

Golden era of summit seasons for Africa

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Front row (L-R) Then -chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and other African heads of state pose for a group photo at TICAD in Nairobi, Kenya, last year. File picture: Daniels Urungu/EPA

Leaders of 54 African countries and international organisations will gather once more in Yokohama, Japan, next week from August 28 - 30, for the 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 7).

Since the inaugural TICAD 1 in 1993, the World Bank Group, UN, UN Development Programme, and the AU Commission (AUC) are partners in this summit.

For Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, this summit, under the theme, Advancing Africa's Development through People, Technology and Innovation, provides him with a golden opportunity to achieve a number of strategic foreign policy goals for Japan.

Firstly, haunted by the country's unsettled aggressive WWII record in the region, especially in South Korea and China, Japan seeks to strengthen its relationship with the African continent.

Secondly, Japan also wishes to regain ground in infrastructure development space, a field which it widely perceives to be losing to its arch-rival China in Africa. Abe will certainly use TICAD 7 to rebrand Japan in Africa in line with his muscular foreign policy.

Due to the large numbers of African countries' membership in the UN system (they constitute a third of UN membership), the continent is an important one for any country seeking a positive global influence.

In 2018, more African leaders attended the FOCAC Summit in Beijing than the UNGA in New York.

The US-Africa Business Summit was held in Maputo, Mozambique, almost two months ago.

President Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, will have his own Russia-Africa show with African leaders at Sochi in early October. This is indeed a golden era of summit seasons for Africa.

Japan has already entered into an agreement with India to counter the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative through their own India, Japan and the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).

It is important for African leaders to avoid getting entangled in Japan's ideological jabs against China's Africa policy. Japan uses Africa to fight China.

It is widely reported by Japanese newspapers such as Japan Today that Tokyo plans to include "concern" over excessive debt or the so-called Debt Diplomacy in the declaration of the TICAD 7 which is in line with Washington's language to discredit Beijing in Africa.

According to Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, "international assistance should be provided in accordance with international standards such as transparency, openness and economic efficiency".

These principles are crucial components of Japan's quality infrastructure initiative.

African leaders should avoid the usage of ideological phrases or the winner takes all mentality akin to the Cold War era that Japan uses in distinguishing itself from China.

Confronted by a fast shrinking working age, Japan is looking at employing some of the African students studying in its universities when they graduate.

Africa should welcome Japanese assistance in training its people; however, this should not cause a brain drain on the continent.

Unfortunately, Japanese strict adherence to the OECD and unwary support for the US's Africa policy stands to undermine its own Africa policy.

To win in Africa, Japan ought to abandon its previous Cold War mentality. Throughout the Cold War Japan supported Washington's policy in Africa.

In South Africa, for example, the Japan government unashamedly accepted “honorary white” status to fit into the apartheid system.

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