018	Then Foreign Minister Regis Immongault	He met with then EAM Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, CIM Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Steel, Mr. Chaudhary Birender Singh and MoSfor Chemicals and Fertilizers, Mr. Rao

		Inderjeet Singh.
May 2007	Minister for Mining, Energy and Hydraulic Resources, Mr. Richard Auguste and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Regional Integration, Mr. Jean Ping	---
November 2007	Ali Bongo Ondimba, then Senior Minister for National Defence of Gabon and incumbent President	He met Raksha Mantri for bilateral talks and visited the defence training centres and production facilities
December, 2009	Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Hydrocarbons, Mr. Julian Nkoghe Bekalen	He participated in the 2nd India-Africa Hydrocarbons Conference held in New Delhi
May 2010	Ms. Laure Olga Gondjout, Minister of Communications	---
March, 2011	Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Paul Bunduku Latha	He participated in the 7th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave on India Africa Project Partnership
January	Eight-member	They attended the 4th India

2016	delegation led by Mr. Mabina Kombila Edgard, Director Exploration, Ministry of Petrol and Hydrocarbon	Africa Hydrocarbons Conference held in New Delhi
May 2016	Minister of State for Environment and Natural Resources Mr. Crepin Magliore Gwodog	He took part in a road show organized to attract Indian investment
19-21 June 2022	<p>Minister of State, Minister of Industry H.E. Mr. Pacome Moubélet-Boubeya, Minister of Investment Promotion H.E. Mr. Hugues Mbadinga Madiya and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Ms Yolande Nyonda.</p> <p>The Minister of State, Minister of Industry of Gabon held bilateral meeting with Indian Minister of State for Trade and Industry. During the meeting, the two ministers discussed on diversification of trade basket.</p>	17 <sup>th</sup> CII-Exim Bank Conclave

October 2022	Visit of H.E. Michel Moussa ADAMO, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mumbai and Delhi	UN Counter Terrorism Committee meeting hosted by India.  Bilateral between EAM and FM of Gabon was held.
December 2022	Visit of H.E. Michel Moussa ADAMO, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to New York for the India's UNSC Presidency Signature events	The event was chaired by Hon'ble EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar
June 2023	H.E. Mr. Patrick Taofick MOUGUIAMA DAOUDA, Minister of Higher education  H.E. Mr. Charles MVE ELLAH, Minister of Agriculture, and  H.E. Mr. Hugues Judicael MBANDINGA MADIYA, Minister of Investment Promotion	18 <sup>th</sup> CII-Exim Bank Conclave, New Delhi

**India to Gabon**

<b>Date of Visit</b>	<b>Dignitary who visited</b>	<b>Purpose/Outcome</b>
16th-17th September, 2015	Special Envoy of PM Modi, Shri Ram Shankar Katheria, MOS [HRD]	He visited Libreville on 16th-17th September 2015 and handed over the invitation to President Ali Bongo Ondimba for the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi.
December 2020	Virtual bilateral meeting between Hon'ble MOS V. Muraleedharan & the Foreign Minister of Gabon Mr. Pacome Moubele Boubeya	<p>The two leaders discussed entire spectrum of bilateral relations. Both leaders undertook a detailed review of bilateral ties including the Covid-19 pandemic and possibilities of cooperation in the post-Covid scenario. Both leaders also reviewed the utilization of ITEC slots and finalization of draft MOU for participating in e-VBAB Project.</p> <p>Gabonese EAM raised the issue of opening up of Resident Mission of India in Gabon. Both leaders also committed to support each other's candidature at UN &amp; other international forums.</p> <p>It was also recognized that existing LOC facilities could be utilized by Gabon wisely</p>
30 May – 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2022	Official visit of Hon'ble Vice President of India,	HVPI met with the President (Ali Bongo

	<p>Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu to Libreville, Gabon</p>	<p>Ondimba), PM (Ms. Rose Christiane), Foreign Minister (Mr. Michael Moussa Adamo) and the heads of the two Chambers of the Gabonese parliament</p> <p>During the visit the entire gamut of bilateral relations and global issues of mutual concerns were discussed. Two MOUs were also signed (JCM and MOU between SSIFS and MOFA).</p> <p>During the visit, a CII-Delegation also visited Libreville and an India-Gabon Business Forum was held. CII signed MOU for International Co-operation with ANPI (Investment promotion body of Gabon).</p>
<p>24-27 September, 2022</p>	<p>Indian Naval Ship INS Tarkash</p>	<p>INS Tarkash visited Port Gentil, Gabon for a Port Call visit. The visit was a part of its visit to countries in Gulf of Guinea (and beyond) for anti-piracy cooperation with the countries of the region.</p> <p>This was also the first ever visit of an Indian Navy Ship to Gabon.</p>

**Last Updated: September 2023**