

India-Guyana Bilateral Relations

During the colonial period, Guyana's economy was focused on plantation agriculture, which initially depended on slave labour. Guyana saw major slave rebellions in 1763 and again in 1823. Great Britain passed the Slavery Abolition Act in British Parliament that abolished slavery in most British colonies, freeing more than 800,000 enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and South Africa. British Guiana became a Crown colony in 1928, and in 1953 it was granted home rule. In 1950, Mr. Cheddi Jagan, who was Indian-Guyanese, and Mr. Forbes Burnham, who was Afro-Guyanese, created the colony's first political party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), which was dedicated to gaining the colony's independence. In the 1953 elections, Mr. Cheddi Jagan was elected chief minister. Mr. Cheddi Jagan of the PPP and Mr. Forbes Burnham of the PNC were to dominate Guyana politics for decades to come. In 1961, Britain granted the colony autonomy, and Mr. Cheddi Jagan became Prime Minister (1961–1964). In 1964, Burnham succeeded Jagan as Prime Minister, a position he retained after the country gained full independence on May 26, 1966. With independence, the country returned to its traditional name, Guyana. Mr. Burnham ruled Guyana until his death in 1985 (from 1980 to 1985, after a change in the constitution, he served as president).

Mr. Desmond Hoyte of the PNC became president in 1985, but in 1992 the PPP reemerged, winning a majority in the general election. Mr. Cheddi Jagan became President, and succeeded in reviving the economy. After his death in 1997, his wife, Janet Jagan, was elected President. Former Finance Minister Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo assumed the presidency in 1999 and continued till 2011. He was succeeded by Mr. Donald Ramotar till 2015. Mr. David Granger of APNU became President from 2015 to 2020. In 2020, Dr. Irfaan Ali became the President.

Guyana is the only South American nation in which English is the official language. The majority of the population, however, speak Guyanese Creole, an English-based creole language, as a first language. Anglophone Caribbean. CARICOM's headquarters is in Georgetown. In 2008, Guyana joined the Union of South American Nations as a founding member.

Guyana is located on the Northeastern shoulder of South American continent between latitudes 1N and 9N and longitude 56W and 62W. It is bound by Suriname on the East, Venezuela on the West and Brazil on the South and Southwest. It has an area of about 215,000 square kilometers and a population of 750,000. Density of population is 3.3 per square kilometer. There are four natural regions. First is the Low Coastal Plain along the Atlantic with about 400 km coastline. The coastal plane made up of alluvial soil of Amazon is about six feet below the mean high tide level and is protected from tides by a sea wall along the length of the coast. Second is the white Sand belt, which is covered mainly by forests. Third is the Highland region of mountain ranges like the Pakaraimas and the Kaieteur plateau. The last is the interior Savannahs which are divided into South and North Savannahs by the Kanuku Mountain range.

India's relations with Guyana are warm and cordial with a high degree of understanding. The interaction is structured through periodic Joint Commissions, Foreign Office Consultations, Cultural Exchange Programme and ITEC. Though structured bilateral visits are not very frequent, there are meetings of leaders at international conferences, in India or abroad. Prime Minister met with the then President Jagdeo during Trinidad CHOGM Summit in November 2009 and Speaker of Guyanese Parliament visited India in January 2009 to attend Commonwealth Speakers' Conference.

There is a small Indian community of Indians approximately 300 working as doctors, nurses, lab technicians, small business, skilled workers and laborers in big companies in Guyana. The number of Indians is likely to increase with the participation of Indian companies in the field of Agriculture and other business ventures.

India's contribution:

India executed some high-visibility projects under Line of Credit in Guyana, i.e. cricket stadium, traffic lights in Georgetown and supply of 14 irrigation drainage pumps. India has also set up a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) in Guyana in April 2019 under its Grant assistance programme. An LoC of US\$50 million was extended in March 2016 for construction of East Bank-East Coast Road linkage project and is under execution. M/s RITES Limited was engaged in early 2018 as Project Management Consultant (PMC) for preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR).

