

India-Sudan Relation: Understanding India's Engagement with Sudan

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Abstract

The paper examines the ever-evolving relationship between India and Sudan. The countries share a rich history that can be traced back to the Nilotic times and continued to thrive till contemporary times. Both countries, with robust bilateral relations and strong diaspora, began to diversify in areas of economic cooperation, energy and food security, capacity building, and humanitarian assistance. This paper tries to emphasize the need for analysis of current India-Sudan relations based on empirical research.

Keywords: Historical, Bilateral Relation, Trade, Economic Cooperation, LOC, Investments, Capacity Building, Humanitarian Assistance, Cultural Connections.

INTRODUCTION

India and Sudan have a rich and cordial history that can be traced back to ancient times. According to archaeological sources, not only there was a rich cultural connection between the Nilotic people and the Indus Valley Civilization but also a lucrative trade between silk, gold, and silver ornaments. The pastoral Beja Community, related to the Hamitic people constitutes 5 percent of Sudan's population and claims their origin in India. Trade relations also flourished towards the end of the 12th century and evidence suggests that by 1699, the Funj Sultanate's capital, Sennar indulged in trade and commerce with India through Sawakin Port with key items of trade being silk, silver, leather, and gold (Fisher et al., 2012b).

Bilateral relations in period of 1900-1950

In the 1900s, in Khartoum and Atbara, two steel suspension rail bridges, imported from India were built. Even today, people still use these bridges. Indian specialists have contributed to the growth of Sudan's timber industry since 1900. On his trip to England in 1935, Mahatma Gandhi halted in Port Sudan and interacted with people from the Indian Diaspora there. While on the way to the United Kingdom visit in 1938, Jawaharlal Nehru also made a stop in Port Sudan. The Chhotalal Samji Virani hosted Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indian National Congress served as a major source of inspiration for the Sudanese Graduates General Congress, which was founded in 1938. The British Indian Army together with soldiers from Sudan fought in Eritrea in 1941. For demining Metemma, the Bengal Sappers received the Victoria Cross and they triumphed in the pivotal Battle of Keren (Bilateral Brief, MEA, Govt. of India, 2024).

Bilateral relation in the post-Independence Period

In 1953, the Chief Election Commissioner of India, Sukumar Sen, presided over the first parliamentary elections in Sudan. The Indian election laws and procedures served as a model for the Sudanese Electoral Commission founded in 1957. The Sudanization Committee, founded in February 1954, to displace the British government employees in the post-independence Sudanese administration, was provided financial assistance by India. In March

1955, India established its embassy in Khartoum. In April 1955, Ismail al- Azhari, the interim prime minister of Sudan, travelled to New Delhi with other ministers in route to the Bandung Conference (the first Afro-Asian Relation Conference) in Indonesia (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

The nation did not have a flag to represent it at Bandung. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru as a kind gesture scribbled Sudan on his handkerchief to represent Sudan at the conference. The Sudanese government funded the Sudan Block at the National Defence Academy of India. In appreciation for the sacrifices made by Indian troops during the World War II North African Campaign, the Government of Sudan donated 100,000 pounds to the building of the Block. In 1958, for the development of an embassy, a six-acre property in New Delhi was given by India to Sudan. The honorary consulate of India in Port Sudan was shut down in the 1970s. In August 2007, India inaugurated a general consulate there. After South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, it became the Indian embassy in that country. During the First and Second Sudanese Civil War, India maintained its neutrality. India abstained from UN resolutions that denounced Sudan in 1993 and 1994. In 1994, India fought against efforts to pressure Sudan into leaving the International Monetary Fund (MEA Report, Govt. of India, 2023).

In 2003, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) purchased a stake of around 25 per cent in the Sudanese Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company for US\$650 million. The Canadian company Talisman Energy departed Sudan as a result of pressure from the Canadian government and condemnation from human rights organizations, and it was acquired by ONGC's overseas investment arm. If we look at the Indian investment in the oil industry, it was around \$1 billion in 2011. In 2004, Sudan received a line of credit worth \$50 million from the Export-Import Bank of India. ONGC vis a vis a contract agreed to construct a 745-kilometer long pipeline to transport petroleum and its derivatives from the Khartoum Refinery to the port in Red Sea. The training of the Indian armed forces, namely the army, the navy and the air force and cooperation with the media and entertainment industry were other topics of discussion with Sudan. As of the beginning of 2011, India had sent roughly 2,700 military men to UNMIS.

