

General Studies-2; Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

India's Africa Outreach

1) Introduction

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is undertaking a state visit to three African countries, namely Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa.
- India shares close, warm and friendly relations with Africa which are cemented by robust development partnership and a large presence of the Indian diaspora.
- As many African countries transitioned from colonialism to freedom, India's democracy was the template for them.

2) Highlights of PM's Visit

- The visit of the Prime Minister to Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa will further strengthen our relations with the African continent.
- This is the first ever Prime Ministerial visit from India to Rwanda.
- It is also the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Uganda in over 20 years.
- PM Narendra Modi's Uganda visit marks the 25th high-level bilateral visit from India to Africa in just four years—underlining a significant build-up in India's ties with the continent.
- India has extended lines of credit (LoCs) worth \$200 million to Rwanda.
- Prime Minister Modi announced that the first Indian diplomatic mission will be opened in Rwanda.
- India and Rwanda signed an agreement of \$100 million for development of industrial parks and expansion of Special Economic Zones.
- Another \$100 million for agriculture and irrigation infrastructure.
- Modi gifted 200 cows as a contribution from India to the 'Girinka' scheme of Rwanda.
- The move emphasised common rural ethos in the two countries.
- In Uganda, too, India extended two lines of credit of \$141 million for electricity lines and sub-stations, and \$64 million for agriculture and dairy production.

3) Africa visits by Modi and Xi

- Chinese president Xi Jinping, too, is on a four-nation visit to the continent.
- China and India are among Africa's most important and fast-growing economic partners.
- Political analysts say the Africa visits by Modi and Xi are evidence of competition between the Asian giants for strategic space.
- The continent with its abundant natural resources and improving governance structures is being viewed as the next global growth hub.
- Therefore, the moves that India and China make in Africa today will have a huge impact on the future.

4) India's past mistakes

- Given the historic ties between many African countries and India, a more robust engagement would have paid much higher dividends.
- India's lack of a consistent proactive policy towards Africa led to the Chinese leading in terms of investment and trade.

- Chinese investments were up to \$ 3.5 trillion in 2015. In contrast, India will cross the \$ 500 billion mark in 2020.
- India's ties with the continent were seemingly strong between the 1940s and 1980s.
- The following decade saw India reorient its policies towards the West, and ceding strategic space to other countries, including China.
- Gap between promise and performance in India's engagement.
- India's ties with Francophone Africa remain weak. But China's Africa strategy has no such disparity.

5) India's Recent Engagement in Africa

- Africa has been the top priority of India's Foreign Policy.
- In recent years, India has reinforced its relations with Africa to reclaim lost ground.
- India is focussing on lines of credit and capacity building, including skilling the local people.
- India recently announced that it would be opening 18 new embassies in Africa between 2018 and 2021.
- India's new embassy in Kigali is expected to open shortly.

6) Where India wins over China

- India's policy has focused on job creation in the countries it has invested in, China has tended to bring in its own labour causing resentment among the locals.
- India is rectifying past mistakes and re-engaging with Africa in a big way as the series of high profile visits in the last four years shows.
- The Chinese model has often been criticised for creating huge debts for the nation in which it sets up projects, the Nairobi-Mombasa rail link being one example of this.
- The \$ 4 billion project has left Kenya with enormous debts.
- Chinese Chequebook diplomacy has come under criticism.
- Indian approach is seen as benign with mix of grants and loans offered at nominal interest rates.
- The Chinese military base in Djibouti has raised fears that Beijing is abandoning its non-interference policy in the region.
- Many African countries are wary of putting all their eggs in the Chinese basket. This is something India must exploit to its advantage.
- India has been helping Rwanda in capacity building, infrastructure development and ICT.
- It is a matter of pride that India is a trusted development partner of Rwanda.
- Large presence of the Indian Diaspora and Mahatma Gandhi's link with South Africa cements the ties.

7) Where China wins over India

- China has emphasised investments in infrastructure and business, building roads, container terminals, ports and railways, and acquiring copper and platinum mines, besides oil and gas assets.
- China already has diplomatic presence in 43 of the 54 countries in Africa.
- India cannot match the resources that China has deployed in Africa.
- Chinese security cooperation with Africa has advanced at much faster pace.
- According to the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research, China's arms exports to Africa have increased 55 per cent during the period 2013-17.
- India does not have much of a defence industrial base to enter the African arms market.
- Beijing has nearly 2,400 peacekeepers currently deployed in Africa and is training many regional peacekeepers.

8) Way Forward

- India and Indian companies must shed their traditional conservatism and pursue bigger gains in Africa.
- India must push to see that \$10 billion line of credit from 2015 to 2020 is used appropriately.
- India must play to its natural strengths and move swiftly into the education and infrastructure fields as well as IT in Africa.
- India should boost ties with Morocco. Morocco can be India's launchpad for engagements with Francophone Africa.

