

Unpacking India's Defence Cooperation with Africa

*Ruchita Beri**

India's defence cooperation with African countries is on the rise. This cooperation is to some extent driven by the common security challenges faced by these countries. It is also guided by three principles: keeping African priorities first, SAGAR (Security and Growth for All) and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', the World is One Family. Training of African defence officers, involvement in United Nations Peacekeeping on the continent and maritime cooperation are the three pillars of defence engagement with African countries. Certain recent initiatives such as the India–Africa Defence Dialogue and joint military exercises indicate the desire of India and Africa to enhance defence cooperation.

Keywords: *India, Africa, Defence Cooperation*

India and the African continent have a shared history and extensive economic linkages. In recent years, India has accorded high priority to developing closer relations with Africa. This was reiterated by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi while announcing the 'Ten Guiding Principles of India's engagement with Africa' during an address to the Ugandan parliament in 2018. He said, 'Africa will be at the top of our priorities. We will continue to intensify and deepen our engagement with Africa. As we have shown, it will be sustained

* Ms Ruchita Beri is a Consultant at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDS), New Delhi.

and regular.¹ This attention is also visible through the increase in high-level visits from India to the continent. There have been over 36 high-level visits at the level of the Prime Minister, President and Vice President from India to the African region in the last nine years.² The African countries are equally interested in engaging with India. More than a hundred high-level visits from Africa to India during the same period underline this point.³ Over the years, India has developed a close political and economic partnership with African countries. This is reflected in the increasing bilateral visits and various initiatives taken by the government and the private sector. In a push towards diplomatic engagement with Africa, India has announced the opening of 18 new diplomatic missions in the region.⁴ India has also institutionalised the engagement with African countries by organising the first India–Africa Forum Summit in 2008. The third India–Africa Forum Summit held in 2015 had representation from all 54 countries of the continent. Likewise, India has established a development partnership that is based on the African priorities. Over the years, the trade between India and African countries has grown considerably. In 2022–23, the two-way trade is valued at around US\$ 98 billion and is expected to cross US\$ 100 billion soon.⁵ Similarly, the multiple initiatives by the private sector, such as the annual India–Africa Growth Conclave organised by Confederation of India Industry (CII) in collaboration with the Export Import Bank (EXIM) of India has given a boost to the trade and investment between India and Africa. At the same time, defence and security cooperation has been an important aspect of the India–Africa engagement.⁶ This article unpacks the common security challenges, guiding principles, main pillars and new platforms of India–Africa defence cooperation.

CONVERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES

Converging security challenges have nudged India and Africa towards closer defence cooperation. Some of the significant challenges that India and African countries currently face include rise of terrorism, extremism, maritime insecurity, energy deficit and climate change. Terrorism is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges to global peace and security. India has been a victim of terrorism for several decades. In recent years, several parts of Africa too have witnessed a rise in terrorism. In the Horn of Africa, Somalia is the hub of terror activities of the group Al Shabab with severe impact on neighbouring countries, in particular Kenya and Uganda. In Sahel, a region in west and north central Africa, several terrorist groups have

been active. There is a growing presence of Islamic State in Greater Sahara and Jamaat Nursat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (a coalition of Salafi jihadiists) in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In Nigeria, the notorious Boko Haram terror group has terrorised a large section of population in the country. In Southern Africa, Mozambique has been a target of terrorist attacks for the last five years. Similarly, North Africa continues to face challenges of terrorism. In Libya, ISIS and Al Qaeda are still active; Egypt has faced the threat of terror group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) an affiliate of ISIS; in Algeria Al Qaeda continues to be a challenge, while in Tunisia some jihadist terror groups, affiliates of Al Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM), are still active.⁷

Africa, like India, has long coastline and is blessed with abundant marine resources that contribute to the blue economy. India and African countries share the waters of the Indian Ocean and have faced common maritime security challenges such as piracy, maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, armed robbery and illegal fishing. These challenges impact the stability of African nations, as security of marine resources and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) is vital for economic growth. In the 2000s, the threat of piracy was mainly in the eastern seaboard of Africa, that is, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In the last decade, due to the combined efforts of the international community, piracy incidents have gone down considerably in the east coast of Africa. However, there is a considerable increase in piracy and maritime terrorism in the Gulf of Guinea region of West Africa.

