India, Ethiopia elevate ties to strategic partnership

Focus on cooperation in mining, critical minerals, DPI and clean energy

ARCHIS MOHAN & PTI New Delhi, 17 December

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Ethiopia, which concluded on Wednesday evening, the two sides discussed deepening the economic partnership, especially in the fields of digital public infrastructure (DPI), mining, critical minerals, and clean energy in the context of the African country opening up its economy.

In his address to the joint sitting of the Ethiopian Parliament on Wednesday and also during his discussions with his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed on Tuesday evening, Modi stated that Indian companies have invested over \$ 5 billion in the Ethiopian economy, especially in essential sectors of manufacturing and pharmaceuticals, creating over 75,000 local jobs. More than 650 Indian companies are registered with the Ethiopian licensing investment department.

Given the reform agenda that the Ethiopian PM has undertaken in the area of economy and development, Modi conveved to Prime Minister Abiv that India will work very closely with Ethiopia as per Ethiopia's priorities and encourage the Indian private sector to do more in Ethiopia, Indian officials said.

In his address to the Ethiopian Parliament, Modi said, 'India's national song 'Vande Mataram', and the Ethiopian national anthem, both refer to our land as the mother. They inspire us to take pride in the heritage, culture, natural beauty and protect the motherland."



PM Narendra Modi (left) with Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed at the Ethiopian Parliament in Addis Ababa PIC: X/@NARENDRAMODI

Ethiopian PM, Modi conveyed India's support to Ethiopia's accession process at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as membership to the New Development Bank. Ethiopia has recently joined the BRICS grouping, and India has been a consistent supporter of Ethiopia's bid to join as a borrowing member to the New Development Bank.

During their meeting, the two leaders decided to elevate the bilateral partnership to a strategic partnership. Both sides agreed to further expand cooperation in several other areas including trade and investment, agriculture, renewable energy. health, education, skill development, defence, and artificial intelligence (AI)

At a special ceremony organised at the Addis International Convention Centre last evening, Modi received Ethiopia's highest award, the "Great Honor Nishan tions scholarships and AI short of Ethiopia" from the Ethiopian courses for Ethiopians, and sup-PM. On Tuesday, the Ethiopian port for maternal and neonatal

In his discussion with the PM received Modi at the airport and drove him directly to the National Science Museum and

Friendship Park in Addis Ababa.

India has also offered to support Ethiopia with the G20 Common Framework on debt to address the debt vulnerability of some developing countries. India has signed an agreement that will give some sort of leeway to Ethiopia in terms of debt payment under the lines of credit given by India to Ethiopia in the past few years. Indian officials said. During Modi's visit, the two sides signed agreements in the fields of UN Peacekeeping Operations Training, Mutual Administrative Assistance in the Customs Matters, and the establishment of a data centre at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia. The two sides also announced upgrading ties to 'Stra-Partnership', restructuring under G20, more Indian Council for Cultural Rela-

In an X post, Modi said: These are significant steps forward in our longstanding and trusted partnership." He said that from governance and peacekeeping to digital capacity and education, the focus remains on empowering people.

'The emphasis on knowledge, skills and innovation underscores our shared faith in youth as the drivers of tomorrow. Cooperation in health care reflects a deeper commitment to human dignity and care for the most vulnerable. "These outcomes reflect an India-Ethiopia partnership focused on growth and people-centric development," he said.

Modi landed in Muscat on Wednesday evening, the last leg of his three-nation visit. India and Oman will sign a free trade agreement on Thursday in Muscat, opening greater opportunities for sectors such as textiles, food processing, automobiles, auto components, and gems and jewellery. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has reached Muscat for the FTA signing. Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Speaking at the Oman-India Business Forum in Muscat, Goyal said it would be the first trade agreement Oman is entering into in nearly two decades. Oman last inked a similar agreement with the US in January 2006, he said.

"The free trade agreement offers immense opportunities for all of you," Goyal told the gathering of businesses.

He said huge potential is

MOVE TO REPLACE MGNREGA

Civil society plans stir from tomorrow

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE New Delhi, 17 December

Civil society groups, led by the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, are planning a nationwide protest - similar to the farmers' stir a few years ago-starting December 19 demanding scrapping of the new Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (GRAMIN) or cc.

The groups are planning to mobilise agriculture and rural workers in all state capitals, district headquarters, block offices and panchayats and also march towards the national capital demanding abolition of the new draft and continuation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) scheme.

"If there was one Act that truly made India a 'vishwaguru', it was MGNREGA and repealing it with a new centrally sponsored scheme would mean that all powers will get concentrated in the hands of the Central government without any corresponding obligation," Jean Dreze, economist and former member of the National Advisory Council (NAC), told reporters at a press conference on Wednesday.

Dreze said that in the new draft VB-G RAMG, the Central government holds unbridled power to determine which part of the country the rural employment scheme will work, and where it won't. "Twenty years back when the scheme was being framed we had opposed this provision and it was dropped after much effort, but once again Centre wants to bring this provision back," Dreze said. The real reason for repealing MGNREGA seems to be political, Dreze said, while calling upon all states to bitterly oppose the draft Bill. "This normative based allocation and 60:40 ratio of expenditure share is also highly problematic," Dreze said.

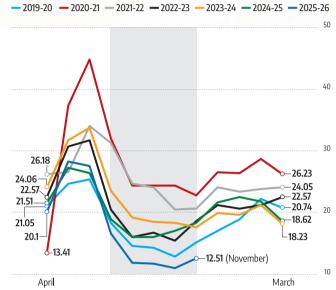
Jayati Ghosh, economist and former professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, said that repealing MGNREGA will pull down aggregate demand and further hurt the economy.



