

# **T&T, India converting cultural links into commercial possibilities**



Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism Satyakama Maharaj, left, presents a copy of his book to Indian High Commissioner Dr Pradeep Rajpurohit at the launch of the T&T Indian Business Federation at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Cooperation in Mt Hope on Sunday. Looking on is TTIBF president Vaalmikki Arjoon . PHOTO BY SHASTRI BOODAN



As the global economic map is being redrawn, for the first time in generations the compass is pointing decisively toward New Delhi, Dr Vaalmikki Arjoon, the first president of the T&T-India Business Federation (TTIBF), observed, describing India's evolution from a cultural touchstone into what he called "a US\$4.6 trillion juggernaut."

"India is now the fastest-growing major economy on the planet and on a collision course with becoming the world's third-largest economy," he continued, pointing to projections that growth will exceed 7.0 per cent in 2026, powered by a middle class of roughly 600 million people with rising demand for energy, food and high-tech services.

Yet, despite centuries of historical and cultural ties, Arjoon argued that commercial interactions between the two countries have not kept pace.

"In 2024, bilateral trade stood at just US\$368.96 million. In a world where India speaks the language of billions, we are still trading in millions," Arjoon told the Business Guardian in an interview on Tuesday.

The TTIBF was launched on Sunday at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Co-operation (MGICC) in Mount Hope.

He formed the TTIBF against what he described as a rapidly shifting global backdrop.

"Supply chains that took 50 years to build are being dismantled and rebuilt in five. The world is hunting for new, reliable and high-growth partners. Our private sector cannot afford to be a spectator."

"The federation is the vehicle to bridge the gap between our two business

communities,” he added.

“Our role is to identify concrete opportunities and drive partnerships with Indian firms that can strengthen and expand our local private sector.”

A new silk road

“For decades, our default commercial orientation has been toward North America, China and Europe,” Arjoon noted. “Those relationships remain vital, but India represents a fundamentally different opportunity a rising power with world-class capabilities in technology, pharmaceuticals and manufacturing.”

He distilled the Federation’s mandate into three words: “Identify. Connect. Advocate.”

“We are a stable, English-speaking jurisdiction with a skilled workforce. That makes us a natural landing pad for Indian capital seeking a foothold in the Americas,” he said.

The pharmaceutical sector, in his view, illustrates the scale of untapped potential. “India supplies roughly 20 per cent of global demand for generic medicines. By importing bulk active pharmaceutical ingredients from India, we can do more than reduce healthcare costs.”

“I see a pathway for us to become a regional packaging and distribution hub, exporting finished generics into Caricom and Latin America,” he added.

Energy also features prominently.

Firms such as ONGC Videsh and Reliance Industries, he argued, could increase competitiveness in local bid rounds.

“Greater participation drives stronger outcomes and supports long-term gas production.”

Turning to technology, Arjoon described the digital economy as “a frontier we must claim.” With the adoption of India’s Unified Payments Interface (UPI), he pointed out that cross-border transactions are becoming seamless.

“Attracting Indian IT firms to Tamana Intech Park is not just about jobs. It is about importing the DNA of a global tech superpower.”

Agriculture is also on his radar. “Indian precision irrigation systems and seed innovation can materially improve productivity and food security. These are practical solutions, not abstract ideas.”

Helping the little guy

Dr Arjoon is particularly focused on smaller enterprises.

“The big fish in business often have the networks and advisory capacity to navigate international markets. Many of our Small and Medium Enterprises do not.”

India’s scale and regulatory complexity can be daunting.

“Without institutional support, it is intimidating,” he acknowledged.

“That is precisely why the TTIBF was designed to lower those barriers.”

He is building direct pipelines to bodies such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and other export councils.

“We want curated introductions, credible market intelligence, and structured engagement for smaller players.”

Trade missions will be deliberate rather than symbolic.

“Our entrepreneurs will not just walk trade show floors. They will walk into pre-arranged meetings with clear commercial objectives. At the end of the day, deals are done face-to-face.”

He also pointed to India’s expanding venture capital ecosystem.

Indian investors are actively seeking emerging market opportunities.

If a young local tech entrepreneur has a viable product, we want to ensure that capital sees that potential.”

“The federation will maintain a rhythm of quarterly business forums and sector-specific roundtables,” he stressed.

“Commercial relationships are built through sustained, consistent contact,

not one-off ribbon-cutting ceremonies.”

## Commerce over conversation

Reflecting on the Federation’s origins, Arjoon emphasised that it was not born from a single flash of inspiration.

“It grew out of sustained discussions and shared conviction, with a group of businessmen, and India’s High Commissioner, Pradeep Singh Rajpurohit,” Arjoon said.

“For me, this is rooted in years of studying our economy’s vulnerabilities,” he explained.

“Being overly dependent on a few narrow markets and commodities is a risk we can no longer afford.”

He accepted the presidency, he indicated, because India represents “a strategic opportunity to shift the trajectory of our national development” and because “we must be at the table as the global economic order evolves.”

Public policy alignment is also emerging. Satyakama Maharaj, Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism, confirmed that a Partial Scope Trade Agreement with India is being pursued to reduce tariff barriers and encourage joint ventures, laying the groundwork for investment, employment and technology transfer.

Arjoon also highlighted Rajpurohit’s endorsement of deeper economic engagement. The High Commissioner has underscored the scope to elevate a longstanding partnership into a more robust commercial relationship, noting that while trade currently sits in the hundreds of millions of US dollars, engagement between economies of this scale should ultimately be measured in billions.

“The objective is to convert historical kinship into a high-performance economic engine,” Arjoon concluded.

“Our job is to identify, connect, and advocate in a sustained, professional manner. Indian private capital is searching for stable, English-speaking jurisdictions. We meet those criteria.”

By building direct institutional pipelines and supporting modernised tax and

customs frameworks, he added, “we can move from conversation to commerce and build bridges that transform shared history into shared prosperity.”