

India-Seychelles Relations: An Old Bond Strengthening India's Indian Ocean Strategy

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India-Seychelles Relations Latest News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a three-day visit to Seychelles to attend the island nation's 50th Independence Day celebrations on June 29 as the Guest of Honour.
- The visit is an occasion to revisit the deep historical, demographic and strategic ties that bind the two nations, located some 4,000 km apart in the Indian Ocean.

A Demographic Bond: From Five Indians to 5% of the Population

- The Indian connection with Seychelles is older than the country itself. In 1770, five Indians landed there as plantation workers, alongside seven African slaves and fifteen French colonists — recorded as the islands' first inhabitants.
- Today, Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) make up about 5% of the population.

- The PIO population with Seychellois citizenship is estimated at around 6,000, which is significant in a nation of roughly 120,000 people.
- Most belong to the Gujarati and Tamil communities. Beyond citizens, over 9,000 NRIs hold Gainful Employment Permits, working mainly in construction, as shop assistants and as professionals.

Migration and Trade

- A steady flow of Indians began in the 20th century — mostly from Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and later Gujarat — settling as traders, labourers and construction workers.
- A key historical link was administrative: during British colonial rule, Seychelles was for a time governed from the Bombay Presidency, with regular shipping and goods flowing from India.
- These trade routes encouraged Indian traders — who had reached a saturation point in East Africa — to seek new opportunities in the islands.

Diplomatic Relations

- Diplomatic ties were established in **1976**, the year Seychelles gained independence (June 29, 1976).
- At that first Independence Day, a contingent from **INS Nilgiri** participated — a tradition echoed this year by an Indian Armed Forces contingent and two Indian Navy ships.
- Earlier in 2026, PM Modi described Seychelles as a key part of India's maritime vision — MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).

Cultural Ties

- Cultural contact has been largely community-driven, sustained by the diaspora.
- In June 2022, a **statue of Mahatma Gandhi** was unveiled at the Peace Park in Victoria, standing alongside statues of Nelson Mandela and Sir James Mancham, the founding President of Seychelles.
- India's recognition of the community is reflected in the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, conferred on Justice D. Karunakaran of the Seychelles Supreme Court in 2015 — the second recipient from the country after entrepreneur V. Ramadoss in 2006.

India as a Development Partner

- India has become one of Seychelles' most trusted development partners, working through grants, concessional credit and capacity-building.
- More than 1% of the population has received professional training in India.
- New Delhi has extended Lines of Credit and grants for infrastructure, healthcare, education and public transport.
- In 2026, PM Modi announced a Special Economic Package of \$175 million.
- India remains a premier medical tourism destination for Seychellois, with island hospitals tied institutionally to facilities in cities like Chennai.

Strategic Significance: The Indian Ocean Chessboard

- Seychelles is a cornerstone of India's **Global South strategy** and a critical maritime partner in the Western Indian Ocean. Its location near Africa, the Middle East and Asia makes it strategically vital.
- For India, the partnership serves two purposes: it helps combat seaborne terrorism, piracy and illegal fishing, and it acts as a counterweight to China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- For context, PM Modi last visited in 2015, and Indira Gandhi (1981) was the first Indian PM to visit. During this trip, Modi will also address the National Assembly of Seychelles and meet members of the Indian community.

Conclusion

- The India-Seychelles relationship is a rare blend of the personal and the strategic — built on a diaspora dating back to 1770 and sustained today by development partnership and shared maritime interests.
- As the Indian Ocean becomes an arena of intensifying competition, a stable, friendly Seychelles serves as both a partner in securing the seas and a quiet counterbalance to rival influence.
- PM Modi's presence at the 50th independence celebrations signals continuity in a tie that has matured from migration and trade into a full strategic partnership.

Source: IE

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