



Chintan  
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EVENT REPORT



# INDIA AFRICA FORUM SUMMIT IV

Geopolitical and Economic Expectations and  
Opportunities

4 MAY 2026



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Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) is an emerging independent think tank dedicated to shaping policy through rigorous research and thought leadership. With a strong focus on fostering collaboration between policymakers and industry, CRF integrates practical insights into its research and advocacy efforts. It conducts comprehensive research to support informed decision-making and engages with stakeholders through discussions, events, and publications. CRF's research is focused on three core areas – Climate Change & Energy Transition, Economy & Trade, and Geopolitics & Strategic Studies. The Centre for Climate Change & Energy Transition aims to be a research and expertise hub, focusing on sustainable and clean energy, environmental stewardship, and climate actions.

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Roundtable Discussion

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# INDIA AFRICA FORUM SUMMIT IV

Geopolitical and Economic Expectations  
and Opportunities

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4 May 2026 | CRF Conference Room



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In the context of the upcoming India–Africa Forum Summit IV, a high-level closed door roundtable was convened featuring Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, Ambassador Gurjit Singh, Dr Sushmita Rajwar, Dr Veda Vaidyanathan, Ms Ruchita Beri, Ms Huma Siddiqui, Mr Kallol Bhattacharjee and Dr Vijay Singh. It was moderated by Prof Ajay Dubey, Distinguished Fellow at CRF. The discussion was done under Chatham House Rules. It explored the changing geopolitical, economic, and institutional environment of India-Africa relations. The speakers listed the main challenges, including low involvement with the African Union, limited progress in trade and unresolved implementation gaps in development cooperation. The necessity of increased financial commitments, precise sectoral prioritisation, robust evaluation frameworks, and deeper integration of the private sector was emphasised, as was the need for a structured, outcome-driven partnership.

## OPENING REMARKS



**PROF. AJAY DUBEY**  
Distinguished Fellow,  
CRF

Prof. Ajay Dubey opened the roundtable by putting the urgency of the discussion into context, noting that the India-Africa Forum Summit IV was imminent and that India's engagement with Africa needed to go beyond rhetoric to a measured, policy-driven approach. He emphasised two important imperatives: first, the need to approach Africa with a bilateral priority and as a critical dimension of the Global South outreach of India; and second, the need to understand that Africa of today is not the Africa of past, the continent is now actively sought by various global partners, and India must position its engagement accordingly.

## SPEAKERS' ADDRESSES



**AMB. RAJIV BHATIA**

Distinguished Fellow, Foreign  
Studies Programme at  
Gateway House

Ambassador Bhatia organised his speech into three general themes. On the wider geopolitical front, he warned against over-optimism about Africa's role in global affairs, noting that in the current decade, Africa has faced growing marginalisation as the world pursues competing global priorities such as the Ukraine conflict and Indo-Pacific dynamics. He encouraged actors to realise the magnitude of this predicament rather than believing that the world is after Africa. He said that it was doubtful whether Africa is really central to Indian foreign policy, as the External Affairs Minister's speech of 23 April suggests.

In the background to the Summit, Ambassador Bhatia urged revisiting the commitments of Prime Minister Modi at the previous summit, noting that merely fulfilling past commitments would not suffice and that new commitments and additional financial resources would be necessary. He also noted that the Kampala Principles needed to be updated, as there had been significant developments, including the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), increased focus on the extraction and trade of natural resources, and trilateral cooperation.

On policy proposals, he suggested: further commitment of financial resources; a reversion to a three-year summit cycle with joint monitoring review meetings held every 18 months; a comprehensive brief of what India has actually delivered on economic cooperation; the formation of a Centre of India-Africa Network of Think Tanks; and an institutionalised annual meeting between the External Affairs Minister of India and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.



**AMB. GURJIT SINGH**  
Former Indian Ambassador  
to Ethiopia

Ambassador Gurjit Singh drew on his vast experience in African diplomacy to make sharp remarks. He emphasised that the India-Africa Summit cannot be credible without a substantive and institutionalised relationship with the African Union, and that since 2015, India has lost its connection with the AU Commission. He partly attributed this to the tenures of the AU Chairs, who were either not engaged or actively unsympathetic to India's interests, including the unintended oversight of failing to formally invite the AU Commission Chairperson when the latter was admitted to the G20.

He advocated against the bilateral relationship being held hostage to summits. Instead, he demanded a regular, institutionalised mechanism that would bring together governments, academia, industry and civil society on both sides. He suggested a Track 1.5 dialogue format for structured, ongoing engagement and advocated a regional approach to engagement rather than purely bilateral or summit-based engagement. He also highlighted the need for an India Development Initiative that can focus on private-sector players that have already succeeded in Africa, without relying solely on lines of credit. He recommended that the conclusion of double taxation avoidance agreements and the investment of a substantially larger amount in African regional development banks be considered to facilitate Indian private investment.



