



National

Africa, India, And Japan: A Partnership Shaping The 21st Century Global Economy

India and Japan's collaboration in Africa combines infrastructure, technology, and capacity-building to offer a sustainable, transparent alternative to China's influence and traditional aid models.



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addresses the Japan-India-Africa Business Forum (PTI)



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New Delhi: At a time when global power dynamics are shifting, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has reaffirmed the strategic importance of India-Japan cooperation in Africa, emphasising the need for sustainable development, economic resilience, and an alternative to debt-driven infrastructure models.

Speaking at the India-Japan-Africa Business Forum via virtual mode on Wednesday, Jaishankar highlighted how collaborative investments in Africa not only promote economic growth but also serve as a counterbalance to monopolistic influences in the region.

"India's approach to Africa has always been guided by a deep-rooted commitment to building long-term, mutually-beneficial partnerships," Jaishankar said. "Unlike extractive models of engagement, India believes in capacity-building, skill development, and technology transfer, ensuring that African countries not only benefit from investments but also develop self-sustaining growth ecosystems."

Highlighting India's contribution in developing Africa's economy, he said that initiatives such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, the Pan-African e-Network Project, and High-Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) have strengthened local capacities across education, health, and digital infrastructure.

"To provide high-quality virtual education and medical services to our African partners, the e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti network was launched in 2019 for tele-education and tele-medicine," Jaishankar said. "Under this initiative, youth from 19 African countries have enrolled for various courses in undergraduate, postgraduate and diploma courses. India believes that investments in human capital would be a truly collaborative and mutually beneficial partnership with Africa."

Jaishankar pointed out that India is Africa's fourth largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching nearly \$100 billion and growing steadily. "India has also made a significant commitment to Africa's connectivity and infrastructure development, with over \$12 billion in concessional credit and more than 200 completed projects spread across the continent in areas such as railways, power generation, agriculture, and water supply," he stated.

"India's development projects in various sectors such as drinking water schemes to irrigation, rural solar electrification, power plants, transmission lines, cement, sugar and textile factories, technology parks, railway infrastructure, etc. have generated local employment and, in fact, changed life in Africa."

Jaishankar also impressed upon the gathering how India has emerged as the voice of the Global South. When India hosted the G20 Summit in New Delhi in 2023, the African Union was brought on board as a full member of the intergovernmental forum.

"As the Global South emerges as the future driver of economic growth, it is imperative that we ensure its aspirations and interests are fully represented on the global stage," he stated. "India has consistently championed this cause, whether through the Voice of the Global South Summits or indeed our G20 presidency, where African Union's full membership in the G20 was successfully ensured. And, of course, in platforms such as the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)."

Describing how India-Japan cooperation is critical for Africa's growth, Jaishankar said that with India set for continued rapid economic growth, it serves as an ideal hub for Japanese companies seeking to expand into Africa and the Middle East.

"Japanese investments, India's solid industrial base and digital capacities and African's talent and consumption can come together to create beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders," he stated. "India and Japan can also collaborate to strengthen resilient supply chains for African countries, particularly in critical and emerging sectors."

It is worth mentioning here that in recent years, India and Japan have intensified their engagement with Africa, recognising the continent's strategic and economic significance in global geopolitics. Their collaboration in Africa is rooted in mutual interests – economic growth, strategic partnerships, and a counterbalance to China's growing influence. By combining India's historical and cultural ties with Africa and Japan's financial and technological prowess, both nations are offering an alternative model of development focused on sustainability, inclusivity, and mutual benefit.

The India-Japan collaboration in Africa was formalised through the 2017 Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), which aims to promote connectivity, quality infrastructure, and people-to-people partnerships. This initiative aligned with India's commitment to South-South cooperation and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision, providing African nations with development alternatives beyond China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

One of the core areas of India-Japan cooperation in Africa is infrastructure development. Unlike China's BRI, which has faced criticism for creating debt traps, India and Japan emphasise quality infrastructure, sustainability, and transparency.

