

Indo-Mauritius Bilateral Relations: A Growing Bonhomie

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Abstract

The present paper provides a comprehensive overview of Indo-Mauritius bilateral relations in the 21st Century, examining their political & diplomatic, commercial, defense & strategic and cultural dimensions. The political and diplomatic relations between two republics India and Mauritius exist since 1948. This aspect of bilateral relations has become so strong and cordial because of regular high-level visits from both sides. Since 2005 India has been one of the major trading partners of Mauritius and since 2000 the Cumulative FDI worth USD 177 billion has come from Mauritius to India. The defense cooperation constitutes the backbone of their strategic partnership to counter Beijing's growing footprint in the Indo-Pacific region. India has also strong cultural ties with Mauritius. Over 70 % of Mauritian population is of Indian descent. Hence, Mauritius is rightly called 'Chota Bharat' (Mini India).

Keywords: Indo-Mauritius Relations, Indo-Pacific Region, SAGAR, MAHASAGAR

1. Introduction

Mauritius is a small island nation in the Indian Ocean, situated off the eastern coast of Africa. This island nation was first discovered by the Portuguese in 1505 and in 17th century it was named as Mauritius by the Dutch in the honour of the Prince Maurits Van NASSAU (Mohapatra & Gusinge, 2022). Mauritius lies about 500 miles east coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Its outlying areas are Rodrigues Islands, located about 340 miles eastward, the Cargados Carajos Shoals, 250 miles northeastward and the Agalega Islands, 580 miles northward from the main land. This island nation has had different waves of colonial rule like Portuguese, Dutch, French and British. After a long freedom struggle Mauritius got her independence from the British colonialism on 12th March, 1968 (Singh, 2024). Mauritius is one of the littoral states like Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Maldives etc. in the Indo-Pacific region. Today, this region has much maritime and strategic interests, attracting the attention of the global powers. In fact, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged appreciating the convergence of two largest Oceans of the world like the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and it has become widely recognized as a geopolitical concept in the 21st century. Also, the region has much importance to the global order as it has the largest share of the global GDP, the busiest trade routes of the world, the most populous and the most powerful militaries.

These days, China's coercive behavior has increased in the Indo-Pacific. In order to counter the growing Chinese footprint in the region, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) has been formed and revitalized by four democracies (India, Australia, US and Japan) in 2007 and 2017 respectively. Moreover,

India has a proactive Indo-Pacific policy and intends to have bilateral and multilateral dialogues in the region through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR), the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiatives (IPOI) and the Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR). In India's Indo-Pacific Policy, the littoral states have occupied a significant position because of their geostrategic positioning, resource capacity and most importantly the existence of the vast Indian diaspora in such nations. Among the littoral powers in the region, Mauritius is India's key partner. The Republic of India and the Republic of Mauritius have close and longstanding relations connected by the rich cultural, historical, political, economic, military and social affinities (Baitha & Chatterjee, 2022). These two key Indian Ocean Partners have uniquely close cooperation in different areas like the maritime security, the socio-economic developments, the capacity-building and so on, thus upgrading their ties to an Enhanced Strategic Partnership. The recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Mauritius from March 11-12, 2025 has opened a "new and bright" chapter in the bilateral relations between the two nations, thus upgrading the bilateral ties to an "Enhanced Strategic Partnership". Moreover, during the visit, the Prime Minister Modi has been conferred Mauritius's highest civilian award the 'Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and the Key of the Indian Ocean' by the Mauritian President Dharam Gokhool.

2. A Brief Genesis of Indo-Mauritius Relations

India- Mauritius relations have a long history dating back to the early 1730s, when the Indians were brought to Mauritius from Puducherry and Madras Presidency to work as the artisans and masons. Since the time of Dutch, French and British rule in the island nation, Mauritius has contacts with India. Under the British rule, between 1834 and the early 1900s, about half a million indentured workers from India were brought to Mauritius and about two-third of them permanently settled there in island nation. The India Diaspora in Mauritius played a significant role in the freedom struggle of this island nation. While on his way to India from South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi had a brief stop over in Mauritius from 29th October to 15th November, 1901. During this short layover he steered the destiny of Indian community with his three transformative messages like the importance of education, political empowerment and staying connected with India. The National Day of Mauritius is observed on 12th March each year, paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi Salt March. Although Mauritius became an independent state from the British colonization in 1968, but India established her diplomatic relation with this island nation in 1948. Here, looking at this brief history we can say that both India and Mauritius have been connected by history, geography and culture and have been sharing very cordial relations (Singh, 2024, Baitha & Chatterjee, 2022).