**DR VEDA VAIDYANATHAN**  
Fellow, Centre for Social  
and Economic Progress

First, she highlighted the issue of knowledge asymmetry: Indian scholars and think tanks know little about Africa, while African scholars and think tanks know very little about India. She observed that, in her interactions with think tanks in Zambia and Zimbabwe, most research funding was channelled towards understanding China, reflecting a significant gap that could be bridged by India's missions to enhance local research on India. Second, she highlighted the opportunity of digital public infrastructure (DPI), and that countries such as Namibia and Zambia were already exploring DPI collaborations with Bangalore-based institutions, and that the African discussion on digital solutions was framed around development leapfrogging - going beyond aid towards inclusive financial and digital ecosystems.

Third, she highlighted the need to link the private sectors' ecosystems in India and Africa and noted a sense of hunger among African governments and businesses to connect with their Indian counterparts, which was not being satisfactorily addressed. Fourth, in the context of critical minerals, she noted that private sector companies are always seeking government support for risk hedging, policy certainty and investment facilitation. Fifth, she opened up the possibilities of trilateral collaboration with Japan, where the Japanese had shown much interest in working with India and Africa, especially in capacity building, where the magnitude of India and the Kaizen philosophy of Japan could complement one another in the manufacturing and farming sectors.



**DR SUSHMITA RAJWAR**

Associate Professor,  
Jawaharlal Nehru  
University

Dr Rajwar emphasised the significance of sectoral prioritisation, third-party assessment, and institutionalised involvement. She contended that the summit was a valuable opportunity to demonstrate that India had learned from past implementation gaps, especially those reportedly left unaddressed by the time of the third summit in 2015. She requested that there be a mandatory, independent third-party assessment of all summit commitments every two years, rather than every five years, as was the case with the next summit.

She stressed that the energy sector had to be put at the centre of the summit and offered great opportunities. She also emphasised the need to organise ongoing dialogue with the AU Commission, including the possibility of establishing an India-AU Secretariat or sector-specific engagement mechanisms with the AU. She claimed that the summit could not be a purely bureaucratic process, and that active participation of academics and civil society was necessary to make it a real platform of progressive policy.



**MR VIJAY SINGH**

Assistant Director,  
CUTS International.

Mr Singh has provided a critical evaluation of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA-I) in India, and has indicated that it has serious structural flaws. He observed that there was always a MOU-to-implementation gap: projects were announced, and credit lines extended, but ground delivery always lagged. He cited the grievances of African governments, raised at past summits, about the slowness of project execution, the 75% tied procurement requirement (which greatly reduces the flexibility and appeal of Indian credit lines), and the lack of any public performance assessment.

He pointed out that the Neighbourhood First policy in India had resulted in a sharp budgetary imbalance, with Bhutan receiving ₹2,400 crore in development assistance in 2023 and all of Africa receiving a combined ₹250 crore. He emphasised that India was unable to match China's scale of infrastructure investment in Africa (estimated at between \$130 and 270 billion). Still, he argued that India had unique leverage in pharmaceuticals, digital public infrastructure, and small language models (SLMs) that could be deployed through low-cost AI solutions. He recommended that the sustainability of DPI and AI projects should be guaranteed by national budget lines in recipient countries, citing the IIIT (International Institute of Information Technology) Bangalore-Togo collaboration as a relatively successful example.



**MS HUMA SIDDIQUI**  
Senior Journalist,  
StratNewsGlobal

Ms Siddiqui highlighted the critical minerals gap between India and Africa and noted that the continent hosts almost 30% of the world's critical minerals and rare earths. She noted that Russia and China were already well entrenched in the critical mineral extraction across the continent, and that India needed to use its bilateral partnerships, including with other countries such as Japan and the US, to develop a more coherent and forward-looking critical minerals strategy. She demanded tangible results from the summit in this field, rather than pledges confined to closed-door deliberations.



**MS RUCHITA BERI**  
Senior Fellow,  
Vivekananda International  
Foundation

Ms Beri organised her comments around what she termed the 5 thematic pillars of India-Africa engagement: Fuel, Fertilisers, Food, Digital, and Defence. Regarding fuel, she noted that in recent years India has reduced its energy imports from Africa, although Africa remains an important energy partner. On fertilisers, she demanded a special India-Africa discussion on how to reduce reliance on the Persian Gulf as a source of fertiliser, given Africa's need to produce agricultural products on its own. On food security, she pointed out the mutual weakness of both India and African countries in the face of global disruptions. On digital cooperation, she emphasised that India should approach Africa as an equal co-creator, not as a top-down provider of solutions; that 80 per cent of African countries already have digital IDs; and that substantial innovation is emerging on the continent itself.

