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Address by Vice President at Indian Community Event in Kampala, Uganda (February 23, 2017)

February 24, 2017

Thank you and good evening everyone. High Commissioner Shri Ravi Shanker, Honorable Minister, Honorable Members of Parliament of India, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It would be an understatement for me to say that my wife and I are delighted to be here in Kampala. We have spent two very busy, very useful and very productive days here.

Uganda has always been known as the pearl of Africa and the joy is compounded by the fact that there is a unique vibrant community of over 30,000 people who are of Indian origin and who are Ugandan nationals.

I don't need to tell you about the background of how Indians came to this beautiful land because each one of you not only knows it better but also has a unique story to tell. But in more recent times we have seen the vicissitudes of time which affected many of you and it is a tribute to your resilience and a tribute to the wisdom of the Government of Uganda that it not only invited back all those who were compelled to depart but made sure that they got back what they had left behind and today this community, I understand, plays a critical role in the economic activity in the city, in all walks of life and contribute in substantial measure to the tax resources of the country.

Each one of you knows the background of independent India's association with all parts of Africa. We made certain commitments way back after independence and we have been consistent in pursuing them.

We wanted the people of Africa to be freed from the yoke of colonialism, to be freed from all the unpleasant aspects of what was known as the Apartheid policy and in that we extended, as a government and as a people, our whole hearted support and this support was

acknowledged by African leaders of previous generation and is acknowledged by the people and leaders of Africa today.

Yesterday when I came here, the Hon'ble Vice President of Uganda was my host and so was everybody else. So this is a relationship which goes beyond normal economic or commercial relationships, relations of convenience between two countries or two sets of people.

This is a relationship in which it is a relationship of the heart and it is a relationship of minds and it is a relationship which is committed to developing closer relations between our two people to mutual benefit. Not one sided benefit that characterized the presence of outsiders in these beautiful lands.

It is the policy of Government of India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji has consistently emphasized this in his interactions individually and in group interactions with leaders of Africa that India wants to build a new vibrant relationship relevant to the 21st century in which our approach is not to prescribe but to cooperate.

We do not tell our African partners what they should do and what they should not do because they know better than us about their requirements. But if they have a requirement and they need a helping hand of India or Indians, we will always be there to assist and this cuts across the board starting with the youthful segments of the community. A large number of students go from here, they study in Indian institutions and they come back enriched in their knowledge and experience and contribute to the development of the country in different walks of life.

We do want to pursue this approach with regards to the youth of this country and the youth of other African countries that government has recently decided that over the next five years it would offer 50,000 scholarships in India to the students from African lands.

Similarly in matters relating to economic cooperation, as you are only too well aware from frequent or less frequent visits to the country of your origin, the Indian economic scene has changed. The Indian capacities have grown and today they are in a position to contribute more meaningfully to cooperative ventures with our friends abroad.

So we want to look at the relationship with our African friends not in terms of the equations of the 20th century but the new emerging requirements which will underline the equation and which will promote the equations of the 21st century.

We know that the secret of any society's development lies in the empowerment of its people, starting with the young people. And in that assistance of empowerment we in India would be very happy to be partners with the people of and the government of Uganda and with the young people who want to avail of such facilities as may catch their fancy.

Terms of trade has been referred to, let me acknowledge candidly that they are not equitable, not because this is a result of government's deliberate policy but this is how things are developed and this is not a unique situation. It develops from time to time with all countries.

But one of the things that His Excellency the President suggested and I agree with him is that we should be looking at the Indian capacities to create here in Uganda. And this is something that Indian industrial sector, Indian manufacturers are doing in various places in the world and I am very confident that the result of the meeting which took place yesterday between the two business communities that initiatives will be taken and such initiatives will receive the full support of Government of India as it would receive the full support of the Government of Uganda.

So all in all friends, you are in a very happy situation. You retain your links with the country of your origin and you are proud citizens of this very happy land and in that dual capacity you can be the catalyst for stronger relations between our two countries and our two people.

I wish you all success in this endeavor and I wish you all a very happy stay. Thank you very much.



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