India offered a Grant of US\$ 8 million and LoC of US\$10 million in June 2016 for procuring an Ocean Ferry from India for use in the North Western and South Western regions of Guyana. The vessel could carry approximately 300 passengers and crew members and 14 sedans or 8 sedans plus 2 trucks. The bidding process for finalizing the supplier is in the final stages. An LoC of US\$4 million was extended in February 2017 for procurement and installation of high capacity mobile irrigation pumps for agricultural purposes and mitigation of flooding in Georgetown and its environs. The contract has been awarded to M/s Apollo International Limited, Gurgaon on 6 August 2018 for supply of 9 fixed and 3 mobile drainage pumps over a period of 12 months. The supplier is expected to procure and supply the pumps soon. Government of India extended an LoC for US\$ 17.5 million in July 2017 for up-gradation of three Regional Hospitals at West Demerara, Suddie and Bartica in Guyana. The tendering process is progressing. Proposal for supply of a pilot scale project Rice Husk Gasifier by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy is also under process.

India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme:

India has offered 50 slots during 2021-22 for Guyanese scholars to be trained in India under the ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme). So far, more than 600 Guyanese nationals have benefitted from

ITEC Programme. In 2013, a Forestry team visited India on a study tour. One ITEC Expert on deputation with Rice Board of Guyana completed sharing know-how for four years.

Visa matters:

India and Guyana have an Agreement on Visa Exemption for Holders of Diplomatic, Official and Service Passports. Guyana was included in the list of countries whose nationals are eligible for tourist visa on arrival in India w.e.f. January 25, 2015.

Community :

Indo-Guyanese constitute 39.8% of the country's population, a majority of whom strictly follow religious practices brought with them during the time of indentureship. Though they have lost linguistic and family contacts with India, they play Indian music, watch Indian movies and soaps and wear Indian costumes during festive and religious occasions.

Culture :

Swami Vivekanand Cultural Centre (formerly known as the Indian Cultural Centre) in Georgetown, the arm of ICCR in Guyana, was established in 1972. The Cultural Centre has provisions to teach Indian classical dance, yoga, Hindi and Sanskrit languages and music. Besides organizing classes for dance, yoga and music, the Cultural Centre also organizes cultural events round the year and takes part in cultural events organized by local cultural and social organizations. Phagwa (Holi) is one of the major festivals of Guyana. The Centre organizes Phagwa celebrations in a big way every year where the President of Guyana, the Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister, former Presidents and Prime Ministers, senior Cabinet Ministers, former and current Members of Parliament, prominent Guyanese and children actively participate. The Centre organizes workshops from time to time and also participates in local cultural events as a part of its outreach programme. Hindi classes in Region 2 of Guyana are being held since 2010 under the aegis of ICCR.

Indian High Commission actively participated in celebration of 175th Anniversary of Indian Arrival in Guyana. GOPIO International inaugurated Calcutta monument in Georgetown and at Highbury in Region 6 – the point of first Indian arrival in Guyana. India has donated to Guyana a monument

consisting of six bronze statues commemorating arrival of first group of indentured labourers in Guyana on May 5, 1838. The monument called “Indian Arrival Monument” was jointly inaugurated by President David Granger and the Director General of ICCR, Shri Akhilesh Mishra on May 5, 2019.

A 6-member Bhojpuri Music troupe visited Guyana from 23rd to 26th May, 2014 under the aegis of ICCR. The Troupe gave 3 performances including one on the Independence Day of Guyana. A 5-member music troupe led by renowned Sufi singer Indira Naik visited Guyana from 27-29 October 2014 under ICCR’s sponsorship and gave two performances. A nine member cultural troupe led by Shri Jitendra Parashar visited Guyana from June 3-8, 2015 under ICCR’s sponsorship and gave performances in Georgetown and Berbice. A Bhojpuri Cultural troupe fully sponsored by the ICCR performed at Georgetown and Mahaica in celebration of 50th Anniversary of Independence of Guyana.

The High Commission of India regularly organises a Sari draping and exhibition event for the last few years in a bid to popularise this quintessential Indian popular garment. International Day of Yoga is celebrated every year in Georgetown, Guyana. The Yoga events are received with great enthusiasm and fervor by the local population.