Drug and narcotics trafficking is another menace that both Africa and India have faced. India is wedged between the two largest opium production centres of the world, the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent. These are both destinations and transit routes for the drugs produced in these regions. Drug trafficking is also growing across the African continent. Africa serves as transshipment centre for West Europe. The West African region has emerged as a major hub for trafficking of drugs from Latin America to Europe.⁸ Similarly, for the last few decades, East and Southern Africa have gained prominence for the transshipment of drugs from the Afghanistan/Pakistan region to Western European markets.⁹

Similarly, like India, the third largest energy consumer in the world, energy security is an important concern for Africa.¹⁰ According to the African Development Bank, over 640 million Africans have no access to energy.¹¹ This implies that African countries have an electricity access rate of around 40 per cent only.¹² Energy access is crucial for unlocking the economic potential of African continent and a key driver for economic growth.

Climate change is leading to frequent and severe natural disasters, increase in temperatures, changing rainfall patterns around the world including India. According to a report by India's National Institute of Disaster Management, from 1995 to 2020 India experienced over 1,058 incidents of natural disasters, like floods, cyclones, drought and heatwaves.¹³ Africa too has had a fair share of disasters in the recent years. According to the World Bank, rise in temperature and changes in rainfall patterns have led to an increase in natural disasters across the African region.¹⁴ The Horn, Sahel and Southern Africa have been most affected by these natural disasters. The foregoing discussion on common security challenges underlines the need for defence cooperation between India and Africa.

DEFENCE COOPERATION: CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

The concept of defence cooperation and defence diplomacy have been much debated academically.¹⁵ The emergence of the term 'defence diplomacy' can be traced to the post-Cold War rethinking on security issues. It was the British government that used the term for the first time in 1998. It defined the concept as a 'peaceful use of defence for development of relations with a country'.¹⁶ This may promote an exchange of personnel, ships, aircraft, training and exercises and military assistance among other things. More interestingly, research by the late Professor Martin Edmonds of Lancaster University and Greg Mills, former National Director, South Africa Institute of International Affairs around the same time described 'defence diplomacy' as any use of armed forces to achieve national goals.¹⁷ On the other hand, India's Ministry of Defence (MoD) defines 'defence diplomacy' as a 'form of exchanges of high-level defence-related visits and dialogue on security challenges, port calls and defence cooperation as training exchanges, combined exercises, sourcing, development, production and marketing of defence equipment, and other forms of cooperation'.¹⁸

In this article, the definition provided by India's MoD is used to define defence cooperation, which is very similar to the British definition of defence diplomacy. Further, it appears that India's defence cooperation with Africa is guided by three principles. First, 'African priorities are India's priorities for engagement with the region', as enshrined in the ten guiding principles of India–Africa engagement. These principles were announced by Prime Minister Modi during his visit to Uganda in 2018.¹⁹ Thus, India supports the African Union (AU) goal of a conflict-free Africa, making peace a reality for all embedded within its Agenda 2063. The second principle is the Security

and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative—a vision shared by Prime Minister Modi during his visit to Mauritius in 2015. This vision reiterates that security and growth are the two sides of the same coin and that security is an enabler for development. The third principle that guides the partnership is that of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’—The World is One Family, which denotes the interconnectedness of the world and is echoed in the African concept of Ubuntu ‘I am for you are.’

KEY AREAS OF INDIA–AFRICA DEFENCE COOPERATION

India's defence cooperation with African countries is not new and can be traced back to the 1960s. Broadly speaking, India's defence cooperation with Africa has been centred on three pillars: providing training to African defence personnel, participating in the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations on the continent and promoting maritime cooperation.