Some State Visits

In July 1957, then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru travelled to Sudan. In April 1963, Zakir Hussain, the Indian Vice President and in December 1975, President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed visited the capital city of Sudan, Khartoum. The Sudanese President, Ismail al-Azhari, travelled to India in 1967. This was followed by the visits of Presidents Ibrahim Abboud and Jaffer Nimeiri in the 1960s. The Sudanese President, Omar-al-Bashir, paid two visits to India in July 1999 and 2002 respectively. The Indian President, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam too visited Sudan in 2003, his first visit in 28 years (MEA, Govt. of India, 2003). This visit not only highlighted the rich cultural heritage between India and Sudan but also reignited economic ties. Both leaders signed a bilateral investment agreement that further strengthened ties. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam addressed the Sudanese Parliament and delivered an insightful lecture at the University of Khartoum. This Indian visit was significant because Khartoum during this time was undergoing political turmoil with the National Islamic Front (NIF) facing

internal power struggle and Sudan's inclination towards China, marking a shift in Sudanese Foreign Policy.

Some Recent Political Interactions

On December 14, 2020, the Acting Foreign Minister of Sudan and Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan, met virtually to discuss bilateral relations as well as regional and global problems of shared concern. Some areas which both parties listed as needing more cooperation constitute defense, infrastructure development, renewable energy, food security, mining, and maritime security. On August 27, 2021, External Affairs Ministry (EAM) conducted a teleconference with Dr. Mariam Al-Sadig Al-Mahdi, the Sudanese FM. Shri V. Muraleedharan, Minister of State for External Affairs visited Sudan in 2021. He paid visits to Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Abdallah Hamdok and Transitional Sovereignty Council Head, General Abdel Fatah Al Burhan Abdel Rahman. MoS reviewed the whole range of our bilateral ties and discussed bilateral collaboration with Foreign Minister, Dr Mariam Al-Sadig Al-Mahdi. The CII-EXIM Bank India-Africa Conclave was attended by the Minister of Trade and Supply, Ms Amal Sahel, on her July 2022 visit to India. To participate in the Third Ministerial Conference on Counter-Terrorism Financing (NMFT), the Interior Minister and Director General of Police, Lt. Gen. Anan Hamed Mohamed Omer visited India in November 2022. In October 2022, a two-person defense delegation that included the Commander of the Ground Forces, Sudan, Lieutenant General Rashad Abd Alhamid Ismail, and Secretary General, MoD, Lieutenant General Esam Mohamed Hassan Karar, traveled to India to attend DEFEXPO-2022. The Honorable Minister of Finance and Economic Planning of the Republic of Sudan, H.E. Dr. Gibril Ibrahim Mohammed, took part in the Voice of the Global South Summit, which was hosted by India in virtual format from January 12–13, 2023 (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

Joint Ministerial Commission and Foreign Office Consultations

In June 1997, the first Joint Ministerial level Committee was held in New Delhi and it was here when the 'Sudan Joint Committee', which was set up in 1995, during the visit of the then Foreign Minister, Ali Osman Taha was made, at the ministerial level, the Joint Commission. In 2017, the third round of the India-Sudan Joint Ministerial Commission took place in New Delhi. The Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) are the cornerstone of India-Sudan relations, with the first round of FOCs held in Khartoum in 2000 and the eighth round being held in New Delhi. (MEA Report, Govt. of India, 2023)

In terms of economic ties, the relationship between Sudan and China continued to thrive with an exponential rise in Chinese exports to Sudan. Since oil exports began in 1999, there has been a sharp rise in Sudan's imports from China by over 640 percent, averaging over US\$900 million a year in 2009. The export from Sudan constitutes US \$2.3 billion a year in the same period, making the trade balance in favour of Sudan. Simply put, the Sudan-China trade pattern consists of the export of crude oil, timber, cotton and copper and the import of manufactured Chinese products (Large & Patey, 2011b). Trade between India and Sudan since 2005 has increased constituting over US \$900 million in 2009-2010. (Export-Import Data Bank Report, Govt. of India, 2010). India to Sudan India

exported \$1.05 billion to Sudan in 2020. The top three exports from India to Sudan were raw sugar (\$359 million), men's non-knit shirts (\$55.6 million), and light pure woven cotton (\$45.4 million). During the past 25 years, Indian exports to Sudan increased from \$37.7 million in 1995 to \$1.05 billion in 2020, the average growth rate being 14.4 percent.

