INDIA'S NEW ENVOY LANDS

BY SIBUSISO DLAMINI

India's new High Commissioner to Eswatini, Anand Prakash, has arrived in the country to begin his diplomatic assignment, opening a new chapter in a relationship that has grown considerably in development cooperation, education and high-level political engagement.

Prakash announced his arrival on his social media, describing it as the beginning of a new journey and stating that he was committed to his intention to deepen relations between the two countries.

"Looking forward to working with the government and people of Eswatini, and committed to deepening the ties and friendship between our nations," he wrote.

His arrival follows India's announcement last month that he would succeed outgoing High Commissioner Ram Prasad, who assumed office in the country in 2023.

Prakash is a 2009-batch officer of the Indian Foreign Service and was serving as a director in India's ministry of external affairs in New Delhi before his appointment to Mbabane.

He arrives to take charge of a diplomatic relationship that dates back more than five decades, but whose footprint in the kingdom has expanded significantly in recent years. India and Eswatini established bilateral relations in 1970. However, India only opened a resident diplomatic mission in Mbabane in August 2019.



India's new High Commissioner, Anand Prakash, welcomed by a member of the high commission staff upon arrival at the King Mswati III International Airport yesterday. *(Courtesy pic)*

Before then, its high commission in Maputo, Mozambique, was accredited to Eswatini.

The relationship has since developed around diplomacy, infrastructure, health, education, capacity building and trade, with India financing several major development projects in the kingdom. Among the most significant is the new Parliament building, for which India extended a line of credit worth approximately E1.76 billion (US$108.28 million). A further E169.4 million (US$10.4 million) line of credit was agreed for the establishment of a disaster recovery site for the National Data Centre at the Royal Science and Technology Park.

The park itself was constructed through an Indian line of credit worth approximately E325.8 million (US$20 million) and inaugurated during then Indian President Ram Nath Kovind's State visit to Eswatini in April 2018. That visit marked an important point in relations between the two countries.

Kovind addressed a joint sitting of Parliament, announced India's decision to establish a resident diplomatic mission in the country and was conferred the Order of the Lion, the kingdom's highest honour.

India's development assistance has also extended into agriculture, health and disaster relief.

Development

An earlier US$37.9 million agriculture development and mechanisation project was completed with Indian financing, while India has provided medicines, medical equipment and other forms of assistance over the years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India donated 20 000 doses of vaccines to Eswatini in March 2021, while its wider grant assistance has included support for the National Disaster Management Agency and irrigation infrastructure in the Hhohho region.

Education and professional training have increasingly become another pillar of the relationship.

India has now increased its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation training allocation for Eswatini from 30 places to 50 in 2018 and then to 70 from the 2025/26 period. More than 400 locals and government officials have benefited from the programme, according to information from the Indian government.

From the 2026/27 academic year, 40 Indian Council for Cultural Relations scholarship places have also been allocated to students from Eswatini. The diplomatic traffic has moved in both directions. King Mswati III has visited India on several occasions, including for the India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015 and the CII-EXIM Bank Conclave in 2017.

Several Cabinet ministers have travelled to India in recent years for engagements covering health, agriculture, energy, tourism, ICT and economic development. India has similarly stepped up its engagement in Eswatini. In July 2025, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles Pabitra Margherita visited the kingdom, where he met His Majesty King Mswati III, Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini and Cabinet ministers.

The two countries also held their second Foreign Office Consultations in Mbabane in February 2024, while cooperation agreements cover areas including trade, health and medicine and visa exemptions for diplomatic and official passport holders.

Economic ties, however, remain relatively modest compared with the scale of the broader diplomatic relationship. India and the kingdom have had a bilateral trade agreement since 2002, under which the two countries grant each other Most Favoured Nation status.

Indian exports to Eswatini have included pharmaceuticals, fuel products, fertilisers and machinery, while imports from the kingdom have largely included organic chemicals.