

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO DAILY GRAPHIC OF GHANA WHICH APPEARED IN THE NEWSPAPER ON JUNE 13, 2016

Q.No.1. Good afternoon Sir, Could you please let me know the rationale for your visit to the Republic of Ghana?

Ans. At the outset, on behalf of the people and the Government of India, and my own behalf, I would like to convey greetings to the warm and friendly people of the Republic of Ghana.

My visit to Ghana at the invitation of the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Mr. John Dramani Mahama, is first ever Presidential visit to Ghana from India. It is aimed at giving a renewed thrust to our bilateral relations. India shares a long historical relationship with Ghana that goes back to the early days of independence. India-Ghana bilateral relationship is rooted in the shared global vision of our founding fathers, the mutual goodwill between our peoples, and in the values of democracy, pluralism and inclusiveness. I intend to convey to the people and leaders of Ghana how much the Indian leadership values this partnership.

A series of high level visits is taking place this year from India to Africa. My visit to Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Namibia comes immediately after the visit of Vice-President of India, Hamid Ansari to Morocco and Tunisia. My visit will be followed by visits to countries of East and South Africa by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

After the successful hosting of the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in New Delhi during 26-29 October 2015, India intends to consolidate and further strengthen its engagement with Africa.

Q.No.2. Could you also please explain why you are undertaking the trip at this particular period?

Ans. H.E. Mr. John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana visited India in October last year to participate in the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit. H.E. Mr. Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arthur, Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana visited India recently to participate in the 12th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave held in New Delhi from 14-15 March 2016.

My visit is a natural expression of the mutual desire to strengthen the warm and close bilateral relationship between India, the largest democracy of the world and Ghana, a vibrant democratic nation in West Africa with a strong institutional framework.

Q.No.3. Kindly give me an idea about your programme and mention the key activities.

Ans. I will be accompanied on the visit by a Minister, four Members of Parliament and senior officials. I will meet President John Dramani Mahama, who will host a State banquet. I will pay floral tributes to Ghana's first President Late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah at his Mausoleum in Accra and unveil a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the University of Ghana. I will also plant a sapling at the Flag Staff House, an iconic building constructed with Indian assistance. I will deliver an address at a

Joint Business Forum and also at the University of Ghana. I will interact with the Indian community in Ghana and with students, faculty and alumni of the India-Ghana Kofi Annan Centre of IT Excellence, which was set up with India's help.

Q.No.4. Sir, I know about the bilateral relations between your country and Ghana. But may we have the new focus of the relations?

Ans. Our bilateral relations are extremely cordial and enjoy support across political spectrum in both countries. The main purpose of my visit is to impart fresh momentum to this vibrant relationship, add new dimensions, enhance the mutual goodwill of our people, and ensure that our relations are consistent with rapidly evolving geo-political dynamics.

Q.No.5. Please, India is a major player in democratic governance. Could you kindly share your experiences with us as the biggest democracy in the world?

Ans. The essence of democracy is that the people are the raison d'etre of governance. Democratic governments must implement and deliver what is in the interest of the people. They must be in position to meet the needs, particularly of the poorest of the poor among them.

Mahatma Gandhi has said and I quote: **"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen,**

and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s above words guide all our actions in India. The main objective of our government is to reduce social and economic inequalities and work towards inclusive growth so that benefits of economic advancement trickle down to the poorest of the poor. Democratically elected governments must ensure to their citizens the right to life with dignity, equality and equal opportunity while guaranteeing and protecting basic fundamental freedoms. Periodic elections are the barometer to check the performance of elected governments.

Democracy is not an event, but a dynamic process. It must have an in-built resilience as well as flexibility to respond effectively to the evolving needs of the people and the nation. The system of checks and balances through separation of power nurtures and strengthens democracy. A spirit of cooperation amongst all stakeholders is critical for the success of democracy. We in India have come a long way on this democratic path. But, no democracy is perfect. We are still in the process of improving and refining this dynamic system. I commend Ghana’s achievements in democracy. We should both learn from each other.

