

## **INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO “FRATERNITE MATIN” OF COTE D’IVOIRE**

### ***1. What is the state of bilateral relations between India and the Ivory Coast?***

At the outset, let me say that I bring warm greetings from the people of India to the people of Cote d’Ivoire.

I am greatly looking forward to visiting Cote d’Ivoire at the invitation of President Alassane Ouattara on the first ever Presidential visit to from India. This is also personally the first time I am travelling to your beautiful country.

India values its friendship and longstanding cooperation with Cote d’Ivoire. Our bilateral relations have steadily grown and rest today on the foundation of a shared vision of democracy and development. India desires to reinforce this friendship and strengthen our bonds, taking advantage of the immense goodwill between the two countries.

The Third India-Africa Forum Summit was successfully organised in New Delhi from 26-29<sup>th</sup> October, 2015. Many important decisions were taken at the Summit. My visit is also intended to provide a renewed thrust to India’s engagement with Africa. I am visiting Cote d’Ivoire after a State visit to Ghana. I will then proceed to Namibia. A series of high level visits to Africa is

being undertaken by Indian leaders this year. Our Vice-President, Hamid Ansari recently visited Morocco and Tunisia.

President Ouattara has declared India a focus country. He has also emphasised the importance of expanding cooperation with India in ICT, Agriculture, Mining and Infrastructure. I appreciate this pro-active approach taken by President Ouattara.

Bilateral trade between our two countries has shown impressive growth in the last five years. Trade increased by over 40% in 2014-15 (US \$ 841.85 million) making India the 5<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner of Cote d'Ivoire.

In 2014-15, India's exports to Cote d'Ivoire was US \$ 309.75 million and imports amount to US\$ 532.10 million. During 2015-16, for which data is available from April 2015 to February 2016, Indian exports amounted to US \$ 359.74 and import was US \$ 562.30. Cote d'Ivoire is the second largest exporter of cashew in the world and India imports around 80 percent of Ivorian exports of cashew.

There is a great potential to further enhance trade. I along with President Ouattara will discuss how our trade turnover can be increased from the existing level, within a fixed time period. A Joint Business Forum is being held during my visit with a view to encouraging establishment of business linkages and identifying new areas of mutual cooperation. The opening of a representative office

of the Export Import Bank of India in Abidjan will also facilitate greater interaction between the business communities of the two countries.

A number of Indian enterprises have established presence in Cote d'Ivoire in recent years making India one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment in the country. Many Indian companies are operating in the mining and minerals sector. There are also several Indian companies – small and medium size – involved in trading, manufacturing; ICT; agro-processing etc. Leading Indian pharmaceutical companies also have operations in Cote d'Ivoire.

I am confident my visit will strengthen bilateral relations and provide fresh momentum to enhanced trade and economic relations, based on our complementarities.

***2. India has a proven reputation in software and IT. How India can assist students of Ivory Coast and Africa develop skills in software and IT?***

India has made considerable strides in the sphere of Information Technology. Indian software companies and professionals are well known all over the world. India stands ready to provide whatever assistance possible to Cote d'Ivoire and Africa to develop skills in software and IT.

India and Africa already have a history of partnership in this field. India has been helping African Countries including Cote d'Ivoire bridge the digital divide. The Indian Government funded Pan-Africa e-Network was launched in 2009 with the aim of narrowing the digital divide in Africa and harnessing socio-economic benefits of ICT. Under this project, India has set up a fibre-optic network to provide satellite connectivity, tele-medicine and tele-education to African countries.

India has assisted through concessional credit in setting up of Mahatma Gandhi IT and Biotechnology Park in Cote d'Ivoire. The Indian Government is also assisting in capacity building in the IT sector by offering scholarships under its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. I understand that India is the favoured destination for many Ivorian students who want to pursue education in IT and software development. The Indian Government will continue with its efforts to assist Africa and Cote d'Ivoire in the above regard.

**3. *We know India assisted Ivorian government is setting up of Mahatma Gandhi Côte d'Ivoire Technology Park in Abidjan. How we can take this initiative forward?***

I am happy to note that Mahatma Gandhi IT & Bio-Technology Park at Grand Bassam near Abidjan is functioning satisfactorily. I have been informed that a leading Indian company Shapoorji Pallonji is ready to construct the first building in the Mahatma

Gandhi IT Park. India is open to any proposal to make this Park a vibrant economic hub for the growth and development of Cote d'Ivoire.

Africa is today an engine of growth for the global economy. With a projected average growth of about 5% between 2013-25, it is second only to the emerging economies of Asia. Cote d'Ivoire has registered an impressive annual growth rate of 9-10 % in the last three years making it one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. According to IMF forecasts, Cote d'Ivoire is expected to grow, in the year 2016, at a rate of 9.6%. It is regarded a prime destination for investment in Africa. India is willing to work closely with the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to make this technology park a success.

***4. As you may be aware, Ivory Coast is the largest producer of Cocoa and Cashew nuts. In fact, India imports eighty percent of cashew nuts produced in Ivory Coast. The Ivorian Government is keen to develop agro-processing units to add value to Cocoa and Cashew nuts to generate employment. How can India assist the Ivorian government?***

I understand Indian companies are interested in setting up of agro-processing units in Cote d'Ivoire to process agricultural products, particularly cashew nuts. The Indian Government is committed to assist the efforts of the Ivorian Government in this

regard and would be happy to look at any specific proposal from the Government of Cote d'Ivoire for India's assistance in this field.

**5. *This is the first visit by any Indian President to Ivory Coast. What is the message that President of India would like to convey to Ivorians.***

My visit reflects India's desire and determination to deepen ties with Cote d'Ivoire. India shares a cordial and warm relationship with Cote d'Ivoire based on a solid foundation of trust and mutual understanding. Our bilateral cooperation is multifaceted, dynamic and mutually beneficial.

It is a singular honor for me to be the first Head of State of India to visit your beautiful country. India is committed to remaining a steadfast partner of Cote d'Ivoire in its economic development and growth.

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