



## Consulate General of India Johannesburg

### Press Release

**Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (Festival of Independence)** is an initiative of the Government of India to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of progressive India and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements. It is an embodiment of all that is progressive about India's socio-cultural, political and economic identity. The official journey of this festival commenced on 12th March, 2021 which started a 75-week countdown to our 75th anniversary of Independence and will end post a year on 15th August, 2023.

In keeping with this objective, the Consulate General of India in Johannesburg has planned a host of activities in with India's diverse diaspora in the coming two years. The Consulate would invite people to participate digitally in the events that unfold through the year. These events will highlight India's culture and heritage and bring awareness to the unique legacy of India.

To intensify our efforts in this direction, the Consulate in association with High Commission of India in Pretoria is organising a special week-long programme to celebrate the shared legacy of India and South Africa - Gandhiji.

**On 2nd October 2021**, we are paying tribute to Gandhiji and Madiba at the Tolstoy Farm in Lawley. This will be followed by a five km walk from Tolstoy Farm to the Lawley train station and back, singing of devotional songs culminating with a Gandhian cuisine.

**Tolstoy Farm**, named after famous Russian author and philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, was established in 1910 by Mahatma Gandhi. The farm, initially known as Roodepoort No. 49 was a 1100-acre piece of land purchased by Hermann Kallenbach, who was Gandhiji's staunch supporter and friend, from a Johannesburg Town Councillor L. V. Partridge for £2 000 on 30 May 1910. There were an estimated 1 000 fruit-bearing trees with peaches, apricots, figs, almonds, walnuts and a small plantation of eucalyptus trees. One of the aims of establishing the farm was to serve as training ground for new members of the passive resistance movement, prisoners and as a haven for their families. Tolstoy farm housed a diverse group of people who included Gujaratis, Tamils, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Parsis and African families. At its height, Tolstoy Farm supported a community of about fifty adults and thirty children.

The tribute at Tolstoy Farm will be preceded by a garlanding of Gandhiji's statue at Constitution Hill.

**On 3rd - 4th October 2021**, we are doing a Gandhian trail to promote peace, non-violence and harmony. Revisiting Gandhi's footsteps will also generate awareness in younger generations in South Africa about the long, arduous and bitter freedom struggle of both South Africa and India.

With 75 people in two luxury busses, the journey will embark from Tolstoy Farm early in the morning of 3rd October. Our first stop will be Pietermaritzburg train station.

**Pietermaritzburg station**, as everyone is aware, was the one at which history was made where a young lawyer took a stand against racial inequality and began his life-long fight against discrimination.

In May 1893, on a train trip to Pretoria, Gandhiji sat in a "whites only" compartment on the train, which was a first-class part of the vehicle. Despite instructions to leave, he remained defiant, bravely demanding the same rights to sit here as the white folk, despite the inner turmoil and terror that he felt. In this moment, he made the decision not to return to India and blindly forget the inequalities that he had witnessed and experienced first-hand during his time in South Africa. He rather chose to stay here and become an active advocate of non-violent opposition to racism. In the poignant words of the late former president, [Nelson Mandela](#), *"When Gandhi was evicted from the train, an Indian visiting South Africa fell; but when Gandhi rose, an Indian South African rose"*.

Other venue in Pietermaritzburg will be the prison where Kasturba, wife of Gandhiji, was held captive in 1913.

**On 4th October**, the day will start with a visit to the Phoenix Settlement where Deputy Mayor, Ms. Ela Gandhi and others will be there to welcome the group. The Consulate will donate 20 computers to the Gandhian Development Trust which runs an IT Centre at the settlement for the underprivileged children. The Centre was looted during the recent racial riots.

**The Phoenix Settlement** comprised of 100 acres of land and was purchased by Gandhiji in 1904. It is on this Settlement that Gandhiji started his journey of transforming from a successful lawyer to a simple peasant with a passion for liberation, nonviolence and spirituality. He began his experiments with communal living, non-possession, interfaith harmony, simplicity, environmental protection, conservation, manual labour, social and economic justice, nonviolent action, principles of education and truth.

After Phoenix, the group will start for Ladysmith.

During the Battle of Spion Kop near **Ladysmith** between the British forces and two Boer states, Gandhiji served as a volunteer stretcher-bearer in 1900. He also trained others for various duties.

Our last stop will be **Dundee**. In 1913, Gandhiji held 2 protest meetings in the Dundee Temple grounds, as part of the campaign against the hated poll tax. A group of eleven Indian women, including Kasturba Gandhi, courted imprisonment by crossing from Natal into the Transvaal without permits. The Indian labourers on the coal mines around Durnacol and Newcastle went on a sympathy strike. The coal mine owners raised objections to it. Hence, Gandhiji took responsibility for these miners and their families. He decided to walk the 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children from the mines to the Tolstoy settlement, but was arrested along the way. Tried in the court room of Dundee again on 11 November 1913, Gandhiji was sentenced to a fine of 60 pounds or a prison sentence of 9 months, with hard labour. He chose the prison sentence and did not pay the fine.

The group will be back by 4<sup>th</sup> October evening to the Consulate premises.

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021, a musical evening is planned with Gandhiji's favourite devotional songs. Singers from the Indian diaspora will be lending their voice to spread the message of universal peace.

The activities will conclude on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021 with a non-commercial screening of the movie, "The Making of the Mahatma" by Shyam Benegal in partnership with SABC. The movie is based on a book by Fatima Meer and depicts Gandhiji's life in South Africa.

**1 October 2021**  
**Johannesburg**