

India-Africa Summit to forge strategic economic relations

The first India-Africa summit is currently underway in the India capital, New Delhi, with the aim of forging a strategic economic partnership between the two regions.

Trade, investment, energy security and peacekeeping are top of the agenda at the summit.

President Thabo Mbeki together with Foreign Minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma joined 13 other African leaders who are being hosted by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

According to the South African Foreign Affairs Department, the government delegation will participate in the summit within the context of strengthening Africa-India relations in particular, Africa-Asia relations in general and to consolidate South-South co-operation.

"In this regard, the dynamic changes taking place both on the African continent and in India have opened new possibilities for a closer partnership.

"Furthermore, the realities of an increasingly interdependent world has emphasised the need for countries on the African continent and India to work closer together to address common goals and challenges," the department said in a statement.

The two sides are also keen to work closely on important global issues like the proposed reform to the United Nations, the fight against terrorism and global warming.

Preferential market access

In his inaugural address at the summit, Prime Minister Singh announced that India would give preferential market access to 34 countries in Africa, which were among the least developed nations in the world.

He called for turning the 21st century into a "century of Asia and Africa".

India's commitment for overall development and progress, he said, was steadfast as it was keen to see Africa find its right place in the world.

Prime Minister Singh described Africa as the "land of awakening", adding that the two billion people of India and Africa could set an example of "fruitful partnership".

The prime minister said there was much to gain from this partnership.

Engaging all sections

However, he stressed that it should not be limited to an interaction between governments but should also reach to an engagement between the widest possible sections in India and Africa.

The two-day summit seeks to forge a more contemporary partnership in key areas of trade and energy.

Welcoming the guests from Africa earlier in the morning, Minister of State for External Affairs Anand Sharma said the summit would help the two sides establish a "dynamic partnership".

A film on India-Africa ties is expected to be screened during the summit for the visiting leaders and delegates.

The foreign ministers of India and Africa, who met Monday, 7 April 2008, have finalised a draft declaration which will be

released by the leaders at the end of the summit Wednesday.

The declaration aims to identify areas of potential growth where the two sides could work closely for their mutual benefit.

Amongst those attending are Uganda President Yoweri Museveni, Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Burkina Faso Prime Minister Tertius Zongo, Democratic Republic of Congo President Joseph Kabila, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ghana President John Agyekum Kufuor, Kenyan Prime Minister Mwai Kibaki and Senegal President Maitre Abdoulaye Wade.

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