Q. No. 6. Excellency, we are aware India is the largest democracy of the world. Yet, you are able to ensure free and fair elections consistently. Ghana will be having her elections on 7 November this year. Kindly let's have the benefit of your experiences as a democracy, and how you deal with media coverage, female-representation, etc.?

Ans. I wish Ghana a very successful election, both for the Parliament and for the Presidency. Ghana's democracy is respected across the world.

There are many contributions India has made to the world over centuries. But, I believe her brightest achievement in modern times is the successful running of our multi-party parliamentary democratic system.

India is the largest democracy in the world. We conducted our last elections to the lower house of Parliament in May 2014. The electorate for this elections was 834.1 million voters. The total voter turnout was 66.4% or 553.8 million.

Conduct of peaceful elections every five years and bringing about changes in Government through the ballot box reflects the strength of our democratic process. Every election also serves to showcase the formidable institutional strength and experience we have built over the years in holding elections on such a large scale, across our diverse and complex nation.

At the time of our independence in 1947, there were many sceptics who thought our experiment with parliamentary democracy on the basis of adult suffrage where a large number of persons are illiterate, backward, poverty stricken, divided into various regions, languages and religions would fail. But, later the very same sceptics became great admirers of our system.

Strength and maturity of institutions is critical for the success of any democracy. Our Election Commission, Supreme Court, High Courts, the media etc. have functioned admirably, while the Constitution itself, drafted with great vision and foresight, provides an over-arching framework and places checks and balances that prevent abuse of power.

India has made tremendous strides in ensuring representation of women in the political field by reserving 33% of the seats in local bodies for women. The issue of reservation for women in provincial legislatures and national parliament is under discussion. Today, more and more women are entering politics on their own strength and merit.

The media has an important role to play not just during elections, but at all times by ensuring freedom of speech. There is need for responsible journalism. Media should exercise self-restraint on its own in difficult and sensitive situations. At the same time, the media should have full freedom to report, comment and criticise.

Q. No. 7. During the last India-Africa Summit, India pledged some support to Africa. Specifically, what is in that support for Ghana?

Ans. The last IAFS in New Delhi was the third edition, which built upon the partnership initiatives that were taken in the first and the second Summits and gave the IAFS process new momentum according to evolving mutual needs.

As announced at the Summit, India will be offering US\$10 billion concessional credit in the next five years, which is in addition to over US\$7 billion already committed since the first Summit. Further, there will be grant assistance of US\$600 million, which will complement US\$1.2 billion grant already provided since 2008. The grant will include a US\$100 million India-Africa Fund and US\$10 million Health Fund.

Capacity building has been a very important element of our cooperation. In the last three years, about 25,000 African youth have been trained and educated in India. India's IAFS pledges include another 50,000 scholarships in the next five years.

Ghana will benefit from all these assistance programmes. Some would be bilateral projects while others could be regional. India's approach is to give ownership over assistance programmes to African governments and their people. The people of Africa and their governments should define what is best for them. India's support will always be with due respect to the sovereignty of the African nations and from the perspective of South-South Cooperation.

Q. No. 8. Ghana and India played major roles in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. What learnings have the two countries picked from NAM to promote South-South Cooperation?

Ans. The Non-Aligned Movement was conceived by our founding fathers such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah with great vision and foresight. It is true that the world is a changed place today. Bipolarism, cold war as well as unipolarism are all behind us now. Today, we are a multipolar global order with very different geo-political dynamics. The purpose and the objectives of NAM are however, still relevant. The developing world is yet to claim its rightful place in international affairs. The philosophy of NAM continues to inspire us to realise the dream of a life of dignity and equality for teeming millions of the developing world. Even as past challenges recede into history, new ones are surfacing that demand unity of purpose and collective will of NAM members. For instance, Climate Change and Migration are amongst few of the serious challenges the international community is confronting today. Addressing these often requires collective action by NAM members and greater South-South Cooperation.

Q. No. 9. Hon'ble President, we know that India has a strong base in education in general, and ICT in particular. How can we benefit from your expertise? How do you see the role of our youth in the context?