3. India-Mauritius Initiatives

Over the years, there have been some prominent and landmark initiatives of both nations for maintaining their close and cordial relations. The initiatives are : the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (1982) , Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (1998) , Agreement on Cooperation in Biotechnology (2002) , Extradition Treaty (2003) , MoU on Cooperation against Terrorism (2005) , MoU on Cooperation in the field of Environment (2005) , Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters (2005) , MoU Concerning Cooperation in the Exchange of Finance Intelligence Related to Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (2008) , MoU on Science and Technology Cooperation (2012) , MoU on Textiles (2012) , MoU on Cooperation in MSME Sector (2013) , MoU on Cooperation in Ocean

Economy (2015), MoU in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy (2015), In 2017, a number of MoUs were signed, which include Establishment of Civil Services Colleges, Maritime Security, Oceanography Institute, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Research and Education in Marine Sciences and Technology, ABM Mauritius Infrastructure Development Co. Ltd and Export-Import Bank of India for Dollar Credit. The MoUs signed in 2018 include MoU on Consumer Protection and Legal Metrology, MoU in the field of Language, Culture, Arts, and Literature, MoU for the establishment of Ayurveda Chair in the University of Mauritius to initiate education and research in Ayurveda, MoU for the exchange of experience on modern approach to public service recruitment and selection and MoU with the Nalanda University to promote local networking and collaborate with active centres of excellence in East Asia.

Most recently in March 2025 numerous MoUs have been signed, which include Agreement between the Reserve Bank of India and the Bank of Mauritius for the Establishment of a Framework to promote the Use of Local Currencies for Cross-border Transactions, Credit Facility Agreement between the Government of Mauritius and the State Bank of India, MoU between the MSME of Mauritius and the MSME of India on Cooperation in the field of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, MoU between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, MEO, Republic of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Republic of Mauritius, MoU between Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reforms, Govt. of Mauritius and National Centre for Good Governance, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India, Technical Agreement on sharing of White Shipping Information between Indian Navy and Government of Mauritius, MoU between Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, Ministry of Earth Sciences, GOI and Prime Minister's Office, Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration, Government of Mauritius and MoU between Directorate of Enforcement and Financial Crimes Commission of the Republic of Mauritius.

4. Different Areas of Cooperation

India and Mauritius bilateral relations are unique and multi-faceted, encompassing political & diplomatic, commercial, defense & strategic and cultural areas. They are discussed below.

4.1. Political and Diplomatic Relations

The political and diplomatic relations between India and Mauritius exist since 1948. After gaining independence from the British colonialism in 1968, Mauritius's first Prime Minister and nation father Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had spoken about India's importance and centrality in the Mauritian foreign policy. Over the years, the successive leaders of the island nation have maintained cordial and positive political relations with India. In fact, there is the existence of mutual trust between the two nations, which plays a significant role in their political cooperation. The centrality of their political relations is manifested from various high-level visits from both sides. In 2012, the Prime Minister of Mauritius Navi Chandra Ramgoolam had a four-day visit to India, when five MoUs were signed between the two nations in the areas of science and technology, education, sports & youth and textiles. In 2013, the President of Mauritius Rajkeswur Purryag visited to India, reviving the political and diplomatic cooperation between the two nations. Following this trip, in the same year, a reciprocal trip was made by the then President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee to grace the 45th Independence Day of Mauritius. In 2014, the Prime Minister of Mauritius Ravichandra Ramgoolam (the only non-SAARC leader) visited to India to attend the swearing ceremony of the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi 1.0. In 2015, Mauritian Vice Prime Minister

Showkutally visited to Gujarat and participated in the World Hindi Day celebrations in New Delhi. In 2015, in his 1.0 the Prime Minister Modi had a historic visit to the island nation, when the construction work of the World Hindi Secretariat started and five agreements in different areas were signed between the two nations (Baitha & Chatterjee, 2022). Before the PM Modi, the former Prime Ministers of India who had their visits to the island nation are like Indira Gandhi (in 1970, 1976 and 1982), Rajiv Gandhi (in 1986), P.V. Narasimha Rao (in 1992), H.D. Deve Gowda (in 1997), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (in 1998), Dr. Manmohan Singh (in 2005) (Mohapatra & Gusinge, 2022). After a decade since his last visit, most recently on March 11 and 12, 2025, in his 3.0, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited to the island nation to grace the National Day Celebrations (57th Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius and 33rd Anniversary of the Republic of Mauritius). During this trip, the bilateral relations have been upgraded to an 'Enhanced Strategic Partnership'.

4.2. Commercial Relations

India has been the largest trade partner of Mauritius since 2005. Mauritius is the single largest source of foreign direct investment. For the financial year 2023-24, Indian exports to Mauritius was USD 778.03 million, Mauritian exports to India was USD 73.10 million and the total trade amounted to USD 851.13 million in 2023-24. Apart from the petroleum products, the major items of export from India to Mauritius include the pharmaceuticals, cereals, cotton, shrimps, prawns and bovine meat, while the major items of imports from Mauritius to India include vanilla, medical devices, needles, aluminum alloys, scrap paper, refined copper, men's cotton shirts, light vessels, jewelry etc. Since 2000 the Cumulative FDI worth USD 177 billion has come from Mauritius to India (25% of the total FDI inflows into India). The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) signed on 22nd Feb, 2021 and came into force on 1st April 2021 is the first trade agreement by India with an African nation. Presently 11 Indian PSUs are running in Mauritius. They are like Bank of Baroda, LIC, New India Assurance Corporation, Telecommunications Consultant India Limited, Indian Oil (Mauritius) Limited, Mahanagar Telephone (Mauritius) Limited, SBI (Mauritius), National Building and Construction Company Limited, Rail India Technical and Economic Service, Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation Limited and EdCIL (India) Limited (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2025).

