

Let's cooperate in preserving our diverse cultural heritage'

The President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Dr Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, was in Tanzania purposely to identify fresh opportunities to bolster ties between the two friendly nations. Our senior journalist **Songa wa Songa** caught up with him in Dar es Salaam.

Here are excerpts from the interview.

Q: What is the main objective of your visit?

A: As President of ICCR, Tanzania holds significant importance as a key partner in cultural cooperation. This visit is focused on consolidating our existing collaborations and, more importantly, identifying fresh opportunities to bolster our ties. Engaging with key representatives of the Tanzanian government and connecting with Tanzanian alumni will provide invaluable insights into their expectations while allowing me to articulate a vision for an elevated and expanded partnership with all stakeholders in Tanzania.

Q: How do you perceive the cultural cooperation between India and Tanzania?

A: Our centuries-old relationship, spanning across the Indian Ocean, has deeply intertwined our cultures, leaving an indelible mark evident even today. The fusion of our culinary delights, languages, music, and art showcases the richness of this cultural exchange. With a substantial Indian diaspora in Tanzania and the enthusiastic embrace of Indian culture by Tanzanians, our cooperation thrives. The Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Dar es Salaam stands as a testament to our commitment. We regularly send Indian cultural troupes to participate in Tanzanian festivals, such as the Bagamoyo Festival, and reciprocate by hosting Tanzanian cultural troupes at the prestigious Surajkund Crafts Mela in Faridabad, India.

On a global scale, Prime Minister Modi emphasizes South-South cooperation, particularly in the cultural sphere, where Africa and Latin America share affinities with Indian culture. In the era



Dr Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, President of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), speaks about the purpose of his visit to Tanzania recently.

of globalization, preserving our diverse cultural heritage is vital, decoupling modernisation from westernisation. Our cultural cooperation is pivotal in safeguarding this diversity, contributing to the world's beauty.

Q: What are the specific contributions of ICCR in Tanzania?

A: Dar es Salaam hosts one of the four Cultural Centres established by ICCR in the entire African continent, underscoring Tanzania's significance to us. Our Cultural Centre offers free classes in yoga, vocal music, tabla, and Hindi language to a large number of Tanzanians. Tanzania stands as the largest beneficiary of ICCR scholarships in Africa, with an increase in annual scholarship

slots from 75 to 85 last month. Since 2002, a total of 479 Tanzanian students have benefited from ICCR scholarships, covering Bachelors, Masters and PhD programmes. Furthermore, ICCR facilitates scholarships for studying the Indian traditional system of medicine, with a Tanzanian national set to pursue this under the scheme. In 2021, an MoU was signed with the University of Dar es Salaam for the establishment of an ICCR History chair, with the process expected to conclude soon.

Q: How has India-Tanzania cooperation in culture evolved in recent years?

A: India and Tanzania have maintained a robust cooperation since the

era of Mwalimu Nyerere. However, the momentum significantly increased after Prime Minister Modi's visit to Tanzania in 2016, propelling cooperation across various sectors, including culture. The recent state visit of President Samia last month resulted in the signing of two MoUs related to the cultural sphere, and Tanzania's agreement to be a partner country at the Surajkund Crafts Mela in India. Responding to requests from the Tanzania Kabaddi Sports Association and the National Sports Council, we have deployed two Indian Kabaddi coaches to train Tanzanian players.

Q: Could you share information on any bilateral agreements regarding culture between India and Tanzania?

A: Certainly. During the state visit of H.E. President Samia Suluhu Hassan, two out of six official MoUs signed were related to sports and culture. The Cultural Exchange Programme for the years 2024-27 outlines the modalities of cooperation in the area of culture. Additionally, an MoU for cooperation in sports between the National Sports Council of Tanzania and the Sports Authority of India was signed, further fortifying collaboration in sports.

Beyond official documents, the essence of our relationship lies in people-to-people connections, surpassing the significance of bilateral agreements. Tanzanian students in India, through their firsthand experiences, actively contribute to the enrichment of our cultural exchange, thereby strengthening these grassroots connections. As a pivotal measure, the establishment of the Tanzania Alumni of India association during this visit serves as a crucial step in organizing and fostering the ongoing engagement of our alumni network.

Q: Are you satisfied with your visit?

Absolutely, I had the privilege of engaging with key figures such as Deputy Minister of Culture, Arts and Sports Hamis Mohamed Mwinjuma, Speaker of Zanzibar House of Representatives Zubeir Ali Maulid, Second Vice President of Zanzibar Hemed Suleiman Abdulla, and isles Minister for Tourism and Heritage Simai Muhammed. Our discussions focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation in the realm of culture, including the implementation of the Cultural Exchange Programme. I am happy to share that Tanzania-India Alumni Association has been established during my visit. I am confident that our Tanzanian alumni who have gone on to hold key positions here will act as a bridge between our two nations. Witnessing the popularity of our Cultural Centre, particularly the enthusiasm for Kabaddi, among Tanzanians has reinforced my commitment to intensify our collaborative efforts.