



India-Kenya: An Ancient and Enduring Friendship

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By SUCHITRA DURAI

As we celebrate the 72nd Independence Day of India today, we are also celebrating a bilateral landmark – the Indian Mission in Nairobi marks 70 years this month. It was in August 1948 that Apa Saheb Pant, appointed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as India's Commissioner General to the then British East African Protectorate, arrived by ship in Kenya and opened a resident mission in Nairobi.

Apa Saheb Pant famously referred to India and Kenya as “next shore neighbours”. As two Indian Ocean littoral states, exchanges between India and the East Coast of Africa, particularly Kenya, are not new. They have been recorded as far back as in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea – gold, ivory and ostrich feathers from East Africa were bartered for spices, gemstones and cotton textiles from India. Communities from both sides of the Indian Ocean settled in each other's lands: The Bohra traders of Gujarat settled in Lamu as early as the 12th Century CE and the people of East Africa, known as Siddhis, settled down in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The freedom movement in India influenced events in Kenya: Harry Thuku admired Mahatma Gandhi, while Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga were in touch with Indian leaders. In fact, for the Kapenguria trial, PM Nehru sent Diwan Chaman Lal, Indian lawyer and MP, to defend Kenyatta and the other five leaders.

Indians migrated to Kenya in the late 19th Century to build the Mombasa-Uganda railway as well as to lay the foundation for trade and business into the hinterland. Over time, they became part of the political, social and economic fabric of the country. Makhan Singh, the region's first trade union leader, Pio Gama Pinto and businessman philanthropist Jeevanjee were all well-known Indian leaders.

Trade, business and the colonial legacy have resulted in many Hindi words becoming part of the Swahili vocabulary: Duka, pesa, chapati, samosa, kachumbari. The Indian rupee was legal tender in the 1920s in Kenya. Biashara street in the Central Business District was once known as the Indian Bazaar. Many young Kenyans may be surprised to know that the first cuttings of the famous tea plantations of Kericho came from Assam.



Indian banks have been operating in Kenya since 1953. And Nairobi was Air India's second overseas destination after London. We are hopeful of the airline's return! Traditionally, India has been one of Kenya's largest trade partners. What is less advertised is that India is also the third largest source of FDI into Kenya, about \$3 billion (Sh302 billion) has been invested in Kenya by Indians.



According to some, Indian FDI has created most jobs in Kenya. This has been the Indian approach. Wherever our companies go, they encourage and depend upon local talent and expertise. This is particularly relevant in Kenya, which is rich in human resources.

In the last few years, political interaction has been intense. PM Narendra Modi came to Kenya in July 2016 on a state visit, while President Uhuru Kenyatta visited India twice – in October 2015 for the third India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) and in January last year for a state visit.

India is extending several concessional lines of credit: For the revival of Rivatex Factory in Eldoret, for power transmission projects, development of the SME sector and agricultural mechanisation. Our portfolio is around \$220 million (Sh22.1 billion).

The health sector is an area of interest to both countries. We are happy that thousands of Kenyan patients have returned from India after successful treatment. We understand that Kenya would like to replicate the Indian experience in healthcare and become a medical hub in the region.

Like in India, cancer is a major cause of deaths in Kenya. That is why my government gifted a state-of-the-art telecobalt machine – the Bhabhatron - to Kenyatta National Hospital. The Bhabhatron is a workhorse that treats 70 patients per day. We trained around 20 oncologists in 2017. We are also working with the Kenya Defence Forces on defence medical cooperation.

India has been particularly known in Kenya for its strengths in capacity building. The government of India began its bursary scheme for Kenyan students in 1948. Since 1964, when India launched its Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, we have trained thousands of Kenyan officials. Last year alone, we trained more than 400 Kenyans both from the national as well as county governments. These are fully funded programmes on diverse subjects from accounting, mass communication, rural development, IT, port management, renewable energy, etc.

Additionally every year, 52 university scholarships – at the graduate, postgraduate and PhD levels - are offered. We also offer training slots for KDF. This is not a one-way street – a senior Indian officer is currently training at Kenya's National Defence College. This is really a fine example of South-South cooperation.

Both India and Kenya are lucky to have a demographic dividend. The abundant energy of the young has to be productively channelised. Thus, we are looking to working together for skill development of our youth.

India is closely involved in the government of Kenya's Big Four agenda announced by President Uhuru Kenyatta. We are upgrading Rivatex Factory in Eldoret, through which 2,000 direct jobs and several thousand indirect jobs through forward and backward linkages are due to be created. We are extending a line of credit to IDB Capital for the development of the SME sector.

