

MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA ON HIS STATE VISIT TO BENIN

July 29, 2019, Cotonou

1. It is an honour for me to be paying this first-ever State Visit from India to Benin. I thank President Talon for his gracious welcome and hospitality.
2. India-Benin relations have always been warm and cordial. My visit has given an opportunity to add further momentum to our special ties. As the world's largest democracy, India has been impressed by the emergence of the Republic of Benin over the past three decades as a shining example of a stable democracy in West Africa. I look forward to addressing the National Assembly of Benin later today.
3. Today, I held wide ranging talks with President Talon. We both committed ourselves to take our relations to a higher level, with special focus on economic partnership. In the last ten years, our bilateral trade has risen from US\$ 350 million to more than US\$ 800 million. With this, India has become Benin's largest trading partner. Our Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme has helped Benin's exports grow by over 68% last year to reach US\$ 376 million. We agreed that there were immense opportunities to enhance trade and investment ties. India's transformative growth and Benin's natural strengths complement each other. President Talon welcomed new Indian investments in Benin including in the infrastructure, hospitality and health sectors.
4. To boost our economic partnership, we signed an agreement wherein India will help set up an Export Credit Agency in Benin. I also conveyed our decision to extend e-visa facility to Benin to give a boost to business and people-to-people ties. In addition to these initiatives, we offered a fresh line of credit of US\$ 100 million to finance

development projects in Benin. We took stock of the ongoing projects being financed by Indian assistance and hoped that they will be completed soon, especially the project to supply safe drinking water to 103 villages in Benin. Both countries further committed to take the development partnership forward through the signing of Country Agreement for Benin to avail India's tele-education programme - e-Vidyabharati, and tele-medicine initiative - e-Arogyabharati. Under these programmes, India is extending free tele-education courses to 15,000 students and tele-medicine courses to 1000 doctors and paramedics in Africa. Our training programme offered to Benin in both civilian and defence fields will be expanded as per the requirements of the Beninese side.

5. People-to-people relations are an important pillar of India-Benin engagement. President Talon and I appreciated the role of the Indian community in Benin as a living bridge between the countries. To bring the peoples of the two countries closer, we have today also signed a Cultural Exchange Programme.
6. In addition, we also discussed defence and security cooperation. We offered further training assistance to Benin to expand its anti-piracy capacity.
7. President Talon and I also reviewed our global partnership. I thanked him for his express support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Benin and India stand together in the global fight against terrorism and piracy. We agreed to work together to combat climate change through the International Solar Alliance.
8. I also took the opportunity to reaffirm India's strong commitment to Africa. On this trip to West Africa, I will also be paying the first ever State Visit from India to The Gambia and the Republic of Guinea. We

are happy to witness Africa emerge as a vibrant economic entity, well integrated with the world economy. I complimented President Talon on the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement earlier this month.

9. I am confident that with my State visit will open a new chapter in our bilateral relations.

Thank you.