On defence, she claimed that most African states do not have the funds to purchase commercial imports of defence equipment. That capacity building and cooperation in maritime security should be seen as more viable options than equipment exports. She emphasised the need for an implementation assessment. She noted that, although Exim Bank officials claim to conduct internal project assessments, they never present them publicly, making it impossible to hold them accountable.



**MR KALLOL BHATTACHARJEE**  
Senior Assistant Editor,  
The Hindu.

Mr Bhattacharjee introduced a media angle to the debate and noted that Africa hardly features in Indian news unless there is an outbreak of conflict. As an institutional means to close the information gap, he suggested establishing an India-Africa Media Network or an India-Africa News Agency. He also proposed establishing an India-Africa Editors Forum and developing safety infrastructure, including a special mobile application, to serve Indian tourists and professionals in Africa. He observed that Chinese media had a large network of constructive journalism in Africa, with hundreds of correspondents working across the continent, whereas in India, there were none. He suggested that a soft-power instrument, such as financing African journalists to attend seminars and events in India, might be cost-effective.

## SALIENT POINTS DISCUSSED

- **Role and Limitations of the India- Africa Forum Summit through African Union.**  
It was widely agreed that the Summit is a valuable yet inadequate tool for India-Africa engagement. The panellists warned that the summit should not be viewed as the only central policy mechanism for Africa, given the 10-year gap between the last edition and the current one, and the risk of over-concentrating expectations on a single event. The summit was better seen as a culminating point of what ought to be a multi-dimensional, ongoing dialogue with African partners. The 2015 experience was cited repeatedly to emphasise that credible implementation mechanisms must follow commitments made at summits.
- **The Indian involvement in the African Union.**  
One of the key topics of the discussion was the deterioration in India's institutional ties with the AU Commission since 2015. Several speakers pointed out that India has been exclusive in its bilateral diplomacy at the expense of its engagement in continental policy processes, such as climate finance, counter-terrorism, trade, and rules of origin under AfCFTA. It was strongly stressed that the need to re-engage substantively with the AU Commission through an institutionalised dialogue mechanism- possibly including an India-AU Secretariat.
- **Gaps in implementation and accountability.**  
The ongoing discrepancy between the promises given at summits and on-the-ground delivery was a constant issue. Estimates that only 40% of the promised values from the 2015 summit were actually paid out were cited as symbolic of systemic failures in project identification, design, tendering, and monitoring. The failure to conduct third-party evaluations and the unwillingness of government agencies to commission them were identified as structural problems that needed to be formally addressed at the fourth summit.
- **Role of the Private Sector.**  
There was consensus that future interaction between India and Africa should not be based on government-led lines of credit, but rather on facilitating a broader ecosystem of private-sector investment. In particular, panellists demanded: the development of Indian credit risk rating independent of the World Bank ratings; investment in African regional development banks; the establishment of a consultancy fund on behalf of DPRs (Detailed Project Reports); posting of Indian investment liaison officers in the African development agencies; and support to SMEs and social enterprises which had already established a presence on the continent without government support.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure and Critical Minerals.**  
Two of the top-priority thematic areas of the next summit were determined to be DPI and critical minerals. On DPI, the discussion highlighted that co-creation was more important than technology transfer, and that India needed to frame its offer within the broader development discourse on financial inclusion and digital leapfrogging across the continent. The urgency of developing a structured Indian approach in the face of well-established Chinese and Russian presence in critical minerals was highlighted, with Japan identified as a potential trilateral partner.

- **Knowledge Asymmetry and Media Engagement**  
Several speakers emphasised the great lack of knowledge on both sides: Indian institutions know too little about Africa, and African think tanks know too little about India. It was recommended that funding be provided for local research on India in African countries through Indian missions, a Centre of India-Africa Network of Think Tanks, an India-Africa Media Network or News Agency, and for enabling African journalists to travel to India for structured engagements.
- **Francophone and generational Africa.**  
The necessity for India to expand its geographic interactions beyond Anglophone Africa, especially with Francophone West Africa, was identified as a critical gap. Energy cooperation was identified as a major entry point into the Francophone markets. More generally, panellists urged a shift in India-Africa engagement from a summit-centric model to a continuous, regionally differentiated one.

