

India-Mauritius Relations: Strengthening Long-Standing Ties

Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius (March 11-12, 2025) is a significant diplomatic event aimed at reinforcing the historic and strategic partnership between the two countries. The visit, coinciding with Mauritius' Independence Day celebrations on March 12, highlights the deep-rooted ties between India and Mauritius, which transcend political changes. The visit also provides an opportunity for Mr. Modi to establish a rapport with the newly elected Prime Minister, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and reaffirm India's commitment to Mauritius' security and economic prosperity.

Historical and Cultural Ties

1. The Legacy of Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam

- Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam, the father of the current Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, played a key role in Mauritius' independence movement.
- He had strong ties with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose during Bose's time in Britain (1919-1921).
- He assisted Bose in proof-reading *The Indian Struggle*, a book about India's freedom movement, and received an autographed copy in appreciation.

2. Indian-Origin Population in Mauritius

- Around **70% of Mauritius' population** is of Indian descent, tracing their origins to indentured laborers brought by colonial rulers for sugar plantations.
- Among them, about **50% hail from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh** and still speak Bhojpuri.
- Other significant Indian-origin communities include Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi speakers who have preserved their linguistic and cultural heritage.

3. Mauritius' Multi-Ethnic Society

- Despite its Indian heritage, Mauritius has a **diverse population**, including African, French, and mixed ethnic groups.
- The **French-origin population (2%)** continues to hold economic influence, especially in banking, finance, and sugar plantations.
- India's diplomacy in Mauritius requires balancing ties with all ethnic communities while maintaining cultural bonds with the Indian-origin population.

4. Cultural and Linguistic Cooperation

- India has taken several initiatives to support the Indian diaspora in Mauritius:
 - The **Mahatma Gandhi Institute** (established in 1976) promotes Indian languages and culture.
 - The **Indian Cultural Centre in Mauritius** is the largest and most active among Indian cultural centers worldwide.
 - Mauritius hosts the **World Hindi Secretariat**, supported by India, to promote

Hindi as a global language.

Economic and Trade Cooperation

1. Expanding Bilateral Trade

- **India-Mauritius trade reached \$554 million in 2022-23**, showing steady growth.
- Mauritius is part of the **African Union** and has preferential trade agreements with multiple African nations.
- The country is **bilingual (English and French)**, making it a strategic hub for businesses targeting Francophone Africa.

2. Mauritius as a Financial Hub

- Due to a **favorable Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)**, Mauritius is a major conduit for **foreign investment into India**.
 - It has developed into a key **international financial center** with a strong banking and finance sector, benefiting from stable laws and regulations.
 - Many global businesses use Mauritius as a gateway for investments in India and Africa.
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Strategic and Maritime Security Cooperation

1. Mauritius' Importance in the Indian Ocean

- Mauritius controls an **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.3 million sq. km**, a vast maritime area requiring enhanced security.
- The **Colombo Security Conclave** includes India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Bangladesh, ensuring regional maritime security.
- Given the **growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean**, India-Mauritius security cooperation is critical for countering potential security threats.

2. India's Maritime Support to Mauritius

- India has provided Mauritius with **coastal radar stations** and **joint surveillance facilities** on Agaléga island.
 - The **Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** in Gurugram shares maritime intelligence with Mauritius.
 - India's **oceanographic survey ship, INS Sarvekshak**, has recently mapped **25,000 sq. km** of Mauritius' ocean territory.
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Key Takeaways from PM Modi's Visit

1. **Political Significance:** Strengthens ties with the newly elected Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, ensuring stability in bilateral relations.
2. **Economic Expansion:** Discusses enhanced trade, investment, and financial collaboration, leveraging Mauritius as a gateway to Africa.
3. **Maritime Security:** Reinforces defense and surveillance cooperation amid increasing Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean.
4. **Cultural Bonds:** Celebrates the Indian heritage of Mauritius while maintaining diplomatic outreach to all communities.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius is more than a ceremonial event—it's an opportunity to strengthen a **long-standing friendship, economic partnership, and strategic collaboration**. India and Mauritius must remain strong allies in a world facing geopolitical challenges, ensuring mutual prosperity and security.