Chandrawat & Partners



BILATERAL RELATIONS

INDIA - NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of India and the Federal Republic of Nigeria have built strong strategic and commercial ties. Both countries recognise English as an official language and are members of the Commonwealth of Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, sharing a history under the British Empire. India maintains a High Commission in Abuja and a Consulate in Lagos, while Nigeria has a High Commission in New Delhi.

India is among Nigeria's leading investors, with Indian firms holding an estimated investment base of USD 27 billion. Official figures on Nigerian investments in India remain unavailable. Meanwhile, India-Africa bilateral trade has expanded significantly, reaching USD 93.69 billion in FY 2025–2026. The geographical distance between Nigeria and India is 7,607 kilometres.

India is the world's third-largest oil consumer after the United States and China. Driven by rapid economic growth as the sixth-largest global economy, India's oil demand remains high, with crude imports sourced from Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the USA, and Nigeri.



BACKGROUND

India's relations with Africa date back to 30 BCE when there was trade between Egypt (under Roman Emperor Augustus) and India. Up to 120 Roman ships set sail each year from Myos Hormos (Al-Qusayr) in Roman Egypt to India. In the same period, Indian dhows frequented East African shores selling Indian handloom products, spices and other goods. Archaeological evidence recently found in Egypt shows that Indian merchants that traded with the Mediterranean region were inhabitants of the Coromandel Coast of India. That exhibits the extent of India-Africa relations at that time.

Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (1497 CE), in search of a short trade route to India, was helped in his journey by Indian merchants and traders on East African shores. Some 20,000 black Africans known as Siddis were brought by Arabs to India as far back as the 7th century. These black Africans have integrated well and are confined to small villages in the Indian states of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and a few live in the city of Hyderabad. These Africans are descendants of the Bantu peoples of East Africa. Some Africans were brought to India by the Portuguese and later by the British. Other Africans came to India as merchants, sailors and mercenaries.

Upon Britain gaining control of India, 34,000 Indians, mostly Punjabi Sikhs, went to East Africa as bonded labourers in 1896 to build the hazardous 660 mile long Uganda Railway. For every mile of the rail line built, four Indian labourers lost their lives, with a total count of 2,493 killed. In year 1898, Indian labourers that worked on a rail bridge over the Tsavo River in Kenya were terrorized by two man-eating lions that killed an estimated 135 Indian labourers.

India gained independence in 1947; Nigeria followed and gained independence in 1960. India strongly supported independence of African countries from colonial rule and established its diplomatic mission in 1958 – two years before Nigeria officially gained independence from British rule. Soon after Nigerian independence, the Indian government got involved in helping establish a military and several other projects in Nigeria. India aided Nigeria in building military establishments like the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) at Kaduna and the Naval College at Port Harcourt, along with other military training facilities. Several Nigerian military personnel attended the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) in Wellington, Tamil Nadu, India. The current President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari attended the DSSC in the 1970s. Other Nigerian presidents who attended the same college are Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1965) and Ibrahim Babangida (1964). A few other top Nigerian military officers also attended India's Defence Services Staff College. Upon Nigeria gaining independence, Indian businesses set up shops in Nigeria.

Both nations possess diverse natural and economic resources and are the largest economies in their respective regions. Both are members of the Commonwealth of Nations. Currently India's concessional line of credit to Africa is almost $9 billion, with present projects taking up $7.4 billion. Over 25,000 African students including Nigerians make use of Indian scholarships, and India sent a grant of $10 million to the UN to fight Ebola and another $2 million to Guinea to tackle the disease.



DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

India and Nigeria share a history of high-level diplomatic engagement spanning over six decades. India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, visited Nigeria in September 1962 to meet Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Subsequently, two Nigerian Presidents served as Chief Guests at India's Republic Day celebrations: President Shehu Shagari in 1983 and President Olusegun Obasanjo on India's 50th Republic Day in 2000.

Nigerian leaders have regularly visited India, including President Obasanjo in November 2004 and Vice President Goodluck Jonathan in November 2007 and April 2008 for the first India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-I) in New Delhi. A defining milestone occurred in October 2007 during Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's State visit to Nigeria, when both nations adopted the Abuja Declaration for Strategic Partnership.

In October 2015, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari visited New Delhi for the Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III), holding bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the summit, India announced USD 600 million in grant assistance, USD 10 billion in concessional credit, and 50,000 scholarships for Africa, including Nigeria. Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari later visited Nigeria from 26 to 29 September 2016, meeting President Buhari and Vice President Prof. Yemi Osinbajo to deepen cooperation. In January 2019, Nigeria's Minister of State for Aviation, Senator Hadi Abubakar Sirika, attended the Global Aviation Summit in Mumbai and held bilateral talks with Indian Commerce, Industry and Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu.