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## FORWARD OUTLOOK

The roundtable concluded with a cautiously optimistic but clear-eyed assessment. Panellists concurred that the India-Africa Forum Summit IV, even though it was held after an unprecedented decade-long gap, offers a real opportunity to re-establish the relationship on a more structured and responsible platform. But the potential can only be fulfilled when the summit makes concrete, time-bound, independently assessed commitments, not aspirational statements.

The new summit was regarded as the opportunity not only to announce new initiatives but also to reconcile accounts with the past - to realise what was delivered, what was not, and what needs to be done differently. It was widely agreed that India needs to adopt a multi-channel strategy that combines bilateral diplomacy, regional and AU-level engagement, private-sector and civil-society facilitation, academic partnerships and effective media and narrative management.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summit Architecture and Institutional Framework.

1. A three-year summit cycle, which would be supplemented by joint monitoring review meetings every 18 months to review progress against commitments.
2. Prepare a publicly available brief report on the actual performance of India on its economic and development cooperation commitments since the 2015 summit, with verified data on its trade and investment.
3. Establish compulsory and independent third-party assessment of summit commitments on a two-year basis, by a credible institution which the Indian government and the AU Commission jointly endorse.
4. Institutionalise dialogue, research cooperation, and policy exchange between India and Africa by establishing a Centre of India-Africa Network of Think Tanks to maintain dialogue, research collaboration, and policy exchange beyond the summit framework.

### African Union Engagement

5. Consider developing an institutionalised annual meeting between the External Affairs Minister of India and the Chairperson of the AU Commission and explore the possibility of creating a dedicated India-AU Secretariat.
6. Proactively participate in policy processes at the AU-level, including on climate finance, agriculture, counter-terrorism, trade, and AfCFTA, as opposed to only engaging in bilateral diplomatic processes.
7. Re-evaluate the formula of summit engagement between the AU, regional economic communities and bilateral partners, tuning the approach of India to the priorities of African nations themselves towards these layers.

### Economic Cooperation and Private Sector.

8. Go beyond lines of credit as the main financial tool and broaden the range of investment vehicles, such as grants, rupee-denominated financing, risk de-risking mechanisms, and investment in African regional development banks.
9. Instead of just depending on Western or multilateral ratings, establish an independent credit risk rating system of African countries based on the data of their own engagement.
10. Establish a rotating consultancy fund to assist Indian companies in doing Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for prospective investments in Africa.
11. Place post Indian investment liaison officers in major African development agencies to enable the entry of the private sector and the formation of joint ventures.
12. Establish a special approach to critical minerals engagement with Africa, in collaboration with like-minded partners such as Japan, through leveraging the existing diplomatic relations that India has with mineral-rich countries.

### Cooperation in digital and technology.

13. The DPI offer of Frame India is a co-creation opportunity and not a technology export, but a part of the development discourse of Africa in relation to financial inclusion, gender equality, and digital leapfrog.
14. Promote the implementation of small language models (SLMs) and low-cost AI solutions through collaborative models, such as the IIIT Bangalore-Togo partnership, making sure that sustainability is ensured through national budget line commitments in recipient countries.
15. Fund bilateral research on India in African think tanks and research institutions through Indian missions, to close the knowledge asymmetry and create a more powerful constituency for the partnership.

### Sectoral Priorities

16. Put energy cooperation, including oil, gas, and fertiliser supply chains, at the core of the summit agenda, and specific commitments to diversify Indian sourcing of West and Francophone Africa.
17. Increase the involvement of the Francophone and West African countries in terms of both trade and diplomatic interests in addressing the current over-concentration of India's trade and diplomatic attention on Anglophone African markets.
18. Invest in capacity building in maritime security and the blue economy as a niche area of comparative advantage in India in its engagement with African coastal and island states.

### Narrative, Media and Public Diplomacy.

19. Create an India-Africa Media Network or News Agency to produce a consistent, substantive coverage of the bilateral relationship and fund African journalists to attend India-based events and exchanges.
20. Incorporate media-level involvement by launching an India-Africa Editors Forum to institutionalise the media level of engagement and establish a platform of constructive journalism on the relationship.
21. Use the summit as a platform to co-create the narrative of the Global South in India, in partnership with African governments, and frame the relationship as a co-equal partnership in the reformed world order.

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## VOTE OF THANKS

Prof Ajay Dubey gave the vote of thanks on behalf of CRF, thanking all the participants for the quality and candidness of their contributions. He reiterated CRF's pledge to continue the deliberations through its Africa Studies programme, policy engagements, and research outputs. He confirmed that the roundtable's findings would be summarised in a policy brief to be submitted to the relevant stakeholder of the India-Africa Forum Summit IV.

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