

INDIA IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA @2020s

(Ambassador Man Mohan Bhanot)

Greetings from India!

As we celebrate India's 74th Independence Day this year on 15th August in Equatorial Guinea, we are doing so within our own confines to safeguard lives of others and ours due to Covid19 pandemic. This occasion demands of me to update our friendly Equatoguineans on 'India in 2020s'. "I owe it more because this is the first time we are celebrating Indian Independence Day in Equatorial Guinea, after having opened our Embassy in Malabo last year."

As I do so, I wish a very joyous Independence day to all Indian Nationals and friends of India living in this lovely country! Even though we have a small Indian community in Equatorial Guinea, I feel proud of all of them, as they contribute their bit to increase bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries in various fields; hydrocarbon industry, supply chains, environment and so on. I would like to remind them about our Prime Minister Modi's talisman for Africa, "Our development partnership will be guided by Africa's priorities. We will build as much local capacity and create local opportunities as possible. It will be on terms that are comfortable to Africa, that will liberate their potential and not constrain it". I appeal all Indian Nationals to continue working in Equatorial Guinea in this spirit.

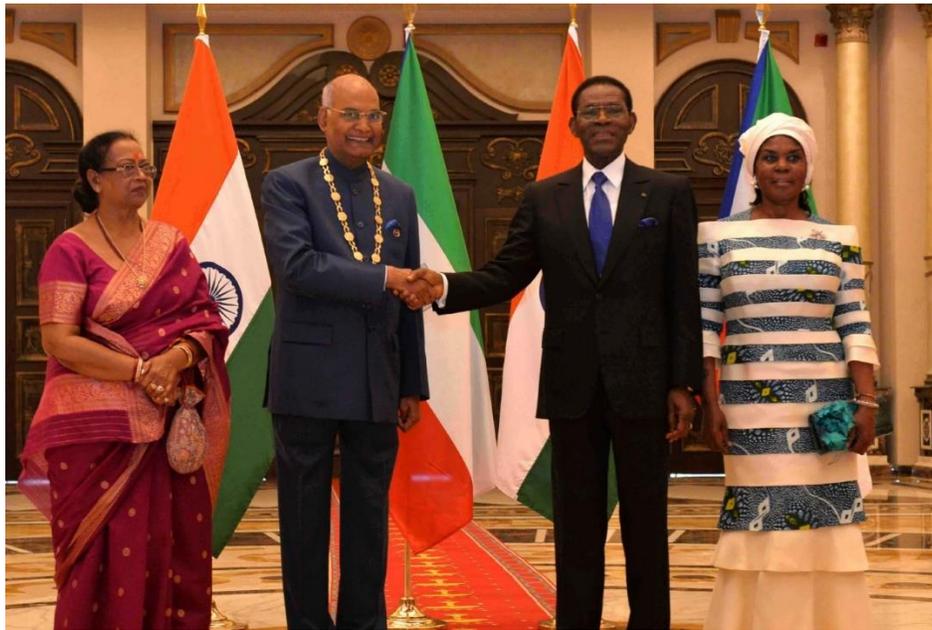
What a beautiful coincidence! This day also happens to be the Constitution Day of Equatorial Guinea. So, I additionally take this opportunity to greet His Excellency President Obiang and all Equatoguineans a very Happy Constitution Day! My gratitude on behalf of all Indian community to His Excellency and his Covid19 task force for having taken all necessary measures to safeguard our lives in Equatorial Guinea during these pandemic times.



(A tribal woman from the Gondi forests in India. The name of the supercontinent **Gondwana** follows from these forests. Gondwana supercontinent is believed to have existed about 140 million years ago, and terrestrial Africa and India are believed to have emerged from it)

As India disjointed from Africa millennia ago, it carried with it the fragments of Africa as it may have existed then. These fragments of life and earth from Africa still exists in India, and one may notice it in many ways. The foremost among these being of ‘peaceful coexistence among diverse and many’. The people, both in Africa and India, are marked by having lived with their multiple traditions and beliefs since ages. This cultural and traditional diversity is always thought by us as an asset rather than a liability. Good number of studies now support that conflict resolution among communities is at its best when these are intrinsically diverse. Such societies are characterized by strong family and social commitments, and respect for elders. The ageless coexistence of various communities has been possible in Africa and India because of recognition of this wisdom of perceiving the underneath oneness in diversity. In Africa, we see it in her native philosophy, Ubuntu, “I am because we are”. It advocates dependency of individual life over collective life. In India we philosophize it as “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” which means, ‘World is one family’. We again see the reflection of this philosophy of coexistence in the favorite motto of our Prime Minister, ‘Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas’ meaning ‘With collective efforts, everyone flourishes’.

In accordance with this mindset, immediately after her own Independence, India started to work for the welfare of other undeveloped/developing nations. It was one of the first, or probably the first country to open a separate academic department on African issues. To share with friendly countries, the rapid progress made by India in scientific and other fields, it started ambitious Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, which was enlarged to Indian Development Partnership Assistance (DPA). DPA encompasses a wide range of programmes and projects and extensive capacity building and technical assistance (14000 slots annually), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. There is growing global appreciation and recognition of India's role in South-South and triangular cooperation.



Historic moment: President of India announced opening of Embassy of India in Equatorial Guinea during his visit in April 2018.