Sudan exported \$254 million to India in 2020. The top exports other oily seeds (\$139M), Crude Petroleum (\$81.7M), and dried legumes (\$24.7M). Over the past 25 years, Sudan exports to India increased from \$17.1 million in 1995 to \$254 million in 2020, with an average growth rate of 11.4 percent. In 2020, no services were exported from Sudan to India. After China, the second-largest exporter to Sudan is India. India is the second largest exporter to Sudan after China. Comparing the two, we discovered that India in terms of overall exports (\$284B) ranked 18 and in the Economic Complexity Index (ECI), India ranked 40 in 2020. Sudan on the other hand ranked 117 in the Economic Complexity Index and in terms of total exports (\$4.03 B), it ranked 123 in 2020. Similar to Chinese interest, it was oil that strengthened India- Sudan.

Oil and Gas Joint Working Group

Oil is the main dominating factor at the center of relation with Sudan to India, China and Malaysia in terms of economic aspects. In November 2010, Khartoum hosted for the first time ‘the India-Sudan Joint Working Group on Cooperation in the Oil and Gas Sector.’ The aim was to rekindle the Nimairi years when oil development happened through alliances with major Asian countries like China, Malaysia, and later India. Hence, oil remains the pillar for economic growth in Sudan with Asian oil companies (China 46percent, Malaysia 34 percent, and India 10 percent) holding stakes in various oil consortiums of Sudan that amounted to 90 percent of total oil production in 2009. (Sudanese Petroleum Corporation, ‘Statistics for Crude Oil and Productions’)

Bilateral Trade Relations with Sudan

According to Sudan’s Central Bank, ‘India is the second largest exporter to Sudan’ with key items of export being food, petroleum products, machinery, equipment, chemicals, manufactured goods, medicines, and textiles. Sudan’s main exports to India constitute sesame seeds, crushed nuts, cotton, hides, and gum Arabic. India voluntarily established the ‘Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Plan’ for LDCs and Sudan was one of the beneficiaries.

There has been an increase in the bilateral trade between the two countries. In November 2022, a 14-member FIEO team traveled to Sudan to meet with the ‘Union of Chambers of Commerce of Sudan’ to discuss potential prospects in trade and commerce (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024). The table below provides an overview of our bilateral trade in USD million:

Year (Jan-Dec)	India’s Exports	India’s Imports	Total Bilateral Trade
2016	753.23	166.21	919.44
2017	840.85	440.57	1,281.42
2018	920.88	742.63	1,663.51
2019	1,096.88	396.75	1,493.63

2020	1,022.33	368.28	1,390.61
2021	1,077.25	129.15	1206.4
2022 Jan-Nov	1,322.16	160.20	1,482.36
2022 April-Nov	939.31	131.87	1,071.18

Source: DGFT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India

Some Projects and Credit Lines

In April 2005, at the Oslo Donors Conference, India committed \$10 million for capacity building, infrastructure development and social sector projects in Sudan. A solar electrification system, funded by the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources of India in April 2006 in Khadarab village, situated about two hours away from the capital, Khartoum, bringing light into the lives of about 1,500 villagers for the first time. Since then, with support from India, such systems have been installed in other Sudanese settlements. The first production facility for solar photovoltaic modules in Sudan was opened in January 2007 at the Energy Research Institute in Khartoum with equipment and technology supplied by CEL from India. The Government of Sudan has received several Lines of Credit (LoC), the first of which was in 1980, when India gave LoC worth Rs. 20 million to Sudan. India has also provided ‘\$617 million for several projects, including two restructurings for past-due interest payments’. India has provided lines of credit of roughly US\$737.07 million between 1980 and 2014 (Annual report, MEA, Govt. of India, 2006-07). Investments from India

In the undivided Sudan, Indian public sector enterprises ONGC (V) have made investments totaling over 2.3 billion. It now holds a stake in Sudan's prolific Blocks 1, 2, and 4. On December 8, 2009, ‘the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas of India and the then Ministry of Energy and Mines of Sudan in India, signed a Memorandum of (MoU) on Promoting Cooperation in the Oil and Gas Sector’. This opportunity would however not be fraught with challenges. (Large & Patey, 2011b)

Also, ONGC Videsh Ltd developed a school for handicapped kids and funded the purchase of sports gear and prosthetic limbs. The business provided Kodok in the Upper Nile state with an electricity generator in response to a request from the Shilluk neighborhood. On August 15, 2007, ONGC provided funding for the restoration of the Indian club in Port Sudan.