Ans. Youth dominate the demography of India and Africa, including Ghana. Unlike older generations, our youth today have an array of choices before them. They are living in a global village and are global citizens. There is an information explosion all around them. They are assertive. It is, therefore, important for countries like India and Ghana to provide them with opportunities that channel their immense talents,

capacities and energies into nation-building and creates a better living environment for everyone.

Education is the key to unlock the energies of our youth. That's why India, immediately after its independence, put great emphasis on education, and took initiative to strengthen its technological institutions. India's partnership with Africa has been from the beginning, anchored around capacity building, human resource development and training. Information and Communication Technology is obviously a critical component of this effort. While scholarships and training support in Indian universities and other institutions have been in place for a long time, India has also started setting up ICT centres of Excellence in Africa, and training the trainers, providing equipment and teaching materials etc. The India-Ghana Kofi Annan Centre of ICT Excellence in Accra is a good example. During my visit, I will be visiting this robust centre which has trained over 20,000 students since its inception in 2003, including many from other countries in the region.

Q. No. 10. India is considered one of the growing centres of excellence in health promotion. Will India help Ghana to develop its pharmaceutical industry?

Ans. The health sector is a critical component of any developmental process. A healthy population is economically the most productive one, apart from having the ability to contribute to a happy society. Our aim is to invest in Africa and create value-addition as well as employment. The India-Africa Health Fund set up at the third India-Africa Summit last year

is meant to strengthen the health sector and healthcare capacities, including pharmaceuticals, in Africa.

Q. No. 11. Is India competing with others to tap into the resources of Africa with renewed interest, or is it just part of the partnership to promote South-South Cooperation?

Ans. To understand India's approach to Africa, one has to study the long history of India's contacts with Africa as well as her freedom struggle. We have always seen the people of Africa as not just friends but also brothers and sisters. India and Africa is together home to 1/3rd of world's population. The bonds between the people of India and the people of Africa have been forged since time immemorial. From the days the monsoon winds were discovered, Indian traders travelled to Africa and made it their home. Today, virtually every country in Africa is home to an important and successful Indian community. Similarly, the people from Africa have also been living in India for centuries. Many Africans who arrived on our shores rose to become valued members of our society, including rulers, high ranking generals of armies and nobility.

The people of India and Africa supported each other during our respective struggles for freedom and independence. We have both been victims of the most cruel forms of colonialism and racism. Today, we are together striding onto the world stage with confidence and finding our legitimate place in the comity of nations. Mahatma Gandhi belonged to India as well as Africa. He fought against racial discrimination and exploitation of the resources of all poorer nations. Leaders like Kwame

Nkrumah of Ghana stood shoulder to shoulder with Jawaharlal Nehru at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955 and in founding the Non-aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961. India led the long international struggle for the end of colonialism and apartheid in Africa.

India understands and appreciates the yearnings as well as challenges of developing nations. A significant segment of India's population is still poor. Yet, India has always supported Africa, through capacity building, concessional project assistance and grants. This assistance has come not out of our surplus but from within our own needs. Our approach has always been to build Africa and the capacities and skills of the Africa people. Our aim is to undertake value-addition to the vast natural resources of Africa within the continent itself. We want our friends in Africa to become architects of their own destinies.

We are living today in an increasingly interdependent world. The factors of production including capital, natural resources and human resources have never been as mobile as they are today. One of the objectives of my present visit to Ghana is to see how we can help you bring value-addition to your bilateral export portfolio, which is already in Ghana's favour. India is keen to expand its investments in manufacturing and infrastructure. Ours is a partnership rooted in the principle of South-South Cooperation.

Q. No. 12. Please, is this your first visit to Ghana and for that matter, Africa? Finally, kindly tell me your impressions about Ghana. Thank you very much.

Ans. I have visited Africa in many capacities during my over five decades of public life. However, this is my first visit to Ghana. Your 'Akwaba' or 'welcoming' spirit is legendary, particularly towards India and the people of India. It is your warmth and friendship which has led to a large Indian community choosing Ghana as their home. I am grateful for the hospitality and welcome extended to our people. I am happy to visit Ghana and looking forward to fruitful interaction with your leadership.