Providing training to African defence personnel

Over the years, India has trained military officers from several African countries at Indian military training institutions. The Ministry of External Affairs' Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, set up in 1964, has been the main mechanism for training of African military officers in India's premier military institutions. There are several factors that have attracted the African countries towards defence training in India. Indian Armed Forces have participated in the United Nations Peacekeeping missions in Africa. Over the years they have acquired a reputation of being a professional force mixed with compassion. These qualities are very attractive to the African countries. At the same time, the Indian Armed Forces have a large operational experience. The Indian Army has been involved in sub-conventional operations, such as tackling insurgency, militancy and terrorism for decades.²⁰ They also have combat experience of high-intensity operations. The Indian Army's experience in counter-insurgency operations, jungle and urban warfare is a speciality that appeals to African countries. Similarity of defence equipment also makes India a sought-after destination for defence training. India has a substantial inventory of Soviet or Russian origin defence equipment. In 2018–22, Russia was the largest supplier of weapons to India, followed by France.²¹ During the same period, Russia was the top weapons supplier for African countries.²²

Over the years, India has trained several African officers in Indian military training institutions such as the Defence Services Staff College and

the National Defence College. It has also sent training teams to some African countries as per their requirement. For example, the Indian Air Force has sent training teams to Botswana, Mauritius, Zambia and Namibia.²³ Some of the prominent African alumni include the former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari as well as the former President of Ghana Fred Akkufo.

Participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations on the continent

India has a long track record of contributing troops for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs). It is one of the countries contributing the largest number of troops and has contributed around 2,75,000 troops for UNPKOs across the world.²⁴ However, the majority of UN peacekeeping missions are at present deployed in Africa. India has participated in most of the UN peacekeeping missions on the continent, beginning with the Congo in 1960. This was also India's first UN peace enforcement operation, as it helped regain Katanga province from the rebels. India was also involved in the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia (1989–91). Indian military observers, police officers, election supervisors were involved in overseeing the withdrawal of foreign troops, conduct of elections during the country's transition to independence.²⁵ In the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) (1989–99), India contributed immensely towards the conventional peacekeeping as well as in reconstructing bridges over various rivers and constructing an airfield. The country was recovering from a long-drawn civil war.²⁶

Indian peacekeepers were deployed in the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) (1992–94) with the mandate to restore peace and conduct elections in the country that had witnessed two decades of civil war. India had also deployed peacekeepers in one of the most difficult UN operations, that is, United Nations Operation in Somalia, UNISOM II (1993–94). While the mission was a failure, India was lauded for providing humanitarian relief. Similarly in the United Nations Mission in Rwanda, UNMIR (1994–96), India has been praised for the peacekeepers' staying power. India maintained its presence in the mission despite other troop contributors withdrawing from the conflict-torn nation.²⁷

India was also present in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMIL) (1999–2001). During this mission, Indian peacekeepers under the leadership of Force Commander Lt Gen. V.K. Jetly displayed great courage in launching 'Operation Khukhri' and rescuing the 233 UN peacekeepers held as hostage by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.²⁸

During the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) (2007–17), India was applauded for sending the first female Formed Police Unit (FPU) for a UNPKO. These peacekeepers earned accolades from both the United Nations and the Liberian government for the good work and for being trend-setters and an inspiration for the women in the country.²⁹

Currently, Indian peacekeepers are present in UN missions in South Sudan, Abeiye, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Western Sahara. India's contribution towards UN peacekeeping in Africa is exceptional in terms of its professionalism, humanitarian concern and promotion of women peace and security agenda. India has also been supportive of the African Union's efforts towards enhancing its regional peace and security architecture.

Promoting maritime cooperation

In the backdrop of the converging maritime security challenges, in recent years, India has enhanced maritime cooperation with Indian Ocean littoral states in Africa. India's Maritime Security Strategy (2015) refers to several tools of maritime diplomacy, such as frequent naval interactions, joint maritime exercises, etc.³⁰ India has deployed the Indian Navy to support African efforts for anti-piracy operations, for surveillance and humanitarian and disaster relief operations and conducting hydrographic surveys in the Indian Ocean littoral African countries.

