

Brief Embassy Report on Bilateral Relations – ITJ Division, DGCI&S, Kolkata.

India-South Africa Bilateral Relations

A. Introduction

1. Indian Trade Journal (ITJ) division of the Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS) brings out weekly publication on Embassy Profile Report providing information on recent policy changes and happenings in other countries that may be of interest to the Indian trading community. This is the Embassy Profile Report for 29.04.2026 depicting the Embassy of South Africa.

2. India's links with the struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa date back to the period during which Mahatma Gandhi started his Satyagraha movement in South Africa over a century ago. India was also at the forefront of the international community in its support to the anti-apartheid movement; it was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid Government (in 1946) and subsequently imposed a complete - diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports - embargo on South Africa. India worked consistently to put the issue of apartheid on the agenda of the UN, NAM and other multilateral organizations and for the imposition of comprehensive international sanctions against South Africa. The ANC maintained a representative office in New Delhi from the 1960s onward. India actively worked for the AFRICA Fund to sustain the struggle through support to the frontline countries. Nelson Mandela was awarded India's highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna, for his role in anti-apartheid movement.

3. India and South Africa signed a Strategic Partnership agreement in March 1997 during the visit of President Nelson Mandela to India called the Red Fort Declaration, thus making South Africa India's first strategic partner. The year 2023 marked 30 years of re-establishment of diplomatic relations with South Africa. Against the background of India's consistent support to the anti-apartheid struggle, there has been a steady consolidation of close and friendly ties with South Africa, both bilaterally and through BRICS, IBSA and other fora. A number of bilateral agreements have been concluded between the two countries since the assumption of diplomatic relations in diverse areas ranging from economic and commercial cooperation, defence, culture, health, human settlements, public administration and science and technology. India's Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) has been a useful medium of promoting cooperation in development of human resources.

B. Recent High-Level meetings

4. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited South Africa from 22-24 August 2023 to participate in the 15th BRICS Summit and in the BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS Plus Dialogue. Prime Minister also had a bilateral meeting with met H.E. Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa on 23 August in Johannesburg on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit.

5. Earlier, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with President Cyril Ramaphosa on 03 August 2023, inter alia, to assess the progress in bilateral cooperation, including in the context of the 30th anniversary of establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. The two leaders also had a telephone conversation on 10 June 2023 wherein the leaders reviewed progress

in bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on a number of regional and global issues of mutual interest. Prime Minister Modi met South African President Ramaphosa in Germany on the sidelines of G7 Summit on 27 June 2022. President Ramaphosa undertook a working visit to New Delhi to participate in the G20 Leaders' Summit on 9-10 September 2023.

B. Commercial Relations (Trade and Foreign Investment) – Recent facts & figures

6. Commercial relations have flourished since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1993. Recent bilateral trade figures are as follows:

Export-Import statistics from 2020-21 to 2025-26 (up to Jan'26)
(US Dollar Million)

Year	Total trade	Import	Export
2020-21	11504.99	7570.79	3934.20
2021-22	17051.10	10965.81	6085.29
2022-23	18872.25	10397.83	8474.42
2023-24	19245.76	10538.23	8707.53
2024-25	18010.42	10548.61	7461.81
2025-26 (up to Jan'26)	13023.47	7184.63	5838.84

(Source: Department of Commerce, India)

7. Major Indian exports to South Africa include vehicles and components, transport equipment, drugs and pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, footwear, dyes and intermediates, chemicals, textiles, rice, and gems and jewelry, etc. Major Indian imports from South Africa include gold, steam coal, copper ores & concentrates, phosphoric acid, manganese ore, aluminum ingots & other minerals. India on 10 April 2020 facilitated the export of about 25 Million tablets of Paracetamol and 0.5 Million tablets of Hydroxy chloroquine (200mg) to South Africa.

8. A virtual telecast of the International Conference on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) was arranged by the High Commission of India in Pretoria on 22 September 2023 at the Sheraton Hotel in Pretoria. Representatives from the South African Departments of Labour & Employment, and Communications & Digital Technologies, and financial institutions viz. SBI, EXIM Bank and Dentons, attended the event.