More Indian businesses and their Sudanese interests

According to data from the Sudanese Ministry of Industry, up until 2015, India invested a total of about US\$450 million in a variety of industries, including the steel industry, packaging, food and beverage industry, pharmaceutical business, and industry-related agro-commodities. Several production lines for pharmaceutical, vegetable oil, and other machinery have been established in Sudan by Indian firms. The dominant brand and market leader in Sudan is Orient Fan. Here, you may find important Indian car brands like Tata, Mahindra, and Bajaj as well as prominent pharmaceutical brands from India.

Capacity Building Initiatives

The Indian initiative, Pan-African E-Network, which came to be known as E-Vidya Bharti and E-Arogya Bharti facilitated tele-education and tele-medicine has been established

in Sudan's educational and medical facilities. Sudan now has 200 ITEC places available as of the 2016–17 academic year. Several programs, including 'IAFS-iii, C V Raman Fellowship Programme, the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD), and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations' offer training opportunities and scholarships for higher education to Sudanese officials. From February 25 to March 9, 2019, a unique training program supported by the Ministry of External Affairs was held at the Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, where 46 young Sudanese Diplomats participated. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme is another Indian initiative that offer a variety of scholarships and courses advantageous to Sudanese nationals.

Humanitarian Assistance to Sudan from India

In 1978, India assisted in the form of tents and medications to the victims of flood in the Gezira state and gave South Sudan medicine to combat the leishmaniasis (kala-azar) pandemic in 1983. In 1985 and 1987, India gave away a total of 22,560 tonnes of wheat. Late in 1996, Khartoum experienced flooding, and India airlifted desperately needed medications. India declared in October 2003 that it would donate \$50,000 worth of medications to the Kassala region's flood victims. In March 2005, on the Sudanese Government's request, 20,000 tonnes of wheat was provided by India as a part of humanitarian aid to the population of Darfur. OVL kindly gave funds for prosthetic limbs, sports equipment, and a school for special needs kids. In July 2007, OVL with the support of the Embassy, provided a 'robust generator to Kodok town in Fashdoda County of Upper Nile State at the request of elders from the Shilluk community'. India gave North and South Sudan flood relief aid of \$100,000 in the form of tents and medications in the beginning of 2008. In 2016, OVL gave solar street lights to a village in Khartoum State's Ombadda region. According to the Ministry's recommendations, OVL has been working on socially relevant initiatives in Sudan under CSR every year. The Indian school in Kassala town received a \$5,000 donation from the private Indian company Angelique International Ltd on August 15, 2007, and OVL assisted in the renovation of the Indian Club in Port Sudan. The Indian army battalion stationed there was able to restore a school in Kadugli thanks to generous donations from several Indian businesses in Sudan. An Indian school in Kassala received funding thanks to a donation from the Indian company Angelique International Ltd, and several other Indian companies contributed to the building of a school in Kadugli in 2007. An Indian Army battalion stationed in Sudan completed the work. On November 2, 2020, INS Airavat delivered '100 MT of food aid (75 MT of white flour and 25 MT of sugar) as HADR supplies to Port Sudan in response to the ongoing COVID pandemic and record-breaking rains in July and August 2020'. Additionally, the Government of India gave Sudan six tons of vital, life-saving medications in April 2021 (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

Health and educational sector coordination

Along with providing training to Sudanese officials as part of Indian capacity development programs, Sudanese patients now mostly travel to India for medical care. In 2018, over 4000 medical visas was issued by the Embassy, 6175 visas in 2019, 3284 visas in 2020, 4090 visas in 2021 and 6966 visas in 2022 and this trend is improving gradually. India is one of the top importers of pharmaceutical items (formulas and APIs) into Sudan.