Anti-Piracy Efforts: India has been involved in anti-piracy efforts in the Western Indian Ocean Region for the last two decades. India's involvement was driven by various factors. The spread of Somali piracy to the west coast of India threatened the country's maritime trade, particularly, energy trade.³¹ It also impacted the safety of Indian seafarers that comprise of around 6–7 per cent of the global marine professionals.³² India launched anti-piracy patrols in Gulf of Aden in 2008. Since then, the Indian Navy has been continuously deployed in the region. India is also a founder member of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) set up in 2009 in pursuance of a UN Security Council Resolution-UNSCR 1981 to coordinate the government, non-government, multilateral and industry efforts to end piracy off Somalia.³³ In 2020, India joined the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC), concerned with the repression of piracy and armed robbery in the Western Indian Ocean region and the Gulf of Aden.³⁴ This Code provides the framework for cooperation in capacity-building to tackle the threat of piracy in the region. It came into existence in 2009 and currently 20 countries of the region are signatories of the Code. In 2017, the DCoC was amended further by the members in a meeting at Jeddah. The Jeddah Amendment (JA)

has broadened the scope of the Code to include challenges such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, human trafficking, maritime terrorism and other illicit maritime activities within its ambit.³⁵ India has been informally cooperating with DCoC/JA member states for a long time; its observer status has helped in formalising the cooperation to enhance maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean region. The other observer states are Japan, Norway, the UK and the US.

Surveillance–Joint Patrols: At the same time, India has cooperated with some African countries for surveillance and joint patrol duties. Earliest deployment can be traced back to 2003 and 2004 when Mozambique invited the Indian Navy to provide security cover and patrol its vast coastline as the country hosted two international events: the African Union Summit and the World Economic Forum.³⁶ In 2006, India and Mozambique concretised defence cooperation by signing a formal agreement.³⁷ This agreement covered anti-piracy patrolling by the Indian Navy in the Mozambique Channel. Mauritius and Seychelles offer another example of close maritime cooperation in the area of surveillance. Since 2009, India has deployed its navy bi-annually to these Indian Ocean island countries in Africa on request for surveillance of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). While initially it was to deal with growing threat from pirates, later on drug trafficking, human smuggling and maritime terrorism have been the main maritime security concerns in these countries.³⁸ The Indian Navy has deployed Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft and P 8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft in Seychelles to deal with such challenges faced by the African country, in keeping with an MoU signed with the country.³⁹ India's deployment and maintenance of Coastal Surveillance Radars in Seychelles and Mauritius is another step towards closer maritime ties.⁴⁰ To some extent, this deployment may be guided by China's increasing presence in African countries. Over the years, China has been actively engaging several African countries including the Indian Ocean island countries like Seychelles and Mauritius. It has increased its presence through infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative and is also increasing its security engagement in the region.⁴¹ While India's concern over increasing Chinese footprint in the region may be a factor, increasing maritime domain awareness may be an equally plausible reason.⁴²

Port visits and Joint Exercises: India's increasing strategic convergence with African countries is visible with the periodic port visits of India Naval Ship (INS) to various African countries. Recently, Indian Navy's missile guided frigate, INS Tarkash visited Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, Namibia

in Southern Africa and Senegal in West Africa.⁴³ INS Tarkash and INS Kochi's visit to the North African countries of Sudan and Morocco and Egypt respectively were followed by maritime partnership exercises with the respective navies.⁴⁴

In the past, the Indian Navy has invited several African countries for the MILAN series of biennial exercises. The most significant development is the launch of the first India–Mozambique–Tanzania trilateral exercise in Dar es Salaam in October 2022. INS Tarkash represented India during the exercise.⁴⁵ This maritime exercise was conducted with the aim to enhance security of the Indian Ocean littoral countries, support in capacity-building of the Tanzanian and Mozambican navies to deal with their current challenges, promote interoperability and share best practices.

