

Sojitz's Ongoing Relationship with India: Business Inherited from Predecessors and the Largest-scale Japanese ODA Project

Since its founding, Japan Cotton Trading procured its cotton from India. One of the company's junior employees, Matazo Kita, was first sent to work in Bombay (present-day Mumbai). Only 40 Japanese people were said to be living in India at the time, but by the Taisho period, Japan Cotton Trading had over 100 employees stationed in India, making it the Japanese trading company with the largest presence in India.

In 1948, the first trade mission following World War II was sent to India. Nichimen Co., Ltd.'s (Japan Cotton Trading underwent a name change in 1943) director Keizo Fukui took part in the mission. Fukui, who would later serve as the company's 11th president, led negotiations regarding the purchase of cotton from India and Pakistan and worked tirelessly to ensure that trade resumed with both countries.

In 1957, Nichimen Co., Ltd. received a joint contract to carry out the electrification of India's national railway together with Japanese National Railways (present-day JR). The project covered roughly 112 kilometers of track from Asansol to Rourkela and is thought to have contributed to advancements in Japan's rail technology. The company underwent another name change in 1982 to become Nichimen Corporation and began production of industrial salt. Sojitz inherited this business and continues to be active in the industrial salt industry today. Sojitz has also contributed to the development of the caustic soda manufacturing industry in Japan and the Asia region.



Keizo Fukui (second from right) pictured preparing to embark on the first post-war trade mission to India as a director at Nichimen Co., Ltd. (Fukui later went on to become Nichimen's 11th president.)

India was also an important country for Suzuki & Co. The company carried out trade with Indian organizations, including the import of pig iron from Bombay-based Tata Group. During the Nissho Iwai Corporation era, the company was involved in the import of iron ore from India to Japan and also contributed to the growth of India's steel and auto manufacturing industries. Since its founding, Sojitz has been involved in the development of industrial parks in the suburbs of the Indian city of Chennai.

Since 2013, Sojitz has been awarded a total of six contracts for work on a dedicated freight corridor from Delhi to Mumbai, including civil and track works, electrification, and signal and telecommunications construction. These contracts combined

amount to over 350 billion yen and constitute the largest group of projects undertaken through a Japanese ODA loan. The dedicated freight corridor project is the world's longest railway to be built by a private enterprise, with construction spanning roughly 1,500 kilometers. The project has also garnered attention for its alignment with one of the Japanese government's previous strategies to "export high-quality infrastructure."



Delhi–Mumbai dedicated freight corridor project (Trial run during partial operations of the track)



A cotton mill in Mumbai that was used until World War II. Cotton purchased in the Indian interior was sorted and weighed at this company-owned facility. The name "JAPAN COTTON TRADING CO LTD" was engraved into the stone façade, but the building has since been demolished.



A guesthouse used by the head of the Bombay office until World War II