While Japan has financed the expansion of Kenya's largest port in Mombasa, Indian companies have contributed to related logistics and trade facilitation. India and Japan are also working together to enhance road and rail connectivity in countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique.

Why the India-Japan collaboration in Africa assumes significance is because it has come at a time of post-second Donald Trump presidency in the US.

"Africa is not in Trump's interest," Harsh V Pant, Professor of International Relations with King's India Institute at King's College London and Vice-President (Studies and Foreign Policy) at the Observer Research Foundation think tank, told ETV Bharat. "He has halted all US aid to the Global South after assuming office for a second term."

The US has been providing over 40 per cent of the world's humanitarian aid, and spending around 1 per cent of its budget on foreign aid, including military aid. Through Executive Order 14169, titled "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," hours after he took office on January 20 this year, Trump suspended all US foreign development assistance programmes in order to conduct a review.

Pant said that this has put China at a monopolistic advantage in terms of development aid programmes in Africa, which is not in the interest of the Global South.

"That is why India and Japan have to step up," he said. "China has got the geostrategic heft. But African countries know that it is not in their interest. They want to diversify." Pant further explained that India's development aid ambitions are growing and New Delhi has a comfort level with Tokyo in meeting these.

"India brings to the table its historical ties with Africa," he said. "Japan brings its technical expertise. This provides an alternative development model." He also referred to the AAGC and said that though this was a sound idea, it never really took off for various reasons.

Ruchita Beri, Senior Fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation think tank and an expert on Africa, concurred. Beri said that following the announcement of the AAGC in 2017, there have been discussions going on for eight long years now about how to take this forward.

"Today's Africa-India-Japan Business Forum should be seen as a precursor to the TICAD scheduled to be held in August this year," she said. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), launched in 1993, promotes Africa's sustainable development and economic growth, focusing on trade, investment, and infrastructure development. It has been an evolving element in Japan's long-term commitment to fostering peace and stability in Africa through collaborative partnerships.

Beri said that India can be a bridge for exporting products of Japanese companies based in the country to Africa. Abhishek Mishra, Associate Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, said that the AAGC envisioned India and Japan's development agenda based on promoting sustainable and inclusive growth for countries of the Global South, whose challenges are unique which require solutions that are relatable and implantable in their local context.

"The symbiotic relationship between security and growth and the twin pillars of connectivity (infrastructure, institutional) and human resource development (capacities, skills, people-to-people linkages, and sustainable development) provided the basis for India and Japan to announce the AAGC," Mishra told ETV Bharat. "Unfortunately, after announcing, a period of lull ensued due to reduced political will, shifting political priorities, emergence of competing corridors like IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) and INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor)."

Interestingly, Mishra expressed the view that Indian and Japanese private investors differed on their long-term objectives in Africa. "The initiative, once hailed as an alternative model of development to China's BRI, had almost been an afterthought, though track 1.5 consultations between India, Japan and Africa continued to be undertaken," he said.

"Since the Ninth TICAD is coming up in August 2025, and probably the Fourth IAFS too later this year, the India-Japan-Africa Business Forum was convened to provide a sustained

impetus to our engagement with Africa. The forum also gave an opportunity to signal to our African partners of the importance India and Japan attach to developing its strategic ties with the African continent."

Mishra is of the view that playing to their comparative advantages, whether through Japanese investments, Indian human resource development, digital capacities and knowledge of African markets, or Africa's talent and viable markets, the task of revitalisation of the AAGC by convening such regular business forums is an imperative for India, Japan and Africa.

To sum up, India and Japan's cooperation in Africa represents a strategic partnership that goes beyond economic interests, shaping the future of global trade, security, and sustainability. By prioritising inclusive growth, capacity building, and transparent development, they offer African nations an alternative to China's BRI, strengthening Africa's role in the global economy while fostering geopolitical stability.

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