

HC's remarks for International Mother Language Day (MATARAM) Event at Chancery Lawns on 28 February 2026

Presidents, Office bearers of different Indian diaspora associations, my colleagues from the High Commission, participants of today's cultural events, ladies and gentlemen.

A warm welcome to all of you to the celebration of the International Mother Language Day, MATARAM. which has been celebrated since 2002. This year, the High Commission of India celebrates the day in honour of our Indian regional languages and our cultural diversity. Mother language day is symbolic of Unity in Diversity, which will be in full display today. I would have liked to speak in Hindi or Bhojpuri, which is my mother tongue but for your convenience, I am speaking in English.

Our Constitution recognizes 22 official languages. Besides we have countless dialects. Our host country, South Africa has total of 12 official languages as of 2023, following the addition of South African Sign Language (SASL) to the 11 previously recognized languages. Our mother tongue is part of our identity, culture and tradition, a legacy that gets passed from generation to generation. For many of us mother tongue is emotive. Let us work together to preserve our languages, heritage, arts and cultural forms. The more the speakers, the more the language thrives.

Since many of our diaspora associations are present with us today, I would like to use your presence to convey a few things.

Firstly regarding the High Commission's website: Our website has recently been updated to facilitate the registration of Indian citizens residing in South Africa. A dedicated link has been introduced specifically for student registration, providing a streamlined and efficient platform to profile and maintain updated records of Indian residents and students in the host country. This initiative aims to enhance communication, improve support services, and ensure that the Mission remains effectively connected with the diaspora and student community. These data points very helpful in other countries, especially during time of need. I recall how it helped in evacuation of students during CoVID during my stint in Kazakhstan. Please register and spread the word.

Secondly, the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC): This Programme recently closed on Wednesday, 25 February 2026. We encourage all eligible applicants who may have missed this round to remain attentive for the next cycle of applications, which is expected to be announced towards the end of

the year, typically around November 2026. Further details and updates will be made available on our website in due course.

Thirdly, Recording our Oral History: As part of our initiative on recording our history, I request each diaspora association to nominate three senior members from their respective regions who have lived in South Africa for a significant period of time. We would value the opportunity for them to share their experiences, reflect on the developments they have witnessed, and document the social, cultural, and economic changes observed over the years. Their insights will contribute meaningfully to preserving the rich legacy and evolving journey of our diaspora community in South Africa.

Fourthly, Consular Camp: after a gap of 4-5 years, the Mission will organize a consular camp to expedite and provide consular services. The first one will be conducted on the 15th of March 2026 in Laudium. As it has been publicized, the Government of India is extending OCI card identity up to the 7th generation of Indian immigrants to South Africa. The Mission will organize a dedicated workshop on OCI.

Fifth, The ICCR Scholarship: The ICCR Scholarship is currently opened to everyone who is interested to further their studies in selected Indian Universities. The closing date is the 18th of April 2026.

Sixth, KIP: the Government of India facilitates the Know India Programme (KIP), which is a three-week orientation programme designed primarily for young members of the Indian diaspora (Persons of Indian Origin – PIOs) living in South Africa between the ages of 18 and 30 years. This programme aims to familiarize participants with contemporary India, promote awareness about India's economic development, heritage, culture, and governance, provide exposure to India's scientific, technological & industrial advancement and strengthen cultural ties with India.

I would also like to mention that Ministry of External Affairs proposes to introduce the Overseas Mobility Facilitation and Welfare bill in the Parliament to replace the existing Emigration Act of 1983 which will have comprehensive emigration management and regulatory mechanisms for safe and orderly migration. India's new diaspora policy, centered on a 4C framework (Care, Connect, Celebrate, Contribute), transforms overseas Indians into strategic national partners for a "Viksit Bharat" (developed India).

So kindly note the above points and enjoy the day.

Thank you!