9. The India-Business Forum South Africa (IBF SA) in association with the High Commission of India in Pretoria and the Consulate General of India in Johannesburg, on 19 August 2023, organized its Annual General Meeting wherein, *inter alia*, Shri Dammu Ravi, Secretary(ER), Shri Prabhat Kumar, High Commissioner of India to South Africa and Lesotho, and Mr. Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General, African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) briefed the business community on the opportunities. A seminar titled “India-South Africa Connect: Global visions meet digital realities” was organized at Johannesburg Business School on 29 February 2024 where Dr. Shamika Ravi, Member, Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister of India, remarked on ‘India’s Remarkable Economic Growth Story’. Two panel discussions on ‘The Digital Payments Revolution in India and possible areas of cooperation with South Africa’ and ‘A South African Perspective on Inevitable India’ were held.

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12. Prime Minister Modi met South African President Ramaphosa in Germany on the sidelines of G7 Summit on 27 June 2022. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with President Ramaphosa on 17 April 2020 and on 4 February 2021 on COVID-19 cooperation. Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi paid an official visit to South Africa to participate in the 10th BRICS Summit on 25-27 July 2018 and a bilateral visit to South Africa from 7-9 July 2016.

13. President Ramaphosa undertook a working visit to New Delhi to participate in the G20 Leaders' Summit on 9-10 September 2023. Earlier, President Ramaphosa paid a State Visit to India on 25-26 January 2019 and was the Chief Guest at the 70th Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2019 in New Delhi.

C. Other Major Areas of Cooperation:

➤ Several Agreements/ Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) have been signed between India and South Africa for cooperation in the fields of defense, economic and commercial links, technical cooperation and culture.

➤ The Defence Cooperation between India and South Africa officially commenced in 1996 with the signing of an MoU on "Cooperation in the field of Defence Equipment" which was further revised by an MoU on "Defence Cooperation" in 2000. Consequently, an India- South Africa Joint Defence Committee (JDC) co-chaired by the Defence Secretaries of both countries was instituted, with eight editions of the same held till date.

➤ Indian Naval Ships (INS) regularly make port calls to South African ports. INS Sunayna and Trishul visited Durban from 21-25 August 2023 and 06-10 June 2023 respectively to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Pietermaritzburg Railway Station incident, the birth of Satyagraha and also to strengthen bilateral relations in the 30th year of diplomatic ties between both the countries.

➤ Both countries also regularly exchange high level military delegations to enhance military cooperation between the two countries. A 16-member NDC delegation led by Shri Vijay Nehra, IAS, SDS (CS) visited South Africa from 02-08 June as part of Foreign Study Tour of 64th NDC

Course. Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari, Chief of the Air Staff, visited South Africa at the invitation from Lieutenant General W. S. Mbabmo, Chief of South African Air Force from 05-10 May 2024. A South African defence delegation led by Ms. Thandi Ruth Modise, Minister of Defence and Military Veterans visited India from 18- 22 October 2022 in connection with Def Expo 2022 at Gandhinagar and on the sidelines of Def Expo, the delegation also attended India-Africa Defence Dialogue and Indian Ocean Region Defence Ministers' Conclave. Visit of SA Chief of Army Lt. Gen. L.K. Mbatha took place in August 2022 and that of SA Air Force Chief, Lt Gen Wiseman Mbambo was held in November 2021. The maiden India-South Africa Defence Industry Webinar was held on 20 Sep 2020.

➤ South Africa also deployed SA Navy's Liaison Officers at Information Fusion Center - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) of Indian Navy from April 2022 onwards. Indian Navy conducted customized Ocean Sail Training for SA Navy officers in March 2022 and December 2022.

➤ SA Navy also participated in the MILAN exercises held in India on 18-27 February 2024 and earlier in February/March 2022. South African Navy's teams participated in Admiral's Cup Regatta in 2019.

➤ To address the shortage of skills among South Africans which is a national priority of the Government of South Africa, an MoU on the setting up of the "Gandhi-Mandela Centre of Specialization for Artisan Skills"(GMCoS) in South Africa was signed during the Prime Minister's visit to South Africa in July 2018. The Centre, with the collaboration of Hindustan Machine Tools Limited (HMTL) offers technical expertise, training material, machines and equipment as well as interactive ICT equipment for video conferencing in a multi-skills formation comprising off our skills: mechanical fitter, electrician, boiler maker and millwright for all of which there is demand in South Africa. The soft launch of the Gandhi-Mandela Centre of Specialization for Artisan Skills took place in Pretoria on 8 October 2018 in the presence of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Naledi Pandor. The GMCoS was officially launched in Pretoria on 28 October 2021 in presence of Deputy Minister of Higher Education Mr. Buti Manamela and High Commissioner Mr. Jaideep Sarkar.