Another important development was the first joint maritime exercise between Indian and Nigerian navies during the visit of INS Tarkash in 2022. This is the first instance of joint deployment by Indian and Nigerian navies. The focus of the exercise was counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Guinea, a region that has been prone to piracy, armed robbery and maritime terrorism.⁴⁶

The visit of Indian naval ships to Africa also presents an opportunity to cooperate with external actors, such as the US in the region. In 2021, INS Talwar participated in the multinational maritime exercise Cutlass Express held under the aegis of US Africa command and led by the US Naval Force.⁴⁷ The primary objective of this exercise is to improve maritime cooperation between the US and the East African Western Indian Ocean states. The secondary objective is to train the contingents from the participating countries in the region to enforce maritime law.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Another area where the Indian Navy has been involved in Africa is to provide Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR). There is no doubt that Indian Armed Forces have been deeply involved in HADR activities within India. In recent years, the Indian Navy has been the first responder to several disaster-struck countries in Africa. For example, when Mozambique was hit by Cyclone Idai (2019) and Madagascar by Cyclone Dianne (2020), the Indian Navy was the first responder. In 2020, the Indian Navy provided COVID-19 relief to several IOR countries in Africa such as Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles and Comoros under Mission SAGAR. Similarly, the Indian Navy also delivered food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea during the pandemic.⁴⁸

RECENT INITIATIVES

Traditionally, defence cooperation has been discussed bilaterally through the defence wings in India's diplomatic missions in African countries. Low priority given to defence cooperation in the region is visible from the fact that at present there are defence wings in only five diplomatic missions in Africa. In a bid to strengthen India's defence diplomacy, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced the creation of 10 more defence attaché posts across the world.⁴⁹ Of these, some were to be deployed in Africa. In another important step towards enhancing defence cooperation, India organised the first India–Africa Defence Dialogue, a meeting of defence ministers from India and Africa on the sidelines of DefExpo 2020. The second dialogue took place in Gandhinagar in October 2022 on the sidelines of DefExpo2022. India has also conducted joint military exercises with representatives from African countries in India and hosted the first India–Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave.

India–Africa Defence Dialogue: An important initiative launched by India towards enhancing defence cooperation with African countries was the first India–Africa Defence Ministers Conference (IADMC) held in Lucknow in 2020 on the sidelines of India's premier defence exhibition DefExpo 2020. This initiative was renamed as India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) in 2022 and institutionalised to be held on the sidelines of each DefExpo subsequently. This initiative denotes the emergence of a formal mechanism to deliberate on matters related to defence between India and African countries. Fifty African countries, including 20 defence ministers participated in the IADD held at Gandhinagar in 2022.⁵⁰ This dialogue was driven with the aim to strengthen and synergise defence cooperation with African countries. The idea was also to foster 'inclusive collaboration based on shared security challenges'.⁵¹ The fact that dialogue was held alongside the DefExpo indicates that India is interested in showcasing its burgeoning defence industry to the African partners. Over the years, India's defence industry has witnessed an expansion.⁵² Prime Minister Modi's clarion call for 'Make in India, Make for the World' has heightened this move. The hosting of IADD also implied that India is ready to move beyond the traditional areas of defence cooperation that hinged on training, UN peacekeeping and maritime cooperation. In recent years, India has become an important supplier of defence equipment to some of the southern African countries such as Mozambique, Mauritius and Seychelles.⁵³ The launch of IADD at the DefExpo 2022 has opened the possibility of enhancing defence industry

collaboration with African countries. This has been reiterated by India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh,

India has emerged as a leading defence exporter in recent years. A defence manufacturing ecosystem has been created here ... with the aim to empower our African friends ... we are also committed to sharing our expertise and knowledge in defence manufacturing, research and development.⁵⁴

There is no doubt that the India–Africa Defence Dialogue provides an opportunity for India to invite African countries to explore Indian defence equipment to meet their security requirements.

