

Title:

India Wants To Fight China in Africa

Word Count:

385

Summary:

India has its task cut out in Africa - to gain the advantage lost to China.

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Article Body:

NEW DELHI: India has its task cut out in Africa - to gain the advantage lost to China. New Delhi has at last realised the immense potential Africa offers and has organised the first India-Africa conference which formally begins on Monday, though the summit is slated for March 8, 2009.

Unfortunately, the focus on Africa is more of an after-thought triggered by China's growing reach and clout in the continent. Last year, China went on a massive publicity blitz when it organised the China-Africa summit in Beijing.

India's traditional links with African countries go back much further than China's. During India's anti-colonial struggle, several African countries were also going through similar movements to gain independence. Mahatma Gandhi's role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa is now part of history. In the first decade of India's independence, links with Africa remained intact, but gradually, as India itself faced domestic problems, interest in far away Africa waned.

Now however, much of this has changed. Africa is one of the richest continents whether in oil, gas, minerals, diamonds, and Indian industries are spreading their wings there. The Tatas are well established in South Africa.

Indian pharmaceuticals companies are providing life-saving drugs, including AIDS retroviral drugs, at costs less than half of western manufacturers. India's image among thinking Africans is said to be much better than that of the Chinese, who some regard as exploitative like the former colonial rulers from the old world.

"The focus of India has been, and shall continue to be, on capacity-building and

human resource development in Africa. There are many Africans who come not only to study but also there are batches which come for dedicated courses in capacity-building," minister of state for external affairs Anand Sharma said while inaugurating the India-Africa editors' conference on Tuesday.

India is also keen to get a handle on Africa's hydrocarbon assets to meet its surging energy needs. "India has a very cordial and old relationship with countries in Africa and we are now going to move forward in a big way, to further consolidate this relationship and give it a new shape.

We will certainly look aggressively at Africa for oil and gas assets to ensure energy security for the country," petroleum and natural gas minister Murli Deora said.