



# Africa in India's Geo-Strategic Map

Guest Lecture by Amb Rajiv Bhatia

November 17, 2023

11 am to 12:30 pm IST

Platform: Zoom

## ABOUT THE EVENT

Since ancient times, India and Africa have had cultural interactions, and in recent years, the relationship has grown in terms of its geo-strategic value and is economically more mature than in the past. Since post-independence, India has been engaging Africa through various diplomatic initiatives, from the non-aligned movement of the 1950s and renewed economic and diplomatic interest in the 1970s to holding the first India-Africa summit in 1980. Following the Cold War, India's economic reforms further boosted India's engagement with the African continent. From the initial focus on political issues such as support for decolonisation, it further focused on advanced cooperation in multilateral forums for south-south cooperation, and in the last four decades, economic and security issues have increasingly come to the fore. Three India-Africa summits were held in 2008, 2011 and 2015. India-Africa relations are also growing in the minerals sector, making India a net importer in this sector. India is also Africa's fourth-largest trading partner. India also actively participates in the infrastructural development of Africa, along with countries like Japan, through initiatives like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. Engagement with Africa supports India's global ambitions as New Delhi continues to see itself as an advocate for the Global South. The Africa Union's official entry into the G20 under India's presidency is the latest example of Global South cooperation.

As relations grow, India's engagement with Africa in the future will have to become much more fine-tuned to the various differences among the African states. Enhancing risk mitigation strategies for private sector investments and commercial operations in Africa will be an ongoing challenge for India.

### KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- Evolution of India-Africa Relations
- Analysis of the current trade and investment patterns between India and Africa
- China's Footprint in Africa
- India's Action Plan to re-engage Africa
- India-Africa South-South Cooperation in Global Platforms

## SPEAKERS



### **Amb. Rajiv Bhatia**

Former Indian Ambassador (Kenya, South Africa, Lesotho). Distinguished Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies Programme at Gateway House

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia is a member of CII's International Advisory Council, Trade Policy Council and Africa Committee. He is the Chair of FICCI's Task Force on Blue Economy and served as Chair of Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC. He is a founding member of the Kalinga International Foundation and a member of the governing council of Asian Confluence. As Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) from 2012-15, he played a key role in strengthening India's Track-II research and outreach activities. During a 37-year innings in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), he served as Ambassador to Myanmar and Mexico and as High Commissioner to Kenya, South Africa and Lesotho. He dealt with a part of South Asia, while posted as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. A prolific columnist, he is also a regular speaker on foreign policy and diplomacy in India and abroad. He was Senior Visiting Research Fellow during 2011-13 at the Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. He holds a master's degree in political science from Allahabad University.

His first book *India in Global Affairs: Perspectives from Sapru House* (KW Publishers, 2015) presented a sober and insightful view of India's contemporary foreign policy. His second book *India-Myanmar Relations: Changing contours* (Routledge 2016) received critical acclaim. His third book *India-Africa Relations: Changing Horizons* (Routledge 2022) has been receiving positive reviews.

## MODERATOR



**Ms Neelima A**

Associate-Research, CPPR

Neelima is a Post Graduate in MA Geopolitics and International Relations from the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE). Her interest and expertise are in West Asia, South Asia, Multilateralism and Global and National Security. She has been leading several IR projects in CPPR and is continuously engaged in conducting discussions on relevant IR issues.

## SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

- Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia highlighted how important Africa is to India's geopolitical considerations. The conversation underscored that India's ambition to become a global power requires deep and meaningful engagement with Africa.
- In light of shifting geopolitics, the relationship between India and Africa was examined with an emphasis on the outcomes of the G20 Summit in 2023.
- Africa is expected to account for 25% of the global population by 2050 due to its rapid population growth. African history from traditional to colonial times was explored, as well as the current state of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- India's Plan of Action: The speaker discussed the three stages of India-Africa relations, with a particular emphasis on trade during Manmohan Singh's tenure and its subsequent development under the Modi era.
- The speaker also offered five points for the emerging collaboration between India and Africa:
  - i) Emphasis on implementation of the G20 decisions

- ii) Organising the India Africa Summit in 2024 and clarifying the strategies for IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) and BRICS 2.0 (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
  - iii) To boost global trade to \$150 billion within the next three years, it is necessary to prioritise the economic pillar by allocating funds for investment and trade promotion.
  - iv) To engage proactively with the third space by motivating think tanks and universities.
  - v) To address the needs of the African diaspora (such as providing work visas to African graduates of Indian universities).
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** The lecture revealed a gap in knowledge, a preponderance of negative information, and difficulty accessing accurate news, highlighting the need for an open dialogue between government and business representatives regarding restrictions.
  - **Trade and Investment Opportunities:** Africa can become the "food basket of the world" with India's assistance. Cooperation on digital public infrastructure through bilateral agreements with African nations can go a long way. Africa has a ready market for any kind of goods, particularly products and services from farmers.
  - **Diaspora Engagement:** Given the importance of the diaspora to the economies of countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, the government is making efforts to encourage diaspora participation. A balanced strategy is required, with a priority placed on local institutions and people.
  - **Relevant issues** such as China's influence in Africa, India's plan to rebuild relations with the continent, and changing trade and investment trends were discussed in the lecture.
  - India actively engages in deliberate defence and maritime security exercises with African nations while simultaneously monitoring China's naval operations in the region. Viewpoints were shared regarding the importance of the blue economy, prospective initiatives, and the role of knowledge diplomacy in enhancing relationships.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Achieving India's goal of becoming a global power is unattainable without taking into account its strategic ties with Africa, given the continent's increasing importance on the global stage.
- The relationship between India and Africa should be viewed from a multilateral perspective due to the changing world order. Additionally, studies on Africa ought to be conducted from an entirely different perspective than how they are usually done in other regions of the globe. As per the reports, by 2050, 25 percent of the world will be filled with Africans.
- Africa can be the food basket of India, as there is a massive scope for cooperation in agriculture.
- The emerging African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is promising for the progress of Africa as it'll enable the unification of Africa through trade.
- India's engagement in building relations with African nations has further evolved during the pandemic. India's vaccine diplomacy helped the Africans overcome the COVID-19 virus when the West turned themselves against Africans in supplying the vaccines.
- At least six or seven countries, including the US, EU, Japan, Australia, UAE, and other countries, have taken part in Africa, including China, which has not only been huge but also critical. However, one key takeaway worth looking into further will be the political commitment to China-Africa relations, which must be emulated by India.
- India is opening its mission to every region of Africa. India started this mission during the tenure of Dr. Manmohan Singh as the finance minister of India. India's involvement with Africa in peacekeeping (collaboration with the UN) has also increased within the past few years. The central part of it is the involvement of Indian women soldiers in the peacekeeping process in Africa.
- In the early 21st century, trade between India and African nations amounted to approximately USD 5 billion. Presently, this figure has surged

- to USD 100 billion, with Indian investments in Africa reaching a substantial USD 70 billion. India's investment in Africa in building its nations can be seen in every region. Till now, India has invested around \$ 13 billion in the development of African nations. The discussion highlighted India's 5-point formula for enhancing engagement, including the need for implementation, economic collaboration, and proactive involvement with the diaspora.
- The India-Africa collaboration is said to be promising because of the population factor. Both regions comprise 42% of the world population, and collaboration will help develop India and Africa as a whole.