4.3. Defense and Strategic Relations

The defense cooperation between India and Mauritius constitutes the backbone of their strategic partnership to counter Beijing's growing footprint in the Indo-Pacific region. Over the years, the defense cooperation with the littoral nations (Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Mauritius) has emerged as an essential element of India's foreign policy. India and Mauritius have a vital connection in the areas of naval and defense cooperation. In 1974, Mauritius signed a defense agreement with India, which provided Indian Naval assistance to the Mauritius National Coast Guard and transferred naval vessels and equipment to Mauritius. Mauritius looks India as a 'Big Brother' for its defense security, military exercise and training. As a big brother, India has played its role to the Mauritian Police Force and the National Coast Guard and also sent a diving and Marine Commandos (MARCOS) training team to the island nation for the training purposes. Over the years, India has provided Mauritius with nine Mandovi Patrolcraft and handed an SDB Mk.3 Patrol Boat – the T-61 to Mauritius. India has gifted Advanced Light Helicopter - Dhruv, a coastal radar surveillance system and an Offshore Patrol Vessel for providing a boost to Mauritian anti-piracy efforts. In 2015, India exported its first warship 'Coast Guard Ship (CGS) Barracuda' to Mauritius, adding the capacity of the National Coast Guard in multitudes. Since 2015, after Modi became the Prime Minister of India, the defense cooperation between the two nations has grown to a new height.

In 2018, India has agreed to a \$ 100 million Line of Credit for the procurement of Indian defense equipment by the island nation (Singh, 2024). Most recently in March 2025, the Indo-Mauritius partnership has been elevated to an ‘Enhanced Strategic Partnership’, when the Prime Minister Narendra Modi held formal talks with the Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, reaffirming their commitment to have a free, open and secure Indian Ocean. The PM Modi, in this trip, has noted that Mauritius stands at the juncture of India’s Vision ‘SAGAR’, its Neighborhood First Approach and its commitment to the Global South and underlined the important role played by this island nation in advancing these policies for the common benefit of both countries. The PM Modi has also advanced the Vision of ‘MAHASAGAR’ (the Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) for the Global South , ten years after he announced India’s Vision ‘SAGAR’ (Security and Growth for All in the Region) from the same strategically located Indian Ocean nation that , he said , connects India to the wider Global South , encompassing the ideas of trade for development , capacity building for sustainable growth and mutual security for a shared future .

4.4. Cultural Relations

In the cultural sphere also, both India and Mauritius have a strong relationship. Over 70 % of this island nation’s population is of Indian descent. Hence, Mauritius is rightly called ‘Chota Bharat’ (Mini India). Consequently, the India diaspora is continuously promoting different Indian cultures in Mauritius by means of various programmes, fellowships and institutes. In 1976, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) was formed as a joint venture between India and Mauritius for the promotion of India culture. This institution also hosts the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Chairs in Sanskrit & Indian Philosophy and Hindi. In 1987, the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture (IGCIC) was set up by India and it is India’s largest cultural Centre abroad (Mohapatra & Gusinge, 2022). This organization holds classes in Hindustani music, Kathak, Tabla and Yoga for more than 2500 Mauritian students each year, thus promoting Indian culture, language and art in Mauritius. In 2000, the Rabindranath Tagore Institute (RTI) was formed in Mauritius as a Centre of Studies on the Indian culture and traditions. Since 2018, the island nation hosts the World Hindi Secretariat for promoting the Hindi language globally. Since 2004, about 385 youngsters from the island nation have taken participation in 64 batches of the Know India Programme (KPI) of the Ministry of External Affairs. Also, in the NCC Republic Day Camps held in January 2023, January 2024 and January 2025, three Mauritian Youth delegations have participated (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2025).

5. Concluding Observations

In view of the aforesaid facts, it can be concluded that India and Mauritius enjoy a special as well as unique partnership in the 21st Century, encompassing the political & diplomatic, commercial, defense & strategic and cultural dimensions. Today both nations share a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’, thus playing a crucial role to counter the growing influence of the People’s Republic of China in the Indo-Pacific Region. Furthermore, the study finds that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s two-day state visit to Mauritius from 11th to 12th March, 2025, at the invitation of his Mauritian counterpart Navinchandra Ramgoolam to grace the island nation’s National Day celebrations (57th Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius and 33rd Anniversary of the Republic of Mauritius), has opened a “new and bright” chapter in the bilateral ties between the two time-tested and trusted partners .

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