Moreover, Sudanese pharmaceutical manufacturing firms also import equipment from India for their facilities. ‘Prominent hospitals like Apollo, Yashoda, and Fortis are in the process of setting up information centers in Sudan to better serve Sudanese patients. Recently, a comprehensive draft MOU for Cooperation in Health Sector has been shared with the Sudanese side’ (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

Every year, ‘over 1500 students travel to India for higher education’, primarily to Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and Pune. After graduating from Indian universities, over 100,000 Sudanese have made a name for themselves in their respective industries, with some of them occupying prominent positions in both business and government. The Mission is issuing more and more student visas each year. About 1775 student visas were granted by Mission in 2019, 507 in 2020, 1007 in 2021, and 1454 in 2022. Sudanese students can enroll in online distance learning courses for higher education via e-VBAB. Additionally, students from Sudan under the "Study in India Scholarship" program travel to India every year.(Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024)

Cultural Connections

The 142nd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel, ‘Rashtriya Ekta Divas’ was observed in 2018 along with several events arranged by the Mission. The 150th anniversary of Gandhiji's birth is being commemorated by Mission through a number of events. The Sudanese government has been providing logistical support to cultural groups traveling to Sudan even though there is no CEP in effect. Cultural troupes sponsored by ICCR frequently travel to Sudan. The Surajkund International Crafts Mela was attended by a group of 15 Sudanese artists and crafts people in February 2020, March, April 2022, and February 2023. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the ICCR and the Alzaeim Al Azhari University, Khartoum in May 2016 to establish a ‘Hindi Chair’ at the University. The Chair opened for business in February 2017 and hired its first Hindi teacher, who served for two years, ending in February 2019. Since 2015, the Mission has hosted International Yoga Day in Khartoum, with a large turnout of residents and yoga aficionados. The mission has planned several activities to commemorate Gandhiji's 150th birthday. The "Curtain Raiser to the 75-week countdown to India@75" to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence, was organized by the Mission on April 1, 2021. On August 15, the Mission hosted an official event as a part of the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav festivities, commemorating India's 75th Independence Day. The Mission has been celebrating "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav" with a number of events from April 2021. A to Z Bollywood Music & Dance Group (12-15 Nov 2023), an 8-member Gujarati Folk Group called "Kalapath Sanstha" from February 2–4, and an 11-member Maharashtrian cultural troupe called "Bhavani Productions" from November 30, 2022, to December 2, 2022 are the three ICCR-sponsored cultural troupes visited Sudan and saw captivating performances in the India-Sudan Friendship Club, Friendship Hall, Al Neelain University, Ahfad University, Ribat University, Omdurman National Theatre, and Omdurman Indian Club (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

Indian Community in Sudan and Sudanese Community in India

The first Indian to settle in Sudan was a trader, Luvchand Amarchand Shah from the Indian city of Gujarat. In the early 1860s, Shah journeyed to Sudan via Aden and imported

commodities from India. His decision to move his Saurashtrian ancestors to Sudan was motivated by the success and expansion of his firm. The Indian community in Sudan grew as a result of the additional family and friends that these relatives in turn invited. Indians were the first to establish at Port Sudan and Suakin, in eastern Sudan. They gradually relocated to the country's western regions of Al Qadarif, Omdurman, Wad Medani and Kassala. As discussed earlier, the 'Beja', the people of Hamitic origin, constituted 5 percent of Sudan's population, claim Indian origins and the Beja language may be related to Prakrit. A prominent Sudanese national and a Person of Indian Origin (PIO), Dr Anil Kumar Mithani, for his significant contribution to medicine, was given the 'Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA)' in 2021.

Like him, members of the Indian expatriate community work in key areas ranging from the economy to working for United Nations missions in Sudan. The 2013 figures suggest, 'an estimated 3000 Sudanese students' study in universities in India, mainly in the cities of Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bangalore and an estimated 30,000 Sudanese people have graduated from universities in India as of 2013'. (Bilateral Brief, Embassy of India, Khartoum, Sudan, 2024).

Conclusion

The paper criticized the notion that India is the "new colonizer" in Sudan, with goals restricted to containing Chinese dominance. This paper emphasized the need for analyses of current India-Sudan relations based on empirical research. After analyzing the facts and figures we can conclude that India's expanding economic ties with Sudan have the potential to significantly contribute to the development of the world as well as the development of both the countries. India wants to see Sudan develop into a developed, tranquil, and stable nation. India is still convinced that the Sudanese people would overcome their current difficulties and move closer to achieving a peaceful and bright future under this situation.

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