High Commissioner's speech at India–South Africa Symposium on Critical Minerals, 17 March 2026

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• Esteemed Vice Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria: Prof Francis Petersen

• Deputy Director General, Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, Ms. Ntokoza Nzimande,

• Distinguished Professors from University of Pretoria and Indian Professors from IITs & ISM – Dhanbad

• Captains of Mining and Steel Industry

• My colleagues from the High Commission & Consulate

• Students, Ladies & Gentlemen

Namaste, Good Morning

The High Commission of India is really excited to partner with one of the premier institutions in South Africa, i.e, the University of Pretoria for the joint symposium on Critical Minerals. I am thankful to the University of Pretoria for initiating discussion between India and South Africa on the issue. Special credit goes to the Faculty of Engineering, of the University of Pretoria for collaborating with the High Commission of India.

Why are critical minerals such an important issue for both the countries? Both India and South Africa are big importers of hydrocarbons. This also makes us vulnerable to external geopolitics as it is happening today. The more renewable energy we have in our grid and transportation systems, the better it will be for our energy security. Critical minerals strategies are emerging as a pivotal element in the global semiconductor and renewable energy value chains. Critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper, nickel, and platinum group metals play a crucial role in this energy transition, serving as essential components in the manufacture of batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, and other green technologies.

India recently held the AI impact summit. The next Industrial Revolution will be A.I. driven, and the semiconductor chips which drive the A.I. heavily rely on these critical minerals. That's why, it is very crucial that we realize the importance of critical minerals for our lives and that of our countries. Neither India nor South Africa wants to miss this bus. Here comes the roles of Universities. Universities play a key role in the Research and Development of technologies for harnessing the potentials of these minerals.

Critical mineral demand is surging globally as clean energy deployment scales. The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that under its Net-Zero scenario, mineral demand for clean energy technologies will nearly triple by 2030.

This is where the synergy between India and South Africa comes into play. India has a huge requirement for critical minerals some of which can be met domestically but some will require import. To meet our requirements from abroad we have set up Khanij Bidesh India Limited or KABIL in 2019, which is prospecting for critical minerals abroad and has already identified some assets in Australia and Argentina.. We launched the National Critical Mineral Mission in January 2025, a seven-year programme with an outlay of approximately US$ 4 bn which aims to build a full domestic value chain supported by policy reforms and a critical list of 30 minerals which are crucial for its green energy transition, defense, and high-tech electronics. India has also joined the Mineral Security Partnership led by the United States.

India has also taken some important regulatory and structural steps to boost domestic production of critical minerals. For instance, the government has amended the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act to make it easier for the private sector to explore and mine strategic minerals like lithium and cobalt, streamline auction processes, and introduce exploration licences. As India embarks on the journey of Viksit Bharat or

Developed India 2047, minerals will continue to play an important role for the nation's progress.

India’s ambitious trajectory to achieving Net-Zero by 2070 entails energy independence and carbon neutrality that hinge critically on large-scale deployment of clean energy technologies like solar, wind and batteries. Recognising the strategic importance of critical minerals, policy decisions governing them have gained substantial momentum since India’s G20 presidency in 2023.

The countries in Africa wish that beneficiation and value addition of these minerals should take place in their country of origin themselves in order to benefit from the intrinsic value of the minerals and which will also generate employment for the local populations. We totally agree with this proposition. The presence of professors from India’s premier institutions is a first step towards this collaboration. I will request all present here to benefit not only from their interventions in the symposium but establish a long term relationship with the professors and premier institutions of India. Similarly, I will urge the professors to work to build a long term relationship.

Both India and South Africa share a unique bond of friendship, exemplified by our combined struggle against colonialism. Our historical experience of colonial exploitation has taught us that we should be self reliant to the extent possible. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for Atmanirbhar Bharat or Self-reliant India. Self -reliance in critical minerals would therefore be a desired outcome for both India and the continent of South Africa.

Today’s event, India – South Africa Symposium on Critical Minerals, is extremely relevant, this further emphasizes the need for greater cooperation and collaboration. India seeks to build partnerships with other like-minded countries and forums/actors in the realm of global supply chain resilience – both in the Global North and the Global South.

Our bilateral trade is on the rise, currently sitting at US$18.1Bn for FY 2025-26. This is expected to multiply over the next decade as the breadth of the relationship extends into new, mutually beneficial sectors. India is also negotiating a Preferential Trade Agreement with SACU for reduced trade barriers and enhanced market access between India and SACU countries.

Our strong bilateral ties offer immense opportunities, particularly in renewable energy, technology, manufacturing, and agriculture. Aligned interests under the G20, BRICS and IBSA frameworks create a promising environment for trade, entrepreneurs, and investors.

I thank you all for being a part of this symposium today. We look forward to a fruitful interaction between all the participants. I wish to see more such partnerships between Universities of South Africa and India for leading both countries into the next stage of the Industrial Revolution.

Thank you!

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