**India-Egyptian Relations are Now Strategic**

[Manish Rai](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/manish-rai/)

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Ambassador Ajit Gupte, a senior diplomat from Indian Foreign Service (IFS), is currently serving as the Indian Ambassador to Egypt. We are presently witnessing a deepening of Indo-Egyptian ties, as was evident from the recent visit of Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to New Delhi as the Chief Guest of the 74th Republic Day of India. In an exclusive interview with Manish Rai at the Indian Embassy in the Egyptian capital Cairo, Ambassador Gupte spoke on various aspects of Indo-Egyptian trade, security, military and strategic relations.

Question- If you could please throw some light on the historical and civilizational links between India and Egypt?

Answer- India and Egypt are among the oldest civilizations in the world and have had maritime contact for over 4,000 years. It has been said that some of the essential oils used in the process of mummification were imported from India by the ancient Egyptians several thousand years ago. During the recent visit of President Sisi to India in Jan 2023, Prime Minister Modi said that the excavations at the ancient port of Lothal (which is located in the Indian state of Gujarat) showed evidence of trade relations between India and Egypt, which are at least 4,000 years old.

In the 20th century, the leaders of our freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi and Saad Zaghloul inspired each other. Egypt was one of the first countries with whom India established diplomatic relations after gaining independence. Our diplomatic relations were established within just three days of India getting independence in 1947. There was a special personal friendship between President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which is fondly remembered in Egypt even today. India, Egypt and Yugoslavia worked closely together to establish the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. NAM inspired many newly-independent developing countries in Asia and Africa to adopt an independent stand during the Cold War.

Question- Recently on India’s Republic Day parade President Sisi was invited as the Chief Guest. How did this visit contribute to India-Egypt bilateral relations?

Answer- The recent visit of President Sisi to India was particularly important since it was the first time in history that an Egyptian President was invited as the Chief Guest for our Republic Day parade. President Sisi was, indeed, extremely satisfied with the warmth and hospitality he received during his visit. Both leaders agreed to expand cooperation in many areas, such as defence, security, trade, commerce and investments, pharmaceuticals and health, agriculture, education and IT. Most importantly, it was decided to upgrade the Indo-Egyptian ties to a “Strategic Partnership;” keeping in mind the multifaceted cooperation India and Egypt enjoy.

Question-India is one of the largest investors in Egypt. In which areas Indian companies are investing or planning to invest?

Answer- Yes, India has been among the most important investors in Egypt. To put that in numbers, approximately 50 Indian companies have invested around US$ 3.20 billion in the last 15 to 20 years in Egypt. The main areas of investments include chemicals, petrochemicals, garments/textiles, pharma and automobiles. Further, US$ 800 million of investment is in pipeline in various sectors. Recently, three leading Indian renewable energy companies have signed MoUs worth US$ 18 billion to develop green hydrogen in Egypt. This could add a new dimension to our economic relations with Egypt.

Question-Indian Foreign Secretary recently mentioned that India and Egypt are looking for deepening military cooperation can you please elucidate on this?

Answer- Both countries have a long history of defence cooperation. Back in the 1960s, we jointly tried to develop a fighter aircraft. This program progressed to the extent that we were able to develop a prototype. In the last two years, joint exercises have taken place between the fighter aircrafts of our Air Forces in Oct 2021 and June-July 2022. In addition, nine Indian naval warships have visited Egypt since June 2021. We are looking into the possibility of co-production of defence equipment. It’s also a very positive sign that Egypt is now looking at India as a long-term defence partner.

*Manish Rai is a columnist for the Middle East and Afghanistan-Pakistan region and Editor of the geo-political news agency ViewsAround.*