➤ A fully-funded specialized two-week ITEC Media Training Programme on Journalism and Public Relations has been organized in two cities – Hyderabad and Delhi - from 26 February to 9 March 2024 for 30 South African professionals.

➤ An MoU on Cooperation in the Reintroduction of Cheetah in India was signed between the Republic of India and the Republic of South Africa on 17 January 2023. The MoU facilitates cooperation between the two countries, *inter alia*, to establish a viable and secure cheetah population in India. A first batch of 12 cheetahs (7 males, 5 females) were translocated from South Africa to India on 18th February 2023.

➤ India and South Africa signed an Agreement on Cooperation in the fields of Science and Technology on 19 July 1995 and cooperation in Science and Technology between the two countries has flourished and continues to grow. Dr Harsh Vardhan, Hon. Union Minister of Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, accompanied by a delegation of senior officials and scientists, paid an official visit to South Africa and participated in a series of events organized in Cape Town and Durban from 4-6 October 2017 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of India-South Africa

Cooperation in Science & Technology. The Agreement was renewed for a further period of three years during the visit of Minister of Science & Technology to SA in October 2017. 13th Joint Committee Meeting on S&T & Innovation Cooperation between India & South Africa held on 12 July 2023 in Department of Science & Technology, New Delhi.

➤ With the help of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an intensive programme of cultural exchanges is organized throughout South Africa including scholarships for South African nationals. High Commission of India in Pretoria (HCI Pretoria) and CGI Durban in association with Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) organized a 2-day International Yoga Conference on ‘Yoga for Self and Society’ on 27-28 June 2024 in Durban, which saw participation from yoga experts from African countries, including Tanzania, Egypt and several provinces of South Africa. International Day of Yoga 2024 (IDY 2024) was celebrated in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town and the events saw participation from representatives from diplomatic corps, Indian diaspora, Indian companies, yoga schools, students, officials of the High Commission among others. The IDY 2024 event in Johannesburg was historic which witnessed around 8000 participants, the highest in South Africa and the African continent. HCI Pretoria in association with diplomatic Missions of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal as well as UN Resident Coordinator Office organized International Mother Language Day (Matram-V) on 24 February 2024 at the Chancery. An 8-member ICCR troupe ‘Taal Chhandam’ visited South Africa from 23-31 January 2024 and performed as well as conducted workshops in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Tongaat and Phoenix Gandhi Settlement. The troupe also interacted with local schools/ dance academy.

➤ A six-member ICCR Indo-Jazz fusion troupe, "Rajeev Raja Combine" led by Rajeev Etnan Raja visited South Africa from 7-16 December 2023 and performed at the Mpumalanga Cultural Experience and Mapungubwe Arts Festival in Mpumalanga and Limpopo as part of 30 years of establishment of Diplomatic relations celebrations. An ICCR-sponsored cultural troupe comprising 15 members of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipuri Dance Academy group led by Shri Bilash Singh Pukhrabam visited Johannesburg, South Africa from 21-25 August 2022. Activities to commemorate the 75 years of India’s Independence (Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav) were organized across South Africa by the Consulates and Mission which included ‘Revisiting Gandhian Trail’ following Mahatma’s footsteps for promoting peace, non-violence and harmony organized in October 2021 and International Mother Language Day (‘MATARAM’) in February 2022 and February 2023 showcasing linguistic and cultural diversity of India through cultural performances by Indian Diaspora in South Africa.

➤ The South African Indian origin community numbers around 1.7 million and constitutes about 3% of South Africa’s total population. About 80% of the Indian community lives in the province of KwaZulu Natal, about 15% in the Gauteng (previously Transvaal) area and the remaining 5% in Cape Town. The year 2010 marked the 150th anniversary of the first arrival of Indians in South Africa. 2014 marked 100 years of Gandhiji’s final departure to India from South Africa; he reached India on 9th Jan 1915; this date is now commemorated annually as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

➤ Hon’ble President of India on 10th January 2023 conferred on Mr. Mohanlal Hira the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) 2023 in the field of community welfare during the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh from 8-10 January 2023. So far 15 South African nationals of Indian origin have been conferred PBSA (<https://pbdindia.gov.in/pbsa-awardees-prev>).

Source: www.mea.gov.in