

**2<sup>nd</sup> PIO Connect Event at Capital Menlyn Maine, Pretoria (31 July 2026)**

**(Remarks by High Commissioner)**

Namaskar !

Vanakam !

Good Morning

Shri. Mohanlal Hira, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardee

Distinguished panellists, guests,

Deputy High Commissioner

Consul Generals of India in Johannesburg, Mr S Koventhan, in Cape Town, Ruby Jaspreet and Durban, Niteen Yeola

Members of the South African Indian community

our keynote speakers for today:

Dr. Murthi Sooboo and Mr. Fakir Hassen

Ladies and gentlemen,

Greetings and warm welcome to all!

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome all of you to the second edition of the PIO Connect event. As you would know the first edition of the PIO Connect was held in August 2025, a first ever gathering of this nature and was indeed a huge success. Listening to the discussions and deliberations was really enriching and gratifying.

Today's gathering is to celebrate the remarkable journey of a community which started coming to South Africa from 1860. Today, you are 1.8 million out of the 63.52 million population of South Africa. That may be about 3 percent of the total population but your contribution in making this rainbow nation is much greater. It is to celebrate this contribution that we gather here today. Last year our discussion focused on public life, business and sports. This time our emphasis is on academics, music, arts and literature among others.

As you know, India has made remarkable progress after independence, especially in the last few decades. We have done well economically and in other spheres. Our scientists, academics, musicians, artists and sportspersons have made us proud time and again during this journey. India aims to become a developed nation by 2047. This will happen with not only the efforts and contribution of Indians in India but also from the efforts and faith in India of all Indians settled abroad. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi puts it, this

would happen with Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas, that is everyone's support, everyone's progress and everyone's effort. Your contribution will be of great importance in India becoming a developed nation by 2047.

India is proud of the Indian Diaspora's achievements. Wherever they are, they have earned a good name, respect for themselves and for their mother country – India. Today the Indian Community in South Africa have inherited the optimism and enterprise of their forefathers who docked in Durban 166 years ago with hardly a penny in their pocket but with a burning desire to ensure a better life for their families. The present generation of South African Indians have scaled great heights in their areas of work, be it public life, academics, business, law, education, medicine, science, innovation, research, sports and arts.

It is a historical fact that the largest section of the Indian community have, intellectually and politically, always sided with the cause of national liberation. They readily embraced the cause of national unity, democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism, justice and equality. As this is Nelson Mandela's month let me quote from Nelson Mandela on this. In speeches marking the contributions of the Indian community, Mandela said:

**“The contribution of South Africans of Indian origin to our liberation struggle will forever occupy a special place in the history of our country.”**

India and South Africa are today strategic partners. History of the two nations converges with common struggles for justice, equality and human dignity. This is the country where Mahatma Gandhi spent his formative years. India strongly opposed apartheid—becoming the first country to sever trade ties with South Africa in 1946. Today both the countries maintain regular bilateral exchanges, are members of G20, BRICS, IBSA and are vocal about reforms in multilateral organizations, working shoulder to shoulder for common objectives and a prosperous global south.

As we often say, South African Indians are the living bridge of this partnership.

Let me take this opportunity to recognise some of the recent achievers from the community. Cricket arouses all kinds of passions in India. While the young Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is the toast of India right now, the achievement of Senuran Muthsamy, who scored a historic 109 against India in Guwahati in November 2025 was no less. The achievements of Keshav Maharaj as a bowler, as well as the bhajan that is played when

he enters to bat is well known. Yurav Premalal, the young golfer, won the Estrella Damm Catalunya Championship on the DP World Tour by 14 shots, a record winning margin for a maiden DP World Tour title. Prof. Salim Abdool Karim, is renowned for his global leadership in HIV prevention. I would also like to acknowledge the achievers in the Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South Africans under 35 who are shaping South Africa's future across diverse fields. Mr. Tyrel Singh, a 29-year-old admitted attorney from Boksburg, who has been recognized in the 2025 list in the sports category. This recognition highlights his outstanding contributions to sports law, ethics, and governance. I would also like to pay homage to prominent South African Indians who passed on in the last one year. One of them was Shanthie Naidoo, who was known for her fierce anti-apartheid resilience and contribution to the building of South Africa

Today, South African Indians retain a sense of cultural and social connection to India, a special place for your country of origin in your mind. The Government of India has schemes for the Indian Diaspora like the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Card which is a lifelong, multiple-entry visa that lets foreign citizens of Indian origin live, work, and study in India. Key features include lifelong validity, no local registration needed, and parity with NRIs. You will recall that during the Prime Minister's visit last year OCI eligibility was extended to the seventh generation and some of the qualifying criteria was relaxed. Mission will soon organize OCI camps to assist the community members who wish to apply for OCI. I would also like to mention that we are recording the "Oral History" with senior members of the community today to document their journey in South Africa, stories of their ancestors, challenges, success and contributions.

There are some other programmes as well for the Diaspora.

The Know India Programme (KIP) is a 3-week immersion tour for diaspora youth (aged 18–30) to visit historical sites, understand modern India's economic growth, and interact with local leaders. The Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) was introduced in 2006-07 to make higher education, in Indian Universities/Institutes in different fields (except medical and related courses) in India, accessible to the children of Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) & Non-resident Indians (NRIs) and promote India as a centre for higher studies. The proposed Girmitya Games 2027 are being planned as an international sporting and cultural event focusing on the global Indian diaspora—descendants of indentured laborers (girmityas)—with ongoing diplomatic discussions

involving diaspora communities. Our Consul Generals from different jurisdictions are present. Please connect with them to benefit from these programmes of the Government of India. Our Consul Generals will also be organising PIO Connect programmes in similar formats in their area of jurisdictions, so that everyone is aware of India's desire to have a deep connection with the diaspora.

Last year, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India visited South Africa for the G20 Leaders' Summit. Some of you would have met him. He calls the diaspora, proud ambassadors of India, who have brought respect and pride to India, the country of the origin of their ancestors. Today we have discussions in several sectors wherein the South African Indian community has contributed well and are leaders. Looking forward to the panel discussions and all the very best to all of you.

Thank you!

Jai Hind

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