

India - Sierra Leone Relations

The traditionally cordial bilateral relations of India and Sierra Leone were re-energized by the visit of the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri Anand Sharma, to Sierra Leone in January 2009, representing the first high-level visit from India after a gap of ten years. The new thrust in relations was facilitated by a steady ministerial-level interaction between the two countries and an upswing in economic and commercial partnership over the past 4-5 years.

Bilateral high-level visits and consultations include the visit of Indian Defence Minister, Shri George Fernandes, to Sierra Leone in July 2000; the visit of Sierra Leonean Minister of Industry and Transport, Mr. A.E. Bangura to New Delhi in November 1998; the visit of a two-member Parliamentary delegation, led by the Speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament, to New Delhi in January 2003, and the visit of the Foreign Minister Alhaji Momodu Koroma and Trade and Industry Minister Dr. Kadi Sesay to New Delhi in November 2005.

Other ministerial visits from Sierra Leone was of Mr. Momodu Koroma, Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone in January 2007; Mr. Joseph S. Sesay, Minister of Health and Mr. Francis Abdul Rahman Sankoh, Director of Livestocks, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry in December 2007; Minister of Trade, Mr. A.P. Koroma, in March, 2008; and Foreign Minister, Ms. Zainab Bangura, in October 2008 and again in February, 2011.

Two MPs from Sierra Leone, Hon. Mr. Legacy Sankoh and Hon. Mr. Jacob I. Koroma, visited India to participate in the 'Leaders of the Future' programme, held in March 2012. Mr. Oluniyi Robbin-Coker, Minister of Energy and Water Resources visited India to participate in the Global Ministerial level "International Seminar on Energy Access" held in New Delhi in October, 2012.

A 4-member delegation led by Sahr George Pessima, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, visited India for a study tour on 18-27 in January 2013. Dr. Richard Konteh, Chief of Staff, Office of the President, led the Sierra Leonean delegation to the 9th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave held in Delhi in March, 2013. The Deputy Trade and Industry Minister, Alie Badara Mansaray was part of the delegation. The Deputy Minister of Trade & Industry accompanied by the Special Secretary to the Chief of Staff in the Presidency and two business executives participated in the 10th EXIM Bank – CII Conclave held in New Delhi in March 2014.

Shri Sushil Kumar Modi, Dy. Chief Minister of Bihar, visited Sierra Leone to attend the "Sierra Leone Conference on Development and Transformation" held in Sierra Leone from 30 January to 1 February, 2012.

Sierra Leone is a Commonwealth member country. It was represented at the Commonwealth Games Delhi 2010 by its 48-member sports delegation, led by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.

The High Commission of India to Ghana is concurrently accredited to Sierra Leone with residence in Accra. The Honorary Consulate of India is functioning in Freetown since 1993.

The deployment of the 4000-strong Indian military contingent in the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) – initially led by Brig. S.C. Joshi as the head of a 10-member Military Liaison Unit (attached to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Sierra Leone), and, thereafter, by Maj. Gen. V.K. Jetley as Force Commander of UNAMSIL, beginning January 2000 – left a positive impact among the Sierra Leoneans. Indian troops were phased out in January, 2001.

Commercial relations:

India's trade with Sierra Leone is limited. According to available statistics, total bilateral trade between the two countries declined in 2014-15 to US \$ 82.99 million, mainly due to the Ebola virus scare. India's export to Sierra Leone was US\$ 80.40 million as against an import figure of US\$ 2.59 million. India's total trade in 2013-14 was US \$ 124.58 million with India's exports worth US \$ 100.99 million.

Indian export basket comprises mostly of drugs and pharmaceuticals, textile, eggs, and machine tools, while the major items of imports from Sierra Leone include ferrous waste and scrap, wood pulp, waste paper and small quantities of titanium ores.

There are about 20 Indian NRI/PIO trading companies, based in Sierra Leone. BhartiAirtel, after its acquisition of Zain Africa for US\$ 10.7 bn in 2010, has made an entry into Sierra Leone telecom sector, buying over Zain SL. In its assessment, the country offers promising prospects for growth.

Government of India has provided various assistance packages to Sierra Leone. During his visit to Sierra Leone in January 2009, the Minister of State for External Affairs, ShriAnand Sharma, gifted 200 military barracks to Sierra Leone. These were erected by an Indian Public Sector Undertaking. India gifted 29 packages of indelible ink in May, 2007 for Sierra Leone's presidential and parliamentary elections held in September 2007. India also supplied 40,000 tonnes of non-basmati rice to Sierra Leone in June 2008 to meet urgent requirements.

With a view to assisting Sierra Leone in its socio-economic development, India has extended concessional loans through Lines of Credit (LoC) worth US\$ 99.84 million for various projects in the country. These include (i) Development of Commercial Agriculture; (ii) Rehabilitation of Telecom Sector in Sierra Leone (SIERRATEL); (iii) Rehabilitation of Six Potable Water Projects; and (iv) Solar Street Lighting Project. Another two LOCs of US\$ 30 million and US\$ 15 million has been approved for Irrigation Development and Expansion of Rehabilitation of existing Potable Water Facilities respectively in Sierra Leone.

India has also offered to set up the "India-Africa Information and Communication Technology Centre" in Sierra Leone under the decisions of the Indian Africa Fund Summit (IAFS).

The Pan-African e-Network project is functioning well. The Sierra Leone Learning Centre has signed anMoU with all five participating Indian university centres. Furthermore, doctors as well as medical and pharmacology students have been regularly attending the tele-medicine programs and have found them to be beneficial.

Humanitarian Assistance:

To help the Sierra Leonean government combat Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), in December 2014 Government of India donated US \$ 50,000 worth of medical equipment and medicines to the local government. This donation was in addition to the Government of India's contribution of US\$ 12 million to the UN Trust Fund for Ebola and cash contribution of US\$ 50,000 to WHO to help fight the Ebola virus disease in the three countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)

Under the ITEC program, Sierra Leone utilized 45 and 30 slots during the FY 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively. It has been allotted only 10 ITEC slots for the year 2014-15 and only 3 were utilized due to the Ebola Virus disease. The ITEC Rural Solar Electrification course, held at the Barefoot College of Tilonia, has been found to be particularly relevant. Some Sierra Leonean women, upon their return from the course, have successfully installed the solar system in their villages providing inexpensive electricity to the rural households.

Indian Community

The Indian community in Sierra Leone is about 1400 strong, of which 500 are on short term contracts. Indians are mostly engaged in trade and manufacturing. A few of them are into mining and trading of gold and diamonds. There are about 60 Indian owned registered companies. Airtel is the biggest Mobile telecommunications company. Indian Mercantile Association is the only Indian association in Sierra Leone. A Hindu temple is run by the local Temple Committee. Choithram Trust, managed by the Indian owned Choitram Group, runs a Charitable Hospital.

The International Day of Yoga was celebrated successfully in a grand manner with high level participation from the Government and diplomatic community.

Useful Resources:

High Commission of India, Accra website:

<http://www.indiahc-ghana.com/>

High Commission of India, Accra Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/High-Commission-of-India-Accra-Ghana/265297936822857>

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