Bilateral ties reached a historic peak in November 2024 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid the first State visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Nigeria in 17 years. During talks with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in Abuja, both leaders reviewed cooperation in defence, energy, trade, health, and digital technology. On this occasion, President Tinubu conferred Nigeria's second-highest national honour, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger (GCON), on PM Modi—making him only the second foreign dignitary to receive the distinction.

India has also consistently supported Nigeria's development and health security. As the first Asian member of the Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), India provided over USD 11 billion in concessional credit to African nations between 2002 and 2021. During the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020, India donated essential medicines—including a seven-tonne consignment (586 cartons) received by Nigerian Health Minister Dr. Osagie Ehanire—and supplied over 24.7 million vaccine doses across 42 African countries, including Nigeria, by February 2021, cementing a resilient partnership for the future.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

India and Nigeria share a robust economic partnership anchored by strong private-sector engagement. Despite regional security challenges, Indian-owned and operated companies remain Nigeria's second-largest employer after the Federal Government. Over 200 Indian firms operate across diverse sectors, including pharmaceuticals, power transmission, engineering goods, automobiles, plastics, and chemicals. Prominent enterprises include Bharti Airtel, Tata, Bajaj Auto, Birla Group, Kirloskar, Mahindra, Ashok Leyland, Skipper, Godrej, Simba Group, NIIT, Aptech, New India Assurance, KEC, and Dabur. According to the High Commission of India in Abuja, Indian investments in Nigeria are estimated at USD 27 billion. Conversely, cumulative Nigerian foreign direct investment into India stands at USD 16.63 million across construction, textiles, hospitality, and pharmaceuticals.

Bilateral trade peaked at USD 14.95 billion in FY 2021–2022 before moderating to USD 7.13 billion in FY 2024–2025 due to reduced crude oil off-take. Trade rebounded to approximately USD 9 billion in FY 2025–2026, with both nations actively working to restore volumes toward USD 15 billion. India remains among Nigeria's top five trading partners globally. Key Indian exports include refined petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, two- and three-wheelers, automobiles, iron and steel, rice, textiles, engineering machinery, and power equipment such as transformers and insulators. India's primary imports from Nigeria are crude oil, natural gas, cashews, and sesame seeds. More broadly, India-Africa bilateral trade reached USD 93.69 billion in FY 2025–2026, while India's cumulative continental investments stand at roughly USD 80 billion, making India Africa's fourth-largest trading partner and a top-five investor.

OIL TRADE

As the world's third-largest oil consumer after the United States and China, India consumes over 5.5 million barrels of crude oil daily. Following global energy market shifts, India diversified its crude sourcing primarily toward Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the USA, while purchases from West Africa and Nigeria temporarily declined after 2021. However, energy cooperation remains a strategic pillar, with Indian crude imports from Nigeria standing at USD 4.25 billion in 2025 and both governments pursuing renewed long-term contracts to expand energy trade.

CULTURAL RELATIONS

Over 55000 Nigerians live in India, while estimated 25,000 Indian passport holders reside in Nigeria according to the Indian High Commission in Abuja..

There are frequent contact and visits between leaders of both countries at the highest level. Nigerian students started coming to India for higher education in year 1955 that was followed from 1960 onwards the Indian Council for Cultural programmes awarding scholarship that fully funded Nigerian Students to study in India The government of India launched a 'Study in India' portal in March 2018 to encourage deserving and bright student to study in India. In the 1970s- 1980s period there were Indian teachers, doctors, nurses and similar personnel working in Nigeria. An Indian 'Namaste Nigeria' cultural event was celebrated in Abuja on 5 May 2018 to which Nigerian Princess Ginika Nwafor-Orizu, Chief Cultural Officer and Otunba Olusegun Runsewe, Director General, Nigerian National Council were the Chief Guests. The Indian Cultural Association (ICA) holds functions in Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano and Ibadan. There is an Indian Language School in Lagos, for Indian language learning. There are over 55000 Nigerians living and working in India. Nigerians reside in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Goa, Hyderabad and Jaipur. Neither the Indian police nor the Nigerian High Commission in New Delhi have the exact figure on the number of Nigerians residing in India today or on the jobs Nigerians do in India. Few Nigerians have married locals and settled in India.





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