

India High Commissioner seeks to boost trade with T&T

... Targets methanol, vehicles, plastics and pharmaceuticals



Members of the Greater San Fernando Chamber of Commerce and business owners during the Doing Business with India meeting at RPM Plaza on High Street, San Fernando, on Saturday.



High Commissioner to India Pradeep Rajpurohit, right, responds to questions during the Doing Business with India meeting at RPM Plaza in San Fernando on Saturday. Seated next to him is Minister of Education Dr Michael Dowlat. PHOTOS BY RISHI RAGOONATH

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Indian High Commissioner to T&T, Pradeep Singh Rajpurohit, has called for a major push to expand bilateral trade between the countries, urging stronger exports and imports of methanol, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, and plastic products between the two countries.

Speaking with businesspeople from the Greater San Fernando Chamber of Commerce at RPM Plaza in San Fernando on Saturday night, at an event titled Doing Business With India, Rajpurohit said the current level of trade is “far below the potential” and should be increased to at least US\$1 billion.

“When you look at the trade numbers, it comes to about US\$370 million in the last financial year,” Rajpurohit said.

“Our financial year is from April to March, and Trinidad and Tobago is way ahead of us when it comes to numbers. Out of US\$341 million, US\$220 million is the export from Trinidad and Tobago to India, whereas our export here is US\$121 million. We may say there is an imbalance, but the important point is this number is still far below the potential.”

The High Commissioner said T&T’s exports to India are dominated by petrochemicals.

“Out of your US\$221 million, US\$195 million is only about mineral fuels, oils, and related products,” he noted. “There is a demand for methanol in India. From India to Trinidad and Tobago, I see three major products—vehicles, pharmaceuticals, and plastic and related articles.”

Rajpurohit said products from India are often more expensive in T&T because they arrive via “middlemen,” rather than directly from manufacturers.

“Many of the products you see in Trinidad and the region do not come directly from India. They come through other channels, and as a result, the cost increases. The margin made by the middlemen makes the cost higher when it comes to the customers and consumers here,” he explained.

He stressed that there is “a special connection” between the people of both nations and that this should translate into stronger commercial ties.

“The potential for exports is great,” he said.

“We have close connections, the way we follow the culture, the way of life. I think this number needs to be improved to at least a billion or more.”

He called for greater collaboration between Government, business chambers, and the private sector to identify and act on trade opportunities.

Rajpurohit also pointed to other areas ripe for cooperation, including textiles and apparel, agriculture, renewable energy, and processed foods.

“If you are bringing these items in bulk, the cost will go down. I see items like rice, tea, spices, nuts, even processed vegetables and fruits. Can we make some kind of concerted effort so these items are brought here in a bigger quantity?” he suggested.

On pharmaceuticals, he congratulated T&T for adopting the Indian Pharmacopeia.

“It means that all these medicines available in India, subject to certain testing and quality standards, will be available in Trinidad and Tobago directly without getting into all those hurdles. This will make a difference in the life of a common human being here,” he said, adding that lower prices will soon be possible once the market opens up to direct Indian suppliers.

He also spoke of India’s strengths in renewable energy, medical tourism, and affordable mobility solutions such as electric rickshaws, which he said could be ideal for shorter commutes in T&T.

“These are available in India as markets, they can be tapped into. I see that it will make a difference in the mobility sector,” he said.

The High Commissioner added that his mission was ready to link local companies with India’s many export promotion councils, covering every commodity from coffee and tea to textiles and machinery.

“We are here in the High Commission, this is our duty, this is one of our mandates—that we connect, link the business communities,” he said. Rajpurohit also urged for continued dialogue.

Also in attendance at Saturday’s event were San Fernando Mayor Robert Parris and Minister of Education Dr Michael Dowlath.