

India's Minister of External Affairs, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's interaction with Zanzibar Mail

DURING his two-day official visit to the Indian Ocean Islands of Zanzibar last week, Indian External Minister, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (Dr. SJ), granted an interview to the Zanzibar Mail (ZM) in which he expressed his views on the Indo-Tanzania relations generally and Zanzibar specifically. The following is part of the interview in which Dr. SJ explains his vision of India's development support to the East African Islands of Zanzibar.

ZM: The Government of India through the Exim Bank is financing a big water project in Zanzibar, how much do you think this project is worthy to the development of the islands?

Dr. SJ: Tanzania is one of our biggest development partners in Africa. In last few years our development cooperation in water sector has come up to the centre stage with India committing USD 1 billion in water projects of which USD 500 million projects are completed/nearing completion while new water projects of USD 500 million has just started.

The water projects being undertaken in different towns in Zanzibar is being funded by Indian lines of Credit of USD 92.18 million which was announced during the visit of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to Tanzania in July 2016.

ZM: When will this project be completed and how many people will benefit from the project?

Dr. SJ: I have been told that on an average the project is over 80% complete and on full commissioning of the project it will benefit over one million people. I have instructed the team from Indian side to complete it at the earliest. I am hopeful that all projects would be functional by end of 2023.

I have plans to visit the water project site at Kidutani to see the progress of the project myself.

Access to safe and clean drinking water is a pressing issue faced by many developing countries, including India and Tanzania. In India, we have embarked on the Jal Jeevan Mission, a national initiative aimed at providing piped drinking water to every household. I am happy to learn that our development

cooperation is similarly impacting the lives of friends of Zanzibar.

ZM: Tanzania and India have agreed on an arrangement that will no longer make the US dollar indispensable in trade between the two countries. What are the steps that have been taken by India to realize this goal?

Dr. SJ: As you know India-Tanzania bilateral trade is on rise. In 2022-23, it crossed USD 6.4 billion. Tanzanian export to India is also increasing with new products being added to the trade basket. In this context, trade in our national currencies provides an additional framework for traders. This should not be seen as a contradiction.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has allowed Indian banks to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) of corresponding Tanzanian banks through which trade settlements can be completed using local currencies. Three Indian banks namely Bank of Baroda, Bank of India and Canara Bank which have branches operating in Tanzania have already received approval for such accounts for its Tanzanian branches.

ZM: In your opinion, how would you explain the Indo-Zanzibar relations in the past six decades?

Dr. SJ: In the last six decades, the relationship between India and Zanzibar has prospered and become multifaceted. India is among the few countries that have diplomatic presence in these islands, and as you would know India has opened its Consulate in Zanzibar in 1974. We have also received several delegations from Zanzibar and my visit is a statement of our commitment.

As regarding historical connection between India and Zanzibar, the Father of the Indian Nation, Mahatma Gandhi visited Zanzibar in 1893 and in 1912.

Our close relationship continues to this day. Today, I had the pleasure of meeting with His Excellency President of Zanzibar, Dr. Hussein Mwinyi. During the meeting, we signed a MoU for establishing an offshore campus of Indian Institute of Technology, Madras in Zanzibar. During my visit, Indian Naval Ship INS Trishul also visited Zanzibar. These initiatives showcase further strengthening of bonds between India and Zanzibar.

ZM: Zanzibar is implementing a Blue economy policy, do you think India has a



room to support the government to effectively implement that policy, especially in the area of oil and gas exploration.

Dr. SJ: As we understand the Blue Economy is the emerging sector in which Zanzibar Government has put lot of emphasis. It has various components e.g. Tourism, Maritime Transport & Commerce, Fisheries, Oil & Gas and Ports. Regarding promotion of tourism, many people from Indian origin are contributing in this sector, either by opening hotel chains or by

managing hotels and restaurants. Regarding Maritime Transport & Commerce, we are noticing several

Indian companies showing interest to invest in Tanzania including in Zanzibar. As regards to the Oil and Gas exploration in offshore

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blocks, we have to wait and watch when such expression of interest is invited by Government of Zanzibar.

ZM: Food processing and safety are among the areas prioritized by the government and we have information that India is supporting this area at the Vitongoji Vocational Training Centre. What are the benefits of the project and have the goals been achieved?

Dr. SJ: As you know, India is committed to establish Vitongoji Vocational Training Center in Pemba Island. Recently in May, 2023 a team of experts from Indian Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and National Skill Development Council visited Pemba to make a full assessment of the project, and taking it forward. We are committed to complete the project at the earliest. As regarding the potential benefits, the project will impart skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling to the youth of Pemba in several sectors, which will further help them in gainful employment opportunities.

ZM: What are the areas of support that India provides to the islands in the health sector and to what extent have they address the Isles health challenges?

Dr. SJ: India accords high priorities for health sector cooperation with Tanzania and Zanzibar. Various Indian hospitals are in discussions with hospitals in Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar to collaborate and invest in healthcare. Indian companies have also invested in pharmaceutical and animal vaccine plants in mainland which would cater to Zanzibar as well. India provided essential medicines worth Rupees 15.6 million (USD 195,000) to Zanzibar Government in April 2021. I am also happy to note that the people of Zanzibar find India as the preferred destination for advanced medical care.

ZM: India has great experience in the agriculture and fishing sectors, what can the Islands of Zanzibar expect from your visit in strengthening these sectors.

DR. S J: Agriculture sector cooperation has always remained a strong pillar of Indo-Tanzania

bilateral cooperation. If you look at our bilateral trade you will notice that India has historically remained the biggest destination for export of agricultural goods from Tanzania. We have long been importers of pigeon peas, currently at the level of 200,000 MTs. I now see that avocados exports from Tanzania are also growing fast.

Many Indian groups are planning to invest in agriculture sector here. We need to take that to a logical conclusion. This week we have two big delegations from India visiting Tanzania constituted of about 100 business persons. A sizeable number among them are going to explore opportunities in agriculture sector. We will also encourage them to consider investing in blue economy sectors of Zanzibar including fisheries and sea weed.

ZM: What is India's contribution in supporting civil society organizations and entrepreneurial groups in Zanzibar?

Dr. SJ: Civil societies in any country play important role in meeting the aspirations of the people, understanding and raising their grievances at appropriate forums and platforms. Our Consulate is regularly alive in Zanzibar. There is a vibrant Indian Diaspora in Zanzibar who are also active as leaders of various civil societies. Entrepreneurial groups from Zanzibar have an organic relationship with India and Indian counterparts. Government of India has helped setting up a training centre in the past and we are working to set up a vocational one in Pemba Island.

ZM: How do you measure the state of peace and the level of democracy in Tanzania?

Dr. SJ: The United Republic of Tanzania is a democratic country that has developed steadily over the last decades like India. You are also proof that democracy delivers. The diversity and pluralism that characterises your society is something to which Indians readily relate. Our Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi who visited Zanzibar believed that power resides in the people. Both of us are giving expression to it in our respective ways.