A contentious provision of the draft VB-G RaM G Bill, that seeks to replace MGNREGA, is that it permits the state governments to stop the scheme for 60 days of its choice in a financial year covering the peak agricultural sowing and harvesting seasons. Data sourced from MGNREGA website, shows that in the last few years in any given financial year, demand for work under the scheme typically dipped between July to November before picking up again from December onwards. The drop coincides with peak kharif and rabi sowing seasons for most crops. This may be because MGNREGA wages are typically lower than farm wages. SANIFFR MUKHERIFF

Tracking demand

Households demanding work under MGNREGA every year (in mn)



Note: Highlighted portions are peak sowing and harvest months (Jul-Nov) for kharif and rabi seasons in any FY; Source: MGNREGA websit

Lok Sabha passes SHANTI Bill amid Opposition walkout

Oppn members demand govt send Bill to parliamentary panel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New Delhi. 17 December

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, which seeks to open the tightly controlled civil nuclear sector for private participation, by voice vote amid a walkout by the Opposition.

Union minister Jitendra Singh termed the Bill a "milestone legislation" and said: "India's role in geopolitics is increasing. If we have to be a global player, we have to follow global benchmarks and global strategies. The world is moving towards clean energy. We too have set a target of 100 Gw (gigawatt) of nuclear energy capacity

Meanwhile, Opposition MPs strongly pitched for sending the Bill to a parliamentary panel for wider consultations during the debate.

Former Union minister and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor described the bill as a "dangerous leap into privatised nuclear expansion" without adequate safeguards and asserted that the pursuit of capital



CONGRESS MP SHASHI THAROOR D THE BILL AS A "DANGEROUS LEAP INTO PRIVATISED NUCLEAR EXPANSION'

cannot be allowed to override the requirements of public safety, environmental protection and victim justice. He added that the legislation is ridden with exceptions, heavy on discretion and largely indifferent to public welfare. "I am not sure whether it is a nuclear bill or an unclear

Urging the government to send the bill to a Select Committee, Trinamool Congress MP Saugata Roy said nuclear energy is a "risky proposition" and the government has put maximum liability in case of an accident at just \$300 million. The liability should be \$500 million, he said, adding that if an accident takes place, the whole purpose will be defeated. Roy further said India does not have

enough raw materials for producing nuclear energy and with this bill, the government is going to allow private companies to get foreign investment and raw materials.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP Arun Nehru termed the name of the bill, SHANTI, as an "oxymoron" as nuclear energy has nothing to do with 'shanti' (peace). He demanded that the bill be sent to a joint parliamentary committee.

Janata Dal (United) leader Alok Kumar Suman said that the process of issuing licenses for the operation of nuclear power plants should be of the highest standard. He added that the Bill will facilitate 24hour power, and that the production of nuclear energy in India will go up 10 times.

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ALL IN A DAY

Jaishankar holds talks with Israel PM on deepening ties in tech, economy, security

met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netcooperation in technology, economy, strength". Jaishankar arrived in Israel on the meeting.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar Tuesday on a two-day visit during which he called on President Isaac Herzog and anyahu and discussed ways to enhance held discussions with his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar and Minister of Econconnectivity and security, expressing omy and Industry Nir Barkat. Netanyahu confidence that the bilateral strategic also acknowledged the meeting in a partnership will "grow from strength to social media post, sharing pictures from

India, Argentina sign plan to boost agri ties

India and Argentina have signed a three-year work plan to strengthen the bilateral cooperation in agricultural research, capacity building, and technology exchange. The 2025-27 work plan was signed between Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Argentina's National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), an official statement said.ICAR Director General M L Jat and Argentina Ambassador Mariano Augustin Caucino exchanged the signed work plan on Wednesday. The plan will be implemented through joint research.

States have deleted 21 mn fake PDS beneficiaries: Centre

The states and Union territories have deleted 21.2 million fake PDS beneficiaries so far out of the list of 85.1 million suspected recipients prepared by the Centre, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. Under the Public Distribution System via the National Food Security Act, beneficiaries get 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month (mix of wheat/rice).

Court permits Elgar accused to shift to his home in Delhi

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday permitted human rights activist Gautam Navlakha, accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, to shift to his house in Delhi, but said he will have to appear before the special NIA court in Mumbai for the trial hearings as and when required. The Bench asked Navlakha to appear every Saturday before a police station in Delhi.

In a first, Indian patrol vessel visits Chabahar port

Indian Coast Guard's ship 'Sarthak' has $entered\,the\,strategic\,port\,of\,Chabahar\,in$ Iran as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to Gulf countries, officials said on Wednesday. During the port call, Sarthak, an offshore patrol vessel, will engage in a range of activities to strengthen institutional linkages and enhance mutual understanding in maritime safety and security, they said. The ship entering the Chabahar port marks the "first-ever visit of an ICG ship" to the port, underscoring India's grow $ing\,maritime\,engagement\,in\,the\,region,$ the officials said.

Kavach system covers 2,000-km rail network: Minister

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Wednesday told the Lok Sabha that progress on the installation of the Kavach system was "very fast" and 2,000 km of the rail network had been brought under the Replying during the Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, he said the Kavach is a complex system which has five major systems within, including laying down of optical fibre cable (OFC) all along the tracks and installation of telecom towers.