

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF GAMBIA**

Banjul, July 31, 2019

1. I am on the first ever State Visit from India to The Gambia. It is a historic day in our longstanding friendship. You have made this even more memorable by convening a special session of your National Assembly for me to address. I truly and deeply appreciate this gesture.

2. I carry with me greetings from the 1.3 billion people of India. To them, this edifice stands tall as a shining symbol of The Gambia-India friendship and our shared democratic ethos.

3. I have been received with exceptional warmth and affection in Banjul. As I drove from the airport, your people were out on the streets with festoons and flags to greet me. It was an overwhelming embrace. I could not have got anything less in a country that is called the 'Smiling Coast' of Africa!

4. I have come to The Gambia to deepen our bonds, and to reiterate our commitment to our special and historic ties with Africa and the African people. When I became President of India two years ago, the first 7 countries that I visited were in Africa. And now after the coming in office of the new government, the first visit abroad I make is to Africa. On this trip, I have visited Benin and would be travelling to the Republic of Guinea. To these countries, this is the first Head of State visit from India. In the last five years, we have visited 30 African countries at the level of President, Vice President and Prime Minister. There has, indeed, been an unprecedented transformation of our political engagement with Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The world is attracted to the Gambia for its warm people, mesmerizing natural beauty, captivating biodiversity and rich cultural heritage. For India and Indians, we have the privilege to go beyond. Our friendship is rooted in our shared fight against colonialism and our common quest for a better tomorrow.

6. I proudly recall the lead role India had played in the decolonization of Africa. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, was the torchbearer of our solidarity with the African people. He lived in this continent for 21 years. He believed that India's freedom would remain incomplete so long as Africa remained in bondage. His ideas influenced icons in all corners of the world - Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and the Gambian patriot Edward Frances Small. When freedom came to your doorstep, we were there beside you, to applaud you and greet you, as you unfurled your flag on that momentous day, 18th of February 1965.

7. This year, we are celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. We are thankful to President Adama Barrow for penning down a beautiful piece titled - "*What Gandhi Means to Me*". He wrote and I quote "*To me, Mahatma Gandhi remains a relevant inter-generational icon for liberation*" unquote. Drawing inspiration from these prophetic words, an Exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi has been organized to coincide with my visit. I will have the honour to inaugurate it at the Eburnjan theatre tomorrow. I do hope you will join us to celebrate his legacy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Built on our shared aspirations, The Gambia - India relations have come a long way. The goodwill among our people speaks volumes of the precious bonds of amity and solidarity that we enjoy. The warmth of your friendship and the taste of your cashews have been enjoyed by every home in India! We are at an important juncture in our relations.

9. The triumph of democracy has brought peace and stability to your nation. We appreciate the role of his Excellency President Barrow in nurturing these democratic practices and bringing about

stability to your polity. The National Assembly has a very important role in ensuring that these values grow and strengthen as a lasting legacy. The Gambia National Development Plan for 2018-2021, has already started to bear fruits of good governance, social cohesion and a revitalized economy. Let me assure you that India will stand by you in realizing your vision for your country.

10. We cherish our privileged development partnership with The Gambia. We have, in keeping with your priorities, extended support for your social and economic progress - from capacity building, financial assistance to implementing infrastructure projects. We have provided concessional lines of credit worth US\$ 78.5 million to support your programs of rural development, agriculture, drinking water, healthcare and setting up physical infrastructure. Another line of credit of US\$ 92 million has been extended. Each year, we receive young Gambians in India for education, for skilling and for navigating the digital world. Just last month, we hosted 25 Permanent Secretaries and senior civil servants at our National Centre for Good Governance in Mussoorie to share and learn from each other. I understand that an Indian company has been entrusted to build your National University. We remain committed to strengthening your capacity to build institutions and help democracy deliver.

11. India and The Gambia are not only young nations, but they are also blessed with a young demography. Fostering enterprise and entrepreneurship is seminal for our development. We have been privileged to partner The Gambia in this area. The Vocational Training Center established at the Gambian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and an Incubation Center at the Gambian Technical Training Institute with our assistance have been bearing appreciable results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. I mentioned in the beginning that this edifice is a shining symbol of our close ties. If you look at it with a detailed eye, it will also point out to the future of our partnership – of technology

collaboration, of leapfrogging development, of smart solutions and of sustainability.

13. I am happy that we have already begun to walk this path. Today, we received your ratification of the Instrument of Accession to the International Solar Alliance. We hope to help you set up solar projects and contribute to fight climate change. These sustainable development efforts would complement the recently launched India-UN project for Flood and Disaster Management in The Gambia using drones and early warning systems, and contribute to your new technology assets.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. Our partnership has flourished not just in the bilateral ambit, but also in the global arena. We have supported each other in the international fora and at the UN. We need each other to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. Health of our citizens remains a primary concern. New and emerging diseases such as Ebola need a holistic approach. On our part, we take satisfaction that Indian medicines, vaccines and healthcare expertise are providing affordable health choices to people in The Gambia and elsewhere. We must also promote our traditional medicine and knowledge. I am happy that we have already made a start with an agreement today. Our plans for progress must also be made foolproof. These can easily be derailed if peace and security is not ensured. To us, terrorism poses one of the gravest threats to humanity today. Your region has seen its violent and bloody trail. We have no choice but to strengthen the global fight against this evil.

Ladies and gentlemen,

15. Our bilateral ties are on the march. They are constantly enriched by Africa-India special friendship and values. I must, therefore, outline the contours of our larger engagement with the African people. India and Africa are natural partners. In this embrace, we have been guided by our deep historical connect and solidarity. We were honoured to receive 41 Heads of State and Governments at the third India-Africa Forum Summit held in India in

2015. We were equally privileged to host, and for the first time, the African Development Bank Annual Meeting in India in 2017.

16. India and Africa share the same development challenges and are both driven by similar imperatives. Africa's economic projection and India's growth can complement each other. Our trade and investment relations are growing. Our bilateral trade stood at over US\$ 62 billion for 2017-18. India has become the fifth largest investor in Africa with cumulative investments at over US\$ 54 billion. The African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement launched this month will make Africa the largest free trade area in the world. India views this development as yet another opportunity to boost economic ties with Africa.

17. Our development cooperation, based on African priorities and sustainable partnerships, is a key feature of our engagement with the continent. After South Asia, the African continent is the largest recipient of Indian overseas assistance. 181 Lines of Credit have been extended to 41 countries for a total amount of US\$ 11 billion. Our projects have made a great difference to the quality of life of the African people, all over the African continent.

18. Africa and India together represent one-third of humanity. We also represent the bulk of global youth. As the world seeks meaningful solutions to climate change, peace and security and global governance, their voice must be heard. The India-Africa story is one of unprecedented achievement and optimism. Let our bilateral ties gain and grow with it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Today, we have achieved a new milestone in our relationship. Our mutual trust in the partnership has been reinforced yet again. Your democracy has brought new sail-winds to the Gambian river. Let us harness it to travel the path of progress and prosperity. Therein lies the power of our friendship. As the famous Wolof phrase says, "Nyaar A Man Kenn, Ku Nu Sot Nga Jaam Ko", which means the union of two produces a great force. Let us together be that force of change for our common and bright future.

Thank you!
Jarangen Jef!