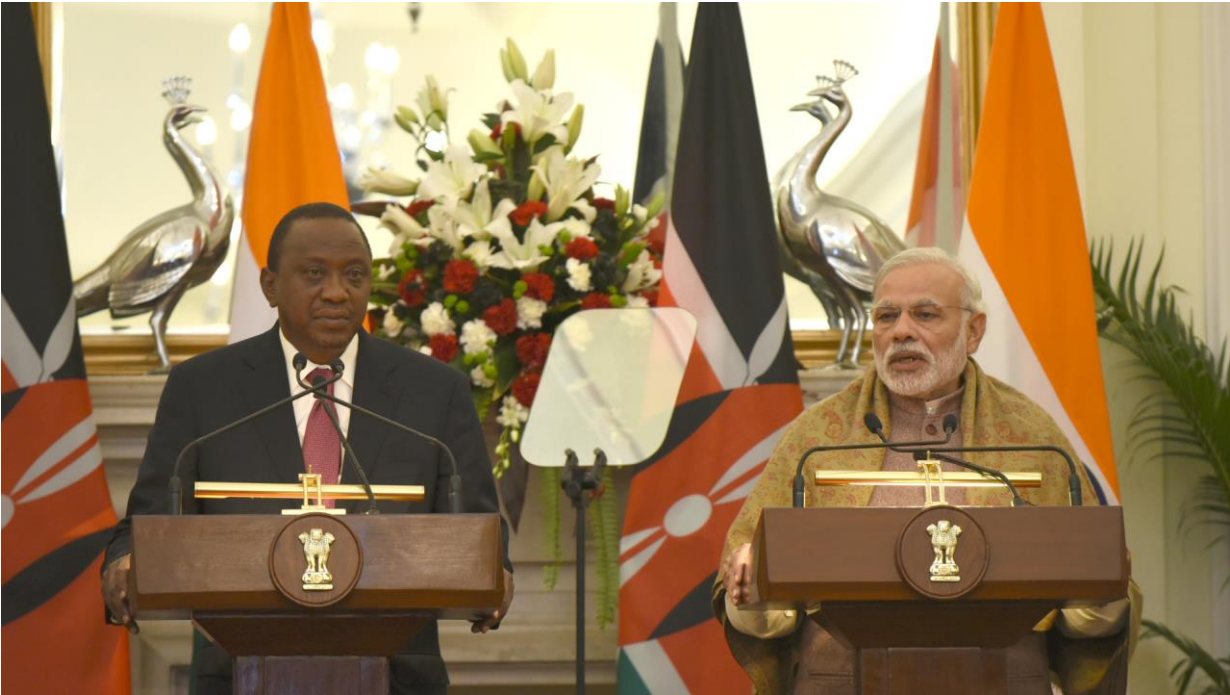
We recently trained 20 Kenyan officers from the Department of Housing. In the health sector, we are collaborating in cancer care and in the training of medical specialists. Recently, I handed over the first consignment of essential medicines worth \$1 million (Sh100 million), announced by PM Modi. As regards food security, India's line of credit of \$100 million (Sh10 billion) in the area of agricultural mechanisation fits into the government of Kenya's programme.

Both India and Kenya are blessed with abundant sunlight. We look forward to collaborating as part of the International Solar Alliance. We also look forward to working together in the area of the Blue Economy.

People-to-people contacts are the cornerstone of any bilateral relationship. Indians are the third-largest group of tourists to Kenya. Last year, 60,000 Indian tourists visited Kenya. This year, the numbers are likely to increase. My own friends and family have been contributing to this! We also organised the first-ever Festival of India in Kenya – Urafiki Utsav – in 2016 and followed it up with visits of several cultural groups in 2017. Two cultural troupes from Marsabit enchanted Indian audiences during the Suraj Kund mela in February 2018.



Make in India and Make it Kenya are complementary ideas. Nairobi is an important economic, transportation and communication hub in the East African region. More than 60 major Indian companies have already opened their offices, some of them have set up manufacturing units. The government of India has been encouraging Indian industry to invest in Kenya. Some like Tatas and Airtel are household names. We also invite Kenyan investors to come to India.



India's freedom struggle is closely linked to Africa. Gandhiji's satyagraha movement based on truth and ahimsa or non-violence was honed during his 21-year stay in South Africa. An independent India led the international community on decolonisation and against apartheid in Africa. Our development partnership with Africa currently includes 180 lines of credit worth around \$11 billion (Sh1.1 trillion) in more than 40 countries. Indian companies have invested over \$54 billion (Sh5.4 trillion) in Africa.

Indian soldiers have served in more than a dozen UN peacekeeping missions in Africa since our first mission in Congo in 1960. At present, 6,000 Indian soldiers and officers serve in five peacekeeping operations in Africa. Indian women established the first all-female police unit of the UN in Liberia. Our defence and security cooperation is growing with African nations, even as we work together to counter terrorism and piracy and keep our seas secure and open.

During his recent visit to neighbouring Uganda, PM Modi delivered a seminal speech in Parliament outlining India's engagement with Africa, which is guided by 10 principles.

India and Kenya are old and reliable partners. Magical Kenya and Incredible India can continue to prosper together.

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