

India-Suriname Bilateral Relations

Oct 2024

Political

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 a half century. Several high level visits have been exchanged since the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Suriname in 1976 with the Indian Embassy opened in Paramaribo in 1977 and the Surinamese Embassy in New Delhi in 2000.

Hon'ble President of India Mrs. Droupadi Murmu's maiden foreign visit to Suriname from 04-06th June 2023, upon the invitation of President Santokhi, marked a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between the two countries. She was a State Guest at the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Suriname. President Murmu was accompanied by a distinguished delegation, including the Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, and Rural Development, Smt. Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, and Smt. Rama Devi, MP (Lok Sabha), along with other high-ranking officials. 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. Additionally, several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed; 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.

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 9th 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 the 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 Memorandums of Understanding (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 the special guest in Youth PBD. On both occasions, he met with PM Modi. He held meetings with the Ministers of AYUSH and the Road Transport and Shipping. 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 Hon'ble 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 visit strengthened bilateral ties and cooperation between the two nations and several MoUs were signed focusing on areas such as health, standards, parliamentary collaboration, and cultural exchange.

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. Earlier at the 4th 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 73rd UNGA on 26 September 2018.

India and Suriname have had several bilateral visits and high-level exchanges. In 1992, India and Suriname agreed to a Ministerial level bilateral mechanism under which eight Joint Commission Meetings (JCMs) have been held since 1994. FM Ramdin and officials attended 8th JCM in New Delhi from 5-7th Dec. 2023 which was co-chaired by EAM. The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress in trade, health, energy, culture cooperation. Both sides also agreed to expand cooperation in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, small businesses, millet production, and cultural events. 7th JCM was held virtually. A Parliamentary delegation from Suriname, led by H.E. Mr. Marinus Bee, Chairman of the National Assembly of Suriname, visited India from 04.02.2024 to 11.02.2024 and called on President Murmu, Vice-President and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Dhankhar, Lok Sabha Speaker Birla, and EAM.

MOS Gen (Rtd) V.K. Singh visited Paramaribo in April 2017 for the 6th JCM when he had bilateral meetings with the President, Vice President and Foreign Minister of Suriname. Finance Minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman met with the Surinamese counterpart Armand Achaibersingh at IMF HQ in April 2022. Surinamese Defence Minister Ms. Krishnakoemarie Mathoera and Lt. Col Mangal participated in DefExpo 2022 in Gandhinagar and in October 2022, Minister of Natural Resources of Suriname David Abiamfofo and Ms. Valerie Lalji attended the 5th Assembly of the International Solar Alliance in New Delhi. Suriname Minister of Agriculture attended the International Year of Millets conference in March 2023 and Minister of Economic Affairs, Entrepreneurship and Technological Innovations Ms. Rishma Kuldipsingh visited India in June 2023 to attend the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Summit when the IndiaStack MoU with Suriname was signed. Additional Secretary(LAC) participated in Association of Caribbean States (ACS) meetings and conferences held in Paramaribo including the 16th Business Forum of Greater Caribbean on 6th May 2024, 8th International Cooperation Conference on 7th May 2024 and opening session of 29th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council on 9th May 2024. On the Margins of ACS, Indian delegation also held bilateral meetings with participating delegations of the Caribbean countries and group associations.

Hon'ble Minister of Spatial Planning and Environment of Suriname Dr. Marciano

Dasai participated in the Environment Ministers' session of the 3rd Voice of the Global South Summit held virtually on 17 August 2024. President Santokhi also shared a recorded video message with India to use at the summit.

Suriname Petroleum oil & gas company- Staatsolie delegation held a meeting with Indian Petroleum company representatives and Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG) in July 2024 in India.

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. 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.

Under the USD 1mn Grant for SME Sector by supplying Machinery from India, announced by our EAM during his India-COFCOR meeting in Guyana- Developments are ongoing for establishing a passion fruit packaging unit under this SME grant project in Suriname. NABCONS (implementation partner in this project) carried out feasibility study in July, 2024 and found the project fit for implementation.

Four community development related small Quick Impact Projects are ongoing. Each project has the monetary ceiling of USD 50,000. Four QIPs are; '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.

