INDIA OFFERS ESWATINI 1ST WORLD TECH, CHEAPER MEDICINES

By Musa Simelane

India extended cutting-edge technologies and affordable pharmaceutical solutions that could transform the kingdom's economy and healthcare if taken up.

It comes in the form of advanced digital payment systems capable of transforming the kingdom to a cashless economy and affordable pharmaceutical solutions that could cut medicine costs dramatically.

Speaking during the 79th Independence Day of India celebrations at the India House in Thembelihle, Mbabane yesterday, High Commissioner Ram Prasad described Eswatini as a valued partner under India's guiding principle that "the world is one family." He said the two countries share warm diplomatic ties, but there is also untapped potential in technology and health cooperation.

One of the most significant offers is India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) — a real-time, mobile-based payment system that allows instant transfers between bank accounts. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India, UPI has been at the heart of India's digital transformation and financial inclusion drive.

"UPI has revolutionised how people in India conduct transactions — from street vendors to large corporations. It's instant, secure and accessible to anyone with a mobile phone linked to a bank account," said Prasad.

UPI is part of India Stack, a pioneering suite of open APIs that enables presence-less, paperless and cashless service delivery. The platform has allowed governments, businesses, start-ups and developers to create solutions that bring millions into the formal economy. The system was designed to be low-cost yet highly scalable, making it ideal for developing economies.



Indian High Commissioner to Eswatini Rami Prasad addressing the India community during the 79th Independence Day commemoration yesterday. (Pics: Musa Simelane)

"We have offered this kind of technology, which is under consideration by Eswatini government," he revealed.

If implemented in the kingdom, it could help drive a fully cashless economy, boost transparency and widened financial access to rural communities.

On the healthcare side, the commissioner said India has also offered Eswatini access to affordable generic medicines by adopting the Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) — the official book of drug standards in India. Published by the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission, the IP sets quality benchmarks for drug identity, purity and strength.

Generic

Signing onto the Indian Pharmacopoeia could open doors for high-quality generic medicines at a fraction of the current cost," Prasad said. "This would be a huge relief in the face of rising healthcare costs and medicine shortages."

Generic medicines are bioequivalent to brand-name drugs but are sold at much lower prices, making them vital for improving healthcare affordability. India, known as the "pharmacy of the world," is one of the largest producers of generic medicines globally.

Prasad confirmed that Eswatini has not yet signed the agreement and that it remains under government consideration. "It would be a big step forward for the country, particularly in light of the current medical crisis," he said.

The high commissioner also highlighted on-going health sector engagement between the two countries. In June 2024, a joint working group on health met with the Eswatini government to discuss cooperation. Eswatini has been invited to India for the next round of talks.

Beyond policy-level discussions, Prasad mentioned that India is investing in Eswatini's human capital through education and training. "This year, we have sent 28 people to India under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, which offers over 400 courses in fields (like healthcare, IT, agriculture and engineering)," Prasad said.

Additionally, 31 Emaswati students have taken up academic scholarships through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which offers under and post graduate to doctoral studies in all fields such as engineering, science, technology, arts, commerce etc.

Prasad pointed to India's own development journey as evidence of what is possible. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has grown from a relatively less developed country into the fourth largest economy in the world. It is now a global leader in information technology, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and space exploration.

India's 79 years of progress marked in Mbabane

The High Commission of India in Eswatini yesterday celebrated India's 79th Independence Day with the Indian community and friends, highlighting the country's remarkable achievements since 1947.

The event, which was held at the India House in Mbabane, began with High Commissioner Ram Prasad hoisting the Indian Tricolour, followed by the National Anthem. He then read the President of India's Independence Day address, paying tribute to Freedom Fighters who fought for independence from colonial rule. Prasad said India has advanced in many fields over the past 79 years from agriculture and pharmaceuticals to information technology and space exploration. Today, India is the world's fourth-largest economy, recording a 6.5% GDP growth rate in 2024–25.

Outlined

He outlined major developments of the past decade including clean drinking water for all through the Jal Jeevan Mission, new national highways under Bharatmala Pariyojana and the digitisation of government services and banking through UPI, 5G and Direct Benefit Transfers. Prasad also praised the Made in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) schemes for boosting local manufacturing and creating jobs. He cited the use of Indian-made weapons in Operation Sindoor as proof of India's growing defence industry. The celebration featured patriotic songs, dances and speeches by children from the Indian diaspora, calling on everyone to support Viksit Bharat 2047 (Developed India Mission). All performers were honoured with gifts from the High Commissioner and Vijayalakshmi.





Members of the India community came in numbers. (r) Some of the cultural performances that were a spectacle.

...Gives Eswatini zero-tariff advantage

Eswatini enjoys zero tariffs on exports to India under a special trade arrangement, a benefit that could open lucrative opportunities if fully tapped.

Indian High Commissioner Ram Prasad revealed the offer during celebrations marking India's 79th Independence Day at the India House in Thembelihle, Mbabane yesterday.

He said Eswatini has been granted Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status under a bilateral trade treaty signed between the two countries in 2002.

"Under the treaty, Eswatini enjoys zero tariffs when exporting to India," Prasad said. "This is a significant opportunity for the kingdom to expand trade volumes and diversify its exports."

Although trade between the two countries has historically been modest, Prasad noted that this year Eswatini recorded a trade surplus with India — a sign of improvement.

"According to economists, Eswatini has a trade surplus with India this year, which means trade is picking up," he said.

The MFN status ensures that Eswatini's goods enter the Indian market on equal footing with those from India's other key trade partners, avoiding customs duties that often limit export competitiveness.

When asked what India seeks from the arrangement, Prasad said his country was open to importing minerals and other products that Eswatini can competitively supply.

"We have proposed forming a joint trade committee to discuss and identify specific areas of cooperation," he said.

Agriculture is one sector where Prasad sees strong potential.

"Eswatini has fertile soil and the ability to produce organic premium fruits. Anything organic coming from here would have a market in India," he said.

"We already have cooperation in agriculture and once a memorandum of understanding is signed, we can take discussions forward."

Prasad stressed that India's consumer base — now over 1.4 billion people — presents an immense market for Eswatini's goods. Organic produce, in particular, is in high demand among India's growing middle class.

"We are ready to buy, but Eswatini must identify what it can supply competitively. Whatever Eswatini needs, it must ask India — almost everything is on the table," he said.