Under DPA, Equatorial Guinea has been allotted 32 scholarships. Another four slots are dedicated for academic qualifications under Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships. So far 37 Equatoguineans have had their trainings in India. I appeal to eligible Equatoguineans to contact Indian Embassy to take advantage of these scholarships after the current pandemic is over.

The Government of India has already approved the budget for setting up of a Vocational Training Centre in Malabo to impart skills in the designated fields for

the needy. This will come in force as the situation normalizes. Setting-up of an English Language lab and IT Centre in Malabo are in the pipeline. In addition to this, movement of Equatoguineans into India has been introduced through e-Visa facility. VISA exemption to the Diplomatic and Service passport holders has been extended.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 continues to exact a heavy toll worldwide. In India too, positive cases are rising, but our effective domestic response has led to a significant improvement in our recovery rate and one of the lowest fatality rate at 2.01%. India's public health response has been appreciated by the World Health Organization. India has demonstrated great resilience in fighting the impact of the pandemic with determination. It has pushed ahead with accelerated development and the creative energy for innovative and new policies as demanded by the times. This strength to face challenges derives from the Indian struggle for independence and is rooted in the concepts of political and socio – economic inclusion inherited from the nation's founding fathers.

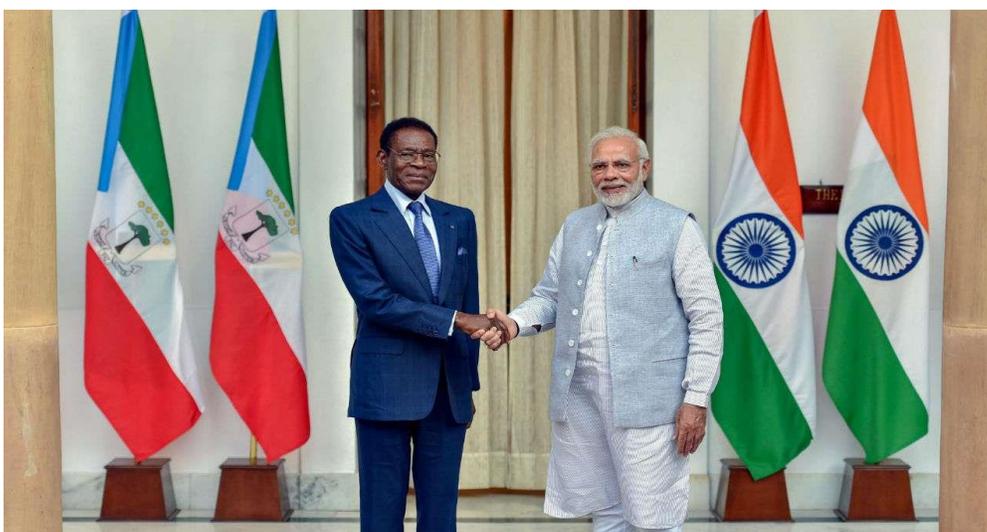
With coronavirus pandemic, a new world economic order is emerging and nations are just coming to terms with it. Prime Minister Modi has been quick in this realization and has accordingly altered existing policies and introduced several multi-sectoral initiatives to further the vision of a thriving economy for India. Reaffirming his belief, in a recent address, he said, "Howsoever big the crisis might be, India is determined to turn it into an opportunity." He then called upon the nation for its support in this regard by making India "Aatma Nirbhar" or Self Reliant. PM Modi also announced a relief package of INR 20 Trillion (10 per cent of India's GDP) that will steer the country onto the path of rapid development and growth, and create a robust local supply chain. India can be partner with Equatorial Guinea in such efforts and assist in the diversification of her economy. With the current dip in oil prices, importance of a diversified economy could not be over emphasized. Endowed with rich fertile land, Equatorial Guinea can collaborate with India to help her turn into the food basket for region.

India's response to pandemic has not been confined to meeting her domestic requirements. As a responsible stakeholder in global health supply

chains, India ensured timely access to essential drugs and medical items for over 150 countries, while meeting her own large domestic requirements. Equatorial Guinea was one of the first countries in Africa to have received medicines' assistance from India as mark of India's solidarity with Equatorial Guinea in fight against this pandemic. Covid pandemic has necessitated that all nation states improve their medical infrastructure. India is world's pharmacy and has the capacity to and experience to produce the best medicines and medical equipment at most economical price. India would continue to support Equatorial Guinea in this endeavor. India's heritage knowledge of Yoga and Ayurveda has helped world in the present crisis. It will continue to guide for healthy lifestyles. Our agreement in traditional medicines and medicinal plants has become all the more relevant in the present crisis.

Pandemic has also forced us to switch to virtual world which is going to be a reality in future. India being an IT hub can collaborate to disseminate this technology to larger section of Equatorial Guinea's society at affordable costs.

Current crisis has displayed the impermanence of things, and therefore necessitated a more interdependent world with a proactive role by multilateral organizations. Only mutual collaborations would help us to come out of these health and economic crises. Equatorial Guinea and India have shared a common vision on it in the past and would continue doing so in future also.



Honorable Prime Minister Modi meeting His Excellency President Obiang in New Delhi ahead of the Founding Conference on International Solar Alliance in March 2018.