During the President Murmu's visit to Suriname, she visited two Indian temples, Arya Diwaker temple and Vishnu Mandir of Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha and also made a donation of USD 25000/- to each of these two organizations. A proposal from the Association Sanatan Dharm Maha Sabha (SDMS) for setting up a Shiva Dhama Vriddh Ashram, a nursing home for seniors in the District of Wanica (adjoining Paramaribo) an estimated budget of US\$ 2,810,500/- has also been approved in principle.

Both countries regularly collaborate in International forums and support the policies of mutual interests. Suriname has Joined International Big Cat Alliance and International Solar Alliance. Suriname has supported India's candidacies in International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Tribunal of the Laws of the Seas (ITLOS) and Executive Board of UNESCO & International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2018 and continued to support India's candidacies in 2019 for WCO, WHO, ICAO and IMO as also in 2020 for ISA, ICPO-Interpol & ACABQ, Candidature of India to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind (2020-2024) in 2020, Candidature of India in the Executive Committee of Interpol-ICPO and more recently the candidature of India for election to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for the term 2023-2028 and various others. Suriname supports India's candidature for the non-permanent seat at UNSC and have confirmed its support for candidacy in the year 2028-29. Suriname also supports the idea of expansion of permanent members of UNSC.

Economy

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:

Financial Year	Export Suriname (US\$ Million)	to	Import Suriname (US\$ Million)	from	Total Bilateral Trade (US\$ Million)
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

There is potential for Indian companies to trade and invest in MSME in Agriculture & Food processing sector, Gold, Petroleum & Gas, Bauxite, Kaolin, Solar Energy, Hydro, Pharmaceuticals, Ayush/traditional medicine, Innovative technology, Tourism and IT. There are a few Indian companies doing mostly trading in Suriname.

On March 7, 2003, an MoU was signed to establish agricultural cooperation between India and Suriname, which led to the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG), providing a platform for specialists to exchange knowledge and deputation of experts in agriculture field. During President Murmu's Visit in June 2023, a five-year (2022–2027) JWG work plan was signed. On October 4, 2018, Mr. Lekhram Soredjan, the Minister of Agriculture for Suriname, held bilateral discussions with his counterpart, Shri Radha Mohan Singh, in New Delhi, focusing on agricultural cooperation, support for rice development research, and the JWG plan for 2017–21. Suriname has received Buyers Credits worth USD 23.4mn from India, which were extended through the EXIM bank of India. USD 15 Mn. was utilized for the acquisition of vertical pumps for M/s Kirloskar. Additionally, a second project worth USD 8.4 Mn. was allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture of Suriname for the restoration of the Pumping Station of Wageningen, also facilitated by M/s Kirloskar. NTPC, is also working on an ISA demonstration grant project 'supply, installation, commissioning of solar water pumping solution' at the grant cost of \$ 40,174.

Two Indian Companies M/s Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited India and M/s Transrail are currently executing EPC projects for power transmission in Suriname. Some infra-related companies (Garuda Group, Vijay Electricals Limited and Kanha Engineering) have recently opened offices here.

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. During President Santokhi's visit to India, the Economic Diplomacy Division of the MEA, in association with CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM, held a business meeting in Gandhi Nagar,

Gujarat on January 12, 2023. A Surinamese government delegate also took part in the 9th CII India-LAC Conclave, from August 3–5, 2023.

Culture

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 145th 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 8th Ayurveda Day on November 10, 2023, in Saramacca, Suriname, under the theme "Ayurveda for everyone every day," or "हर दिन हर किसी के लिए आयुर्वेद." 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. Suriname also celebrated National Ayurveda Day on October 16, 2017, a Congress on 'Traditional systems of Medicine' was organised in Paramaribo with the collaboration of Government of India. An MoU on Traditional Systems of Medicine was signed in January 2020. International Day of Yoga (IDY), is also celebrated with enthusiastic participation from citizens of Suriname. In 2024, IDY was celebrated at the Arya Diwakar Hall in Paramaribo, Dr. Dew Sharman, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly as Chief Guest at the event.

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, 59th ITEC day was celebrated along with Holi festival and a dance group led by Mr. Bhola Pandey 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 Speaker 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 6th 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_ST86i5GvkpwL8mbHA/videos