

## Amid China's OBOR, India renews outreach to Africa

Virendra Pandit



*Asia-Africa Growth Corridor will rope in Japan, US: Modi*

Gandhinagar, May 23:

Barely a week after China unveiled its ambitious One Belt, One Road (OBOR) policy as a diplomatic-economic 'peace offensive' across Asia and Europe, India, too, has launched a soft power push towards Africa with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday, offering the erstwhile 'Dark Continent' the light of mutual cooperation and economic development in a number of areas.

Inaugurating the 52nd annual meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) Group here, Modi deftly roped in the US and Japan, who are also cautiously watching China's \$900-billion initiative in the backdrop of Beijing's activities in South China Sea and its littoral states.

Representatives from 80 countries are participating in the AfDB meeting, being held here from May 22 to 26.

"India is also working with the US and Japan to support development in Africa. I gladly recall my detailed conversation with (Japanese) Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe during my visit to Tokyo...In our joint declaration, we mentioned an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor and proposed further conversations with...Africa.

"Indian and Japanese research institutions have come up with a vision document...This was done in consultation with think tanks from Africa. I understand the vision document would be presented at the (AfDB) board meeting later. The idea is that India and Japan, with other willing partners, would explore joint initiatives in skills, health, infrastructure, manufacturing and connectivity," Modi said.

"India's commodity trade with Africa in 2015-16 was higher than our commodity trade with the United States of America."

The PM spoke at length, reminding the gathering about India's association with Africa over the centuries. "Historically, communities from western India, especially Gujarat, and the eastern coast of Africa have settled in each other's lands. The Siddis (of Gujarat) are said to have come from East Africa. The Bohra communities in coastal Kenya date back to the 12th century.

"Vasco da Gama is said to have reached Calicut with the help of a Gujarati sailor from Malindi. The Dhows of Gujarat took merchandise in both directions. Ancient links between the societies have enriched our cultures. The rich Swahili language includes many Hindi words," he said.

### **History of ties**

"During the colonial era, 32,000 Indians came to Kenya to build the iconic Mombasa-Uganda railway. Many lost their lives during its construction. Around 6,000 of them stayed back and took their families. Many of them started small businesses called *dukas*, and came to be known as the *dukkawalas*.

"Mahatma Gandhi, another Gujarati, perfected his tools of non-violent struggle in South Africa. He also visited Tanzania in 1912 along with Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Several leaders of Indian origin supported strongly, and fought alongside, the leaders of Africa's struggles for independence, including Mr (Julius) Nyerere, Mr (Jomo) Kenyatta, and Mr Nelson Mandela."

Modi further said the third India-Africa Summit in 2015 was attended by all the 54 African countries having diplomatic relations with India. A record 41 African countries participated at the level of Heads of State or Government. “Since 2015, I have visited six African countries, our President has visited three, and the Vice-President visited seven. There is no country in Africa that has not been visited by an Indian Minister in the last three years.”

India joined the African Development Fund in 1982 and the African Development Bank in 1983. For the most recent African Development Fund replenishment, India pledged \$29 million.

### **Farming wealth**

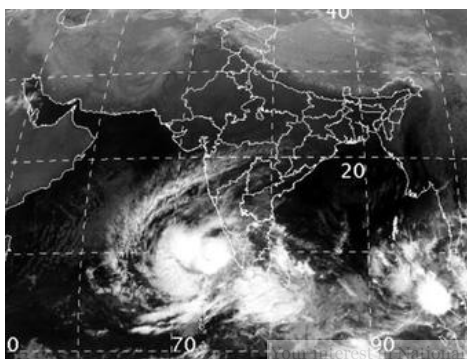
“The theme of this event is ‘Transforming agriculture for wealth creation in Africa’. This is an area where India and the Bank can fruitfully join hands,” Modi concluded.

It, however, remains to be seen how far India can pip China in Africa. Contrast this: China’s bilateral trade with Africa in 2015 was worth nearly \$200 billion, compared to India’s \$57 billion, which is projected to be \$100 billion in 2018.

India is the fifth largest investor in Africa with \$72 billion worth of investments so far vis-à-vis China’s \$60 billion worth of fresh capital investments pledged in 2016.

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