Africa–India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX): The first AFINDEX-19 took place in March 2019 in Pune, India. Contingents of 17 African countries (Benin, Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) participated in the exercise.⁵⁵ During the second edition of this joint military exercise, AFINDEX-2023, held in March 2023 in Pune, a total of 25 countries from the African region participated along with Indian troops.⁵⁶

The aim of the exercise is to practice the planning and conduct of Humanitarian Mine Action and UNPKO. This exercise also strived towards building military relations, understand the best practices and promote interoperability while executing the exercise.

As mentioned earlier, India is one of the largest Troop Contributing Country (TCC) in the world with a long history of UN peacekeeping, particularly in the African continent. In recent years quite a few African countries have been contributing troops for the UNPKO. Rwanda, Egypt, Ghana, Senegal and Morocco are the top five TCCs to the UN from the African continent.⁵⁷ In most of the UNPKOs in Africa, Indian peacekeepers have to serve along with the UN peacekeepers from African countries. For example, in MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, India is the largest TCC.⁵⁸ South Africa, Morocco, Tanzania and Malawi are some of the African countries that have sent their peacekeepers to this UN mission. The AFINDEX multinational exercise helps in team-building and provides practice of peacekeeping tasks such as protection of civilians, patrolling, combat deployment and convoy protection.

Another important aim of the exercise is in terms of training on Humanitarian Mine Action. Africa is one of the most mine-affected regions in the world. Landmines were used and stockpiled in various colonial and

post-colonial conflicts in Africa. Millions of people have lost their lives or have been maimed due to these deadly weapons. It has been over two decades since the adoption of the landmark anti-personnel mine ban treaty. However, 70 countries globally are still contaminated.⁵⁹ Many of these countries are in Africa. Ethiopia, Angola, Eritrea and Zimbabwe are some of the countries that have large contamination by anti-personnel landmines.⁶⁰ The Indian Army has a significant experience in humanitarian mine action. This exercise will help train the participants in the various nuances related to humanitarian mine clearance and disposal of the explosive remnants of war.

India–Africa Army Chiefs’ Conclave: Similarly, along with the AFINDEX, the India–Africa Army Chiefs’ Conclave was held in March 2023 with the theme ‘Africa–India Militaries for Regional Unity–AMRUT’. The main purpose is to create greater synergy between the armed forces of India and Africa as part of a regional cooperation mechanism. The other important aim is to develop an institutional framework for joint training between the armed forces of African countries and India.

CONCLUSION

India and African countries have a longstanding and multifaceted political and economic partnership. This significant relationship has fostered deeper cooperation in the defence sphere. Future cooperation in defence sphere will depend on India and African countries efforts to understand each other’s security challenges and capacities. India may also work towards enhancing training programmes, capacity-building and support towards peacekeeping and post conflict reconstruction in Africa. An early convening of the next India–Africa Forum Summit will also be helpful. The fourth India–Africa Summit was planned to take place in 2020. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the Summit. Announcement of the next Summit will validate the high priority given to Africa in India’s foreign policy. Expanding the military wings in Indian missions in Africa will also boost defence cooperation between India and African countries. Hopefully, India will create defence wings in more diplomatic missions in Africa to enhance greater interaction between military personnel and to consider country-specific priorities. India and Africa may also strive towards deeper cooperation in the domain of defence industry including through joint ventures, research & development and supply of defence equipment on mutually beneficial terms. Efforts should also continue towards greater exchange of ideas and dialogue on defence issues between the governments, think tanks, academia

and the private sector of India and African countries. Finally, India and Africa together make one-third of humanity, an augmentation of defence cooperation will hopefully serve towards building a secure and prosperous future for all.

NOTES

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 19. These principle are: Africa will be top of India's foreign policy priorities, India's partnership with continent will be guided by African priorities, India will increase its trade and investment with the region, India will share its digital revolution experience with African countries, increase cooperation in agriculture, dealing with climate change and energy security, combating terrorism, maritime security, work

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